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The Point of View of João Porém

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Abstract

We propose an analysis of the short story “João Porém, o criador de perus” which is part of *Tutaméia: terceiras estórias (Trifle: The third stories)*, by João Guimarães Rosa. The short story performs the function of an allegory of the author, and the way the protagonist is related to the work of breeding turkeys correlates itself with the function of the author in the literary field. The story narrates the life of João who inherited a lot of land and used it to breed turkeys, becoming prosperous. The good result of João’s work was due to the love and dedication to ordinarily lowly-profitable activity. Although João inherited a small lot of land and a hard situation of tiring work, he reversed it, surprising the “indiscreet village”. The people referred to the protagonist as “João Porém” and repeated the nickname as onomatopoeia which imitates the “gobble-gobble” of the turkeys. “Porém” (“however”) has the meaning of contrast and also the meaning of differentiation regarding the own limits of the situation and of the public opinion. This study seeks to define the way the situation, that was lived and transposed by João Porém, allegorizes the authorship. In order to reflect about these significations of the short story, we shall resort to Robert Weimann’s chapter “Structure and History in Narrative Perspective: The Problem of Point of View Reconsidered”. The point of view or the cosmovision of the author is more than a technique concerning the narrative focus. It is also not related to an autobiographical category relative to the author’s positions about politics, current civil issues or certain intellectual attitude. The point of view deals with the work and is founded in the correlation between its historical nature and the implicated aesthetic choices in the composition. The short story is critical of the activity of the protagonist and of the way it interferes with the culture. It represents the conflict of individual and collective voices which have a social meaning. It also represents João’s affectionate gesture, which resorts to the indeterminacy when evaluating the narrated events with an aesthetic meaning. We shall consider Weimann’s definition of point of view in order to think about the aesthetic and social signification of João Porém’s story that allegorizes the authorship.

Keywords: Guimarães Rosa, *Tutaméia*, author, stories.

Indeterminacy

The name of the protagonist João Porém personifies the indeterminacy that the introductory paragraph reiterates when informing about the choice of his name as well as where he was born. The father persisted in the fact that the boy would not be João and insisted on denying the prevailing and unjustified wish of the mother, as the short and humorous sentence informs: “The mother, yes”. João inherited the father’s “no” and the mother’s “yes”. He persevered in the turkey breeding, distinguishing himself by good sense and affective liberality or by the ability of unconditional love; these ones were his affirmative practices. He lived in a “small indiscreet village, out of the landscape. There any certainty would be imprudence” (Rosa, 1979, p. 74). The village people began to envy João from the first signs of prosperity and embarrassed him, more and more, in order to sell his small lot of land where he bred the turkeys, since they attributed the progress in the animals breeding to the place. In the interaction with his fellow countrymen, João used to use the deaf part of his ear, he hemmed, changed the subject; in a nutshell, he denied. João’s characteristics reiterate the indeterminacy or his practice of “chimeric economies”; “false indecision of the cockeyed one”; “half-deaf” (Rosa, 1979, p. 74).

The Author of the Modern Text

In an unusual way, the indeterminacy in the social tract and the affective liberality confirm the prudence and dedication of the character to the hard task which was destined to him to be executed. By evaluating as formula of prosperity or as valid form the combination between the indeterminacy and the affirmation of the effects of an amorous imaginary supported by the community, the author’s point of view intervenes in the literary field, activating it. Fictions that evaluate the negativity and the credit to the imaginary as practice of misadventured heroes have become a common place in the most broadcast slopes of Romantic literature. Barthes gives as an example the difficulty that Werther had to evaluate and, consequently, represent, which explains his difficulty in drawing his loved one, Charlotte. Like João Porém, Werther also seems to be a kind of allegory of the modern text in which the author drives away the point of view of someone that has fallen in love and is absorbed by the public imaginary. It lacks to the modern author the conditions of delineating, imitating, sharing an imaginary. According to Barthes in *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, the author of the modern text cannot install himself comfortably under the domain of the imaginary and needs to evaluate his own participation in the public imaginary in order to propose a signifying game in writing (Barthes, 1984, p. 75; 91-92).

According to Robert Weimann’s chapter “Structure and History in Narrative Perspective: The Problem of Point of View Reconsidered”, in modern literature the narrator lost his traditional function of mediating a community knowledge about wholeness. Modernity favoured the broadening

of the “international class divisions, growing technical and educational specialization, and an ever-increasing flow of information and communication” (Weimann, 1984, p.135). With the increase of the complexity in the relations of production and with the replication of the areas of knowledge, the author of modern fiction cannot spare a very particular critic evaluation when proposing a representation. The demand for a conscious positioning of the author puts him in tension with the domain of the imaginary which also provides matter for fiction. In the short story, Rosa proposes an allegory of the author, in which João Porém personifies the indeterminacy and, simultaneously, makes the author’s authority on the representation slides in the paradox of the sensible passionate one which denies the Romantic evaluation and the Realist one of the imaginary.

The Hard Job of Validating the Invention

João Porém endorses the public imaginary by loving the legendary Lindalice who is only an invention of the local covetous people. He postpones the long trip to the loved one’s distant house until his death in order not to neglect the turkeys. He evaluates his own task with good sense and the fate of the orphan who just inherited a hard job as means to protect himself. “Life is never and where” (Rosa, 1979, p. 74-75). Modernity bequeathed the hard job of validating the invention to orphan authors of God or devoid of metaphysical fundament to representation. João Porém is successful in the turkey breeding and tragic in the relation to the public imaginary. The story of the envied João Porém, breeder of bum turkeys, surprises the reader of Romantic literature who expects to see the negativity as an update of the tragic scene performed by anti-heroes of extraordinary misadventures. The short-story also bothers the reader of Realist literature who, though enjoying ordinary-situation-characters as an orphan inlander, is used to only credit verisimilar plots. Such threads are incompatible with the paradox of good sense which João Porém practices with “chimeric economies”.

The story is especially ironic in the way it evaluates João’s invention departing from a proper name, which points out an absence eventually. João makes such a name a motto for a lonely amorous practice. In the short story, the name of Lindalice assumes diverse meanings (for the people and for João) and conflictual functions. The fictitious lady, who lived in a “shot distance” to which João would have to travel, is an invention or “oral news” by the covetous people in order to drive João away from the turkey breeding. Due to the necessity of “missing without knowing what”, João had faith in reality and in the love of Lindalice (Rosa, 1979, p. 75).

In *João Guimarães Rosa and the longing* (João Guimarães Rosa e a saudade), Susana Kampff Lages designates the singular worth of the word *saudade* (the feeling of missing someone or something; longing) in the Portuguese imaginary, to which many poets and writers contributed carefully to the history of a people marked by migrations and navigation. Lages quotes the interview to Lorenz in which Rosa defines longing (*saudade*) as a peculiar

paradox to the Portuguese imaginary and relates it to the “brazilianity” that also exhibits a paradoxical value in the Brazilian imaginary. The word longing assumes a paradoxical character in Portuguese culture in which it gives meaning to the periodic presence of absence. The issue of national identity had become relevant in Brazilian literature since the processes of Independence of Brazil, which had resonances on Romanticism. Modernists made “brazilianity” the organizing centre of an aesthetic update project, part of a broader project of modernization of the country. Comparing Rosa’s novel with what Euclides da Cunha had already achieved in *Rebellion in the Backlands (Os sertões)*, part of the critics complimented *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands (Grande sertão: veredas)* as a symbolic and metaphysical broadening of the representation of Brazil. In the interview to Lorenz, Rosa pondered about the “irrational importance” that “brazilianity” assumed for the Brazilians and he defines it as the paradox of a “feeling-thinking” about something that is absent (Lages, 2002, p. 46-47).

João Porém was a breeder of animals whose origin is equivocal. In Brazil, we name the bird *peru* which would have come from Peru. The name of this country also worked, for a long period of time, as a metonym for the countries of Latin America where Spanish is spoken. Many English speakers refer to the animal as turkey for they believed it came from Turkey. The French call him *coq d’Inde* as if it came from India. The short story refers to the turkeys as “*egiptos*” (Egyptians) as if these animals were native of Egypt. Turkeys were already domesticated in Mexico between 200 BC and AD 700, but the date and place are not specifically known. Soon after the discovering of America, Mexican turkeys were taken to Europe where they spread fast.

Rate of diffusion is estimated at 40-50 km/yr. By comparison chickens moving from Asia to Europe in ancient times had a rate of 1.5-3 km/yr. (...) Turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) as a domestic animal probably are the greatest gift of the Americas to the world. They have had tremendous importance as an animal protein food source, especially in developed countries (Crawford, 1992, p. 307; 309).

In the author’s allegory, the turkeys are a metaphor of the literary field in which the author intervenes with fiction, for instance, when he counters the expectations of the reader of Romantic and Realist literature. Specifically, the author intervenes in the Brazilian literary field as he presents the question of the equivocal identity by the means of the turkeys. These birds work as a metaphor for the processes of shaping of identities or representations through diverse evaluations that tend to stabilize the perspectives of groups in which they circulate.

The narrator defines love as “remembered light”. This expression eludes to the Platonic theory of reminiscences according to which things are shadows of the true knowledge or the Idea that the philosopher gradually accesses it inasmuch as his submission to Socratic maieutics. The short story deforms the Platonic duality of things and ideas as he privileges the “logic of sense” operated in the paradox. According to Deleuze (2006, p. 1-13), Lewis Carroll’s

literature performed the Stoic theory of meaning elaborated from the study of the paradox. Stoics deduced the duality of things and effects or happenings (immaterial causes) from paradox; and such a mechanism of the paradox reverses the Platonic duality of things and ideas. Paradoxes also function as instruments of analysis for two language groups: the name of things and verbs that are not things, rather logic attributes which give meaning to the becoming in happenings. The Stoic theory also implies a worldly image of the philosopher and highlights the practical interest of the immediate production of meaning in language.

João Porém receives, at the title of the short story, the epithet “The turkey breeder”. The preface of *Tutaméia* “Aletria e hermenêutica” refers to the “*Arabic gum of daily language or circle-of-chalk-to-arrest-turkey*” (Rosa, 1979, p. 4) [author’s emphasis]. Rosa refuses the daily language adopted in Realist literature by elaborating a mythic language like the one spoken before Babel. Hansen refers to it as fiction of the pre-Babel language whose style displaces linguistic uses like the ones of Realist literature that intend to represent doubles of the real, conceiving it according to Aristotelian verisimilitude and Rationalism (Hansen, 2007, p. 59). Terrestrial and gregarious birds repeat automatically the language which is normalized in the society of writing and impoverished by mass media. Vanguard texts, like the ones that opt for a few conventional or very inventive games and styles, reverse the processes of normalization of linguistic uses. João Porém’s loved one’s name, Lindalice, is a valise word or a joke that couples the adjective beautiful (*linda*) with the name of Lewis Carroll’s character, Alice. Kristeva (1976, p. 137) claims that vanguard texts try to “force the redoubt of the occidental metaphysics” with the intention of making way to a new society which is conscious of the material production of meaning in the uses of language. Rosa operates a pre-Babel mythical language in fiction in a way that validates itself inasmuch as he interferes in the literary field, placing relevant questions to readers and creating with these issues new difficulties to their mental habits.

João immediately received the effect of the fiction of love as an internalized thing or reality that daily tasks stopped him verifying. He secreted Lindalice’s name to his own memory and the effects experimented by João also marked the memory of the village, “over a thousand turkeys, extremely”. In an unusual way, the lie of the village does not succeed because it does not have what Bakhtin (2011, p.11) called “aesthetic objectivity” necessary to the authorship which is not in the factual reality of the referred object in the literary creation. Objectivity or finish results from the axiological centrality of the character in the creation which differentiates him/her from the interests of the writer. According to Bakhtin, the amorous relation among author, character, and the happening concerning the latter shows itself in the empathy with which the author evaluates ethical and cognitive implications on the aesthetic form. The jesting and greedy people produce representations that João denies partially. The short story defines authorship with the metaphor of the amorous ability of producing valid effects by means of the denial of current evaluations. The people invented Lindalice’s name which João accepted as a

continuous motto, becoming author of an effect of absence, in an amorous style. The local people did not succeed in persuading João to travel to the place where Lindalice supposedly lived and he persevered in his job, prosperously. “By pity or fatigue, or fear of absurdity”, the people told the truth about the invention of Lindalice. João heard them with his selective hearing or with the “deaf half of his hearing”. The narrator evaluates João’s reaction, proposing a paradox in a proverbial form in which he displaces the usual function of communicating a socially admitted thought: “the one who will not see is the best lynx”. The paradox parodies the proverb: “there’s nobody as blind as those who will not see”. Eventually, repentant for the lie and worried, the people inform João about Lindalice’s death. “And he closed his road in a circle”. The name of Lindalice lost the stimulating effect when João found her immateriality out, “cause for intact tenderness”. Since then, the absence of the name means the death of a myth in whose mourning João began to perish. The people, who were touched, introduced a local lady to João. Although the woman was similar to the description of Lindalice, they did not succeed in reanimating him until frighteningly he died without leaving a will.

Conclusions

The short story is an allegory of the author in which João Porém “metaphorizes” the denial to the combination that authorial evaluation prints on representation. He also “metaphorizes” the partial affirmation of the effects of an amorous imaginary which is shared with the community or the literary field. The modern author has to face the issue of the validity of the form that s/he proposes like a particular formulation which will be judged by the reader. Rosa proposes fiction in a way it does not determine Romantic and Realist assumptions regarding representation and the relation between author and public imaginary. Using the form of the paradox, he points out the coextension of the evaluation of the pre-Babel language to the scene where the reality of the immaterial effect takes place: presence of absence like the Portuguese longing (*saudade*) and brazilianity. Since the logic of the paradox affirms the material production of meaning in language, the author installs a process of validation of the fiction of form as he produces it with the pre-Babel language. With the death of the metaphysical fundament of form, even the myth becomes a dead or inapt form producing effects of total validity. The author dies without leaving a will or formula. Each author has to propose a point of view with which he interacts with the literary field. Such field, when accepting the validity of form, assimilates what it identifies as the last evaluation of representation to be repeated.

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