LAUGHING QUEERLY IN A THICK PRESENT: TRANSLATING VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *FRESHWATER: A COMEDY* FOR THE BRAZILIAN STAGE

RINDO DE MODO QUEER EM UM PRESENTE DENSO: TRADUZINDO *FRESHWATER: A COMEDY*, DE VIRGINIA WOOLF, PARA OS PALCOS BRASILEIROS

ABSTRACT

Virginia Woolf's *Freshwater: A Comedy* (1923/1935) is an irreverent farce that playfully mocks Victorian norms, offering rich possibilities for queer theatrical translation. In its first Brazilian stage adaptation, *Água Fresca: uma comédia de Virginia Woolf* (2025), laughter functions as both a disruptive and connective force, challenging hegemonic gender and sexual norms. Drawing on Woolf's concept of "the value of laughter" (1905), this article explores how comedy can simultaneously reinforce and resist compulsory heterosexuality, proposing a queer reorientation of Woolf's work in Brazil (Ahmed, 2006; Butler, 1993). Engaging with queer translation theory (Baer & Kaindl, 2018) and the performative complexities of theatrical translation (Bassnett, 1991, 1998), this study examines how *Freshwater* is adapted to foreground non-normative desires and gender expressions. The translation process incorporates clown performance as a queer theatrical strategy, leveraging its potential to destabilise fixed identities and expose the absurdity of rigid social structures. By situating this adaptation within a "thick present" (Haraway, 2016), the article argues that *Água Fresca* queers Woolf's critical reception in Brazil, challenging melancholic or solemn interpretations of her legacy. This analysis highlights how humour, theatricality, and translation intersect to disrupt dominant readings of Woolf and activate queer possibilities in performance. Ultimately, the adaptation of *Freshwater* in Brazil is not merely a linguistic or cultural transposition but a queer translational act, expanding Woolf's comedic vision while unsettling normative theatrical traditions.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf. *Freshwater: a Comedy*. Queer laughter. Theatre translation. Thick present.

RESUMO

Freshwater: a Comedy (1923/1935), de Virginia Woolf, é uma farsa irreverente que satiriza as normas vitorianas, oferecendo ricas possibilidades para a tradução teatral queer. Em sua primeira adaptação brasileira para os palcos, *Água Fresca: uma comédia de Virginia Woolf* (2025), o riso funciona simultaneamente como força disruptiva e conectiva, desafiando normas hegemônicas de gênero e sexualidade. A partir do conceito woolfiano de "o valor do riso" (1905), este artigo investiga como a comédia pode, ao mesmo tempo, reforçar e resistir à heterossexualidade compulsória, propondo

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uma reorientação queer da obra de Woolf no Brasil (Ahmed, 2006; Butler, 1993). Apoiado na teoria da tradução queer (Baer & Kaindl, 2018) e nas complexidades performativas da tradução teatral (Bassnett, 1991, 1998), este estudo examina como *Freshwater* é adaptada para enfatizar desejos não normativos e expressões de gênero dissidentes. O processo tradutório incorpora a linguagem do palhaço como estratégia teatral queer, explorando seu potencial para desestabilizar identidades fixas e expor o absurdo das estruturas sociais rígidas. Ao situar essa adaptação em um "presente denso" (Haraway, 2016), o artigo argumenta que *Água Fresca* queeriza a recepção crítica de Woolf no Brasil, contestando leituras melancólicas ou solenes de seu legado. Esta análise evidencia como humor, teatralidade e tradução se entrelaçam para perturbar leituras dominantes de Woolf e ativar possibilidades queer na performance. Em última instância, a adaptação de *Freshwater* no Brasil não é apenas uma transposição linguística ou cultural, mas um ato tradutório queer, expandindo a visão cômica de Woolf e desestabilizando as tradições teatrais normativas.

Palavras-chave: Virginia Woolf. *Freshwater: a Comedy*. O valor do riso. Riso queer. Tradução teatral. Presente denso.

Introduction

The first mention of *Freshwater*: a Comedy (1923;1935), Virginia Woolf's only theatrical experiment, appears in a diary entry in 1919 (Woolf, 2008, p. 67). The book mentioned by Woolf is *The Annals of an Artist's Life*, a biography of the Symbolist painter George Frederick Watts (1817–1904), written by his second wife, Mary F. Watts (1849–1938). Similarly, Woolf also highlights the jurist Charles Hay Cameron (1795–1880), the husband of her great-aunt, the renowned Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879), celebrated for her portraits of artists and prominent figures, including the writer Sir Henry Taylor (1800–1886). These figures are not only farcicalized in *Freshwater*, but also closely linked to the locations that inspired Woolf's narrative, particularly the village of Freshwater on the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England.

> Now, to tune myself up, I am going to shut *Mrs. Watts on George Frederic* and open *The Antigone* of Sophocles. One second—I must note, for future use, the superb possibilities of *Freshwater* as a comedy. Old Cameron, dressed in a blue dressing gown and not venturing beyond his garden for twelve years, suddenly borrows his son's coat and walks down to the sea. Then they decide to journey to Ceylon, taking their coffins with them, and the last sight of Aunt Julia is on board ship, presenting porters with large photographs of Sir Henry Taylor and the Madonna in lieu of small change (Woolf, 1977, p. 237).

After this diary entry, it was not until 1923 that the first version of *Freshwater* was drafted during a break from Woolf's fourth novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), which was still being called *The Hours*. Woolf (1882–1941) was immersed in literary experimentation and worried about her artistic outcomes. "I wish I could write *The Hours* [*Mrs. Dalloway*] as freely and vigorously as I scribble *Freshwater: a Comedy*" (Woolf, 2008, p. 165). Although she described the play as a light-hearted diversion, in August 1923, Woolf wrote to her sister, painter Vanessa Bell (1879-1961), expressing concern about revisions (Woolf, 1977, p. 67). In October, she mentioned to literary critic Desmond MacCarthy (1877–1952) the possibility of staging it at Christmas (Woolf, 1977, p. 72), outlining her vision for the production, including photographs of the Camerons, cameos, and laurels (Woolf, 1977, p. 73). These elements are part of Woolf's inspiration for writing the play, which is inspired by the Freshwater Circle, an informal group of Victorian intellectuals and artists who gathered around Woolf's great-aunt Julia Cameron at Dimbola Lodge on the Isle of Wight (Swenson, 2017). This group included figures such as the laureate poet Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), Charles Hay Cameron, George Frederic Watts, and the Shakespearean actress Ellen Terry (1847-1928), many of whom Woolf farcically fictionalised in *Freshwater*.

Woolf abandoned the project, dismissing it as "burlesque" and "thin" (Woolf, 1977, p. 75). However, in 1935, prompted by her niece Angelica Bell's (1918–2012) birthday, she revisited the work. After twelve years, the originally one-act play expanded into three acts and was performed at a Bloomsbury gathering on January 18, 1935, at Vanessa Bell's studio (Ruotolo, 1976). The next day, Woolf recorded in her diary that she and her friends had enjoyed "an unbuttoned laughing evening" (Woolf, 2008, p. 365). A farce of the Victorian era, the play featured Woolf's friends and family in key roles: Leonard Woolf as Charles Hay Cameron, Vanessa Bell as Julia Margaret Cameron, Duncan Grant as George Frederic Watts, Julian Bell (1908-1937) as John Craig (the only entirely fictional character), Adrian Stephen (1883-1948) as Alfred Tennyson, Angelica Bell as Ellen Terry, Ann Davies Synge (née Stephen [1908-1993]) as Mary, one of Julia Cameron's maids, and Eve Younger (Angelica's friend) as Queen Victoria.

Ruotolo (1976, p. vi) notes that the performance was filled with noise and laughter, with Clive Bell's reactions audible throughout (Bell, 1972, p. 189). Woolf called it a farce, a mere joke, and even dismissed it as "tosh" (Woolf, 1982, p. 265). Traditionally viewed as a minor work (Santiago, 2022, 2024), *Freshwater* has often been framed as a birthday gift for her niece or as an interlude between Woolf's significant projects (Bell, 1972). However, recent Brazilian scholarship has reassessed it as a modernist experiment (Pinho, 2020; Santiago, 2022; Santiago; Pinho, 2023; Pinho, 2025; Santiago, 2025) that enacts laughter as a critical tool to destabilise gender norms and racialised representations.

In the play, the Camerons express a desire to go to India. However, Charles Cameron relocated to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), then a British colony, where he pursued a career in law and administration. Woolf's choice to reference India instead of Ceylon is significant, as it reflects her own family's connections to British India. Both her mother, Julia Prinsep Stephen (1846-1895), and Julia Cameron were born in British

India, making colonial ties a deeply embedded part of Woolf's familial history. By situating the Camerons' imagined journey in India, Woolf not only plays with historical inaccuracy for comedic effect but also gestures toward her colonial ancestry (Pinho, 2025, p. 188). This deliberate distortion turns the Camerons' colonial aspirations into an absurd theatrical spectacle, parodying Victorian ideals of empire, displacement, and exoticism.

The play's farcical theatricality[1] exposes the performative nature of imperial authority, reinforcing *Freshwater*'s broader critique of gender, race, and colonial power structures through humour. Through exaggerated theatricality, *Freshwater* exposes the performative nature of gender and the colonial underpinnings of artistic legitimacy. By parodying figures such as Julia Cameron and Tennyson, Woolf playfully dismantles the solemnity of Victorian ideals, transforming performance into a space of social critique. The play's humour not only undermines the rigidity of social categories but also invites a queer and racial reading of Woolf's work, positioning laughter as an act of resistance and reimagination.

Departing from this "unbuttoned laughing evening" that Woolf and her friends had, this study draws on queer translation theory (Baer & Kaindl, 2018) and theatrical translation studies (Bassnett, 1991, 1998) to explore how *Freshwater* moves from page to performance, foregrounding non-normative gender expressions and desires, highlighting how translation problematises sexual identities and their reception in different cultures, shaping queer politics (Santaemilia, 2018). This interplay culminates in the first Brazilian translation of *Freshwater* and its subsequent theatrical adaptation, *Água Fresca: uma comédia de Virginia Woolf*[2] (2025). Rather than a minor Bloomsbury pastime, *Freshwater* demonstrates Woolf's subversive comic force, aligning with her feminist manifesto *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Pinho's work on her "androgynous humour" (Pinho, 2020). *Água Fresca* serves as both a translation and a queer theatrical reimagining, engaging with Woolf's avant-garde (Goldman, 2004; Santiago; Pinho, 2023) and expanding *Freshwater*'s comic vision. Finally, this study shows how critical reception, translation, and performance have repositioned *Freshwater* from the margins of Woolf's oeuvre to a dynamic site of queer theatrical experimentation.

1 Farce is defined in the *Dicionário do Teatro Brasileiro* as a popular theatrical genre that emerged in the Middle Ages and still serves as a performative technique today. Its name derives from the Latin *farsa* or *farcire*, meaning "to stuff" — initially referring to the insertion of humorous interludes into solemn liturgical plays. Characterised by exaggerated gestures, grotesque expressions, and minimal staging, farce relies heavily on physicality, repetition, and absurdity. As Davis (2003) notes, farce operates not through psychological realism or narrative resolution but through its embodied performance, provoking laughter via rhythm, spatial disruption, and comic violence. Though often dismissed as a minor or vulgar genre, farce has deep roots in Dionysian ritual and medieval theatre, functioning as both entertainment and a means of social critique. In this sense, it embodies what Schechner (2003) calls the performative power of "being below", a comic, subversive force that challenges hierarchies through embodied exaggeration and irreverence.

2 The title *Água Fresca: uma comédia de Virginia Woolf* is the Brazilian adaptation and translation of *Freshwater: A Comedy* (1923/1935), Virginia Woolf's only play. In the original, *Freshwater* refers to an actual location—Freshwater Bay on the Isle of Wight, where the play's historical figures, such as Julia Margaret Cameron, lived. However, in the Brazilian adaptation, we made a playful pun in Portuguese rather than keeping the geographical reference.

The Invisibility of Woolf's *Freshwater: A Comedy*

Virginia Woolf's farce, *Freshwater,* is often overlooked in critical analyses in favour of her other works (Santiago, 2022; 2024). Despite initial annotation efforts by Lucio P. Ruotolo (1976), subsequent studies, including prominent works such as Jane Goldman's *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (2006) and Julia Briggs's *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (2005), largely overlook *Freshwater*. The play remains sidelined even in comprehensive collections like *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2010), edited by Susan Sellers. Briggs briefly mentions *Freshwater* in relation to Woolf's broader body of work. Still, it is not included in lists of Woolf's abbreviations or discussed for its political and aesthetic significance within her work. Instead, Briggs highlights other novels, such as *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) and *Flush: A Biography* (1933), for their more serious treatment of Victorian themes.

It is worth noting that Woolf also considered both *Orlando* and *Flush* to be mere free exercises of no great importance. On October 5, 1927, Woolf recorded in her diary that, after finishing an article for Tribune magazine, she felt free and instantly filled her mind with enthusiasm. She began to think about her next literary project, which would become *Orlando*, as a pleasure, a gift, a treat.

> If my pen allowed, I should now try to make out a work table, having done my last article for the Tribune, & now being free again. And instantly the usual exciting devices enter my mind: a biography beginning in the year 1500 and continuing to the present day, called *Orlando*: Vita; only with a change about from one sex to another. I think, for a treat, I shall let myself dash this in for a week, while … (Woolf, 1980, p. 161. My emphasis).

And about *Flush*, Woolf, even knowing that writing it would be exceedingly laborious, doubted its value, considered the project a waste of time and money, and thought that Leonard Woolf (1880- 1969), her husband, would be disappointed. However, she also considered it a moment of rest because, compared to *The Waves* (1931), *Flush* would not require much planning, as it would not require much forethought. "But I can't get back into *Flush*, ever, I feel & L.[Leonard] will be disappointed; & the money loss too—that's a bore. I took it up impetuously after *The Waves* by way of a change: no forethought in me; & so got landed: it would need months of hard work - & even then I doubt it" (Woolf, 1982, p. 134).

Regarding the most famous biographies of Woolf — written by Quentin Bell (1972) and Hermione Lee (1999) — it is notable that *Freshwater* also does not receive the same prominence as Woolf's other works. Quentin Bell's biography largely overlooks *Freshwater*, briefly mentioning it as an interruption during Woolf's writing of *The Years* (1937). It details the play's first staging at a Bloomsbury party in 1935, listing the participants and noting it as a distraction from Woolf's more so-called "serious projects". In contrast, Hermione Lee's biography devotes more attention to *Freshwater*,

exploring backstage conflicts and familial tensions that surrounded its production. Despite this, unlike Woolf's novels, the play lacks a dedicated entry and is seen through the lens of familial dynamics rather than its literary merit. Lee (1999, p. 650) suggests that *Freshwater* may have had more potential than previously acknowledged, hinting at its dramatic qualities and experimental nature within Woolf's broader artistic endeavours. Both biographers treat *Freshwater* as a minor work in Woolf's repertoire despite its unique insights into her experimental writing and personal relationships within the Bloomsbury circle.

Therefore, I intend to take Woolf's comedy "seriously". This paper queerly shifts Woolf's farce to the centre of an analysis of her writing. According to the British-Australian critic Sarah Ahmed in her book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), the world is oriented in specific directions that become intrinsically familiar. Our bodies are culturally and geographically conditioned to follow ontological and epistemological paths. Nevertheless, following "straight" lines hides the possibility of taking "queer" paths. That is, "[w]e don't know what happens when we reach such a line and let ourselves live by holding on. If we are pulled out, we don't know where the force of the pull might take us. We don't know what it means to follow the gift of the unexpected line that gives us the chance for a new direction and even a chance to live again" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 18).

Therefore, I aim to queerly reorient studies on Woolf in Brazil, particularly the critical reception of *Freshwater*. Before presenting a genealogy of performances of Woolf's farce, starting in the 1970s, and making a queer proposition of how *Freshwater* has been staged in Brazil, it is of great importance to understand Woolf's "value of laughter", which she artistically elaborates in her "The Value of Laughter" (1905) and *A Room* (1929)

From the "value of laughter" to "androgynous humour": laughing in a "thick present

The day after the staging of *Freshwater*, Woolf recorded her thoughts in her diary: "The play came off last night, with the result that I am dry-brained this morning, and can only use this book as a pillow. It was said, inevitably, to be a great success; it is good to have an unbuttoned laughing evening once in a way" (Woolf, 2008, p. 365). This "unbuttoned laughing evening", enjoyed freely among friends, initially seems random but aligns with Woolf's philosophical and artistic explorations, particularly on gender and sexuality. For Woolf, laughter is inherently gendered.

In October 1928, invited to deliver lectures - which later became *A Room* - at Girton College and Newnham College on "women and fiction", Woolf envisioned Oxbridge, a fictional blend of Oxford and Cambridge, using fiction to create a distance between present and past, narrative and audience, fact and fiction, because "fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact" (Woolf, 1929, p. 18). Her narrative

addresses the barriers to women's full access to higher education, noting that although they could attend Girton and Newnham Colleges, they still could not receive degrees, as Pinho reminds us (Pinho, 2019). *A Room* narrates the challenges women face in accessing certain university areas, such as the library, without permission from males. In addition, Woolf's narrator calls attention to the differences in treatment between men and women during Oxbridge luncheons and the conversations she overheard.

Reflecting on these luncheons, Woolf remarked: "Before the war at a luncheon party like this people would have said precisely the same things but they would have sounded different, because in those days they were accompanied by a sort of humming noise [...]" (Woolf, 1929, p. 28). This humming, Woolf suggests, was musical and altered the meaning of words. "Could someone set that humming to words?" (Woolf, 1929, p. 28), she rhetorically asked. Woolf implied that poets could transform this inarticulate sound into words, revealing her reference to the Victorian period. Woolf invoked Tennyson (2009) and his poem "Maud" (which is farcicalized in *Freshwater*), questioning the humming of verses by men and women at Victorian luncheons. She inferred the significant rupture between pre-war and post-war luncheons was the war itself. The war became a source of laughter for Woolf, as illustrated by the image of the tailless Manx cat, which is naturally bobtailed. This image may symbolise the difficulty of narration and humming in the aftermath of World War I's atrocities. Woolf's narrative suggests that the humming at Victorian luncheons disproportionally portrayed gender roles of masculinity and femininity. Later, when comparing Tennyson and Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), Woolf acknowledged both as great poets, yet they were incomparable in their distinct styles. The verses of pre-war luncheons often conveyed feelings and illusions that offered easy answers without deeper inquiry. Tennyson and Rossetti hummed their verses, embodying the historically constructed gender roles of masculinity and femininity in a state of apparent harmony yet discord.

Woolf posited that vulnerability, whether experienced by men or women, was obscured by the façade of gender complementarity and the performances of masculinity and femininity. The woman, relegated to embody docile femininity, was metaphorically the tailless cat of Empire, politics, and sociocultural relations. Not by chance did Woolf refer to this tailless cat as "he". From a place of vulnerability and anguish, the female narrator in *A Room* laughed at this male tailless cat that failed to perceive its "taillessness", laughing at dichotomies, separations, and binary divisions. The war disrupted everyone's complacency, uniting men and women in vulnerability and helplessness. Woolf advocated thinking from this standpoint of shared vulnerability, a perspective marginalised in social, cultural, and political structures both in her time and ours. Narrating history from the viewpoint of the most vulnerable disrupts imperial mechanisms, countering the hero's perspective and highlighting our shared human vulnerability (Cavarero, 2016; Pinho, 2020).

Laughter served as one of her tools, paradigmatic for disentangling hierarchical and stifling structures. This disentangling quality of laughter recurs in Woolf's work, particularly in "The Value of Laughter" (1905), where she examines the relationship

between laughter and power. In this essay, young Virginia Stephen[3] asserted that an outdated consensus on tragedy and comedy operated in a disparate manner. While comedy revealed human flaws, tragedy upheld male superiority (Woolf, 1905, p. 58). As Pinho (2020) notes, this consensus, which defines tragedy and comedy differently, underscores gender disparities in Woolf's argument within the realms of gender (male and female) and genre (dramatic genres). Who possessed the right to laugh if tragedy upheld male superiority and comedy exposed their flaws? Sparked by observing the tailless cat, Woolf's laughter exposed society's vulnerabilities, structured between those who freely attended university and those with restricted access. In "The Value of Laughter", Woolf anticipated her 1929 debate in *A Room*, proposing that humour, confounding "masculine-tragedy" and "feminine-comedy", could bridge this gap. Despite humour traditionally being denied to women, Woolf advocated for conceiving an "androgynous humour" (Pinho, 2020, p. 44), humour with a feminine legacy, historically embodied by figures like the graces and muses, capable of dispelling male solemnity. According to Woolf, this feminine comedy represents a path to consider humour that confounds gender and genre disparities, ridiculing the phallocentric logic of such hierarchies. This comedy does not yield to male charms but instead celebrates the "merriment of her sisters" (Woolf, 1905).

Reading Cavarero (2016) and Butler (2004) alongside Woolf, Pinho (2020, p. 36) argues that the "value of laughter" fosters shared vulnerability, thereby disarming hegemonic ideals. In Woolf, laughter is inclusive and open to difference. Drawing on Henri Bergson's (1900) conception of laughter as a social critique of established customs, Woolf's comic gestures can be read as a challenge to dominant social norms (Bergson, 1900, pp. 44–45). Furthermore, Donna Haraway's (2016) notion of the "thick present" helps us see that laughter can chart a course between the gravity of political crises and the "politics of sublime indifference" (p. 4), disrupting cyclical histories and activating a present dense with potential for alternative futures (p. 133). Haraway's SF—science fiction and speculative fabulation—proposes a method of "staying with the trouble," imagining kinship beyond identity and nation. Reading Woolf through these lenses allows us to queerly reorient (Ahmed, 2006) her work in Brazil, imagining new kinships and futures. Woolf's "speculative feminine laughter" brings the Victorian past near through satire, revealing the intimacy of what seems distant. As Putzel (1999) notes, her use of theatrical distance keeps audiences engaged and intellectually active.

Freshwater's farce, with its comic revision of Victorian ideals, invites reflection on social vulnerability (Butler, 2004; Pinho, 2020). Since the 1970s, various stagings have revealed Woolf's humorous side and queered her reception, challenging the dominant melancholic readings of her work.

3 Virginia Stephen becomes Virginia Woolf in 1912, when she marries Leonard Woolf (1880-1969).

Genealogy of Adaptations of *Freshwater*: Towards a Brazilian Queer Reading in a Thick Present

As the critic Andrea Adolph suggests about *Freshwater*, it is improbable that Woolf had any interest in staging her farce because, in addition to seeing the play as merely a joke and not representative of her writing, Woolf would have rejected a proposal made by a theatre company to stage her comedy (Adolph, 2001, p. 67). However, after the night of "unbuttoned laughter" at Vanessa Bell's studio, *Freshwater* was adapted and staged a few times, generally by university student groups, as Putzel (2012, p. 170) informs us. In addition to being a pioneer in studies on this farce and the first to annotate the text, as already mentioned, Ruotolo also staged the play. As Putzel (2012, p. 170) informs us, on March 3, 1974, theatre students performed the play at Stanford University.

After Ruotolo, *Freshwater* was adapted by the Franco-Tunisian theatre director Simone Benmussa (1931-2001) to commemorate the centenary of Woolf's birth in 1882. On December 15, 1982, at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the play was performed by amateur French actors, including the Franco-Romanian playwright Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994) and his wife, Rodica Ionesco (1936-1994). Benmussa's production was presented several times in France and then moved to New York.

On October 20 and 21, 1983, the play was staged at New York University, once again in a university setting. On October 22, 1983, literary critic Eva Hoffman wrote a note for *The New York Times*, in which she discussed the unusual performance directed by Benmussa, which brought together French artists and intellectuals to stage Woolf's play in French (Hoffman, 1983, p. 9). A month later, an article about Benmussa's adaptation appeared in *The New Yorker*, written by Natasha Stewart (1983). Stewart's text certainly contributed to the discovery of a comic side of Woolf, but for the critic, it was only "a joke for amateurs to perform in front of family and friends" (Stewart, 1983, p. 43). However, Stewart provides us with valuable information about the premiere of *Freshwater* in New York. Stewart ends her text by informing her readers that Nigel Nicolson (1917-2004), son of Harold Nicolson (1886-1968) and Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) — one of Woolf's loves and to whom she dedicated the novel *Orlando* (1928) —, made an appearance and a speech at one of Benmussa's performances in New York. According to Stewart, Nicolson stated that Woolf's farce was the only record that survived from Bloomsbury's theatrical nights. Still, he was misinformed because, according to Ruotolo in his preface and E.H Wright in the essay "Bloomsbury At Play" (2011), other skits were found.

Moreover, Nicolson stated that Woolf's farce was true, as the story of the Camerons going to Ceylon (not India) with their coffins did indeed happen. He also mentioned many in-jokes, such as the figure of the porpoise, which appears in the second act of the 1935 version. Porpoise was a lovely pet name Woolf used to refer to Vita, which conceals a queer/lesbian subtext in the play (Santiago, 2022). However, after providing valuable clues, Nicolson ended his speech negatively by saying that

not even New York could find an audience for such a "bizarre" project (Stewart, 1983, p. 46). After that, Benmussa's adaptation was staged at the Théâtre du Rond-Point in Paris on November 7, 1983, and at the Riverside Theatre in London on November 26 and 27, 1983. Finally, it was included in the *Spoleto Festival* on July 4 and 5, 1984, in Charleston, South Carolina (Putzel, 2012, p. 170).

In 1984, a version of *Freshwater* not mentioned by Putzel was adapted by American composer Eric Valinsky (b. 1953). On October 19, 1984, the one-act experimental opera was presented at the Minor Latham Playhouse in New York. Benmussa's US tour may have influenced Valinsky, but it is interesting to note that Woolf's farce attracted the attention of musicians and composers. After all, it was not just Valinsky who transposed *Freshwater* to music. Welsh composer Andy Vores (b. 1956) also adapted and orchestrated the play ten years later with the special participation of the *Boston University Symphony Orchestra*. His work received critical attention, especially from British researcher Richard Dyer, a professor at King's College in London, who interviewed Vores and published an article for *The Boston Globe* on November 27, 1994, entitled "If You're Writing Your First Opera, Why Be Afraid Of Virginia Woolf? Composer Andy Vores Finds His Own Way to *Freshwater*" (1994b). On December 1, 1994, at Boston University, the opera *Freshwater* (Vores, 1994) was performed. It received a review, which was also written by Dyer and published in *The Boston Globe*. For Dyer, *Freshwater* is a piece that "holds, as 'twere, the funhouse mirror up to life, and in it we find our own reflections" (Dyer, 1994a, p. 47), making a humorous reference to *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1603), by William Shakespeare (1564-1616)[4]. This comparison Dyer makes somehow situates Woolf's farce within a literary tradition by referencing one of the most extensively researched tragedies in the West, despite also acknowledging that *Freshwater* is not "flawless." Even so, Dyer believes in its potential to endure for a long time, attract the attention of small theatre companies, and be a gift for operatic experiments (Dyer, 1994a, p. 47).

Putzel (2012, p. 172) also mentions the adaptation of Woolf's farce by American theatre director and critic Anne Bogart (b.1951). To celebrate the 128th anniversary of Woolf's birth, from January 15 to February 15, 2009, *Freshwater: a Comedy* (Bogart, 2009) was staged at the Julia Miles Theatre, once again in New York. Bogart's adaptation combines the two versions of Woolf's sketch. In Bogart's adaptation, the 1923 and 1935 versions are combined into a three-act play, marking the first off-Broadway production of Woolf's farce. In a way, Bogart's work gives more prominence to the 1923 version, considering that even in the volume edited by Ruotolo (1976), this version is in the appendix, while the 1935 version forms the book's core. Considering that these are

4 In the second scene of the third act of the tragedy, Hamlet assigns actors the responsibility of performing a farce in front of the entire court, especially for King Claudius, his uncle, and stepfather, as he married his mother, Queen Gertrude, shortly after his father's death, King Hamlet. Prince Hamlet is informed by his father's ghost in the first act that he was brutally murdered and wants revenge. To be sure that his uncle and stepfather are responsible for this deed, Hamlet summons actors to stage the murder of a king, believing that the performance will cause such discomfort that it will confirm King Claudius's guilt. Hamlet explains to the actors how he wants the performance to be conducted.

two experiments conducted by Woolf at different times with issues unique to each historical moment, I believe both versions deserve attention.

Besides being on stage for a month, Bogart's production received a review written by American theatre critic Charles Isherwood (b. 1964) for The New York Times, titled "Proof That Virginia Woolf Did Have a Light Side" (2009). Isherwood's title already informs readers that the serious and dour image (the dour figure of high seriousness) of a writer who put stones in her pockets and committed suicide would be questioned. The critic says, "The play is featherweight, but it is fun, and the fun resides in the high comedy of its wordplay" (Isherwood, 2009). Thus, even questioning Woolf's signature as a melancholic and serious writer and recognising the comic side of the play, Isherwood does not consider *Freshwater* a substantial work. However, he sees in Woolf's farce a potential wordplay that Bogart does not utilise. For the critic, the director prioritises the movement of the actors on stage over the language.

Although Isherwood does not extensively elaborate on what he understands by this exaggeration of movements compared to the study of the play's text, he provides an important clue about how to stage *Freshwater*. Suppose the aesthetics of Woolf's work challenge rigid truths, since truth in her writing is always fluid and temporary. In that case, we can infer that what displeased Isherwood about Bogart's production was that the play deprived the audience of the pleasure of engaging with the text in performance. By emphasising exaggerated movements, the production may have diluted the linguistic and structural humour embedded in Woolf's farce. The result was a blatantly "funny" performance, but perhaps, for Isherwood, not funny in a way that foregrounded Woolf's "high wordplay" and farcical nuances. On the other hand, Bogart's approach seems to have captured the spirit of the original Bloomsbury performance, where Woolf and her circle embraced spontaneity, irreverence, and in-jokes. If Bogart's direction prioritised a night of "unbuttoned laughter", it may have aligned with Woolf's vision of *Freshwater* as an unashamed joke rather than a polished theatrical event. However, Isherwood's review suggests that he expected a more subtle and refined staging, precisely the kind of high-art aesthetic that Bloomsbury friends themselves often questioned through humour (Wright, 2011).

This tension between linguistic humour and performative humour raises fundamental issues in theatre translation and theatrical adaptation, particularly regarding the role of the text in performance. Susan Bassnett (1991) argues that "performability" in theatre translation is often problematic and ill-defined, as it assumes that a playtext contains an implicit gestural code waiting to be realised on stage. According to Bassnett, theatre translation is not merely about linguistic fidelity but involves a complex negotiation between text, performance, and cultural context. If *Freshwater* were written as a literary joke rather than a fully realised dramatic script, its theatrical translation would require a delicate balance between textual fidelity and performative playfulness.

Bassnett also distinguishes between literature and performance, emphasising that a playtext is not necessarily incomplete without performance. While many theatre scholars argue that meaning is only fully realised in *mise en scène*, Bassnett

challenges the idea that the translator, or even the director, must pre-emptively embed performative elements into the text. Applying this perspective to *Freshwater*, we might reconsider whether Bogart's emphasis on exaggerated physicality enhanced or overshadowed Woolf's linguistic humour. Does one prioritise its literary complexity or farcical, improvisational spirit in adapting *Freshwater*?

While novels and poems are primarily intended for individual reading, eventually to be adapted for the stage, a play can be both read and is expected to be performed. However, its relationship with performance exists beyond the boundaries of the dramatic text (Bassnett, 1998, p. 99). A complex system of theatrical signifiers, including directorial choices, actor interpretations, set design, cultural expectations, and audience reception, shapes it. Because of this, the meaning of a play is never fully contained within the written text alone; it is constantly reshaped by its staging, historical moment, and cultural context. Rather than striving for a so-called "performable" translation, which assumes a universal and stable theatrical language, translators must engage with the translational possibilities of the dramatic text while recognising the fluid and evolving nature of theatrical meaning. If a translator is invited to participate artistically in a staging production, they may engage more directly with performance choices. As Bassnett reminds us, the dramatic text is not inherently meant for performance (Bassnett, 1998, p. 99). Thus, a translator need not be concerned with staging unless directly involved in the production process, which rarely happens.

Within this framework, I would like to highlight one of the most recent stagings of *Freshwater* in Brazil, which took place on March 29, 2021, one day after the 80th anniversary of Woolf's death (March 28, 1941). For the first time, Woolf's modernist farce was staged in Brazil, made possible through funding from the Aldir Blanc Law, which provided emergency aid to the cultural sector during the COVID-19 pandemic (Santiago, 2021). The chosen title for this adaptation was *Água Fresca: uma comédia de Virginia Woolf* (2021). While *Freshwater* is a geographical reference, the decision to modify the title stemmed from the need to connect with an audience unfamiliar with Woolf's theatrical work. More than a "free" translation, *Água Fresca* was conceived as a metaphor for renewal and resistance, evoking the idea of a fresh perspective ("fresh water", a pun with the place Freshwater and the Freshwater Circle) in a country devastated by a fascist government. The adaptation aimed to engage viewers in a "thick present" (Haraway, 2016), using performance as a political and artistic intervention.

This production raises crucial questions about translation in performance, not as a subservient act but as a process of rewriting that negotiates literary and performative traditions (Bassnett, 1998). In theatrically translating *Freshwater* as *Água Fresca*, translation became a performative act, reimagining Woolf's modernist avant-garde through digital dramaturgy. This queer re-imagination extends beyond gender and sexuality to challenge broader structures of epistemological and systemic oppression (Butler, 1993; Ahmed, 2006). Unlike Woolf and Bell's exclusive Bloomsbury staging, which was limited to a white, upper-class avant-garde circle, this Brazilian production adopted a radically queer, democratising approach. By making the performance publicly accessible and broadcasting it live, *Água Fresca* disrupted the historical

whiteness and class exclusivity often linked to Woolf's circle. Featuring queer and Black performers, it re-signified the play's reception, situating Woolf's feminist writing (Pinho, 2015; Oliveira, 2017) within a broader, intersectional framework that speaks to contemporary struggles for representation and social justice.

It is essential to recognise, however, that Woolf and many members of the Bloomsbury Group were themselves queer and engaged in relationships that challenged conventional sexual and gender norms (Helt; Detloff, 2016). Woolf's romantic and intellectual bond with Vita Sackville-West, the same-sex relationships of figures like Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant, and E.M. Forster, and the group's general rejection of heterosexual conventions complicate any simplistic reading of Bloomsbury as a purely elitist or heteronormative space. Nevertheless, despite their queerness, Bloomsbury remained predominantly white and socially privileged, and their intellectual freedom was often circumscribed by class and race-based exclusions (Jones, 2023). *Freshwater* itself is a satire of Victorian artistic circles that were equally white and elite, reinforcing the group's tendency to critique the cultural spaces to which they simultaneously belonged.

In "Critically Queer", Judith Butler (1993) argues that queerness is not just a fixed identity category but an ongoing performative practice that subverts and reconfigures dominant norms. Following this logic, *Água Fresca* operates as a queer intervention, troubling the historical exclusiveness of *Freshwater* and resisting its containment as a literary artefact or a private Bloomsbury joke. Instead of replicating the intimacy of Woolf's original staging, the adaptation uses digital space as a site of disruption, where meaning is not fixed but open to collective, participatory re-signification. By centring bodies that were historically absent from Woolf's circle—Black and queer performers—this production reshaped the reception of *Freshwater*, expanding Woolf's feminist critique beyond its early 20th-century context.

Therefore, by shifting from an intimate drawing-room setting to the open, digital commons, *Água Fresca* queers theatrical reception itself. Moving from an exclusive space to an interactive, virtual arena disrupts hierarchies of access, interpretation, and ownership over Woolf's work. If, as Butler argues, queerness emerges through acts that destabilise identity and cultural norms, this performance enacts queerness by rejecting standard theatrical conventions, resisting both Bloomsbury's elitism and rigid interpretive frameworks. Moreover, Woolf's modernist impulse to use performance as an intervention is reactivated through *Água Fresca*'s digital accessibility, collective engagement, and political resonance.

Laughing Queerly in a Thick Present: Staging Freshater/*Água Fresca* for the First Time in Brazil

Following the online experiment, *Água Fresca: uma comédia de Virginia Woolf* was staged for the first time in 2025 in São Paulo, Brazil, marking a significant moment in the queer theatrical translation of *Freshwater*.

Engaging with the aesthetics of clowning, we decided to work within a thick present and, through speculative dramaturgy, explore new ways of becoming inspired by Woolf's words. "And I shall hire a donkey's head to take my call in—by saying, 'This is a donkey's work'" (Woolf, 1982, p. 273), Woolf wrote days before *Freshwater*'s premiere in her sister's studio. The farce, which she had already described as a joke, reveals the playful yet self-deprecating ambiguity in Woolf's approach to her writing. Her references to the play oscillate between enjoyment and critique, as she immersed herself in the preparation for a comedic intervention while simultaneously questioning the artistic value of what she had written. If Woolf humorously suggested that she might wear a donkey's head to represent herself, she was, in a way, performing the role of a "clown-writer", an idea that directly influenced our creative process.

The Brazilian performer Lili Castro (2019, p. 22) argues that the clown archetype should be studied rhizomatically, following Deleuze's concepts, as its origin is non-linear, fluid, and mutable. The art of clowning is an embodied process, an enduring and untransferable act of creation in which the clown persona is inseparable from its performer. Unlike orthodox theatre, which relies on mimesis and the simulation of truth, clowning exposes rather than conceals. It explores the tension between reality and fiction, engaging the audience in unpredictable encounters that rely on risk, failure, and the breakdown of theatrical illusion. This process is inherently queer, operating in a constant state of becoming, failure, and disruption (Butler, 1993; Ahmed, 2006; Haraway, 2016). Thus, if Woolf playfully suggested bringing a donkey's head to represent herself, she was already queering the authorial function, experimenting with self-parody and performance as modes of critical intervention. In this sense, *Água Fresca* does not simply stage *Freshwater* but actively performs a queer translational act, laughing with and through Woolf, resisting the constraints of textual fidelity in favour of a radical, embodied reinvention.

Working with clowns is also a way to reignite Woolf's farcical impulse while expanding its political potential. The Brazilian staging of *Água Fresca* features a cast of professional clowns and actors who have worked with clowning aesthetics, as well as an intersectional ensemble comprising Black, white, Asian, LGBTQ+, non-binary, transgender, and plus-size performers. Their identities and subjectivities become raw materials for performance, reframing *Freshwater* as a farce of the Victorian intellectual elite and a critique of contemporary cultural hierarchies and social exclusions.

This vision is vividly realised through the whole *Água Fresca* crew (Image 1), with special attention to the art direction of Pedro Paulo de Souza[5], whose extensive research into Bloomsbury aesthetics allowed him to craft a contemporary interpretation that bridges past and present. His approach offers a fresh yet historically aware take on the play's visual world, merging Woolf's modernist sensibilities with a reimagined aesthetic for today's audiences. Meanwhile, Sol Faganello's direction, in collaboration with the makeup artist and prosthetic makeup assistant, brings a distinctly children's clown-inspired perspective to the production. Together, they devised characters as

5 See: *Água Fresca: uma comédia de Virginia Woolf*. Directed by Sol Faganello. Sesc São Paulo, 2023. Available at: https://www.sescsp.org.br/programacao/agua-fresca/. Accessed: 18 mar. 2025.

dreamlike figures who simultaneously evoke Woolf's time, reflecting her modernist pen, and the generation she humorously critiques. Yet, as we laugh at both generations, we also laugh at ourselves, recognising the paradox of progress: where there is a struggle, there is also something to resist. This layered approach transforms *Água Fresca* into an intergenerational dialogue, using laughter as both a celebration and a critical lens on societal contradictions.

Image 1 - The Cast of *Água Fresca* (2025)

Source: *Água Fresca* Archive. Photo by Camila Picolo.
Photo: Standing (from left to right): Danila Gonçalves, Gabriel Saito, Joana Santos, Dante Preto, Diego Pallardó. Sitting (from left to right): Ana Paula Lopez, Camilla Flores

As Castro (2019, p. 104) points out, clowning engages with the present, responding to real-time events and breaking the fourth wall, inviting the audience into epistemological battles. From the Latin verb *torquere*, which gives rise to "distort," "torque," and even "torture," this theatrical translation deliberately twists and queers Woolf's original play. Rather than treating *Freshwater* as a historical artefact, it reclaims Woolf's absurdity, laughter, and irreverence as tools for artistic and political disruption. As translation critics Baer and Kaindl (2018, p. 1) assert, "queer theory problematises the representation of otherness, and translation studies highlight the otherness inherent in representation." Recognising that no representation occurs without transformation, *Água Fresca* has been inevitably reimagined in its transition from page to stage.

Woolf's irreverent spirit meets contemporary struggles for justice, visibility, and collective joy. This is particularly evident in the fight for justice for LGBTQIAPN+

communities, especially for transgender people, who remain among the most marginalised in our society. This significance is embodied in the performances of Joana Santos as the Shakespearean actress Ellen Terry and Dante Preto as John Craig (Image 2). Their presence in *Água Fresca* underscores the production's commitment to reimagining Woolf's play as a space of inclusivity, where marginalised voices are centred, not as tokens, but as vital contributors to the evolving dialogue between past and present.

Image 2 - Ellen Terry and John Craig (Act II)

Source: *Água Fresca* Archive. Photo by Camila Picolo
Photo: Joana Santos (Ellen Terry) and Dante Preto (John Craig)

The prohibited performativity of Black trans people in our society is theatrically translated not as a site of further violence but as an artistic intervention that engages with the most vital realm of art, one that not only reflects and questions pain but envisions possibilities for a better present and future. This is why the presence of two Black transgender performers at the heart of *Água Fresca* is so significant. It can be understood, inspired by Woolf's *A Room* (1929) and Pinho's concept of "androgynous humour" (Pinho, 2020), what I call an *androgynous praxeology* on stage, a creative and political act of representation distinct from the solitary imagination of the reader yet equally powerful in its aesthetic and political resonance. Theatre, unlike individual reading, fosters a collective experience, forging connections with a diverse audience and amplifying voices that have been historically excluded from dominant narratives. In Image 2, the lighting design by Sueli Matsuzaki, combined with Camila Couto's

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sound design and the movement and physical comedy direction by Ana Paula Lopez, alongside director Sol Faganello, contributes to a dreamlike encounter between two people whose lives serve as fiery beacons of hope in a binary, racist world. Their presence on stage transforms performance into a powerful means of resistance, laughing away the enduring struggle for visibility and justice.

This concept engages with Woolf's legacy while addressing our contemporary reality, demonstrating that her work continues to challenge and unsettle our times. Her ideas remain strikingly relevant as we continue to navigate a transphobic and homophobic era. As Woolf writes in *Orlando* (1928), "Let biologists and psychologists determine. It is enough for us to state a simple fact: Orlando was a man till the age of thirty, when he became a woman and has remained so ever since" (Woolf, 1928, p. 98). In staging *Água Fresca*, we reclaim Woolf's playful yet radical engagement with gender/androgynous fluidity, using her modernist critique to illuminate contemporary struggles while expanding theatre's potential as a space for transformation.

> JOHN
> Look here, Nell. Let's talk sense for a minute. Have you ever been in love?
> NELL
> In love? Aren't I married?
> JOHN
> Oh but like this. [*He kisses her*.]
> NELL
> Not quite like that. [*He kisses her again*.] But I rather like it. Of course, it must be wrong.
> JOHN
> Wrong? [*He kisses her*.] What's wrong about that?[6] (Woolf, 1935, p. 28)

John's question in *Freshwater*—"What's wrong about that?"—frames a moment of playful subversion, inviting reinterpretation beyond heteronormative expectations (Image 3), for it performs the kiss between two transgender people. Suppose Ellen's hesitation toward love and marriage is open to revision. In that case, John's question, too, can be recontextualised, not as a simple expression of heterosexual desire, but as a broader interrogation of gender, sexuality, and social conventions. As Santaemilia

6 In Portuguse, for the staging production:
JOHN
Olhe aqui, Nell. Vamos conversar de forma coerente por um minuto. Você já esteve apaixonada?
NELL
Apaixonada? Não estou casada?
JOHN
Ah, mas deste jeito. [*Ele a beija*]
NELL
Não exatamente desse jeito. [*Ele a beija novamente*.] Mas até que eu gosto. Claro, isso deve estar errado.
JOHN
Errado? [*Ele a beija*.] O que tem de errado nisso?

notes, "each culture establishes its moral and ethical limits, where we encounter its taboos" (2018, p. 15). This elasticity of meaning positions *Freshwater* as a fertile site for queer theatrical translation, where performance unsettles normative identities and opens space for dissent.

Ellen's trajectory in the play resonates with Woolf's portrayal of the historical Ellen Terry, the celebrated Shakespearean actress. In her 1941 essay "Ellen Terry," Woolf describes her as a performer who constantly transcends the confines of any single role: "Each part seems the right part until she throws it aside and plays another. Something of Ellen Terry it seems overflowed every part and remained unacted" (Woolf, 1941b, p. 170). This image of fluidity and excess aligns with the androgynous praxeology proposed here: a queer translational methodology grounded in performance, which resists fixed gender categories and embraces collaborative reimaginings of selfhood. Rather than privileging the individual translator or performer, this approach places the "making together" (Elkins, 2022) at the centre of theatrical creation.

Image 3 - Ellen Terry and John Craig (Act II)

Source: *Água Fresca* Archive. Photo by Camila Picolo
Photo: Dante Preto (John Craig) and Joana Santos (Ellen Terry)

In *Água Fresca*, this "androgynous praxeology" becomes a site of trans resistance, where Black transgender performers radically reframe Woolf's *Freshwater* in the context of urgent contemporary struggles for visibility, dignity, and self-determination. By re-staging *Freshwater* as *Água Fresca*, the performance evolves into a collective act of trans affirmation, challenging the historical erasure and exclusion of transgender

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bodies from both theatrical canons and broader social discourse. One of the most striking moments in this reorientation is the appearance of the porpoise after Ellen and John's kiss. This farcical, destabilising figure functions as a metaphor for the fluidity and excess of gender. Rather than reinforcing romantic closure or binary roles, the porpoise interrupts the scene with absurdity, dissonance, and ambiguity, refusing to be domesticated into normative narrative arcs. Its presence disrupts heteronormative and cisnormativity logics, expanding the space of queerness beyond identity into the realm of performative and symbolic androgynous elasticity. Moreover, this reimagined porpoise gesture alludes to Woolf's lesbian aesthetics, recalling the private nickname "Porpoise" that she affectionately used for Vita Sackville-West. In this way, *Água Fresca* reclaims and reanimates Woolf's queer legacy, actualising its latent possibilities through trans embodiment and theatrical experimentation.

This reimagination reaches its climax in Act III, when Julia Cameron hands her camera to Ellen. The gesture becomes a symbolic transmission of artistic lineage, reframing the history of art through an encounter between women (Elkins, 2022). While Julia Cameron was privileged by race and class, she nonetheless navigated the limitations imposed on women artists in a patriarchal world. Ellen Terry, in Woolf's play, similarly struggles under the possessive male artistic gaze of the painter George Frederick Watts. In *Água Fresca*, the scene is reconfigured: a white cisgender woman passes the camera to a Black transgender woman, not as a replication of artistic heritage, but as a feminist and transfeminist reorientation (Ahmed, 2006) of authorship and visibility. Their encounter is not predicated on sameness, but on the affirmation of difference, a recognition that resists the male gaze and asserts a shared commitment to reimagining queer artistic agency (Elkins, 2022).

This queering of lineage is further deepened by the decision to integrate elements from both the 1923 and 1935 versions of *Freshwater*. Notably, the earlier version features a scene in which Ellen cross-dresses in masculine attire, a moment that exemplifies Woolf's farcical critique of the "New Woman" and her performative contradictions. In *Água Fresca*, this gesture is recontextualised through the performance of Joana Santos, a Black transgender actress. Here, cross-dressing is not only a comic device or a moment of theatrical play, but an embodied act of gender disidentification. It collapses the boundary between stage and life, foregrounding both the constructedness of gender and the material politics of trans visibility. What emerges is a layered intervention in the history of gender representation in theatre, one that reclaims farce as a tool of resistance and expands Woolf's modernist critique into a transfeminist poetics of multiplicity, dissent, and reparation. When Ellen, embodied in Joana Santos's body, declares, "I'm alive! I never felt more alive in all my life" (Woolf, 1935, p. 44), the line resonates not only as theatrical exuberance, but as a declaration of survival, presence, and queer vitality.

What follows reinforces these gestures. Ellen turns the camera toward the audience and takes a photograph, a performative act that collapses the boundary between stage and spectatorship. The audience is no longer merely observing; it becomes part of the frame, part of the archive, part of the scene. This moment echoes

Between the Acts (1941b), in which Miss La Trobe confronts her audience with mirrors, forcing them to reflect, both literally and figuratively, on their role in the theatrical event. In *Água Fresca*, this reflection becomes an act of queer intervention: it queers spectatorship itself, inviting the audience into a space of mutual implication and affective co-presence.

Image 4 - Ellen Terry with Julia Cameron's Gift (Act III)

Source: *Água Fresca* Archive. Photo by Camila Picolo
Photo: Joana Santos, as Ellen Terry

Finally, it is a Black trans woman who holds the camera, reclaims the narrative, and reweaves Woolf's queer legacy into the present. By merging the 1923 and 1935 versions of *Freshwater*, queering canonical figures, and unsettling conventional theatrical boundaries, *Água Fresca* enacts not only a tribute but a radical reimagining. It inscribes alternative genealogies into the history of performance, being shaped by trans embodiment, Black resistance, and the creative force of theatrical (re)invention. Rather than simply commemorating Woolf's desires, the production reactivates them, embedding queer love, androgynous subjectivities, and nonlinear intimacies within a contemporary dramaturgy informed by Black trans experience. The result is a performance that queers not only Woolf's text but also the very structures of representation and reception, offering an inclusive and affectively charged engagement with the modernist legacy.

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Final Considerations: Towards an Androgynous Praxeology in Theatre Translation

Água Fresca is not merely an adaptation of *Freshwater*, it is a radical reimagining of queer theatrical translation, one that transforms the act into a vehicle of resistance, play, and gender dissidence. At its core lies an "androgynous praxeology": a methodology that dissolves rigid binaries and weaves together dramaturgy, translation, and performance as a dynamic process of becoming. This approach repositions the translator not as a peripheral figure but as a dramaturgical agent, actively shaping the stage rather than remaining in the margins of creative production.

Unlike conventional translation practices, which often render the translator invisible, *Água Fresca* emerged from an integrated process in which text and performance developed in tandem. This collaborative method challenges hierarchies between written and embodied expression, reframing theatrical translation as a collective, improvisational, and politically engaged act. By embracing clowning as a disruptive queer aesthetic and centring Black, trans, and nonbinary performers, the production extends Woolf's critique of gender and power, grounding it in contemporary struggles for visibility and justice.

The laughter that once filled Vanessa Bell's studio now reverberates in a different, yet equally turbulent present, demonstrating that Woolf's humour, like water, flows, adapts, and resists containment. More than a translation, *Água Fresca* stages a radical theatrical reinvention, reclaiming performance as a space of collective transformation, defiance, and queer joy. Through its "androgynous praxeology", it invites both performers and spectators to experience gender, translation, and theatricality as fluid, relational, and always in motion.

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