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A TOUR THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE IN THE STYLE OF MACHADO DE ASSIS, SEEN IN THE FIRST ROMANCES

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Abstract: The work examines the description of nature in novels: ``Ressurreição`` (1872), ``A mão e a luva`` (1874), ``Helena`` (1876) and ``Iaiá Garcia`` (1878) by Machado de Assis and how this affects the characters, the plot and the narrative structure, according to Barthes (1972), Cunha (2013), Diego and Senna (2018), Salvaia (2019) and Santos (2009). Verifies how the storyteller uses linguistic resources such as adjectives, verbs, normally used in the present and imperfect indicative, comparisons, metaphors, synesthesia, painting colors, transmitting smells, tastes, tactile impressions, sounds, with words, such as in a painting, in a photo, in a film.

Keywords: description of nature; first novels; Machado de Assis style.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars of Machado's work state that the descriptive aspect of nature in his prose is scarce, because:

- a) did the writer intend to avoid local color in order to give his fictions a less tropical – or more European – tone? – (BOSI, apud KAUFFMAN, 2020);
- b) “it is not necessary to talk about the place to be a writer from your country” (DIEGO; SENNA, 2018, p. 11);
- c) the Brazilian landscape would not please the public, “accustomed to foreignisms” (SALVAIA, 2019, p. 154) and
- d) Machado attempts to produce cosmopolitan literature as opposed to regionalist, represented at the time by ``O Cabeleira`` (1876), by Franklin Távora, for example (SANTOS, 2019);

However, it still fulfills an important narrative function, nor is it an object of beauty that Machado's famous irony does not hinder.

The novels on screen, *Ressurreição* (hereinafter R), *A Mão e a Luva* (ML), *Helena*

(H) and *Iaiá Garcia* (IG), in accordance with one of the principles of Realism, concentrate the action in the home of the urban middle class of Rio de Janeiro. January of the Second Empire, in the period before the 13th of May and the Proclamation of the Republic, and the writer intends to define, analyze, sketch situations, as stated in the Advertence of the first edition of R, in 1872, and characters, in that of ML, in 1874. Imagine if you didn't sketch them!

The city, at that time, was so deforested that Emperor D. Pedro II ordered Alto da Boa Vista to be reforested, due to the drought of the Carioca River, which supplied it with water, using enslaved labor. It is also observed that even Debret's watercolors, from 1816 to 1831, when he was here, paint Rio's daily life, its customs, people, buildings, external scenes, stripped of vegetation; sometimes, a tree here and there (BAPTISTA, 2015).

And the center of Rio, surrounded by the sea and the hills of Castelo, Santo Antônio, São Bento, Conceição, Providência and Santa Teresa, where some characters from the novels live (Valéria and her son Jorge from the novel *Iaiá Garcia*, for example, they live on Rua dos Inválidos, in Lapa, and have a summer farm in Santa Teresa), resulted from the filling of floodplains, ponds, swamps and mangroves, to shelter the expanding city: “Here we walk on water, thanks to the many embankments that pushed back the sea. And manual labor to occupy the wetlands. There is a lot of water under our feet. In Largo da Carioca we step over Lagoa de Santo Antônio and on Passeio Público, over Boqueirão da Ajuda (TORRES, 2015, p. 33-34).”

The “singularity of the description (or of the ‘useless detail’), in the narrative fabric, its solitude, points to its importance for the structural analysis of narrative discourses, because everything in the narrative discourse is significant and, if it is not, what is the

significance of this insignificance?” (1972, p. 37-38), asks Barthes. This is the question whose answer we intend to give here, that is, to verify the functionality of the description of nature in relation to characters relevant to the selected descriptive excerpts and the triggering of the plot. It will be examined how the description of nature (including landscape, flora, birds, the sky, sun, clouds, rain, weather phenomena) operates a transition from one scene to another; sometimes it marks the narrator’s critical or conciliatory approach to the character relevant to the scene; sometimes it corresponds to the romantic tendency to associate the ambience with the character’s innermost being; Now it works as an index to trigger the action.

It will be seen how the storyteller masterfully uses the linguistic resources characteristic of the type of descriptive text, defined in linguistics and literature manuals, whose lessons emanate from Lukács to Marcuschi, according to which description is anchored in adjectives – in Machado, abundant and precise; in state verbs, normally in the present and imperfect indicative; in comparisons, metaphors, synesthesia, because it appeals to sensory impressions: colors, smells, tastes, tactile impressions, sounds (CEREJA; MAGALHÃES, 2000).

As in a painting, photo or film, the description produces a temporal suspension in the narration of events and a faithful portrayal of the facts. Composed of the elements *describere*, the word means writing according to a model, in order to give verisimilitude to the report (LOPES; REIS, 1987, p. 87-88).

The sharpness of the “profile contours” of Viana de R, Camargo de H and Antunes de IG exemplifies this (ASSIS, 2005, p. 18). Given his pecuniary interest, at the expense of the three young married women, the first’s sister, Lívia, and the daughters of the other two, Eugênia and Estela, respectively, the narrator reserves

his acidity for them. Guiomar, the heroine of ML, does not need a procurer, because she has so much autonomy that she herself will choose the husband that suits her.

FÉLIX, LÍVIA, RAQUEL AND VIANA

R opens with one of the most beautiful descriptive pages of the “semi-urban and semi-sylvan landscape of a farm in Laranjeiras”, framing the spirit of Félix:

That day – ten years ago! -, The Doctor. Félix got up late, opened the window and greeted the Sun. The day was splendid: a fresh breeze from the sea came to break the heat of the summer a little: some rare thin and transparent white clouds stood out in the blue of the sky. Some birds used to semi-urban life were chirping in the farm next to the doctor’s house, a semi-sylvan area that could offer them a farm in Laranjeiras. It seemed that all of nature collaborated in the inauguration of the year (ASSIS. 2013. p. 9).

Enchanted by the beauty of the day, contemplative and absorbed, he wakes up to his lunch routine, forgetting the experiences of the previous ten years. The wear and tear of the forest, of a “semi-urban, semi-sylvan life [of] a farm in Laranjeiras”, is affiliated with the dryness of the hero, characterized as “a complex, incoherent and capricious man”, “made of sincerity and affectation”, owner of “a cold look” and “a natural and spontaneous face, [and] another calculated and systematic” (p. 10), symmetrical to this awakening.

Just as the sunset scene, ignored by his girlfriend Lívia, premeditating a declaration of love, denotes his contained profile, central to the outcome of the plot:

The afternoon was really beautiful. Félix, however, took less care of the afternoon than of the girl. He didn’t want to miss the opportunity to tell her, as if it were true, that he loved her madly. Leaning against the parapet of the terrace [...], the widow

pretended to contemplate the splendors of chance; in reality, she sharpened her ear to hear the loving confession (p. 40).

Nature shares the feeling of rival Raquel, when overlooked for Felix's attention, perhaps she yearns to die: "with her eyes fixed on heaven, perhaps asking God to extend his hand so she could better climb there. It was sunset, time for melancholy; everything there assumed the grayish and luminous color of the last moments of the afternoon (p. 88)."

Chapter XIX of R (p. 101-105) is titled, ambiguously, metaphorically, "The door to heaven": the door that opens to the happiness of marriage and the sky that informs weather forecasts. The description, when portraying the characters' humor, even with a certain intention of irony, does not hide the aesthetic perfection to the reader's delight.

Viana, Lívia's brother, "who had an infallible thermometer on his feet and announced an imminent thunderstorm", does not escape the narrator's unfortunate mention, when he gives him the epithet, "the parasite" (p. 83 and 99), and of the same heroine's perspective: "The sister [...] admired to herself the fortune of those for whom the storms of the air matter more than those of life" (p. 102). She didn't realize that her brother sensed the lovers' breakup.

Once the marriage was confirmed, "heaven did not give reason to Viana's fears; The clouds that announced the next storm had dissipated. There was no moonlight, but the night was clear; and very vivid stars [...] shone in the sky". These images give rise to Félix's mood, "exalted and joyful" (p. 104), until the morning of the next day, when "a fine and constant rain" fell: "What did he care about the melancholy of nature, if Did he have a source of inexhaustible joy within his soul?" (p. 105). The storm that worries Viana and the melancholy of nature function as indicators of Luís Batista's perfidy, triggering disappointment.

With the unfortunate outcome imminent, "nature wanted to make another contrast to the opposite of the morning, because if the afternoon smiled happily, [Félix] showed signs of an inner storm. His eyes were red, his mouth was tight, his hair was in disarray" (p.110).

The climatic instabilities described in R therefore confirm the initial assertions, because they reveal the characters' sensations; they prepare, as in a film, the transition from one scene to the next; they function as an index of the successes that will follow, thus answering Barthes' aforementioned question.

ESTÊVÃO, GUIOMAR AND LUÍS ALVES

Estêvão de ML, sentimental and dreamy, does not escape the narrator's disregard; but, like Félix de R, he deserves an atmosphere of beauty that would provide him with the loving atmosphere if it were reciprocated by the muse Guiomar: "The night was beautiful, like the most beautiful nights in that suburb. There was moonlight, a clear sky, an infinite number of stars and the wave gently lapping at the beach. [...]. Estêvão wrote, [...] with a legitimate and sincere enthusiasm (ASSIS, 2005, p. 32)."

In a later scene, Guiomar thinks to herself about the elected Luís Alves: "Do you mean to say that you loved him? You mean you were about to do that? The streak whitened the sky, then dyed the tops of the mountains, finally spilling down the slope, until the sun appeared - the contemporary sun of Adam, and of the last man to come (p. 105-106) ", the narrator philosophizes - and ironizes -, through the image of the sun that always follows the moon, "the arraiada", intoxicating the heroine, outlined as objective and ambitious, and all the young women in love.

The sea will compound Estêvão's misfortune, definitely passed over by her: "In front of him

shone [...] the fortunate mansion; Behind us the slow, melancholy wave was beating, and we could see the bottom of the cove, dark and sad. This arrangement of the place served the plan he had conceived [...] to kill himself right there” (p. 129), which he will not carry out. The personification – the melancholy wave and the sad sea – reflects the boy’s innermost self, whose outcome not even the omniscient narrator knows: “Whether he still vegetates in some corner of the capital, or if he ended up in some village in the interior, it is unknown (page: 130).”

While Guiomar, on her wedding day, was surrounded by an atmosphere of almost mystical happiness, like the dreaming bride, when looking at the farm, “she found it to have a new and better aspect, a divine expansion that animated things around her. Every happy soul is pantheistic; it seems to him that God smiles at him from within the flower that blooms (p. 128)”. And so the narrator goes, accumulating adjectives, personifying “the water that meanders murmuring”, “the humble and rustic vine”, “the dull and neglected pebble on the ground”, recording “the trees, the flowers, the low grass”, “the pure morning air” (p.128).

To Luís Alves, a “strong man” (p. 130), the narrator dedicates the air of the cigar-smoking room, confirming that his representation and that of Estêvão manifest themselves in accordance with his character: while Estêvão comes loaded with sentimentality and of irony, framed by the sky and the sea, his opponent, cold and calculating, does not (HILÁRIO, 2012).

ESTÁCIO, HELENA, EUGÊNIA AND CAMARGO

The description of a line of ants, which Estácio messes up, in one of the last passages of H, reflects the tension between the protagonists Helena and Estácio and the unfolding of the action:

While she spoke, Estácio, who had taken off his Chile hat, was busy circulating the wide ribbon that tied it around the crown. There was great silence between them. A long line of ants followed along the edge of the tank, leading the majority of them to stretches of green leaves. With a dry branch, Estácio was distracted by disturbing the silent and laborious march of the poor animals. They all fled, some towards the land, others towards the water, while the rest hurried towards their home. Helena snatched the branch from his hand; Estácio seemed to wake up from long reflections [...] (ASSIS, 2018, p. 181-182).

The image of disorder and the reorganization of the ants in their work reproduces the narrative structure of the novel, whose imbalance is motivated by Helena coming to inhabit the Vale family farm, destabilizing the newlyweds Estácio and Eugênia and frustrating Camargo’s ambitions, which confirms the Barthesian precept, translated by Roger Bastide: nature must serve the unfolding of the action (2006, p. 422).

The death of the heroine reestablishes the previous balance: “At the same time, in the house in Rio Comprido, Estácio’s fiancée, dismayed by Helena’s death [...], retired sadly to her bedroom, and received at the door the father’s third kiss (p. 266)”, satisfied his ambition of marrying his daughter to a super-rich man.

JORGE, ESTELA, IAIÁ AND ANTUNES

The excerpts from the description of nature in IG echo in unison the core of the characters (BASTIDE, 2006, p. 422).

Jorge, back from the war, penetrating “the shore and revealing his hometown” (ASSIS, 2011, p. 62), compares himself “to the sea that morning, neither stormy nor quiet, but slightly blistered and frizzy, so ready to fall asleep completely, as if growing up and throwing yourself onto the beach (p. 63)”. The

scene expresses the boy's doubts about the crossroads he finds himself at, in the same way that the sky, the city seen from above and the sea inspire in Iaiá a reflection on the love conflict:

The afternoon was beautiful; the sky had all shades, from scarlet to opal [...]. Iaiá sat on a rock [...] and from there he looked across the horizon; then she looked down at the city and the sea, and this spectacle [...] took her to times, not very remote, when no heart had come between her and her father (p. 154).

Before they become rivals in the fight for the young man, the narrative surprises Estela and Iaiá, stepmother and stepdaughter, in a moment of affection, amidst the description of a garden, where “there was a circular bed, planted with grass in the center of which flowed the water from a fountain. Its basin was lined with plants, whose broad leaves [...] interrupted the monotony of the grass (p. 73)”, and formed a garland to decorate the girl by Estela's hands.

Ahead, the placidity of the sky conflicts with the young woman's anguish: “After the storm that had blackened over her head had dissipated, Iaiá saw a specter to the west, and a possibility to the east. These two black dots spoiled the beauty of the blue sky and made it heavy and melancholy (p. 204).”

And once again he denotes his uncertainty regarding the relationship with Jorge, due to the stifled passion between him and Estela, resolved with her separation: “What marriage would be like for her, if she had to enter into it with the perpetual threat before her eyes, an ancient seed of love, that the first spring breeze could make sprout and grow again? (p. 204)”, so that her stepdaughter Iaiá can enjoy the love of the heartthrob Jorge, the rich and award-winning hero of the Paraguayan War, thus fulfilling the happy ending that will please readers.

The anguish caused by the love triangle,

which the landscape mirrors, hangs over the couples in the other novels as well. In R, along with the presence of the teenager Raquel, it is the reason for Livia and Félix to break up, as he is afraid that the widow will betray him, just as much as she had “betrayed” the memory of her late husband. Estêvão, from ML, would threaten the relationship between Guiomar and Luís Alves if he weren't so passive and Helena, if she didn't die, leaving the way open for the newlyweds Eugênia and Estácio.

Viewed by Cunha as a technical character, who sees marriage as “an instrument of social ascension” (2013, p. 14), Antunes, Estela's father, an employee of Jorge's late father, is drawn by the narrator with irony and solemn antipathy, as well as Viana de R and Camargo de H.

The cigar thing attests to this, when Antunes pretends to refuse Jorge's – “yours are very strong” – he says (p. 51). The narrator then states: “Jorge's cigars were never subject to such accusations from Mr. Antunes, who regularly smoked his son's cigars as he had smoked his father's (p. 52).”

CONCLUSION

In a chronicle from 1893, Machado tells how he was outraged by the exclamation of a friend who was singing: “What nature you have!” And the writer further comments: “Our guest's admiration excluded any idea of human action. He didn't ask me about the foundation of fortresses, nor the names of ships at anchor. It was just nature (MACHADO apud SANTOS, 2009, p. 20)”, insisting on his thesis, which the precision of his prose contradicts.

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