

**Dialogism and the Baroque in Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century / *Dialogismo e barroquismo na ficção latino-americana no século XX***

*João Carlos de Carvalho\**

**ABSTRACT**

From Mikhail Bakhtin's studies and discussions about the origins and development of prose and novel in the West, the purpose of this paper is to reflect on the peculiarities of the novel in great literary fictional productions in Latin America during the twentieth century. Based on the concepts of dialogism and the Baroque, this article investigates, with a selection of fragments, the main characteristics of the dialogic confrontation in the formation of Latin America.

**KEYWORDS:** Dialogism; Baroque; Latin America Fiction

**RESUMO**

*A partir dos estudos e reflexões de Mikhail Bakhtin sobre a origem e o desenvolvimento da prosa e do romance no Ocidente, este artigo intenta pensar a sua particularidade em torno das grandes produções literárias de ficção na América Latina, no século XX. Trabalhando basicamente com os conceitos de dialogismo e barroquismo, o artigo investiga, em fragmentos selecionados, aquelas que seriam algumas das principais marcas deixadas desse grande embate com as nossas marcas de fundação.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVES:** *Dialogismo; Barroco; Ficção latino-americana*

---

\* Universidade Federal do Acre – UFAC, Rio Branco, Acre, Brazil; [jccfogo62@gmail.com](mailto:jccfogo62@gmail.com)

For the literature of our continent, the 20th century was a privileged moment in terms of revelation and quality of our fiction, especially from the mid-1930s until the 1970s. The number of great novels and short stories that were published in this period represents one of our greatest desires to be at the center of the major literary productions in the West. It was truly a *siglo de oro*, a golden age for the literature in Spanish and in Portuguese in Latin America. In the short extracts selected herein, we can notice the struggle for a dialogue with the roots of the Latin American identity formation by means of several mannerist conceptions.

The novel is related to the voice of the bourgeois man. The term bourgeois is understood herein as the average man, not the profit-driven individual connected to the rise of capitalism, often associated with the dissemination of Marxism. Since the Middle Ages, the bourgeois man had sought a means that would represent the anxiety of the free man, the man who was not part of the feudal system, the man who would help populate and develop the urban areas in Europe. We know it was rather difficult for literary theory, along the 20th century, to find elements that could stabilize the dynamic comprehensiveness of what prose – especially the novel – represented in Western history. As the theory of the novel was still contaminated by the classical studies of poetics, it was often inevitable to associate prose with epic discourse. With the contribution of several important theorists, among whom Lukacs, Frye and especially Bakhtin, the novel was increasingly detached from the merely epic basis. It rose to a prominent position in the history of literary genres. From the studies of the mentioned theorists, the novel was the first genre to be indissolubly linked to its historical referents; i.e., it was impossible to understand the potential of the novel without relating it to the underlying political and economic forces and contradictions of the Modern Age. On the other hand, this demonstrates, for example, the failure of structuralism to deal with more complex narratives, such as the great novels of the 19th century, or novels that went beyond the binary models, which were largely used during a certain period of effervescent theoretical studies in the 1960s.

Finally, the novel is configured in a process of intense symbiosis between language – a discursive basis that makes use of a combination of several layers – and the tense conditions projected onto the relationships among men in their daily life.

Bakhtin, in numerous studies on the dynamics of prose, stated that, even in a naive intention, the novel was internal and polemic, and consequently dialogized (BAKHTIN, 1981).<sup>1</sup> In an increasingly competitive universe, the novel has the conditions to portray the great controversies of the rise of capitalism. Bakhtin also shows that “heteroglossia washes over literary language from all sides” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.418),<sup>2</sup> especially from the Modern Age on, “those eras that most conduce to the novel” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.418).<sup>3</sup> The more tense the situation faced by discourse is, the more difficult it is to maintain the canonizing establishment ((BAKHTIN, 1981).<sup>4</sup> According to Bakhtin, the distancing between the author and the accents of prose is one of the most important aspects of making a narrative more novelistic. By means of what the theorist refers to as re-accentuation, the variants of double-voiced discourse are rearranged in such a level of discursive expression that the author’s position is disguised, as to any verifiable intention (BAKHTIN, 1981).<sup>5</sup> What prevails in the relation between discourse and object, in this case, is the parodying condition.

For these and other reasons, the novel became a genre which was highly flexible and challenging for scholars, as if each novel were constantly reinvented from its first model – *Don Quixote*. *Don Quixote* is not only the first modern novel; it is the very first novel for Bakhtin: “[...] the classic and purest model of the novel as genre” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.324).<sup>6</sup> Due to its picaresque nature, *Don Quixote* is projected as survival in a verbal mass and it tries to articulate the several voices that nourish it. The model of *Don Quixote* survives in all long or complex narratives, not to reinforce a certain pattern, but because it imposes itself as a challenge of invention that stems from the different layers it organizes.

Dialogism in the novel works as refraction into the character’s intentions, not only the author’s (BAKHTIN, 1981).<sup>7</sup> Re-accentuation is established in different social and ideological levels. Accordingly, the novel for Bakhtin would be the historian of ideas and their contradictions. Each period, seen from whatever perspective, is

---

<sup>1</sup> BAKHTIN, M. Discourse in the Novel. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.259-422.

<sup>2</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>4</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>5</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>6</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>7</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

reinvented and problematized by the perspective of the novel. Heteroglossia decentralizes the universe where the plot is inserted. The basis of the represented world, considered stable then, is now relativized (BAKHTIN, 1981).<sup>8</sup> The strategic distance that configures the essential relation between author and referent lies on the basis of the very evolution of prose in the West by means of the carnivalesque inversion. Heteroglossia is the very creation of a favorable environment for the orchestration of voices (the organizer). Language, in the literary scope, especially prose, is formed in an appropriating and renovating manner. The novel presents itself as the most impure genre (or “antigenre”). Hence, it keeps an even more tense relation to the historical referent, whose elements – motivating, thematic or rhetorical – are organized on the same level, without the need to superimpose the physical configuration upon the content or vice versa. Bakhtin himself expressed concern about the question of superimposing the so-called “architectonic and compositional” forms (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.268).<sup>9</sup> The former refers to moral and physical values, whereas the latter refers to the organization of material representation. Both surpass the old form/content dichotomy, and the work is perceived from its own aesthetic potential, projected onto the verbal mass and onto the ideological contradictions of each period. As an example, the theorist shows that a tragic character (architectonic) may find, in the dramatic form (compositional), its best expression (BAKHTIN, 1990).<sup>10</sup> Likewise, a universe of highly contradictory, competitive or even disjunctive forces would be projected onto the unifying constitution of prose – in the form of the novel or even of the short story.

For Bakhtin, “the novelistic hybrid is *an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another [...]*” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.361; emphasis in original).<sup>11</sup> The compositional form brings the need to acknowledge the “bastard son,” or the subject that is projected onto the remains left by an inequitable world. The riches of the novel are made from the remains. The novel becomes huge, as it does not deny its affiliation with the epic form. However, the novel wants more than just highlight its origins and heroic deeds. The novel starts a new era, an era of

---

<sup>8</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>9</sup> BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov and translated by Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990, pp.257-325.

<sup>10</sup> For reference, see footnote 9.

<sup>11</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

provocation and purification of the contradictions that made up the Modern world. Its environment disintegrates the established orders, or the ethics and etiquette that were involved in social relations. Bakhtin's fascination with the novel has to do with its high level of challenge to a world which was hardened in the era of the heroes. In each historical moment, prose will be considered as live matter.

Prose captures the dialogized energy of risk and acknowledgment. Risk is configured as the basis of the bourgeois world, of the subject who moves in it and reassures himself by his own means. Initially distant from the glamour of the aristocratic halls, for example, prose is affirmed as a marginal element. It is directed to any space that attests to its heteroglot capacity. Acknowledgment claims the legitimacy that had been denied to it by apparently purist patterns of the literary language. The novel is then instituted because it is established outside the description patterns of poetic language, which was traditionally monologic. The novel does not deny poetry; it can render poetry in other formats. Later in the nineteenth century, the novel finds the necessary groundwork to reverberate the historical – highly competitive and tense – conditions, which helped consolidate it in the bourgeois environment of the period. In the 20th century, under the influence of vanguards, the novel finds the suspension of certainties as basis for all experimentalisms. Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner, Döblin, Dos Passos, Rosa, Vargas Llosa, Cortázar, Cabrera Infante, García Márquez, among others, re-accentuate the different styles that a highly renovating genre provides, as a hypothesis of writing in a manner which is always original and is highly dialogic with language. It is interesting to note that this is not limited to a specific genre. In modernism, for example, genres are generally contaminated by the development of prose. Prose is a register which provokes a world that will never be stable. Its hero is the average man – a beggar, a proletarian, a *flâneur*, a dandy, an aristocrat, a millionaire, a bureaucrat, or the “bedeviled”<sup>12</sup> bourgeois man. The latter is the one who gathers all the possible chameleon-like aspects of a world that is in internal and in external disputes. A universe is configured from the clash between the exterior and the interior. This universe is favorable for new categories of individuation. The novel is the prose that is made plural, heteroglot – it becomes the enhanced tool, able to deal with the evolutive imprecision of the very bourgeois world that generates it.

---

<sup>12</sup> TN. The author of the article uses the word “amaldiçoado” (“cursed”) between quotation marks due to the general pejorative reference to the bourgeois man in 19th century great novels.

Cristóvão Tezza, discussing the relation between formalists and Bakhtin, speaks of deviation in prose. The notion of unfamiliarity that characterized literary language, easily found in certain poetic standards, is expanded from Bakhtin's theories. Colloquialism, or the prosaicness, often has particularities that go beyond the control of fixed theoretical patterns. Such particularities transform certain objects – which are apparently ordinary – into poetry (TEZZA, 2003, pp.130-131). It is not the problematic rhetorical level alone that will give the text its heteroglot character, but the capacity to articulate between text and object by provoking forces. Text and object become associated with a project that reveals the world and its antagonist forces. The average trivialized man – pertaining to whatever social class, surrounded by the bourgeois environment, which is increasingly violent, competitive and challenging – acquires a capacity to realize art. This can place prose on the same level as the highest poetic achievements. Accordingly, prose is transformed into an expression with a larger capacity to work mimetically with the referents, reinventing the bases to examine the modern subject.

Bakhtin's idea that the conscience is formed by another's conscience has been largely discussed, and it may be the main instrument to understand the articulation of voices or the dialogic character of the novel, or of the prose. According to Maria Celina Marinho, discourse is always pervaded by other people's discourses (1997, p.249). This alien element that forms the conscience is the conscience itself, according to Bakhtin. Bakhtin's fascination with Dostoevsky comes from this author's capacity to represent someone else's idea with an extraordinary artistic capacity (BAKHTIN, 1984).<sup>13</sup> Humans exist because we are in a complex interaction with conflicting consciences. "The *artist of the idea*" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.85; emphasis in original),<sup>14</sup> as Bakhtin referred to Dostoyevsky, is projected onto the distance created in relation to someone else's idea. The dialogic perspective of discourse aims at comprehending the different levels of contradictory clashes among ideas. To a greater or lesser extent, dialogism was practically in all discursive foundations, and it would be much more evident in a society in which degrees of contradiction are higher. Dostoevsky is referred to as a polyphonic novelist because he experiences firsthand, through his characters, the political and

---

<sup>13</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

<sup>14</sup> For reference, see footnote 13..

existential contradictions of a society undergoing great changes of values in 19th-century Russia. In a certain way, we could be invited to examine Latin America, in the mid-20th century, as a continent that was very close to incorporating the metamorphic effervescence of several existing ideologies. 19th century Russia, which revealed names, such as Gogol, Goncharov, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev or Chekhov, was the heir of slavery, breathing the liberating airs of Western Europe or living the tensions of radical utopias. This Russia was very similar to Latin America, which was also the heir of slavery, of *caudillismo*, of positivist populism. This Latin America revealed names such as Graciliano Ramos, Borges, Clarice Lispector, Guimarães Rosa, Juan Rulfo, Carlos Fuentes, García Márquez, among others. Their styles are similar in terms of aspiring a representation of a reality that was extremely challenging to the bourgeois *status quo* imported from other places. They are interwoven worlds, eager to retell the marks of their foundation in an inexorable dialogue with modern values that trample on and challenge them. Latin American authors represented an impasse in the 20th century. Such impasse seeks to insert our reality into the order of a conjecture of values, of which we are part, but of which, at the same time, we are not part.

In the 1970s and in the 1980s, it became common for us to promote a usual kind of fiction that was developed in the Latin American continent. People discussed the in-between condition of our continental discourse: “Latin American writers play with the signs of other writers, of other books” (SANTIAGO, 2000, p.21).<sup>15</sup> There was an attempt to show that certain resources, already overused in Europe, took on a fresh meaning among us: “[...] the fantastic expression, transposed to Latin America, recovered the image of the artist as a dissatisfied, revolutionary figure [...]” (LINS, 1990, p.113).<sup>16</sup> A kind of boom took place in our literature with a new narrative: “[...] it can achieve an authentic and global representation [...]” (COUTINHO, 1984, p.178).<sup>17</sup> Such aspects are part of a drama of belonging and frontier between here and there, through an imagination that is founded in the relation between the colonizing imagination and the colonized imagination – a phenomenon that would challenge us to

---

<sup>15</sup> TN. The English translations of quotes from books not published in English have been done by the translator of this article for the purpose of its publication.

Text in original: “O escritor latino-americano brinca com os signos de um outro escritor, de uma outra obra.”

<sup>16</sup> Text in original: “[...] a expressão fantástica, transplantada para a América Latina, recuperou a figura do artista inconformado e revolucionário [...].”

<sup>17</sup> Text in original: “[...] pode alcançar uma representação autêntica e global [...].”

take an unheard-of stance in the Western world. It is not in vain that we speak of fantastic literature and magic realism as if they were categories that could not be detached from our way of being. However, Latin American literature proved to go beyond labels. Our writers created particularities, especially because they were able to reproject the cultural heritage they received. In the 1990s, Leyla Perrone-Moisés was firmly against any folkloric labeling regarding our literary productions: “The image of a Latin America, which was poor but jolly, ignorant but vital, is a convenient image from the perspective of hegemonic cultures” (2007, p.41).<sup>18</sup> The development of our contemporary fiction took place naturally and remarkably because we entered a battle field that was very specific to the evolution of prose in the West. Our heroes, or antiheroes, were configured in a way that was not very different from that of other great literatures that were forced to reinvent themselves.

The Baroque present in a great part of our contemporary literature revealed fields of extremely complex tension in the way our intellectuals and writers saw our reality. Firstly, Euclides da Cunha, for example – an essayist, almost a novelist, who was limited by the scientific arsenal of his time and who was still attached to positivist or determinist formulas – was undoubtedly able to recount the saga of the Brazilian renegades in search of the “civilizational light,” whether in the Northeastern *Sertão*,<sup>19</sup> or in the Amazon, occupied by the same *sertanejos*<sup>20</sup> in the rubber boom. Euclides da Cunha’s contrasting or hyperbolic images indicated a universe of effervescent values that would make us rethink our civilization project, imported by the colonizing imagination. In order to reinforce some categories or to expand the scope of reflections, our literary production – at least our most relevant literary achievements –, through Spanish and Portuguese literature in Latin America, became a vigorous account of the identity clashes in our varied social realities mainly in the 1920s and in the 1930s. In the 1970s, Irlemar Chiampi, on the Baroque enunciation, stated that “[i]t is not a casual, disengaged, empty game. It is equally included in the sign of questioning the narrative

---

<sup>18</sup> Text in original: “A imagem de uma América Latina, pobre mas alegre, ignorante mas vital, é a que convém, justamente, ao olhar das culturas hegemônicas.”

<sup>19</sup> Author’s note for this English version: *Sertão* is a term that indicates the difficulties of the expeditions of the Bandeirantes, path finders and adventurers. In Guimarães Rosa’s novel, the term assumes a greater proportion, as the *sertão* refers to the unawareness of a wild, brutal world. This world becomes civilized from its own violence – violence from the outside to the inside, from the inside to the outside.

<sup>20</sup> Author’s note for this English version: *Sertanejo*: an inhabitant of the country side, distant from the urban conglomerate. The *sertanejo* is dedicated to rural activities and also deals with wild nature.



act and, therefore, it is related to the questioning of the narrative act, and therefore, it exposes the rupture between reality and imagination” (1980, p.85).<sup>21</sup> More recently, Affonso Sant’Anna resumes the image of the labyrinth as a resource that markedly characterized the experimentation of the Baroque art over the centuries. It is as if there were an imaginary connection among writers and artists – so different in contemporary production –, such as Kafka, Borges, García Márquez, Saramago, Joyce, Beckett, Mondrian, Pollock, Ionesco, Vargas Llosa, Cortázar, Rosa, Paz, Vallejo, Neruda, Lezama Lima, Asturias and Osman Lins (SANT’ANNA, 2000, pp.57-81). These names describe an invisible fellowship around the dramas of loneliness and art, obliged to be in a labyrinth in which the savage beast is man himself (BORGES, 1993).

Bakhtin’s carnivalesque *weltanschauung* in many aspects reinforces the recreation of the modern hero or antihero. Such notion is extremely connected with the Baroque universe. It is not limited to the specific time period of the seventeenth century; it is also connected with a process which is founded in the very ideas of modernity and humanism. The Baroque, or Neo-Baroque, proposes controversies rather than imposes rules (CHIAMPI, 1994, p.23). The very idea of the labyrinth is expanded by carnivalesque subversion, in which the subject is forced to look for the way out in the very (anti)significance of disorientation. The process of renovation is inalienable from the presence, belonging, and permanence of the literary art, three categories that imprint (un)justice to great works. The Baroque spirit will always potentialize the process of art renovation. Latin American literary expression in the 20th century rediscovers the bases of *conceptualism* and *cultism* as stepping stones to resolve tensions or to keep them. According to Maria Paranhos, in the contemporary dynamics

[...] life will be perceived as a process in constant mutation: a process of becoming, not an unchangeable fact. During the Baroque period, the condition was of an unfinished reality, expressed in fragmented verses, incomplete paintings, emblematic literature, leaving the task of finishing the thought to the reader. In our contemporary society, we see this same condition of unfinished reality – a possible expression of a profound ethical crisis (2009, pp.100-101).<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Text in original: “Não se trata de um jogo casual, descompromissado e vazio. Se inclui igualmente sob o signo do questionamento do ato narrativo e, por conseguinte, da denúncia do corte entre o real e o imaginário.”

<sup>22</sup> Text in original: “a vida será percebida como um processo em constante mutação: um fazer-se e não um fato imutável. Essa mesma condição de realidade inacabada que, no Barroco, evidenciou o gosto pelos versos de palavras cortadas, pela pintura inacabada, pela literatura emblemática que deixa ao leitor a

In a colonial process, in which the dramatic relationship between belonging and frontier was consolidated, permanence could only occur by means of a delayed, incoming modernity. Our social and spiritual misfortunes and our fractures between being and seeming could only be revealed in a paradoxical process of reinventing what was already made. Our Baroque has its own peculiar characteristics, which makes possible the connection among authors and artists who are apparently so distant in their styles.

The hypothesis dealt with herein takes into account the extensive problematics that have articulated the disparate worlds of Latin America since the colonization period. Undoubtedly the Neo-Baroque present in our 20th century literature is not limited to a group of “enlightened” authors. Nevertheless, we can observe that the Neo-Baroque is configured as a fundamental arena that makes the unfamiliar meet. Carpentier stated that we did not have to be original as we had been long before the concept of originality was presented to us (CARPENTIER *apud* SANT’ANNA, 2000, p.267). The Neo-Baroque intensifies the profound relations to the formation of our identity. Great authors adopted other styles, but it was through the Neo-Baroque that our prose, especially the novel, achieved a level of increasing problematization, which was unheard of in other periods. The circulation of our literature, especially among Hispanics, aimed at stripping Latin America’s literature of the label of a mere appendix of European literature.

In order to deal with several aspects addressed in this paper, strategic fragments are selected from some of our most representative fiction writers, who gather the qualities necessary to consolidate the tendencies that founded the bases to understand the dialogic dynamics and the formation of our identity. We confirm the hypothesis that the Neo-Baroque is a fundamental instrument of the search for identity – acknowledgment. Guimarães Rosa wrote *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*<sup>23</sup> as a great microcosm of voracious forces. This novel reveals an extraordinary effort to name the innumerable contradictions that arise from colonial tradition. Rosa’s novel can be

---

tarefa de complementar o pensamento, vemos permanecer em nossa sociedade contemporânea – expressão possível de uma profunda crise ética.”

<sup>23</sup> TN. *Grande Sertão: Veredas* has been translated into English as *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* [ROSA, G. *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*. Translated by James L. Taylor and Harriet De Onis. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963].

understood as an ambitious attempt to gather the necessary conditions to acknowledge an internal and external geography by means of its own *conceptualism* and *cultism*. Let us look at the following fragments:

Urubu? It is a very old place in Bahia, with streets and churches, a place for families to live in. It will do for my thoughts. It will do for what I have to say; I would like to have been remorseful, but I am not. But there is really no devil. It is God who lets the instrument tune itself as it wishes, until it is time to dance. A crossing, with God in the middle. When did I acquire my guilt? Here we are in Minas, yonder is Bahia. I was in those high old towns and villages. The sertão is secluded. My compadre Quelemém tells me that I am very much of the sertão. The sertão – it is inside of one. Do you accuse me? I told you about Hermógenes’s selection of me, and my reluctant yielding. But my patroness is the Virgin through thick and thin. Could I have chosen a middle way? Vampire bats did not elect to be so ugly, so cold – it is enough that they chose to fly in the shades of night and to suck blood. God never goes back on his word. The devil does all the time. I left my beloved Gerais. I came back with Diadorim. The moon, the moonlight: I can see those herdsmen driving their cattle at daybreak, with the moon still in the sky, day after day. I ask questions of the buriti palm, and I gain courage from its answers (ROSA, 1963, p.257).<sup>24</sup>

But then, from somewhere deep inside me a little voice, so weak it was strong – and I am not even sure it was my own – spoke in a whisper. In that brief moment, the little voice gave me a warning. And yes, there is a secret place, little backwaters, through which the devil cannot slip into my great palaces. My heart, that’s what I mean [My sertão, my rejoice!] <sup>25</sup> (ROSA, 1963, p.383).<sup>26</sup>

The fragments deal with a tense relation to the object. The language indicates the tensions that represent the narrator’s contradictory feelings. The signs are projected as appropriations of an actual devouring process.<sup>27</sup> The geography that seduces the narrator is the same one that internally devours him. His challenge is to disfigure the external landscape and bring it inside himself with specific voraciousness to cope with the semantics of the narrative. The narrator needs to digest the perspective of the sign,

---

<sup>24</sup> For reference, see footnote 23.

<sup>25</sup> TN. The translators of the published version in English omitted “meu sertão, meu regozijo,” which can be translated as “my *sertão*, my rejoice.”

<sup>26</sup> For reference, see footnote 23.

<sup>27</sup> Author’s note for this English version: *Antropofagia* was a movement in Brazilian Modernism in the 1920s with Oswald de Andrade and Mário de Andrade. It defended a devouring posture of the artist before the colonizing past. Devouring the enemies was a way for cannibalistic Indians to honor them by retaining the enemies’ force and good qualities. The colonized artist should devour European art – the colonizer – and bring it to the Brazilian reality.

through another field, another ear, which may give him support in light of the symbolic force that the “devil” exerts as temptation and resilience. The narrator also refracts what he devours (“I would like to have been remorseful, but I am not”). The force of the represented world is connected with the weak bases of the attempt to represent the devil as an abstract subject (“But there is really no devil”). The geographical perception characterizes the sensations intensely experienced through the process of internal radicalization (“A crossing, with God in the middle. When did I acquire my guilt? Here we are in Minas, yonder is Bahia. I was in those high old towns and villages. The sertão is secluded”). A saga of journeys is dragged in this process of identification between the internal and the external. Quelemém, the other ear, the other voice, helps organize the narrator’s voice, as acknowledgement (“tells me I am very much of the sertão. The sertão – it is inside of one”). However, acknowledgment is close to risk, as it is what makes the continuance of the search process possible. The narrator’s constant questionings are always projected as a semantic rescue – an image formed to make sense of the contradictory –, which is invented for a truth that reconciles, but one which is temporary as an idea. God is the element of equilibrium, whereas the devil tempts the character in order to have grounds for the very purpose of the search. One never lies; the other lies all the time. The truth is the reconciliation of one with the other. The idea exists when it finds its opposite. Gerais involves the Virgin, dew, Diadorim, the crossing, the moonlight, the herdsmen, the cattle. These parts become subjective appropriations that broaden the dialogic field, which the narrator attempts to keep and represent the object, at any cost, through discursive tension. The semantic price is always the reconciliation with the nature that devours the narrator, with the other voice that cannot be lost (“I ask questions of the buriti palm”). The internalized voice acts in the heteroglot field in a totally natural way. The narrator and the other conscience are temporary partners in the dialogic arena (“But then, from somewhere deep inside me a little voice, so weak it was strong – and I am not even sure it was my own”). In the confrontation with the harsh landscape of the Sertão, the internal reality prevails – the poetic one. The narrator’s truth is projected as possibility for the discourse equilibrium (“And yes, there is a secret place, little backwaters, through which the devil cannot slip into my great palaces”). This is the support that insures the semantic reconciliation (“My heart, that’s what I mean. My sertão, my rejoice”). God and the devil are always

reconciled because they listen to one another. Inside, in the dialogic arena, the combat field is the picture of a landscape. It is an archaic world, where the disintegrated order relives in the reinvention of language.

As we have verified in the fragments, Rosa's novel is the permanent challenge of reconciliation: the internal and the external, the subject and the object, the sertão and sexuality, God and the devil, reality and imagination. Opposing elements reinforce the Baroque character of the novel, making it a devouring narrative, which is highly dialogic. Consequently, the narrative has to move forward, as it comprehends many centuries. The man in the sertão is the one who drinks from all possible waters. With his tortuous, Baroque soul, he can only hope for reconciliation between the opposites by means of tropes. *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* belongs to all frontiers that elucidate the relation of the American<sup>28</sup> man to his origins: he is not a simpleton; he is not a devout religious man; he is not a *jagunço*;<sup>29</sup> he will be the reconciliation between the opposites. All these contradictions end up converging into the biggest one: it is prose, but it is also a highly poetic production. The level of the Baroque problematization presented in the text, in its conjunction, gives us a field of acknowledgment and affirmation unparalleled in the 20th century Brazilian literature. Perhaps it is only matched by Machado de Assis in the nineteenth century. Riobaldo is from the Sertão, from a landscape that, although it is recognizable, it goes beyond the physical space. It goes beyond the ordinary perception commonly expected from the tradition of the *sertanejo*. The *sertão* is the language to be decoded, the frontier to be crossed; it is an imaginary place where there are conflicts between opposing forces.

In the Hispanic-American literature, Jorge Luis Borges projects his dialogic and carnivalesque perspective onto other places, such as in the short story "The Circular Ruins." An Indian ascetic (the wizard) arrives at a temple with the obligation to dream a man:

No one saw him slip from the boat in the unanimous night, no one saw the bamboo canoe as it sank into the sacred mud, and yet within days

---

<sup>28</sup> Author's note for this English version: "American" from North America, Central America, Latin America or South America.

<sup>29</sup> Author's note for this English version: A *jagunço* is generally known as a body guard or a protector of a colonel in the Brazilian Sertão. For Guimarães Rosa, the *jagunço*, who is familiar with the backlands, is a product of the sertão. In this paper the word has a metaphysical meaning. The colonel in this context does not refer to a military title. He refers to a person with political and economic power in a certain region.

there was no one who did not know that the taciturn man had come there from the South, and that his homeland was one of those infinite villages that lie up-river, on the violent flank of the mountain, where the language of the Zend is uncontaminated by Greek and where leprosy is uncommon. But in fact the gray man had kissed the mud, scrambled up the steep bank (without pushing back, probably without even feeling, the sharp-leaved bulrushes that slashed his flesh), and dragged himself, faint and bloody, to the circular enclosure, crowned by the stone figure of a horse or tiger, which had once been the color of fire but was now the color of ashes. That ring was a temple devoured by an ancient holocaust; now, the malarial jungle had profaned it and its god went unhonored by mankind. The foreigner lay down at the foot of the pedestal. He was awakened by the sun high in the sky. He examined his wounds and saw, without astonishment, that they had healed; he closed his pale eyes and slept, not out of any weakness of the flesh but out of willed determination. He knew that this temple was the place that his unconquerable plan called for; he knew that the unrelenting trees had not succeeded in strangling the ruins of another promising temple downriver—like this one, a temple to dead, incinerated gods; he knew that his immediate obligation was to sleep (BORGES, 1999, p.96).<sup>30</sup>

The goal that led him on was not impossible, though it was clearly supernatural: He wanted to dream a man. He wanted to dream him completely, in painstaking detail, and impose him upon reality. This magical objective had come to fill his entire soul; if someone had asked him his own name, or inquired into any feature of his life till then, he would not have been able to answer. The uninhabited and crumbling temple suited him, for it was a minimum of visible world (BORGES, 1999, p.97).<sup>31</sup>

In those fragments, it is possible to notice the depurative aspects that guide the narrator. Since the beginning of the narrative, the mysterious character represents the subject that comes from other cultures and finds a world that is ready to acquire new meanings. The dream is the condition for the worlds to meet. The Latin-American man is inevitably associated with this oneiric figure of other hypothetical places. The historical and geographical references are tenuous, but the need for recognition is enormous. The character who brings references of an indistinct origin is the one who will have a mission to dream the man, or the “new” man. Everything is there in order to be formed (“a temple devoured by an ancient holocaust”). The “new” man brings the nuances of the unspeakable (supernatural), but he will rise from his ruins (“for it was a minimum of visible world”). When the narrator configures his ascetic, or his wizard, as

---

<sup>30</sup> BORGES, J. *Collected Fictions*. Translated by Andrew Hurley. New York: Penguin, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> For reference, see footnote 30.

a probable being, the narrator assigns him the responsibility to ultimately dream himself. This man is doomed to be permeated by every voice he brings inside: the new world is made from patches from the old world. The “new” man will be at a place that is ready to receive information and knowledge. Between the dream and reality, another voice will be configured; this voice will incorporate the contradictions. Its Baroque character gathers the old and the new, helping the passage through the physical and imaginary continents. It also helps connect Latin America with several cultural matrices.

Clarice Lispector is generally referred to as antiregionalist, or profoundly psychological. However, from the perspective of the carnivalesque inversion, she may be seen as an author who is rooted in a problematic terrain such as ours, recipient of so many matrices and combinations. The author’s problematics, which involves belonging and frontier in a limit that was unheard of in our literature, is evident in her entire work. Her fragmented, suffering characters, reveal a world which is difficult to situate, even when it is philosophically very sophisticated:

[...]I'm searching, I'm searching, I'm trying to understand. Trying to give what I've lived to somebody else and I don't know to whom, but I don't want to keep what I lived. I don't know what to do with what I lived, I'm afraid of that profound disorder. I don't trust what happened to me. Did something happen to me that I, because I didn't know how to live it, lived as something else?

[...]

If I confirm my self and consider myself truthful, I'll be lost because I won't know where to inlay my new way of being – if I go ahead with my fragmentary visions, the whole world will have to be transformed in order for me to fit within it. I lost something that was essential to me, and that no longer is. I no longer need it, as if I'd lost a third leg that up till then made it impossible for me to walk but that turned me into a stable tripod. I lost that third leg. And I went back to being a person I never was. I went back to having something I never had: just two legs. I know I can only walk with two legs. But I feel the useless absence of that third leg and it scares me [...](LISPECTOR, 2012, pp.3-4).<sup>32</sup>

The comprehensive structures used in the two fragments above bring the dilemma of rearranging origins. The character lists possible meanings so that she does not drown in her own Baroque verbal vomit. It is a spiral of contradictory and radically insistent sensations. She brings to herself the obligation to situate herself and to displace

---

<sup>32</sup> LISPECTOR, C. *The Passion According to G.H.* Translated by Idra Novey. New York: New Directions Books, 2012.

herself, continuously, in this labyrinth. The more contradictory elements she can deal with, the more monumental is the role of the lyric self in the attempt to find a configuration to deal with sign-related challenges. It is a highly subjective prose. Nevertheless, it is embedded in the need for acknowledgement, which can only entail a dialogic condition which is very *sui generis*. Since the beginning, there is always the dependence on the labyrinth and on the mirror (“Trying to give what I’ve lived to somebody else and I don’t know to whom, but I don’t want to keep what I lived”). The character builds a mysterious imbroglio as a hypothetical projection of her possible doubles (“I don’t trust what happened to me. Did something happen to me that I, because I didn’t know how to live it, lived as something else?”). The character – or the convergence of voices – in Lispector’s prose does not depend on palpable historical referents to project a believable reality: the prose is what it is because it is made into the product of the roamings that formed our continent (“if I go ahead with my fragmentary visions, the whole world will have to be transformed in order for me to fit within it”). The voice which is uttered depends on the uncertainty of the referents (“I lost something that was essential to me, and that no longer is. I no longer need it, as if I’d lost a third leg that up till then made it impossible for me to walk but that turned me into a stable tripod”). In this introspective prose, what is picturesque is the fragmented being – or the sense of reconstruction that cannot stop. It is a very rich imagination; one cannot be limited to the visible referents (“I lost that third leg. And I went back to being a person I never was”). In this novel, the initials G. H. confirm the reminiscences of which we are part. Our mission is to remake ourselves. The hysterical and problematic narrator seems to be screaming all the time, based on a profound philosophy that cuts through the corners of her apartment. The apartment is eager for life and its corners represent a new appropriating way, which contests the ethical crisis of the time, intensely experienced by the character. To be *or* not to be become to be *and* not to be in the extreme and verbal contortions of the Baroque, which is both universal and Latin-American.

In Carlos Fuentes’s ambitious novel, as the last example for this paper, we find a Latin America that deals with an abundance of referents and voices. It is as overwhelming as the earlier fragments, but extremely greater in mythological and historical terms. It is the history of Mexico and also the history of Latin America, emerging from the shadows of a legendary and provoking past. When the Hispanic



America begins to be colonized, a “new world” starts to emerge from the “rumors” that help recreate it in a clandestine ear, provoking a combination of voices that interfere in the linearity of the discourse:

Alguaciles and chaplains, monks and stewards, Julián and Toríbio, Guzmán and the Comendador, the halberdiers taking charge of the three prisoners, the young pilgrim, the blind flautist, the girl with the tattooed lips dressed as a page, the nuns fluttering behind the iron latticework, the Bishop and his companion, the monk of the order of St. Augustine, the scrubbing girls hidden behind the columns, the huntsmen, Guzmán’s men, all hurrying from the chapel, murmuring, lost in amazement, doubt, mockery, deafness, credulity, incomprehension, fear, indifference, hurrying swiftly from the vicinity of El Senor's bedchamber, could you hear anything? I couldn't, and you?, nor I, what did they say?, nothing, pure lies, lands of gold, lands of idols, beaches of pearls, blood, sacrifices, infidels, teach them, truth, the Gospel, barbaric nations, exterminate them, blood and fire, idolaters, by the handfuls, dreams, lies, not one shred of proof, they didn't bring even one grain of gold with them [...]

[...]

[...] fantasies, fairy treasure, God, Our Father, what happened, Mother Milagros?, nothing, daughters, nothing, still another challenge to the Faith, still another, always a challenge, Christianity bleeds from battling against the Infidel, the Body of Christ, the rack of the cross, the redemption of sins, praise, praise, praise be [...] (FUENTES, 2003, p.492).<sup>33</sup>

The third person narration will be crossed by the astonished voices in light of the rumors. It configures the very ambition articulated by the text: retelling a trajectory, told so many times, from the perspective of the worlds that experienced it. This is only possible because there is an increased dialogic dimension and the levels of security that support the referents in question are disturbed. There is a parade of characters from that time (“alguaciles, chaplains, monks, stewards, Comendador, halberdiers, page, nuns, scrubbing girls, huntsmen”), and they recompose the eagerness of a great many referents to reconstitute history. The values of the time are subjected to the dialogic, Baroque test of our literary tradition. Each one of the characters represents his own voice and has his own semantic dimension. However, they make up a very rich and emblematic compound, which is the way to know a universe of values that helped populate the colonies in Latin America. The devouring process – characterized by the

---

<sup>33</sup> FUENTES, C. *Terra Nostra*. Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden. London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003.

use of gerund, adjectives, abstract nouns – emphasizes the less perceptible conditions of the incoming adventure (“hurrying from the chapel, murmuring, lost in amazement, doubt, mockery, deafness, credulity, incomprehension, fear, indifference, hurrying swiftly”). It is not by chance that the third person narration is crossed by the need for acknowledgment, the need to pursue the imaginary frontiers that lead to a certain semantic dimension, which will trigger the colonial exploitation (“could you hear anything? I couldn’t, and you?, nor I, what did they say?, nothing, pure lies, lands of gold, lands of idols, beaches of pearls, blood, sacrifices, infidels, teach them, truth, the Gospel, barbaric nations, exterminate them, blood and fire, idolaters, by the handful, dreams, lies, not one shred of proof, they didn’t bring even one grain of gold with them”). In another passage, the narrator makes clear which are the religious purgative elements to be taken to the colonizing expedition in Latin America (“battling against the Infidel, the Body of Christ, the rack of the cross, the redemption of sins, praise, praise, praise be”). In the excerpts, it is possible to see the author’s capacity to orchestrate voices, transforming the colonizer into the colonized, by means of “rumors,” in order to emphasize the variations involved in the double-voice, refracting any authoritarian intention of a mere vision from the inside to the outside, and reaffirming a continent which is constituted much more from enunciation than utterances. The dramatic narrative is itself a test to find the dimension of the language. The Baroque feature tests the limits in which the opposing voices – or complementary ones – are articulated. Latin America is made from temporal selected aspects in the aesthetic unit, which the author is able to capture in a parodic and highly problematizing intention. In this novel, Carlos Fuentes produces one of the most profound debates about our foundation roots, from the outside to the inside, from the inside to the outside.

The aspects of the authors and the fragments discussed herein aimed at dealing with the enormous amount of difficulties arising from the colonizer’s language that Latin America faced in the construction of its literature in the 20th century. This century was, for us, characterized as an effort of carnivalesque inversion about the negative aspects that had guided us since the first moments of colonization. The insisting Baroque aspect in many of our authors’ writings had its own arsenal of literary representation throughout this whole process, and it increased the level of tension between the extremes (colonizer vs. colonized) that were forming Latin America. For

us, fiction, especially the novel, was projected as a genre that exposed the inadequacy of the colonial past. The marks collected by the novelists, in a more subjective or more objective prose, were revealed in a highly inventive Baroque prose, in which modern techniques were combined with a great need for affirming our “other history.” Our position in the West depended on the conditions of a perspective that selected our internal and external frontiers. The belonging/frontier relation will never give us the concrete feeling of permanence, as this is only possible in literature. Such categories (belonging, frontier and permanence) will depend on how we project the confrontation of our inadequacies. Our great fictional styles (highly diversified) represent the eagerness to reach the great level of contradictions that formed us. Our look upon the other will always be a suspicious look upon ourselves. It is the (re)location in a universe that attracts and repels us. Our relation to the historical referents carries a tension that is typical for those who had their races denied. That is why our mission, based on the work of these fictionists, is to relentlessly revise the variables of our formation. Our Neo-Baroque made us (and will make us) challenge the several matrices of our constitution with its hyperboles and its feverish exaggerations. Authors brought upon themselves the huge responsibility to rethink what we have become.

Modernity, industries and middle classes (petty bourgeois) took a long time to settle here. Our ordinary man (the bourgeois hero) may as well be the Indian, the slave or the *caboclo*,<sup>34</sup> or even a more prominent historical figure, or a lonely bourgeois woman in her apartment located in the Southern part of the city of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>35</sup> We may or may not name specific geographical locations. However, what is important is the way we identify our foundation marks in each of these great poetic and narrative voices, permeated by diverging styles. These styles are, nevertheless, convergent, ready to recount what we used to be or what we could be.

## REFERENCES

BAKHTIN, M. *Problemas da poética de Dostoiévski*. Trad. Paulo Bezerra. Rio de Janeiro: Forense, 1981.

---

<sup>34</sup> Author's note for this English version: *Caboclo* is an Indian mestizo who can represent a peasant, a country person, or the *sertanejo* in the Brazilian countryside.

<sup>35</sup> Author's note for this English version: Middle class area.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance*. Trad. Aurora F. Bernardini et al. São Paulo: Unesp/Hucitec, 1988.

BORGES, J. L. *Ficções*. São Paulo: Abril, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Elogio da sombra/ Um ensaio autobiográfico*. Trad. Maria da Glória Bordini. 5.ed. São Paulo: Globo, 1993.

CHIAMPI, I. *O realismo maravilhoso: forma e ideologia no romance hispano-americano*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1980.

\_\_\_\_\_. El barroco em el ocaso de la modernidade. *Cadernos de Mestrado/Literatura*. UERJ, Rio de Janeiro, Vol. I, p.7-27, 1994.

COUTINHO, E. F. A narrativa contemporânea das Américas: uma narrativa síntese. In: VASSALO, L. (Org.) *A narrativa ontem e hoje*. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1984, p.174-184.

FUENTES, C. *Terra nostra*. Trad. Olga Savary. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1982.

LINS, R.L. *Violência e literatura*. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1990.

LISPECTOR, C. *A paixão segundo G. H.* 9. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1979.

MARINHO, M. C. N. Transmissão do discurso alheio e formas de dialogismo em *Vidas secas*, de Graciliano Ramos. In: BRAIT, B. *Bakhtin, dialogismo e construção do sentido*. Campinas: Unicamp, 1997, p.249-260.

MOISÉS, L. P- *Vira e mexe nacionalismo: paradoxos do nacionalismo literário*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2007.

PARANHOS, M.C.R. *Todos os nomes*, de José Saramago: um texto entre dobras. *Abril*: revista do Núcleo de estudos de Literatura Portuguesa e Africana da UFF, Niterói, Vol. 2, n. 3, p.99-108, 2009. Disponível em [\[www.uff.br/revista\\_abril/revista\\_-\\_03/009\]](http://www.uff.br/revista_abril/revista_-_03/009) Acesso em 20 de set. 2014

ROSA, G. J. *Grande sertão: veredas*. São Paulo: Círculo do Livro, 1984.

SANT'ANNA, A. R. *Barroco: do quadrado à elipse*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2000.

SANTIAGO, S. *Uma literatura nos trópicos: ensaios sobre dependência cultural*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2000.

TEZZA, C. *Entre a prosa e a poesia: Bakhtin e o formalismo russo*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2003.

Translated by Raquel D Elboux Couto Nunes - [rdelbouxnunes@gmail.com](mailto:rdelbouxnunes@gmail.com)

*Received September 26,2014*

*Accepted April 18,2016*