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## A SPHINX AND ITS MYSTERIES: “INFERNO VERDE” AND RANGEL’S INVENTION OF THE AMAZONIAN FICTIONAL SPACE

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**Abstract:** Amazon's fictional representation, from a foreign or native perspective, is expressed through a complex semiotic network that combines the allegorical literary discourse with the common sense's fanciful imaginary. In some cases, the fictional representation can contribute to build and reinforce preconceptions and stereotypes about the Amazon and its people, hiding or restricting the complex Amazonian's natural and social realities. The first literary works that focused on the Brazilian Amazon, in an attempt to 'unveil and explain its mysteries', are based on positivist principles and related to realist-naturalist literary tradition in vogue in the 19th and 20th century. Rangel's "Inferno Verde" (1908) is part of that tradition. The book, by proposing to offer a realistic representation of the Amazon, may have contributed to spread an 'infernal vision about the region and a somewhat diminishing idea of its inhabitants. We discuss "Inferno Verde" taking into consideration the ideological basis of its paratextual organization (Genette, 2009), which support this so-called 'topophobia' towards the Amazon. In addition, we reflect on how a misinterpreted fictional world (Stierle, 1980; Schmid, 2010) may have allowed the permanence of misconceptions and stereotypes about the region.

**Keywords:** Fictionality. Literary discourse. Amazon Region. Alberto Rangel.

## INTRODUCTION

Regarding fictional representation of the Amazon in Brazil in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it would not be difficult to find authors somehow influenced by Alberto do Rego Rangel (1871 – 1945), a writer born in Recife, the capital of Pernambuco state, in the northeastern Brazil, and raised both in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in the southeast of

the country<sup>1</sup>. Rangel's vast work consists of historical studies, philosophical essays and fictional narratives, however, only one of his books, one that has Amazon as its scenario and carries an impressive title and a preface written by the famous author Euclides da Cunha, is still remembered nowadays: "Inferno Verde", published in 1908.

Alberto Rangel also published, in 1913, a second fictional book on the Amazon: "Sombras n'água: vida e paisagens no Brasil equatorial". This volume of short stories has not the same prophetic tone present in "Inferno Verde", but it has the same exuberant language style and seems also shaped in a way that evokes something like an 'Amazon topophobia' into the reader's imagination. But this 1913 book did not have as much influence as "Inferno Verde", that had four editions until 1927.

Although "Inferno Verde" is not widely read and discussed nowadays, the book left a significant allegorical legacy that can be found in some literary works from the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as "Terra Imatura" (1923) by Alfredo Ladislau. "Terra Imatura"'s opening dialogue reinforces the prediction on the future of Amazon and its people made in the final chapter of "Inferno Verde", that is basically the idea that the Amazon needs something like 'outsider heroes' to make it progress.

The journalist and poet Farias Gama was also captured by Rangel's "infernal spell" and published the volume of short stories "Águas e Selvas" (1924). The territory of Acre, as it was then known, is the setting in almost all the stories. In the same way, Misael Seixas also left us his writings on Amazon with the book "Estudos e Paisagens" (1924), which includes historical apology texts, journalistic chronicles and descriptions of the forest.

1. To further information: Vianna, H. (1972, jan/mar). Centenário de Alberto Rangel. *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 294, 237-254; Tonin, F. B. (2009). "Águas Reversas: Confluências da Memória, Literatura e História nas Memórias Inéditas de Alberto Rangel". Dissertação de Mestrado, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, SP, Brasil.

“Terra Imatura” experienced publishing success and had a second edition, reviewed by the author, launched in 1925. Interestingly, just a few months later, Alfredo Ladislau published in the newspaper “Folha do Norte” a letter received from Alberto Rangel with some pleasant lines referring to “Terra Imatura”’s “páginas magníficas e comoventes”. In the letter, Alberto Rangel still expresses his kind apologies for not “julgar-las com as lentes e micrômetros de um crítico em forma” (Rangel, 1924, p. 01).

Raimundo Morais was another writer caught by the impressive scenario of Rangel’s ‘infernal Amazon’ and published, in 1926, “Na Planície Amazônica”, a collection of paintings and curiosities on the jungle – just as the book presents itself. Under the same influence, but with more chorographic and anthropological intentions, we can mention two more works: “Nos Sertões de Gurupi” (1928), by Jorge Hurley, and “A Amazônia que eu vi” (1930), by Gastão Cruls.

“Inferno Verde”, from its very title, evokes a cursed scenario related to the Amazon, which is presented as a dank and morbid region, a hostile environment you could not freely choose to live and from which you would do anything to escape. These apocalyptic echoes can be noticed until today in popular and fictional imagination, and have even inspired the splatter film “Green Inferno” (2013), directed by Eli Roth. In this way, it is very likely that many people nowadays would still consider the fictional world created by Rangel, as well as its fictional echoes, as the real Amazon. Moreover, in “Inferno Verde”’s preface, Euclides da Cunha, using his refined rhetoric along with pseudoscientific arguments, has also contributed to build a popular apocalyptic imaginary in which the Amazon is seen as a hostile place for ‘civilized men’.

And still talking about the famous preface,

it must be admitted that it became, through the years, more remembered and discussed in academic *milieu* than Rangel’s book itself. The book had its fourth edition in 1927 and then experienced 74 years of oblivion until 2001, when a fifth edition was released, and the last edition of the book so far, the sixth, was launched in 2008. Meanwhile, as an interesting fact, the preface ‘survived’ the book and became something like an independent ‘literary scientific piece’ that can be easily found in Euclides da Cunha’s essay collections. This is a curious case in which a book that have been somewhat forgotten for many decades and have not been directly read and discussed for a long time, still survives mostly due to the strength of an impressive title along with the credibility of a preface written by a consecrated author.

This brief overview allows us to direct our hermeneutic effort towards the “narrated world [...] created by the narrator” (Schmid, 2010, p. 32). In this regard, we first address its paratextual elements (especially the peritext), then we discuss the allegories present in the exegetical plane of the eleven chapters that compose the ‘narrated world’: “Taparã”, “Um conceito de Catolé”, “Terra Caída”, “Hospitalidade”, “A decana dos Muras”, “Um homem bom”, “Obstinação”, “A teima da vida”, “Maibi”, “Pirates” and “Inferno Verde”. The paratextual features we investigate are ‘title’, ‘epigraph’, and ‘preface’, “which present to the public at large and then to the reader many other items of information, some of which are authorial and some of which are the publisher’s responsibility” (Genette, 1997, p. 49). Considering these paratextual elements more closely will help us to comprehend the momentary success of a narrative work with such a challenging structure.

Initially, this analysis will provide us with the basis to deal with the most extensive and complex part of our hermeneutic study,

which is to discuss how the absence of a methodologically strong background of scientific knowledge on the Amazon at the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, regarding to geological, biological and human aspects of the region, contributed to strengthen the allegorical fictional discourse, leading to the creation of a set of mystical symbols, and stereotypes, commonly evoked to explain different aspects not well studied yet and peculiarities not satisfactorily understood about the Amazon and its people.

This desire to somehow embrace the totality of the Amazonian phenomena can be seen in the metaphorical discourse of Charles Frederik Hartt. Faced with the complexity of the Amazonian valley, and recognizing there was a lack of linguistic resources in his scientific specialty to express the complexity of such singular environment, Hartt resorted to symbolic tradition of literary fiction:

Mais o que faz actualmente o Amazonas? O gigante com os seus mil braços estendidos sobre a metade do continente está colhendo a terra e levando seus destroços para o mar. [...] O Briareus colhe o seu tribute nos Andes, na Guyana, e nos montes pyrineos e o mar o recebe para fundar novas terras no seu leito, terras que no futuro hão de surgir provavelmente das aguas para ser unidas ao continente. Não sou poeta; emprego a prosa da minha sciencia. *Revenons!* (Hartt, 1894/96, p. 263).

Alberto Rangel, as we know, also employed literary language to build his Amazonian world. Rangel's fictional narrative discourse was successful in mold the Amazon region into a dark, disturbing and strong image: the 'green inferno'. This allegory, as we mentioned before, was reinforced in literary works of authors influenced by Rangel's fictional creation. In this way, a solid synecdoche was established and became more and more evoked to refer to real Amazon, also becoming an idea increasingly present in the

readers' minds. Thenceforth, the fictional or pragmatic representation of northern Brazil would be associated to this impacting Amazon trope, which is able to attract the attention of the most distracted readers.

All types of language use incline towards allegory, whose existence indicates the impossibility of keeping an abstract conception, or construction, abstract. Thinking, which happens within figures of speech, becomes allegorical, giving a visual or linguistic shape to the abstract, which is perceived as personified and personifying, allegorical, creating allegory, and effacing the difference between the abstract and its embodiment as a figure (Tambling, 2010, p. 16).

Interestingly, the freedom of a fictional invention, facilitated by the cognitive instance of a narrative discourse, allowed "Inferno Verde" to conceal its structural ambiguity, which consists in composing symbolic images easy to be understood by readers of that historical context, but disguising, at the same time, the fictional invention by establishing different narration levels, expressed by the change, in each level, of the diegetic authority holder.

Thus the 'charade' in "Inferno Verde" is not about the representation of the Amazon, comprising all its territorial extension and diverse phenomena, but rather Rangel's fictional representation so well disguised by his narrative strategies. But recognizing the fictional world rhetoric movements and the corresponding narrative strategies we can safely go through Hades and Hylean.

## THE PARATEXTS

### AN IMMORTAL TITLE

The title chosen by Rangel, "Inferno Verde", can be related to a well-known concept in the Christian tradition. Until today the idea of a terrifying place of suffering ('Inferno') is very popular even among non-Christians. In

fiction, this concept was expressed in Dante's "Divine Comedy". In his remarkable poem, Dante employed a very common *topos* in the great classical epic narratives: the 'catabasis', a journey to the underworld.

In "The Odyssey" and "The Aeneid", we follow Odysseus and Aeneas going deep down Pluto's kingdom, a place where all pride and boldness of countless warriors has no meaning. In their journeys, our travellers search for answers or advises to help them accomplish their tasks, in what they manage to be successful. And after this underworld journey, both heroes emerge from the earth's bottom, performing an 'anabasis', an ascension from the depths.

Likewise, in Dante's epic poem the catabasis has a moral and ritualistic meaning. In this way, Dante e Virgil, his guide, enter the inferno's cycles in a journey that has the purpose of advert all sinners about the final destiny of those who choose to live their lives apart from God. Then in the end of hell's pit, Dante experiments the slight vision of heaven, it is the beginning of the anabasis.

On the other hand, engineer Souto, main character of "Inferno Verde", go through Amazon sailing rivers and observing people struggling with suffering and injustice. Souto's purpose in his journey is more prosaic and less adorned with noble heroism, his mission to accomplish in the jungle is to earn "fortuna para gozá-la entre os seus, no Sul" (Rangel, 2008, p. 151). However, unlike the other epic travellers already mentioned, Souto fails to achieve his objective. The well-educated young man couldn't overcome the dangerous forest and his death prefigures a catabasis without a way to return. Souto's death symbolizes the forest triumph over another intellectual who intended dominate the region with his wide range of scientific knowledge.

Referring again to Dante's poem, we find an afflicted narrator who says: "I found myself

within a forest dark" (Alighieri, 1887, p. 03), and we can hear an echo of these words in "Inferno Verde". Going deeper into the forest in his journey, at a certain point, Souto was "Só! Considerava o engenheiro, na raiva e no pesar indefiníveis. [...] Companheiros e família estavam como noutra planeta, ou noutra vida..." (Rangel, 2008, p. 144). However, unlike Dante, Souto did not have a guide, as Virgil, to show the "straightforward pathway" (Alighieri, 1887, p. 03) that would lead him out, triumphant, of that 'green inferno'. In the title that names Rangel's narrative, an adjective that commonly refers to life, 'green', acquires a negative, frightful sense, referring us to an environment impressively dominated by vegetation and unpleasantly wet, in which the 'infernal fire' was replaced by the dense foliage and the constant sounds of the forest, which seem to indicate a threat always imminent.

This title is so grandiose and sonorous that it cannot help being "a subject of conversation" (Genette, 1997, p. 75). And, if it can bring us so many images and concepts, it is appropriate to think of the 'answer' that this title may imply in light of the unfinished idea of Euclides da Cunha, the book never written: "Um Paraíso Perdido".

Remained of this project only writings that would be published posthumously under the title "À margem da história" (1909). As a ruin of the great idea of Euclides, these texts do not concern merely a very distant and almost inaccessible space. A justification for the title of this unrealised work could come from the perception that the only 'earthly paradise' had been destroyed by its very discovery, being forced to turn into a hell. Euclides was much more than an enthusiast of "Inferno Verde", he worked on this project as an 'editor'. The author of "Os Sertões" saw the writings of his 'colleague' as a complement to his own perceptions and studies about the Amazon.

Fascinado pelo estilo de Rangel, é como se Euclides projetasse, na construção dos contos-crônicas de *Inferno Verde*, algo de sua escrita híbrida, de seu léxico raro e sintaxe labiríntica, vendo, ao mesmo tempo, nessa mistura tão finissecular entre fantasia simbolista e hiper-naturalismo expressionista, algo que se poderia certamente colher nas páginas de *Os Sertões*, mas que o ficcionista-discípulo parecia, ao liberar-se, ali, da sanha interpretativa, ir mais longe e solto no desatamento das imagens. E assim Euclides imitava seu duplo, seu espelho côncavo como a depressão que ameaça todos o espaço literário (Hardman, 2009, pp. 41- 42).

We are informed of the particularities surrounding the production and publication of “Inferno Verde” through the correspondences collecting by Walnice Nogueira Galvão and Oswaldo Galotti in the volume “Correspondência de Euclides da Cunha” (1997). Some letters provide us with valuable information about the editing process of “Inferno Verde”, a project idealized between the two friends at the time of Praia Vermelha Military School (RJ). Reading those missives, we realize that Euclides considered himself as a co-author of the “Inferno Verde”, even claiming to already have “três críticos a postos, de penas perfiladas, prontos a primeira voz” (Cunha, 1997, p. 346) to receive Alberto Rangel’s book that was published the first time in Genoa. This friendship certainly favored the publication of the book.

Aí vai o exemplar de teu belíssimo livro – que ainda hei de reler aí em tua casa, para destacar vários trechos. Vou fazer o prefácio sem constrangimentos, e sem precisar do estímulo de uma amizade antiga. Encantou-me o *Inferno*. “Teima da Vida” é um rude e maravilhoso poema. Hei de mostrar que naqueles capítulos há uma síntese dos aspectos predominantes da existência amazônica. Não me abalancei a emendar (Cunha, 1997, p. 328).

If “Inferno Verde”, by all appearances, was a production designed by two engineers who tried to disclose Amazonian ‘mysteries’, it is understandable that the work’s subtitle brings a certain duality as to the literary genre, announcing from the start a hybridity of perspectives: ‘Cenas e cenários do Amazonas’. We are thus invited to travel through narratives, displays or simulations of a given reality. In addition, we can observe landscapes from a natural framework painted by “linhas nervosas e rebeldes” (Cunha, 2008, p. 23). The book would provide pretence of entertainment and documentation.

### A DRAMATIC EPIGRAPH

The epigraph from “Inferno Verde” with great propriety, “it consists of commenting on the text, whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasizes” (Genette, 1997, p. 157). The following excerpt, from a famous Shakespeare play, “The Tempest”, appears in order to amplify the expectations of the reader, who is about to experience a hellish narrative in which tortures, troubles, dazzles and wonders can be observed from the safe distance provided by fiction: “All torment, trouble, wonder, and amazement inhabit here” (Shakespeare, 1919, p. 131).

The importance of William Shakespeare’s name, the exuberant language of whose plays is harnessed by Alberto Rangel, confirms the desire to claim a “intellectual pretensions” (Genette, 1997, p. 160), a claim in line with a preface signed by Euclides da Cunha. If we completed the verse which served as an epigraph to “Inferno Verde”, we would perhaps have the manifestation of the engineer’s desire, the protagonist of this work’s latest tale: “Some heavenly power guide us out of this fearful country!” (Shakespeare, 1919, p. 131). These are words that, if placed in the metaphorical context of what the Amazon represents for Alberto Rangel, a place of suffering and death,

an escape guided by a divine power is the only ambition of the man who has been ‘sentenced’ to a ‘stay in (green) hell’.

## THE MOST FAMOUS PREFACE

The last paratext that deserves an extensive discussion is the preface written by Euclides da Cunha. This text became so important that it figures on the cover of the Fourth Edition, rivalling the title’s alluring role. After all, if the strong nomination of this work did not persuade the reader of Euclides’s authorship, it would certainly approve the text for “consumption”. Indeed, such a preamble brings together the “function of recommending” (Genette, 1997, p. 267) in addition to assuming the prestige of a “literary or ideological ‘godfather’” (Genette, 1997, p. 273). Euclides da Cunha organised his text in such a way that it could express its bibliographic and practical knowledge about the Amazon, in addition to promoting an apology of narratives, through a discussion of Alberto Rangel’s style, that would be in conformity with the region’s characteristics. In other words, the Euclidean preface presents two moments.

From the start, Euclides intends to show how scientific efforts have failed in the quest to understand the Amazon, a failure that is not due to the scientists’ incompetence, but rather to the huge geographical extent of the Amazonian territory. In quoting studies by Martius, Jacques Huber and Walter Bates, Euclides’s purpose is to attest that, despite all the effort provided by individuals of rare mental discipline and methodological commitment, the result itself has proved negligible. The research and analysis of the Amazon would do without a short-term goal, only the future can offer a vague hope about the knowledge of a space that “esconde-se em si mesmo” (Cunha, 2008, p. 22).

Although the task may seem colossal,

to investigate the Amazon would not be a completely vain enterprise; as a prophet, not only does Euclides da Cunha provide the basis for a methodological procedure, but he also foresees the result that would be obtained when, in a remote future, we could contemplate “o fecho de toda a História Natural...” (Rangel, 2008, p. 23). The Amazon as an incomplete space, still in a genesis state, could conclude the end of creation, finishing its own research about terrestrial nature. Euclides tries to assert himself not as a simple prophet; his words are close to a messiah’s promises.

Para vê-la deve renunciar-se ao propósito de descortiná-la. Tem-se que a reduzir, subdividindo-a, estreitando e especializando, ao mesmo passo, os campos das observações, consoante a norma de W. Bates, seguida por Frederico Hartt, e pelos atuais naturalistas do Museu Paraense. Estes abalançam-se, hoje, ali, a uma tarefa predestinada a conquistas parciais tão longas que todas as pesquisas anteriores constituem um simples reconhecimento de três séculos [...]. O triunfo virá ao fim de trabalhos incalculáveis, em futuro remotíssimo, ao arrancarem-se os derradeiros véus da paragem maravilhosa, onde hoje se nos esvaem os olhos deslumbrados e vazios. Mas então não haverá segredos na própria natureza. A definição dos últimos aspectos da Amazônia será o fecho de toda a História Natural... (Cunha, 2008, pp. 22-23).

After such a prognosis, the preface-writer feels free to start his criticism of “Inferno Verde”. The presentation by Alberto Rangel could not be as emphatic as the highlight given to ‘heroic intelligence’, which such a dangerous Sphinx (the Amazon) has dared to challenge. The ‘Oedipal’ author-hero would deliver an ‘impetuous’ and ‘fearless’ speech, with which he would be able to roam among the “mais alarmantes paradoxos” abstracting “conhecimentos positivos” for a soul “perdida, entre resplendores” (Rangel, 2008, p. 23). Euclides seems to have been

inspired in the compliment he made; after all, if Alberto Rangel were so delirious before the interrogating beast (the Amazon sphinx) he would be easily devoured. The rhetorical discourse appears to betray the objectivity that should guide the task of the preface-writer, but after the verbal presentation in Rangel's style, Euclides amends himself and, more restrained, continues his text with the following words:

Porque é um livro bárbaro. Bárbaro, conforme o velho sentido clássico: estranho. Por isso mesmo, todo construído de verdade, figura-se um acervo de fantasias. Vibra-lhe em cada folha um doloroso realismo, e parece engenhado por uma idealização afogueadíssima. Alberto Rangel tem a aparência perfeita de um poeta, exuberante demais para a disciplina do metro, ou da rima, e é um engenheiro adito aos processos técnicos mais frios e calculados. A realidade surpreendedora entrou-lhe pelos olhos através da objetiva de um teodolito (Cunha, 2008, p. 23).

Therefore, the guiding force of Alberto Rangel's text would be the realistic, a platonic mimetic perspective. The author of "Inferno Verde" would have literally 'copied' and 'traced' the Amazonian nature, in such a way that the oddity that the text would cause to the critics of the 'city' would be due to this excessive proximity between the pictured object and its representation. However, what Euclides considers a 'copy' of the Amazonian nature is, in fact, 'alarming descriptions' which often use the European cultural imagery to support the grandeur of the 'documentary' text produced by Alberto Rangel. What is proposed as a faithful representation of the Amazonian landscape shows itself as a fictional representation validated by a literary capital known to a learned society, to whom seems to be intended "Inferno Verde".

The thrilled preface-writer tries not to remain stuck to generalities and selects

some narratives to serve as examples of the effectiveness of the Rangel style 'copy'.

Euclides comments on the tales "Maibi", "Hospitalidade", "Teima da vida" and "Obstinação". The last tale receives the greatest emphasis, having a long excerpt transcribed in order to emphasize 'more clearly' a plant called 'apuizeiro' (a type of strangler fig) used as an allegory for the exploitation of man by man. Just as this 'vegetable octopus' wrapped around and slowly killed the 'abieiro' tree, the Amazonian landowner enveloped and consumed the small land owner. The metaphor in this image extracted from an aspect of Amazonian nature is not dealt with in a scientific manner, since Euclides himself acknowledges that no botanist would be able to 'paint in such a lively way' the "maligna morácea" (Cunha, 2008, p. 29). Without realizing it, the preface-writer admits the 'fictional status', the strength of the 'eloquence' that dominates the approach of Alberto Rangel to nature and social problems in the Amazon.

Near the end of the preface, Euclides da Cunha reaffirms the subjective accent that Alberto Rangel has put into its production. Again, there seems to be confusion between the objective perspectives pursued by the observer of the Amazonian space: the engineer, the man of positivist formation that Rangel was; and his amazement at the events he 'witnessed'. In our analysis, he failed to distance himself from his emotionality to compose his text which, being a record of his impressions does not have the descriptive balance we would expect of a book announced as 'sincere'.

Além disto, Alberto Rangel é assombrado diante daquelas cenas e cenários; e, num ímpeto ensofregado de sinceridade, não quis reprimir os seus espantos, ou ratificar, com a mecânica frieza dos escreventes profissionais, a sua vertigem e as rebeldias da sua tristeza exasperada [...] Para os novos quadros e os novos dramas, que se nos



antolham, um novo estilo, embora o não reputemos impecável nas suas inevitáveis ousadias. É o que denuncia este livro. Além disto, enobrece-o uma esplêndida sinceridade. É uma grande voz, pairando, comovida e vingadora, sobre o inferno florido dos seringais, que as matas opulentas engrinaldam e traiçoeiramente matizam das cores ilusórias da esperança (Cunha, 2008, p. 30).

Both Euclides da Cunha and Alberto Rangel take “Inferno Verde” as a work whose textuality would be ‘pragmatic’. This is because both ‘authors’ are convinced that the result achieved in the work under discussion has managed to capture the materiality of the facts as a documentary registration of Amazonian space and societies. If “Inferno Verde” appears as a volume of ‘narratives’ where the intent is to be an informative – and thus, pragmatic – book, we could think of it as a study from a scientific observation aimed at an audience that seeks objective and applicable information within a field of specialised knowledge. Both the reading suggested by the preface-writer and Alberto Rangel’s speech guides the reception of “Inferno Verde” as a ‘pragmatic text’, which could “encourage the reader to create an illusory reality” (Stierle, 1980, pp. 84-85).

We start from this theoretical position, according to which we are dealing with a volume of narratives that requires the reader a positioning on the events’ relevance, leading to a certain type of reading: one that requires a referential perspective.

In this way, we propose a new reading that compares the apparent sociological and scientific intentions of “Inferno Verde”’s author with the exuberant language, rhetoric exaggerations, and allegorical imagery widely employed. We emphasize “Inferno Verde”’s ‘fictionality’, which may have been disregarded until now, ‘swallowed’ by a ‘quasi-pragmatic reception’ process.

Despite all potential references to reality, a fictional text is characterized by being a nonreferential composition. Thus references to reality in fiction have their function in a poetics of fiction that might aim at reality and the collective experience of reality to a greater or lesser degree. While a pragmatic referential text can be corrected by our knowledge of reality, a fictional text – in its potential deviation from facts – cannot be corrected but only interpreted or criticized. [...] In quasi-pragmatic reception fiction is removed from its verbal base without, however, having a proposition in the actual reader’s field of action beyond the text (Stierle, 1980, pp. 83,84).

## “RUN THROUGH THE JUNGLE”

“Inferno Verde” is certainly not an obvious volume of ‘narratives’. The complexity of Rangel’s work can be recognized in terms of both structure and content. Regarding the structure, the book can be pointed as an example of the genre hybridism phenomenon. Throughout the stories it is noticeable the variation of the narrative perspective, which is both “diegetic” and “non-diegetic” (Schmid, 2010, p. 68). A ‘diegetic’ narrator is present in “A decana dos Muras”, “Um homem bom”, “A teima da vida”, and some passages of “Pirates” and “Inferno Verde”, while a “non-diegetic” narrator is manifest in “Tapará”, “Um conceito do Catolé”, “Terra Caída”, “Obstinação”, “Maibi”, “Pirates”, and “Inferno Verde”.

This variation in perspective offers the reader a rich and complex experience. The ‘diegetic’ perspective immerses the reader in the story, turning him into a ‘witness’ of a personal report, whereas the ‘non-diegetic’ discourse, full of geographic and scientific details, suggests the reader an impartial, objective, and reliable report of the matter, which supports the illusion the ‘read text’ is an ‘exact copy’ of reality.

The content, in a simplified way, is a combination of descriptions of the natural

environment of the Amazon rainforest with moralistic concepts illustrated with 'exemplary cases'. The narrator seems to occupy at the same time the position of a naturalist, a poet and a wise moralizer. An admonishing voice can be heard throughout the narratives, and this admonishing authority apparently comes from 'scientific arguments' that supposedly could cover the complexity of Amazon space and people, offering the reader a 'picture of reality'.

"O Tapará", the first text of "Inferno Verde", does not present anything that might characterize it as a narrative – there are no characters, no plot and no action. But there is a particular description of the forest as an 'agonizing' environment, symbolized by the Tapará lake. In fact, the text seems to be a warning from the narrator, as if he wanted to prepare us for the Amazon's 'aberrations'. The description suggests it was made to amplify a desired aesthetic effect regarding the forest instead of showing it from a 'sincere' objective perspective. The narrator even invokes Classic Literary knowledge and relies on the strength of the metaphors as a resource to legitimize and sustain the aesthetic image of something like a 'personified' jungle in permanent conflict with man (invader or victim?).

The invoked Classic Literary Discourse gives the jungle a new and exciting dimension that captures the reader's attention, since the reader is impressed by the striking images of the Amazonian world, a really peculiar environment that is impossible to discover without the mediation of a learned narrator. In this regard, the Tapará is part of a 'Wagnerian' scenario, where "uma festa de duendes" (Rangel, 2008, p. 36) seems to be taking place. This mysterious environment, described in depth of detail, would also succeed in arousing the interest of intellectuals from different fields of research – sociologists, poets, scientists.

The narrator not only suggests that such interdisciplinary research, in fact, should be done in the Amazon – he also accomplishes it. Firstly, in a sociological perspective, the narrator discusses the forest inhabitants' way of life. Aspects such as the benefits the rainy season brings to the 'Caboclo' are emphasized. The narrator illustrates how the rains give to forest people mobility and liberation through rivers and streams, such as Tapará, while their mobility and access to forest resources become restricted during the subsequent dry season.

The close relationship between the 'Caboclo' and the Tapará lake, described by the narrator, reveals that the Tapará's waters supports not only a small ecosystem, but also a 'microsociety' of people for whom this water reservoir is a last resource to help them go through the trials of the dry season.

O lago é, pois, digno de um capítulo digno de Michelet; mais que isto, merece o olhar de frio sociólogo; um hino e uma análise... O lago é o centro de abrigo, quando na periferia um não-sei quê não quer mais que o pobre ilota vingue, desde o pescado que escasseia nos rios, até o vendilhão, que o furta nas contas. Porque a sua luta tem sido enorme, no anfiteatro lacustre do Amazonas o caboclo é o Orestes da tragédia Grega. É perseguido por fúrias (Rangel, 2008, p. 45).

The narrator's sociological description on the Tapará is soon overlaid with another perspective that allegedly conveys the impartiality of Biology to address the Life phenomena related to the lake. But even this 'impartial biological description' is blended with poetic images. In fact, the poetic discourse is intertwined with sociological and biological discourses, with alternatively greater or lesser emphasis for each perspective throughout the narrative.

As an example of this blended discourse, the narrator reports the Tapará as an "laboratório alquímico da microfauna e microflora palúdicas" (Rangel, 2008, p. 38),

where it would be possible to study “uma vida de peles, de escamas, de carapaças”, and where “os broncos jacarés dormem com placidez no lameiro, ao lado de peixes espertos e quelônios tímidos” (Rangel, 2008, p. 41).

The Tapará is also portrayed as a personified organism moved by emotions: in this “água prisioneira [que] parece filtrar um olhar de ódio, olhar de basilisco” (Rangel, 2008, p. 38), “o lago parece abafar a alegria de toda a criação” (Rangel, 2008, p. 41). The ‘rotting’ Tapará can be even investigated from a philosophical perspective as a place where life and death coexist. In a profound metaphor, the lake is still compared with one of the mythological Hades’ rivers:

O Aqueronte devia ser assim, circulando os infernos, qual este sulco d’água morta e infecta, com a mesma decoração em contorno da selva extática e lóbrega; e, talvez mesmo esse lago, onde Heine pôs uma condessa languesciente, vogando entre cabeças espectrais de afogados amorosos (Rangel, 2008, p. 40).

In this way, the ‘rotting’ Tapará can be even investigated from a philosophical perspective as a place where life and death coexist. In this descriptive text as a whole, there is a predominance of the environment over the human element. Local people gain relevance only at the end of the text. The Caboclo is described as an introspective individual, “exilado na propria pátria” (Rangel, 2008, p. 44), pressured by the ‘rubber barons’, threatened by the arrival of strangers – the ‘Cearenses’ –, also facing the Amazon’s seasons and looking for shelter in desolate places such as the Tapará. This melancholic image situates local people in an oppressive place: between ‘predatory’ business men, enigmatic strangers and an infernal nature. This portrait seems to announce a hopeless future to Amazon’s traditional societies, which is touching enough to arouse readers’ sympathy.

In addition, the text announces a scatological prediction on the Caboclo’s future: these people and their culture would come to an end, being replaced by a ‘people amalgam’ formed by different ‘races’ – with Indo-European predominance. This prediction reflects the pseudoscientific idea of the existence of an ‘ideal race’. In the Amazon context, it would mean something like the formation of the ‘ideal people’ to inhabit the Amazon and overcome failures of people that used to inhabit the region during an unfortunate past.

Esse aniquilamento, todavia, é forma de exprimir. Nada se destrói... e no sangue, que há de lavar, um dia, as veias do brasileiro étnico normal, o sangue do pária tapuio terá o seu coeficiente molecular de mistura ao sangue de tantos povos, argamassado num só corpo, cozido e único cadinho, fundido num só molde. Cadinho, molde, corpo: aparelho e resíduo de transformação consumada, onde com o mameluco, o cafuné e o mulato e esse indo-europeu, que preponderar na imigração, ter-se-á tornado o brasileiro tipo definitivo de equilíbrio etnológico. Deixará de ser, afinal, o que tem sido: um desfalecido meio para o trânsito transfusivo de raças (Rangel, 2008, pp. 45-46).

From this analysis, the fictional dimension of the “Tapará” becomes obvious; we realize the text is formatted according to a ‘poetry’ that prevails upon the scientific intentions or the descriptive desire to portray a given reality:

Thus the text can be perceived as a multitude of overlapping structures, which follow both an elementary linear order and an infinitely complex one. The perception of this dual order constitutes the basis for what could be called the immanent poetics of the text (Stierle, 1980, p. 93).

Undoubtedly, Rangel’s poetics is, in fact, the first element that gives the text its fictional status, and the literary references used by the author reinforce the fictional character not

only of “O Tapará”, but also of “Inferno Verde” as a whole. When analyzing the ornamental aspect of the language used by the author, we can realize that it does not match the external horizon of the text, as intended by the author and claimed by the narrator.

Though every fictional text is open to a naive reading – an elementary form of reception that has been learned in everyday communication – there are specific forms of fiction that count on an exclusively quasi-pragmatic reception. In such cases the verbal structure of narration is veiled in order to make the passage from fiction to referential illusion as easy as possible. We find this particularly in the kind of trivial literature whose sole function is to encourage the reader to create an illusory reality. Such literature is produced with the intention to provoke stereotypes of imagination and emotion while it tries to disguise the effect of language at the origin of such illusion making (Stierle, 1980, pp. 85-86).

Reflecting on the definition of ‘stereotype’, in a simplified way, we can say that it refers to widely disseminated, preconceived, fixed and oversimplified ideas about something or someone. In this manner, when the reader takes Alberto Rangel’s book as a veracious description of the Amazon reality, it can contribute to reinforce stereotypes about the Amazon space and people. In this case, what happens is that the reader transcends the boundaries of fiction, trusting an illusion created, in the last instance, by himself. This phenomenon is called quasi-pragmatic reception.

The quasi-pragmatic reception of fictional texts is most strikingly illustrated by the literary figure of Don Quixote. Don Quixote represents a reader for whom fiction changes into illusion to such a powerful degree that it finally replaces reality. As the hero of the first modern antinovel, Don Quixote represents the classic paradigm of a reader overwhelmed by the illusory power of the text, for whom the stereotypes of his

reading turn into stereotypes of his practical and verbal actions because he has lost all awareness of the text as such. The fact that the “lost text” transforms reality itself into a text is the ironic result of a reading which has surrendered to the centrifugal power of reception (Stierle, 1980, p. 87).

Rangel’s “Inferno Verde”, taking into account its particular configuration, could offer just the ‘right’ conditions that lead to this form of reception. In the quasi-pragmatic reading, the fictional and thus self-referential text is taken by the reader as a pseudo-referential text, that is, a text that transcends its fictional character, creating an illusion capable of imposing itself on reality:

In “systematic texts” language acquires an autoreferential function, whose aim is to clarify the use of language in referential texts. But there is another possible use of language, which could be called pseudoreferential. In the pseudoreferential use of language the conditions of reference are not to be found outside the text, they are produced by the text itself. In texts using language pseudoreferentially – that is, in fictional texts – there is no way to distinguish what the author intended to say from what he actually said (Stierle, 1980, p. 89).

Regarding “O Tapará”, the ‘scientific statements’ present in the text cannot really explain the complexity of the Amazonian physiography. In the same way, the pseudo-sociological assumptions cannot offer a “true portrait” of the social phenomena in the Amazon. It is possible to affirm that, in a more attentive or critical reading, the reader is faced with several ‘clues’ that the text “provides us with an experience that does not have to be derived from some extratextual reality, but which is contained in the aesthetic, meaningfully constructed world of the work itself” (Stierle, 1980, p. 101). All the inverted syntax, quotations, hyperboles and metaphors surrounding the ‘scientific statements’ about the Amazon and its inhabitants are not

expected in or do not fit well what would be a 'documentary' or scientific text. But, for some reason, the reader may not notice or even ignore these clues, so a breeding ground for illusion is created.

The second text of "Inferno Verde", "Um conceito do Catolé", differs from the first, "O Tapará", for revealing characteristics of more conventional narratives, such as well-defined characters, plot, action, and temporal structure, in which takes place a "change of state", that is what "constitutes narrativity" (Schmid, 2010, p. 03).

The text addresses the issue of the immigration of Northeastern Brazil inhabitants ('nordestinos') to the Amazon. This theme is also present in others chapters of the book, but it gets more emphasis in "Um conceito do Catolé". On the one hand, the narrative turns to the challenges faced by 'nordestinos' in their adaptation to a geographical space quite different from the one they have left behind. But the narrative focus lies on the particular dramas of a man, João Catolé, himself a 'nordestino' established in the Amazon.

Unlike many other northeastern immigrants, Catolé builds a successful story in Manaus, the place he chose for his new home. However, he is a man with a painful past – he bears the marks of many tough drought episodes in Northeastern Brazil, besides the death of his wife. But as a promise of joy and hope, he still has his daughter, Malvina, with him. Then he goes with her daughter to the Amazon, looking for a better life, a fresh start.

Católé's success as a farmer in the Amazon does not happen overnight, on the contrary, he faces big challenges and works hard for years and while raising his daughter. However, it is his misfortune that happens suddenly, in the most unimaginable way. One day, all of a sudden, his friend Pedro, a 'nordestino' from Ceará, goes completely insane – he kills a

man and kidnaps Malvina, taking her to the forest. Some days later, Pedro e Malvina are found in the forest... both dead. In great pain, Catolé postulates his concept of life, covering the relationship between man and nature, and the relationship between men in society, the theory that contains the essential meaning of the text: " - Ora, a terra! A terra é boa, o homem só é que não presta" (Rangel, 2008, p. 58).

According to Catolé's viewpoint, mankind is the responsible for evil, whatever the land is, be it in the Amazon or elsewhere. From his postulation, Catolé's position is clear enough, but the narrator's position on the same theme seems ambiguous – on the one hand, he describes Amazon natural environment in a negative way, as an 'inferno' that imprisons and consumes the men who settle there. But contrastingly, he also describes the same 'inferno' as a 'land of salvation' to northeastern immigrants:

O Amazonas, tão amaldiçoado país de seringa e de impaludismo, fazia-o proprietário; ao chegar o retirante cearense, dava-lhe o solo, o mantimento, o teto, a assistência médica, a instrução... O monstro devorador de vidas ao pé das *heveas* era, na verdade, também protetor e amigo (Rangel, 2008, p. 52).

In the third narrative, "Terra Caída", the narrator's perspective about Amazon is that of a tough enemy of man. The forces of nature are presented as 'animate entities' that work to avoid the 'domestication' of the natural environment by man. For this reason, the relationship between the protagonist, José Cordulo, and the land is like an 'arm wrestling', a constant measurement of forces: "se o Cordulo fechasse os olhos, quando os abrisse, a floresta pertinaz tornaria a ocupar o lugar donde fora repelida" (Rangel, 2008, p. 61).

However, although the Amazon is a

strong opposer, Cordulo is a persistent and tenacious fighter as well, who does not give up even in the face of the most unexpected and destructive attacks. One day, returning home from a party, Cordulo finds his property destroyed by the phenomenon known as ‘fallen lands’, but the protagonist does not assume a defeated position, on the contrary, he shows willingness for a new beginning – in the same land.

No dia seguinte, o sol nado, a vítima era um vencedor. O caboclo rodeado da mulher e dos filhos, plantava no chão, ao alto da “terra caída”, o esteio de sua nova habitação. [...] A terra podia desaparecer, o caboclo ficava. Acima das convulsões da natureza, acima da fraqueza da terra, estava a alma do nativo com tranquilidade e fortaleza (Rangel, 2008, p. 67).

In this narrative, the fictionalization of the “real landscape with a fictional story it is possible to integrate the real landscape into the closed frame work of the story” (Stierle, 1980, p. 90-91). The common difficulties that should be expected by anyone wishing to settle in the Amazon territory are presented to the reader in terms of a major conflict between man and nature. Faced with this scenario, it would not be surprising if the *naïve* reader saw Cordulo as a type of hero, and the Amazon as a treacherous and merciless villain. Interestingly, the tenacity manifested by the protagonist, more than an unpretentious quality of the character, could be seen as a reflection of the Positivist theory, which was still very much in vogue at the beginning of the 20th Century. In this way, Cordulo represents the man resisting and even prevailing over nature by his power, determination and knowledge.

Afinal de contas, a “terra caída” bem pode ser a definição do Amazonas. Por vezes, no seu terreno aluvial tudo repentinamente vacila e se afunda, mas reconstitui-se aos poucos. Cai a terra aqui, acolá a terra se acresce. Resulta que, nesse jogo de erosões e

de aterros, o esforço do homem é o do Atlas sustentando o mundo e sua luta é a de um Sísifo invertido (Rangel, 2008, pp. 68-69).

Differently, in “Hospitalidade”, the focus of the narrative is on human conflicts and contradictions rather than on the conflict between man and nature, although the Amazon forest still seems to have an important influence on people’s behavior and events, because “a natureza amazônica é capaz de tudo: logra a seus próprios filhos” (Rangel, 2008, p. 72).

After a long description of the natural environment, full of scientific and literary references, and conducted in an authoritative tone, we finally are introduced to the main conflict of the narrative: the encounter of the narrator, the engineer Souto, with Flor dos Santos, a well-known outlaw in the region.

O fato é que estava entregue à mão de Flor dos Santos. O meu sono seria, sob seu teto, à descrição; no seu fojo de fera eu repousava inofensivo. Por que não havia refugado essa hospedagem? Que me forçara a esse mal-estar de temor? Numa indeclinável fraqueza do espírito cheguei a lançar em rosto, a mim mesmo, reprimendas néscias: “Devia voltar! Devia voltar!... Para quê? Situação desagradável... voluntária... evitável...”. E parecia-me pronunciar as palavras, que somente passavam impressas no negativo do cérebro (Rangel, 2008, pp. 76-77).

This is not just a passing encounter. In fact, the engineer is ‘forced’ to stay at the wrongdoer’s house, in the middle of nowhere. Given the circumstances, we could expect the story to be developed in a serious climate of suspense, tension and fear, since a violent act by the criminal against the engineer could suddenly happen!

However, with the progress of the narrative, we see it unexpectedly turns to a comic tone. The engineer, properly accommodated in his host’s house, lying in a borrowed hammock, but still suspicious of the man’s

intentions, trembles with fear while Flor dos Santos goes near... to just give him a roll of tobacco: “O coração aquietara as palpitações precípites. Flor dos Santos ia ainda a sair e eu já tinha reconhecido, no banco, o rolo de tabaco para migá-lo, que ele trouxera, no cuidado carinhoso e paternal por aquele que agasalhara” (Rangel, 2008, p. 78).

The hospitality and peaceful behavior of Flor dos Santos surprised the narrator to such an extent that he declares, in the last paragraph of the narrative: “O malfeitor, que a lei humana mantinha refugiado, exercia no seu refúgio uma lei divina. O réprobo era um patriarca...” (Rangel, 2008, p. 79). Notably, behind the narrator’s statement is the idea that the Amazon is such a peculiar and capricious environment that it is even possible a respectable man and an inveterate lawbreaker coexist peacefully in there.

In this way, the Hylean Amazon not surprises his inhabitants only by the unpredictability of natural phenomena, but it can even affect human relation at a point that an important man, an intellectual, could find himself in such a difficult situation that he may need the help of a criminal, who, in his turn, can manifest such a good behavior that he is compared to a ‘Patriarch of the Old Testament’, thus reflecting the Amazon’s own paradox.

The next narrative, “A Decana dos Muras”, approaches the presence of indigenous peoples in the Amazon, a theme not directly focused in any of the other narratives. The domination process of indigenous peoples is evoked by the narrator, who supports his discourse on historical considerations.

The story unfolds during the journey of the narrator through the Amazon, when he encounters a solitary indigenous woman, who is totally the opposite of the idealized image of the ‘Brazilian indigenous’. The woman’s appearance causes such a great

astonishment in the narrator that he provides us, a description of her aspect – in the smallest detail, as if he wanted to retain her image as the living proof of a history lost in time.

Era uma mulher da cor de barro cru, enorme, adiposa, envolvendo a nudez asquerosa, d’evêdências repugnantes, no curto trapo, que lhe caía no ventre monstruoso, à maneira de saia, das cadeiras até aos joelhos. Quase não lhe viam os olhos embaciados, na face terrosa. A boca murcha e sem lábios. Os cabelos empastavam-se-lhe, muito ralos, na cabeça de fronte fugidias. No rosto cruelmente chato, a pele toda enrugada, tal epicarpo de jenipapo maduro. O colo era revestido de pelangas nojentas, sobre as quais alvejava o disco branco do muiraquitã, pendurado a um fio de tucum. As pernas arqueadas aguentavam mal o montão de banha flácida, coberta de escaras, como dois troncos caraquentos e deformados de envireiras (Rangel, 2008, pp. 85-86).

No one would expect to find a woman like that, except in an “Inferno Verde”. The woman’s grotesque appearance, half human being and half ‘vegetal’, seems to represent the ruin of entirely exterminated indigenous nations, and the memory of the massacre episodes should still be present, even if unconsciously, among ‘caboclos’ of the region, in their everyday conversations. The loneliness, ruin and oblivion of that indigenous woman in the present offer a sad contrast to what she would have been and lived in glorious and beautiful days in olden times.

Mas essa harpia hidrópica e sostreita houvera tido o talhe donairoso, copiado à flexuosidade das palmeiras *mauritia*, os cabelos da cor negra e lustrosa da dos anuns-corocas. Os seus olhos seriam duas lagoas, à noite, retendo iaras... A voz imitaria o canto do enfeitado uirapuru. Teria amado, disporia de um coração ansioso, sonharia... Agora, abjeto detrito de uma raça aviltada, a sua vida era mais simples. Nem complicações sentimentais, nem vertigens de pensamentos. No corpo obeso

e medonho, o coração limitava-se a ser uma caixa de válvulas avariadas e o cérebro, o alojamento indispensável de uma vaga consciência (Rangel, 2008, pp. 87-88).

But despite everything, the representative of the ‘Muras’ people still maintained their language, a heritage and memory of her people. Unfortunately, this language, instead of building a bridge to contact with ‘civilization’, would only reinforce her isolation: “Re iké re uapyra. [...] Māhata remunhã re iko?” (Rangel, 2008, p. 86), since her words were totally incomprehensible to the narrator and to the civilized world that had supplanted the world she had known. That “Mura” woman was, after all, something like an useless relic, keeping part of a history that no one was willing to listen and understand.

In the following narratives – “Um homem bom”, “Obstinação”, “A teima da vida”, and “Maibi” – it can notice a moral inclination developed ‘behind the scenes’. The moral effect of fiction is even reinforced by the use of shocking images and events, which are effective to cause strong reactions in the reader – from surprise to repugnance and revolt.

It is possible to identify the same narrative pattern for these stories (except for “Maibi”).

Firstly, in a discourse full of scientific and literary references, it is provided a detailed description of the Amazonian nature. Only afterwards the events that move the narrative are introduced, from the most banal to the most shocking events, which are used to teach the reader a ‘lesson’.

The very concepts of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ can be questioned in “Um homem bom”. In his journey through the forest, the narrator has his attention turned to a man, a ‘cearense’ who worked as a porter in his entourage. The porter had a mark in his chest, and the narrator asks him how did he get that. So, the man reveals his dark past as a gunman when he still lived in Ceará – he was the trusted man of colonel

Távora, an elderly man who had married the young Mrs. Maroca. The problem was colonel Távora found out his wife was having an affair with a prosecutor, so he charged his trusted man with killing Mrs. Maroca’s lover – and the gunman did his job. But things don’t stop there. The woman wanted revenge against her lover’s killer. She counts on some henchmen that tie up the gunman and start cutting his chest with a knife – since Mrs. Maroca demanded his heart to be ripped out. But before the woman sees her order fulfilled, her betrayed husband suddenly appears and saves his trusted man. However, it happens now a dramatic role reversal – the colonel orders his trusted man to rip out Mrs. Maroca’s heart. And the man, once again, executes colonel’s order.

Ele ficara, “positivo”, espiondo tudo atrás das moitas de mofumbo e assustara logo que Dona Maroca estava se vingando em mim da morte do Promotor. Avançando pra mulher, ligeiro como um preá, o “seu” coronel subjugou-a e depois mandou “positivo” que eu tirasse o coração dela... pelas constas. [...] – Tirei, “seu” doutor...; “seu” coronel era meu chefe... A mulherzinha estrebuchava que nem um porco sangrando. Tinha nas mãos o coração quente, que era ver uma fressura de bode, quando “seu” coronel, dando ordem para enterrar tudo, saiu do terreiro com cada soluço que parecia ter-se acabado o mundo... [...] – Deixem lá! Era um homem bom, o “seu” coronel; foi ele sempre quem me valeu, quando eu andava de rixa e em todos os apertos de minha vida. E confirmou concluindo: Homem chamado bom, “seu” coronel, e sabido, escrevia até deitado! (Rangel, 2008, p. 95).

Finishing the story and quickly recalling other scenes from the past, the now peaceful porter yet calls colonel Távora ‘a good man’. Here is an ‘interesting’ point of view, a paradox – colonel Távora, who cowardly ordered two murders, is declared a ‘good man’ in the very words of the killer himself – can he at least



distinguish good from evil? –, who, in the present, could be also seem, at first sight, as ‘a good man’, just working hard in a new land... and calmly telling his bloody stories to pass the time.

In the next story, “Obstinação”, the narrator borrows from nature an image to illustrate the ancient and ever-present conflict between the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the great and the small. In a famous passage, highlighted by Euclides da Cunha in his preface to “Inferno Verde”, the narrator describes how the ‘apuizeiro’, the strong tree called the ‘octopus’ from the vegetable kingdom, enlaces and kills the ‘abieiro’, a small tree.

Then in the men’s kingdom we see the landowner Roberto spreading his ‘tentacles’ around old Gabriel and his small property in order to take over the old man’s property. This conflict also ends tragically. The small landowner sees the suicide as the only way to face oppression by the powerful landowner.

Mais tarde o Gabriel foi encontrado. Estava na capoeira velha, que revestia um trecho do seu sitiozinho sopresado. Encoberto pelo enorme tronco de uma sapucaia e também disfarçado pela toíça virente de anajás, o caboclo jazia enterrado até o peito. Da terra revolvida a caveira surgia horrível, putrescente, mal fixa nas vértebras cervicais à mostra. Sob o pano azulão do casaco descarnados com o tórax já gretado pelos vermes, desemplastrando-se tudo do revestimento ignóbil. E as suas mãos crispavam-se, com as falanges horrivelmente cravadas no resto de argila do aterro, que sobrara da cova (Rangel, 2008, p. 107).

In his last move in that unfair dispute, old Gabriel makes of his small property – the place where for so many years he peacefully lived with his family – his own tumulus. The rich landowner can finally take the land for himself, but he is condemned to walk forever on that tumulus.

In “A teima da vida” we are confronted with some serious questions about life: would there be a reason for life? Is it possible to define or judge who should live and who should die? Can someone’s life be judged in terms of usefulness and uselessness? All of these questions come to mind when we get involved in the story of the Portuguese Thomé Rodrigues Pereira, and the little daughter of Cambito, a cearense established in the Amazon.

The Portuguese is described as a hardworking man, a ‘Hercules’, who unfortunately has his leg affected by cancer, and barely could stand up. On the other hand, the little girl, ill with encephalitis, is not so praised. The ill made her blind, deaf-mute and paraplegic, yet it causes her to be agitated and scream all the time. There is no hope for a cure, but there is also no imminent risk to her life. However, his father, Cambito, wish the child were dead.

Despite the seriousness of the wound in the Portuguese’s leg, there was still a last hope for a cure. The last resource was to cauterize the wound with ‘American lard’. The narrator gives us the details of the ‘medical’ procedure.

Acordei bem tarde, ao convite para assistir o curativo da “ferida braba”. Desci a escada do limoeiro, encontrando o paciente sobre a mesa, num rupo de seis pessoas que o cercavam, em preparativos. Uma delas construiu pachorrentamente, em torno da úlcera, o rebordo de argila para restringir o campo da aplicação do tópico, na ambustão. Depois, seguraram o “marinheiro” pelos braços, pernas e tronco. Um outro foi buscar à trempe, sob a qual o fogo de cavacos chamejava, uma lata de banha americana, que fervia. E, em movimento rápido, o ajudante verteu o líquido ardente no escarvalho da chaga pavorosa. Sucedendo ao chio, a fumaça ergueu-se dos tecidos podres e cozidos, atroou o berro da vítima, que num esforço brusco procurou contorcer-se e o cheiro da carne queimada marcou o fim da operação selvagem. Feito o que, levaram

o Thomé, caído em colapso, ao quarto que o agasalhava no barracão (Rangel, 2008, pp. 118-119).

It happened that the ‘Hercules’ did not resist to the painful, rudimentary procedure. Sadly, he died not long after. Contrastingly, Cambito’s daughter could be seen devouring “com voracidade um prato de mingau” (Rangel, 2008, p. 119) during the celebration of her sixth birthday.

What can be said about these events? Why did a strong and useful man die, while a fragile, useless child, is still alive and even, as far as possible, enjoys ‘good health’? Reflecting on these contradictions, the narrator expresses some cruel thoughts. He considers that “bastaria uma gota de veneno ou uma lâmina de bisturi, nas mãos de gente misericordiosa, para acabar com a teima da vida...” (Rangel, 2008, p. 120).

When we reflect about the ‘merciful’ act suggested by the narrator, we can remember the figure of the ‘good man’ that we discussed earlier. Is it a really merciful act to take a child’s life just because of an incurable illness? And what about the ‘medical’ treatment given to the wound in the Portuguese’s leg? Is it correct to submit someone to extreme suffering with the justification of trying to save the person’s life? Again, the concepts of good and evil, right and wrong, mercy and cruelty, seem to be confused even in the minds of the ‘best’ and the most intellectual men.

Among all the stories discussed up to this point, “Maibi” can be considered the most symbolic. The title character, Maibi, could be seen as both the representation of women’s social position in the Amazon ‘rubber society’, and the Amazon rainforest itself. We are presented with a surrealistic plot – the rubber tapper Sabino, Maibi’s husband, uses her wife as payment for his debts, so she is ‘given’ to another man, Sérgio, a rubber worker as well. The situation was injurious

enough for Maibi, but we see things become even more absurd. Jealous and regretting the ‘negotiation’, Sabino cruelly decides to kill the woman he himself discarded. In Sabino’s mind, it was intolerable that “as carícias ardentes da moça iriam agora aplicar-se em outro” (Rangel, 2008, p. 123). We also see the rising of a sinful lust in Sabino. The consequences of his perfidious feelings are exposed in the horrendous picture of Maibi’s death.

Atado com uns pedaços de ambécima à “madeira” da estrada, o corpo acanelado da cabocla adornava bizarramente a planta que lhe servia de estranho pelourinho. Era como uma extravagante orquídea, carnosa e trigueira, nascida ao pé da árvore fatídica. Sobre os seios túrgidos, sobre o ventre arqueado, nas pernas rijas, tinha sido profundamente embutida na carne, modelada em argila baça, uma dúzia de tigelas. Devia o sangue da mulher enchê-las e por elas transbordar, regando as raízes do poste vivo que sustinha a morta. Nos recipientes o leite estava coalhado – um cernambi vermelho... [...] O martírio de Maibi, com a sua vida a escoar-se nas tigelas do seringueiro, seria ainda assim bem menos que o do Amazonas, oferecendo-se em pasto de uma indústria que o esgota. A vingança do seringueiro, com intenção diversa, esculpira a imagem impotente e flagrante de sua sacrificadora exploração. Havia uma auréola de oblação nesse cadáver, que se diria representar, em miniatura, um crime maior, não cometido pelo Amor, em coração desvairado, mas pela Ambição coletiva de milhares d’almas endoidecidas na cobiça universal (Rangel, 2008, pp. 130-131).

The image of Maibi’s body fastened to a tree with bowls placed around to collect her blood transcends the representation of a woman’s personal drama and assumes a symbolic meaning – it represents the exploitation of the Amazon rainforest itself by men. In this way, Maibi’s blood is the forest’s blood. The blood dripping

from Maibi's body alludes to the forest's riches greedily exploited by men. What we notice here is an important change in the perspective of how the Amazon is portrayed.

In the narratives discussed earlier, the forest is represented as almost an animated villain, a rational entity that offers strong opposition to men, or yet as an infernal place without much to offer men but challenges, hardship and death. In "Maibi", differently, the figure of a young woman serves as a symbol to the Amazon's richness, beauty and abundance of natural resources, in this way, the Amazon is presented as a victim of human vileness and greed. Reflecting on the strong symbolic essence of the narrative, it could be affirmed "Maibi" makes it even clearer that the narrator's (and Rangel's?) scientific pretensions are supplanted by an eloquent poetic discourse.

In the following narrative, "Pirates", the natural resources of the Amazon as well as the human greed are still in scene. It all starts when a 'caboclo' named Vicente comes across some shiny golden stones in a clump of 'piassava', then he thinks he has discovered a gold mine. Completely dominated by the idea that he could build wealth overnight with the newly discovered treasure, Vicente goes to Manaus, carrying the 'valuable' stones with him. But on the way there is a Vicente's friend called 'cearence', who is also interested in the 'treasure'. That 'cearence' ends up murdering Vicente and taking the golden stones to be analyzed by a respectable 'doctor'. However, after analyzing the shiny stones, the specialist proclaims they are not gold, but pyrite, and that they have no value. Thus, the murderer sees his dream of wealth frustrated. Besides, the doctor discredits the mineral potential of the Amazon, stating the region has a purely agricultural 'vocation' instead.

- Não é nada. São pedras à toa. Não valem coisa alguma... Há por toda parte. E, remexendo as pedras, elucidou com descrença. Pode ser! Mas não acredito na riqueza mineral d'esta terra. Dizem que no alto Rio Branco, no Atumã, no Madeira... o que há, é uma desilusão, em que fantasistas espontâneos ou tratantes sistemáticos se comprazem. [...] Olhe, meu caro, a mina é toda esta terra e inesgotável. Uma várzea, no Amazonas, é a verdadeira Califórnia. Plante seringa, milho, cacau, feijão, cana, mandioca, arroz e verá; o mais são histórias de "mil e uma noites" (Rangel, 2008, p. 141).

Interestingly, the Amazon's mineral potential is at the same time suggested and doubted – in a forecast that proved to be wrong over the years. In addition, the narrative also has a moral motif. It seems to remind us that the availability of valuable resources or just the promise of wealth is enough to reveal the worst face of human beings.

The last narrative, "Inferno Verde", gives the powerful title to Rangel's book. This is the final stage of the engineer Souto's journey through the Amazon. Up to this point, the reader has seen through the narrators' eye the region's natural and social complexity expecting the outcome of such an incursion. However, it is worth mentioning that, actually, Souto's motivation to take the trip was an ordinary one: just satisfying his "ambição de moço e recém-formado" (Rangel, 2008, p. 143). First of all, Souto was on a 'business' trip. The engineer's mission was to demarcate a distant territory that would be used to receive other waves of northeastern immigrants.

At first glance, everything seemed to indicate the trip would be a successful one and Souto – a young, determined and well qualified man – would be able to fulfil his mission and receive due payment, but that is not what happens. The engineer, needing some rest from the long journey through the forest, sets up camp near the standing waters of a small swamp. After coming into contact

with the “*eflúvios letais d’água morta*” (Rangel, 2008, p. 149), Souto contracts a fatal disease and dies in the midst of delusions on the Amazon forest. Then we see the engineer’s ‘business’ trip become a trip with no return (catabasis).

[...] ele agitava-se todo em gestos convulsionados, num delírio de ação, apontando em ameaça às árvores em torno. E repetia frases que se estrangulavam, delirando e murmurando: “Minha terra... os meus... minha terra, que deixei...” Em dado momento atirou-se às rosas, e as arrancava das hastes, sangrando-se nestas, procurava cobrir-se das corolas despedaçadas; levava-as à cabeça, tentando delas coroar-se anacrônico, num triunfo que não merecesse. [...] Justamente quando Miguel chegava, acompanhado de um seringueiro, ele caía no estendedouro do rosal, apostrofando à mata, esposada com o rio: - Inferno!... Inferno... verde! (Rangel, 2008, pp. 161-162).

Although tragic, Souto’s death between the roses of the ‘*inferno verde*’ is an image of great poetic power, likewise the personification of the Amazon as a ‘sphinx’ that demands a ‘hero’ to solve her mysteries. In fact, we can notice the building of an ‘Amazon poetics’ throughout Rangel’s book, and the poetic element is precisely what makes the book still relevant nowadays, while its supposedly scientific considerations have been overcome by the passage of time.

Mas essa terra que, matando o aventureiro, o estemava de rosas, poderia no entretanto responder: “Perdoo-te e compreendo o estigma que me lanças. Fui um paraíso. Para a raça íncola nenhuma pátria melhor, mas farta e benfazeja. Por mim as tribos erravam, no sublime desabafo dos instintos de conservação, livres nas marnotas pelas bacias fluviais afora. Ainda hoje, o caboclo, sobra viril e desvalida nos destroços da invasão, vive renunciado e silencioso, adorando-me e bendizendo: - seu repouso edênico, sua plaga abençoada, seu recanto pacífico, na herança feticheira e venerativa

dos povos autóctones de onde proveio. Diante os insucessos da avidez do “branco”, o nativo murmurará: “Contudo aqui se sofre, mas ainda se aguenta...” [...] Mas enfim, o inferno verde, se é geena de torturas, é a mansão de uma esperança: sou a terra prometida às raças superiores, tonificadoras, vigorosas, dotadas de firmeza, inteligência e providas de dinheiro [...] porém, aguardo as gerações que hão de seguir, cantando, o caro de meu triunfo (Rangel, 2008, pp. 162-164).

The final discourse delivered by the ‘Amazonian sphinx’ on the future existence of an ‘ideal race’ that only would be able to conquer the forest and bring the progress to the region is an example of a pseudo-scientific and even prejudiced idea that has completely lost its credibility over the years. Comparing the first story, “*O Tapará*”, with the last one, “*Inferno verde*”, it is interesting to notice the similarity of ‘intellectual horizons’, ‘world vision’, ‘narrative competence’, and ‘ideological discourse’ that exists between the personified Amazon, in the last story, and the non-diegetic narrative voice (something like a “scientific conscience”?) in the first story.

## CONCLUSION

The inherent creative power of Fiction allows the author to create a ‘narrated world’ where events, characters and settings have intrinsic ontological, poetic and cognitive value, since the created world has its own order and logic, and is not subjected to factual or scientific evidence.

However, there are interesting cases in which the ‘narrated world’ can be confused with the ‘real world’, not only by the reader – who believes he is accessing the ‘truth’ about a given reality of interest – but also by the author, who even unconsciously could be convinced he is providing the reader the portrait of ‘the world as it really is’, leaning towards the ‘scientific discourse’ to give credibility to his writings. We are talking

about a curious phenomenon in which the author seems to forget Literature's own independence and credibility, and tries to put on his writings a credibility borrowed from science.

Rangel's "Inferno Verde" is exactly one of these cases. This work, written in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, reflects the overvaluation of 'scientific knowledge', which was based on the Darwinian view of nature and the Positivist view of the social phenomenon. As expected, Literature was also affected by these doctrines. Naturalism movement emerged as an attempt to apply the scientific method to Literature, in order to give Literature the same prestige that the natural sciences enjoyed at that moment.

In this way, the distant and exotic Amazon seemed to be the perfect 'laboratory' to Rangel's naturalist ambitions. Some passages of *Inferno Verde* are full of detailed descriptions of the Amazonian environment, as if was made by a naturalist, along with scientific claims on different subjects, and scientific predictions about the Amazon and its people's future. In our study, we also point to the strong scientific claim in the book's preface, which seems to be in conformity with the author's purpose when designing the book, and is manifest in the non-diegetic narrative perspective. In this regard, when discussing "Os Sertões" and its fictional features in his "O Cãnone Republicano I" (2003), Flávio Kothe makes a statement that could be applied to "Inferno Verde".

O autor, embora envergonhado de o seu relato transformar-se em literatura – a ponto de fingir-se "cientista" –, não deixa de ser um "ficcionalista" tanto nas teorias quanto nos "fatos" que expõe. O ficcional é usado na invenção de cenas e de diálogos para dar aparência de fatos a cenas que o autor não havia vivenciado ou para "demonstrar pré-conceitos". [...] A ficção, ao não se assumir como ficção, serve para apresentar como fato a sua versão,

encobrimo assim a diferença entre ambos (Kothe, 2003, p. 228).

Disguising the limits of Literature and reality is an always current technique used by authors, and some readers can be really convinced that fictional texts are 'reality', as in fact it seems to have happened to some of *Inferno Verde*'s readers. Interestingly, despite Rangel's scientific inclinations or pretensions – yet reinforced by Euclides da Cunha's preface – the book remains relevant today not due to its 'scientific content', but precisely because of its fictional and poetic character, along with the complexity of its narrative structure.

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