

CULTURE AND REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZILIAN FICTION

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RESUMO: A imagem poética, graças a essa realidade nova que representa, permite ao leitor ver diferentemente, ver outras coisas que a palavra esconde e, nessa diferença, a imagem impõe um reconhecimento e uma representação de mundo mais ampla, exigindo uma disponibilidade e uma abertura que, em última análise, são compartilhadas pelo poeta e seu leitor. Nesse caso, partindo-se do texto “Partida do audaz navegante”, contido em Primeiras estórias, de Guimarães Rosa, espera-se verificar as diferentes formas de representação poética na narrativa ficcional de Rosa, observando, para tanto, os elementos e estruturas literárias e discursivas. Com a contribuição bibliográfica de críticos e teóricos renomados, espera-se desenhar algumas linhas de força que fazem do texto de Rosa uma experiência de prosa e poesia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: cultura, imagem poética, narrativa, representação

ABSTRAC: The poetic image, thanks to this new reality that it represents, allows the reader to see differently, to see other things that the word hides, and in this difference, the image imposes a wider recognition and representation of the world, demanding an availability and an opening that are ultimately shared by the poet and his/her reader. In this case, starting from the text "Departure of the daring navigator", found in First Stories, by Guimarães Rosa, it is expected to verify the different forms of poetic representation in the fictional narrative of Rosa, observing, for that, the literary and discursive elements and structures. Some lines of force, that make Rosa's text an experience of prose and poetry, are expected to be drawn with the bibliographical contribution of renowned reviewers and theorists.

KEY WORDS: Culture, poetic image, narrative, representation

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[...] of the so called “modernism”, resulted a boldly experimental phase for Brazil’s intellectual and artistic development [...] which has revolutionized letters and life in Brazil, not only in terms of authenticity, but also in terms of intellectual or cultural spontaneity and Brazilians’ self-confidence. In the sense of cultural and intellectual liberation from the colonial subordination surpluses to Europe.²

The quote above, originally from a lecture given by Gilberto Freire in the United States in 1944, already anticipates the experimental audacity of Guimarães Rosa. It also anticipates a draft of that which represents a project of identity, settled amid a multitude of representations, senses and literary products, hitherto unrecognizable if not as plots by everyday life.

Thereby, and perhaps permeated by an exercise of intellectual and artistic freedom, Rosa confesses: *All I know is that there are too many mysteries surrounding books, those who read them and those who write them. Sometimes, nearly always, a book is bigger than ourselves*, leading to a riveting reflection about narrative constructions and their forms of representation in contemporaneity.³

If often a book is bigger than ourselves, then the fact that there are four prefaces in *Tutameia* is astonishing itself and leaves a silent response hanging in midair. An incomplete *why?* and a deaf, unanswered interrogation, insistently questioning: “All this, could well be nothing more than a cunning artifice, a writer’s trick to excitingly launch the game” (E. D.: 681)⁴, as Rosa himself (or is it the author?) asks in one of the seven parts of *Sobre a escova e a dúvida* (“On the brush and the doubt”), preface published in *Pulso* magazine on May 15th, 1965, which appears on the book *Terceiras estórias* (“Third stories”), accompanied by a glossary.

“Preface”, derived from Latin, *praefatio*, “what is said in the principle, initially”, is, according to A. Buarque de Hollanda, “a text or warning, usually brief, preceding a written work, used to introduce it to the reader” (1986:1381).

Concerning *Tutameia* specifically, one notices that this dictionary definition is the exercise of a contradiction by Rosa’s writing practices: the work provides the reader with four prefaces, each in its own manner, each one binding to a group of stories, and yet, each an independent world.

Aletria e hermenêutica [“Vermicelli and Hermeneutics”] (as expected, this preface, however placed in the beginning of the work, does not introduce it) shows the use of language in a playful proposal, through which anecdotes have the power to ridicule and innovate, surpassing the domain of logic by questioning the word.

² FREYRE, Gilberto. *Interpretação do Brasil: aspectos da formação social brasileira como processo de amalgamento da raças e culturas*. [Trad. Bras. e Organização de Omar R. Tomaz]. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001. p. 314

³ We present the term contemporaneity from the understanding of G. Agamben in *What is contemporary and other essays*: “Contemporaneity, therefore, is a singular relation to time itself, which adheres to it and, at the same time, takes a distance; more precisely, this is the relation with time that adheres to it through dissociation and anachronism. Those who agree fully with the very time, that in all aspects adhere to this perfectly, are not contemporaries precisely for the fact that they cannot see it, they cannot keep our gaze fixed on it” (AGAMBEN, p. 59).

⁴ In order to facilitate and distinguish the reference to the four prefaces, those corresponding to the preface “On brush and doubt” will henceforth be noted with the abbreviation E. D. , followed by the page number in which that matter is found in the complete edition of the works of G. Rosa, namely: ROSA, Guimarães. *Complete fiction*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1994, v.2

“Hipotrélico⁵”, defends, with all the grace and poetry inserted in everyday life, one of the pillars of literary creation, which are neological creations, aiming to dress words worn out by time and crystallization of senses in new meanings. Invention, creativity and play recover the poetic content of this word, allowing Rosa to question in another preface: “We, the temulent”, the double reality of existence: “Our philosophers understand that our essential conflict and perhaps single drama is really being-in-the-world (ROSA:1995:623), thinking humorously, with plenty of *nonsense* and poetry about the unanswered questions of the essential search and anguish.

Sobre a escova e a dúvida, (“On the brush and the doubt”) – the last and densest of the four prefaces – addresses themes about existence in an unexpected manner, mixed with other allegedly nostalgic ones, which analyze the pillars of modern literary construction with vigor and distinction. All scattered throughout the work, in no coherently defined order, mixing to the stories of *Tutameia*, as if they were an identity named and given by the creator himself.

In this case, prefaces are closer the function set by Carpeaux (1968), who sees several types of prefaces, which can be classified according to the author’s purpose, even suggesting the creation of a new literary genre.

They are stories out of order with a new proposal for literary making in common; now grounded in a relationship of recognition, acceptance and interlocution with the various dialogical voices which surface from the text, and as consequence, endorse the coexistence – sometimes grueling and confrontational – of a cultural plurality and discourses laden with meaning and enunciative load, seemingly new and autonomous.

At this moment, perhaps, one understands the infinite possibilities that the readings of Rosa’s work allow to unveil. One may also understand that the blend of poetry and prose, pervading discourses and narratives, turns the literary act not only into art, but into a gathering of smooth and opposing impressions, in which dialectics and the antagonism sought in a primitive and original creation are merged, and whose sensitivity garnishes the spirit and the word. Hence, the regional and the scholarly also merge, seeking to cement the lesson Rosa shared with Dantas in a letter:

In literature, there is a lot of a burdensome ministry, Dantas. It is a position one assumes very seriously, significantly before the world. I always strive for the highest forms. I am a man leading an ascetic life. I play many records by Luis Gonzaga and Tônico e Tinoco on that phonograph you saw in my apartment. I enjoy authentic sertanejo music, the *moda*⁶ of life. I have used a few in my books, recreating them as counter-songs. Folklore exists to be re-created. I fear common-places, very precise descriptions, unspotted dusks, postcard like. National fiction overdoes it much. (DANTAS,1975:28)

This testimony expresses a [side of] Guimarães – a profound *connoisseur* of world texts and an astute reader – interpreting with rare sensitivity, the images and lessons of life. With tricks that mislead the easy and the ordinary, he shows this communion which surfaces from the text, making it eternal and timeless: “the world was scared in me” (E. D.: 676), perhaps because “we accept Adam and his infinite quotient of souls, not fearing the waste of strength there is in every disaster” (E.D.: 676), or perhaps because “since it is not simple to be

⁵T.N.: A neologism created by Rosa, meaning someone acutely bothersome, lacking respect with others’ opinions, pretentious.

⁶T.N.: Tônico & Tinoco, *sertanejo* and *moda* are all references to authentic root/country music. Sertanejo music originates from the celebrations of festivities and religious events in the interior of the states of Minas Gerais, Mato Grosso do Sul, São Paulo and Paraná, as well as in southern Goiás and southern Bahia, during the colonial era.

thoughtless, one ought to fill every little bit of recess, as in the good old circus” (E.D. 677). Thus, filling bits and pieces, the reader sees oneself as a player, starting out with the concrete – the sign – then weaving a tangle of knots until reaching the abstract: the new word, original and reinvented by the playful, according to Huizinga. And by the willingness to search, in a tangible manner, for the boundaries of the essence like an alchemist, an apprentice of Bakhtinian formulations: “a convention system, can always, in principle, be deciphered” (1992: 333). By filling his story and presence in the world with sensitive and creative exercises, Rosa stimulates his readers to weave their own world view, and consequently their web of relationships and representations, drawn from a view of the other, another Guimarães Rosa as well.

This polish, evidently, is achieved by mediation of language or the poetic word, which reveals numerous discourses supported by the principle of dialogism, also theorized by Bakhtin, which affirms that no statement is isolated. In other words, all discourses correspond to a sum of other discourses that dialog with one another, promoting an expansion of senses, whose interpretations are subject to the laws of polysemy and polyphony.

It is worth mentioning the intriguing question of agreed relationship between reader and author, as a statement is laden with extra linguistic and dialogical elements, that nonetheless, express an image of the author, representing subject and for that very reason, “the image of the author is *contradictio in adjeto*. The author’s image is, in fact, of a special kind, different from other images of the work, but regardless of it, it is an *image*, like an author: the author who created it” (BAKHTIN, 1992: 336).

Within this threshold is the fact that man cannot be thought outside the relationships that connect it with others; relationships concerning the voices existent in discourse, different from those which coexist the same text, in which the *other* – a mirror element by excellence – is a key element to conceive the I.

As such, the literary text is understood as the space of practice of creation, the working place of verbal language, of discourse confrontations, of values and ideologies, entangled gaps which allow numerous interpretations and, therefore, numerous meanings.

Consequently, one may think that the work mediates the dialogue between creating author and reader, providing the latter with multiple and cryptic signs, allowing the recreation of a fictional whole and also the acknowledgment of the interactive and dialogical process between the distinct minds that comprise the voices of the text: author-creator-hero; author-creator-character; author-creator-narrator; author-creator-reader; hero-characters; character-character; narrator-hero; narrator-character; hero-reader and character-reader. This remark is made very clear by the observations read in the first chapter (?) of “On the brush and the doubt”.

Peguei-lhe aos poucos o fio dos gestos, tudo que ao exame submisso. Temia ele o novo e o antigo, carecia constante sustentar com as mãos o chão, as paredes, o teto, o mundo era ampla estreiteza. Queria, não queria, queria ter saudade. Não ri. Ele era – um meu personagem: conseguira o Rão no orbe transcendente... todos não sabemos que estamos com saudades uns dos outros. (E.D.:672)⁷

It is still within this threshold, confused, highly expressive and sensitive that Rosa, devoid of thematic concerns, involves his reader once again, imprisoning it in deceitfully simple dialogical texts, full of magic, of personal, philosophical, critical and literary inquiries, inviting the reader to enter the antagonistic universes of doubt, shaking the building blocks of a safe and comfortable superficial linear perception.

⁷The underlining is our own and has as principle to insist on the author-creator-character relationship that Rosa offers the reader.

And in this context, we have a statement on the word as a pure and sensitive mode of social relationship, for it is the instrument through which a given ideology is expressed externally, or even, internally, a certain sensitive matter. Such aspect of communication as an inductive factor of these relationships surfaces – specially in Rosa – more clearly and completely in language, placing it as an essential object in the study of the numerous ways to manifest ideology, values and culture.

Perhaps, as a result, Rosa reproduces with poetry his farthest memories:

Menino, mandavam-me escovar em jejum os dentes, mal saído da cama. Eu fazia e obedecia. Sabe-se – aqui no planeta por ora tudo se processa com escassa autonomia de raciocínio. Mas, naquela época, disso eu ainda nem desconfiava.... Faltavam-me o que contra ou pró a geral, obrigada escovação. (E.D.:679)

Rosa tries to justify himself, and even, insist on the waste of daily routines, whose habits reflect the non-organization of an efficient order, or in the non-cultural organization of habits perpetuated throughout life, from generation to generation, without people realizing the permanent doubt they carry. Maybe, for this reason also, Rosa affirms:

Meu duvidar é da realidade sensível aparente – talvez só um escamoteio das percepções. Porém procuro cumprir. Deveres de fundamento a vida, empírico modo, ensina: disciplina e paciência. Acredito ainda em outras coisas, no boi, por exemplo, mamífero voador, não terrestre. (E.D.:673)⁸

This statement's great ambiguity lies on the fact that doubt that rise in so far as reasonings, even if antagonistic, are equivalent, bringing an indetermination to them, and according to *Sexto Empirico* ("Empirical Sixth") (*Hipot. Pirr., I,7*), reading Guimarães Rosa certainly does that, as there are two epigraphs by the philosopher are found along this preface – the doubt constitutes a hesitation between affirming and denying, solidifying, almost as an objective foundation, the subjective character of doubt (ABBAGNANO: 278). To other philosophers, such as Saint Augustine, the relationship between doubt/certainty is thought-provoking:

Quem sabe que duvida, sabe a verdade, e está certo que sabe: logo está certo da verdade. Logo, quem duvidar de que existe a verdade, já tem em si mesmo uma verdade, a verdade de que não pode duvidar; já que nenhuma coisa verdadeira é verdadeira sem a verdade. Portanto, não deve duvidar da verdade quem pôde por uma só vez duvidar. (ABBAGNANO:279)

This relativization and individualism of truth, and consequently, of the objective certainty of doubt, lead us to consider certain problems or situations, which cause a reflection and analysis behavior in each of them, promoting more consistent and better researched statements.

Guimarães states in a given moment of *On the brush and the doubt*: "Everything is fake data first. The genuine and the authentic comes later. Is a writing enough? My doubt is a petition for more certainty" (E.D.:673). Doubting is a certainty for the writer, who in an exercise of critical and reflexive lucidity, internalizes the lessons of S. Empirical and Saint Augustine, giving back to the outside and the readers, truths disguised as doubts, ambiguities and false incoherencies which hide in the word, and only through it, in its most broad and organizing functions, can they be accomplished.

⁸In italics in the original.

These functions of the word refer to the fact that men cannot be thought of outside the relationships that connect each other. This other is key to the conception of an authentic 'I', that promotes a true blossoming, after the "faking" that the very dialogical exercise offers:

The I lurks in the other and in others, only another to others, to enter the end of the world of others as another, to free itself from the weight of the only self in the world (I-to-me) (BAKHTIN,1992).

Thus, one may infer that, whether it is an autobiographical writing, as it allegedly announces the trap placed on the excerpts of the aforementioned prefaces, or whether it a fictional writing with a 1st person narrator, the man/author relationship – which ends up to be the specific object of a representation – does not cease to be a represented image with an author; someone turned up and remained in the work.

In a way, the text involves its writer by means of complex marks. For instance, look at the interpretation of Nascimento, by his readings on Foucault⁹:

There are historically established discursive rules for the recognition of the author figure, and if it is possible to objectify such rules, this is because they are part of a familiar repertoire. First name and author name have a pragmatic function between the designation and the description, but the function of recognition in one case and in another proceeds in a different way.

At this moment, in the last chapter (VII) of this preface, it is understood that the following observations risen from a dialogue between an I who writes and a *Zito*¹⁰, a character of that vast and inebriating journey throughout the backlands (*sertão*) and the cattle.

Um, a par do outro, quiprocamos¹¹, foi entre a Vereda-do-Catatau e o Riacho das Vacas. Dava eu de prenarrar-lhe romance a escrever – estória com grátis gente e malapropósitos vícios, fatos. Ele, de embléia: arriou o berrante: - O Sr. tem de reger essas noções... Pelo que pensava, um livro, a ser certo, devia de se confeioar da parte de Deus, depor paz para todos, virtude de enganar com um clareado a fantasia da gente, empuxar a coragens. Cabia de ir descascando o feio mundo morrinhento; não se há de juntos iguais festejar Judas e João Gomes.

-E a verdade? Fiz

Zito olhou morro acima, a sacudir os ombros e depois a cabeça – O Sr. ponha perdão para o meu pouco-ensino... olhava como uma lagartixa. – A coisada que a gente vê, é errada... – queria visões fortificantes – Acho que... O borrado sujo, o sr. larga na estrada, em indústrias escritas isso não se lavora. As atrapalhadas, o Sr. exara dado desconto, só para preceito, conserto e castigo, essas revolias, frenesis... O que Deus não vê, o Sr. dê ao diabo. (E. D. p. 686)¹²

⁹NASCIMENTO, Evando. *Derrida e a Literatura: "notas de literatura e filosofia nos textos de desconstrução"*. 2. ed. Niterói: EdUFF. 2001 p.281.

¹⁰Zito is short for Joãozinho – Rosa's childhood name. It is also the name of the character from "Departure of the Audacious Navigator" In *Primeiras estórias*.

¹¹To talk, Exchange ideas. Neologism derived from "quiproquó". In: MARTINS, NilceSant'Anna. *O léxico de Guimarães Rosa*. 2. Ed. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo. 2011. P. 408

¹²Seeking fidelity and respect for the work, this fragment and the next were kept as they are written, that is, the italics and their variations were written by Guimarães himself and copied as found in the book, despite the rules of formatting that recommend these citations differently.

When talking about recognition, once again Guimarães prepares his reader for a healthy trap about authoring enigmas, allowing a preview of Zito – an interlocutor who shares the same name as the author who once travelled through the state of Minas Gerais is now a character in this travel and writing. Guide/cook, Rosa sustains with him a long dialogue about the issues of writing and about his fictional content, locating the origin and function of the book to the guide (?). In a fantasy product, whose creativity acquires a new value of benefit for the reader, insofar as he subverts reality, sprinkling subtleties and images of the concrete reality, real, though painfully cruel. Often displaying dialectics and values in equally antagonistic situations, in which the interlocutor suggests decision making on the author's part, who, in turn, contributes to a consistency in the reader's perspective. It is necessary to mold the creative nature in his fictional contextualization, seeking to seize the sensitivity in exercise formed by the creative outlook. Thus, the work, more than a subjective construction, results of values and priorities specifically chosen to this exercise of life, and not from a conditional truth that is thought to irradiate.

Therefore, one can recall that according to Derrida, textuality, being comprised of "Differences and differences of difference, is by nature absolutely heterogeneous and composes without ceasing with the forces which tend to annul it"

It is thus understood that the characteristics of the text presented in "On the Brush and the Doubt", extended to the Rosian texts in general, will lead to a presence of readings and intertextual data, linked to the game (as previously mentioned) and which, nevertheless, take into account a structural signic decentering ("difference of differences") that oppose the most orthodox concepts of classical poetry and its characterization.

In Rosa's texts, significances exist as a construction that becomes discourse, producing signification by difference. This causes polysemy, both in artistic and Rosa's text, to produce full and unexpected senses, always inaugural and not yet lived, therefore, not revisited by an established sign, yet substantial for their origin and presence, in writing and in discourse.

Thus, the author is completely within the work, but could never become a part of the image front (of objects). He, the author, is not the *natura create*, nor the *natura naturata et creans*. Rather, he is purely *natura creans et non creata*, so to speak, after Bakhtin (1992:337).

To say in Rosa's words, this creating nature is "dreams are still scribbles of desaturated children" (ED: 675), chooses the sensitive and representative material of fictional spaces to be filled, stamping the enunciative fabric elements representative of power and the inventiveness which translate the creativity-creative, metaphysical and metalinguistic genius of this storyteller from Minas Gerais, and loaned to herdsman-guide. To Zito, a refined interlocutor, there remains the certainty already announced above: God and the Devil are of the same poetry, derived from the same creative exercise, whose content is only distinguished by perspective. There is no dialectical or antinomic game in the poetic narrative or poetry that privileges right or wrong, good and evil, material and sacred, and so on. On the contrary, there is a game of opposites that is united to validate the poetic writing as creative content organized according to the "truth" of the writer.

In this game, in fact, the unusual and the strange also meet, formerly considered as foul or lacking poetry, but which acquire new nuance and subtlety through the eyes of the writer:

- A gente não quer mudança, e protela, depois se acha a bica do resguardado, menino afina para crescer, titiágo-te, a bicheira cai de entre a creolina e a carne sã... O que como o dito ademais, vertido compreender-se ia mais ou menos: O mal está apenas guardando lugar para o bem. O mundo supura só a olhos impuros. Deus está fazendo coisas fabulosas. Para onde nos atrai o azul? Calei-me. Estava na teoria da alma.

It is interesting to once again verify the sensitive, intellective and scriptural game that is developed between the said guide – a soulful herdsman and the substance of a writer – and Zito, a visitor/interlocutor of this guide. In this dialogue, he ends up pointing out comments and life lessons risen of the unsystematic and intuitive conviviality with nature – of man and of the world.

For this purpose, in fact, it is necessary to transform into common language all the wisdom in this nature, and how it shows men the interpretative elements that prioritize life lessons united in a universe of sensitivity and creative intuition. One verifies the deep simplicity and the poetic load emanating from Rosa's perspective:

It is what most resembles "happiness": an unsystematic mode, detached from events – a stratum of our being, hidden for the moment - outside the rigid limits of desire and horological reasons... (E. D. :674)

Within this elaboration, happiness is stripped from all and any meaning of the world in order to promote, in an ascetic exercise, fruition and enjoyment, placed in the origin, in the primitiveness of meaning, abandoning concerns about a chaotic and penetrating philosophical reflection that often masks the sensation and sanctity of the impressive moment. And in this sense, we complete these observations, basted and inclusive, as the subject is vast and one gets lots along the way among the several motives which decorate the seven parts of "On the brush and the doubt". Yet, one must only remember that the multiple relationships derived from the author-creator-reader interaction are powerful elements questioning revolution and modern writing, which standardize aesthetic facts not by the Cartesian and evolutionary rigor in traditional narratives and aesthetics. They standardize by the Dionysian writing that questions itself and makes the literary act a mystery, a true adventure, full of meaning as it is created while the author-creator develops his inquiries, leaving them as marks of an insertion in the literary world, and consequently, of doubt, of difference which answers the most mysterious and eloquent essential truths.

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