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THE CHRONICLE OF LIMA BARRETO AND THE TIME OF REPUBLICAN PROGRESS: A STYLISTICAL REVIEW OF GREAT NARRATIVES

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Abstract: This article discusses strategies with which the chronicle of Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto (1881-1922) revised forms of official discourses on progress, among which the abolitionist novelty was inserted. From the analysis of the treatment that the writer makes of the historical events around the festivities of the “Golden Law”, our analysis identifies an elaborate expedient organized by the chronicler to communicate other temporalities. In the writer’s commitment to those marginalized by official discourses, the achieved record could be read as an authentic literary intervention in the narratives that deal with the abolitionist events in the country.

Keywords: Lima Barreto, abolition, republic, progress, chronicle.

INTRODUCTION

The literary chronicle of Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto (1881-1922) problematized in the daily form of the newspaper the impossibility of narrating from the traditional ways of the epic form, the forms dictated by the literate mandarins, the rhetorical gestures of the brotherhoods. Such limitations of narrative work were appropriated in the author’s commitment to the representation of a temporality that amalgamated the diversity of experiences that would characterize the contradictions of Brazilian society and its transformations in the early 20th century.

From a moral and political point of view, a certain idea of progress was fixed to us by the doctrinal strands of republican thought as a formula for a speech inaugurating a new era for the country, which would exclude our pre-capitalist reality. Now, it was characteristic of republican ideology, therefore, to translate itself into the perception of a new historical time that eliminated continuities, signaling strong “ruptures” with the slave-holding and monarchical past.

This way, at the intersection with liberal

ideals, the positivist vigor of defense of a new era had become the outcome of Brazil’s insertion in the excited historical flow of a nominalized civilization. Indeed, the structural interventions in the reconstruction (1903-1906) of the city of Rio de Janeiro would be added as a programmatic element in a set of actions and discourses that would try to seal the establishment of a new present and future for the country that had recently arrived at the Republic.

In general terms, the press played an amplifying role in this perceptive defense of the ideals of progress. Although without a specific standard, the historical conception embedded in the editorial space served to broaden political facts and scientific convictions around such a conception. The equipped space of the newspaper tried to build for itself a special sensitivity for the present debate. This perception was set both in the content of articles and in the graphic option of organizing the information. Old and new rules of the news ended up having different effects on the ways in which the new temporalities represented there were perceived.

In this sense, literati registered dissonant perceptions of progress. The historical representation of the sensation of temporal novelty, for example, was able to encourage “the Brazilian accent of our cultural reflection” (DIMAS, 1994, p. 537). Current criticism agrees that authors such as Lima Barreto, Euclides da Cunha, João do Rio, for example, recognized that they already had an instrumentalization of new resources to narrate the complex Brazilian social reality as well as the discursive daring to face the media apparatus that sustained the official narrative of republican discourse.

Thus, treating Lima Barreto’s chronicle as an adequate textual space to exemplify the hybridity and dissonance of our idea of modernity, the purpose of this article is to, in

a summary way, present stylistic options of the carioca writer in a decoding of a relative idea of progress for the city of Rio de Janeiro, especially the one that reinforces a supposedly victorious official version of Abolition (1888).

Having done that, we believe in a critical proposal that enriches the approach to the work of a writer like Lima Barreto, who is commonly emptied of his literary attributes and loaded with racist stereotypes and biographical inaccuracies. On a recurring basis, pictures of a suffered life are artificially drawn to explain a combative and ostracized profile, even contributing to a cruel fictionalized atmosphere around the life and work of the author of *Policarpo Quaresma*.

The struggle of black peoples in Brazil was at the heart of the literary production of Lima Barreto, who became a prominent figure in this debate in the press at the beginning of the 20th century. Following this article, we will analyze the chronicle “Maio” to extract from it a very particular way of the author in interpreting the historical events around the Golden Law and the winds of progress that blew with the republican novelty.

“MAY”: A STYLISTIC REVIEW OF GRAND NARRATIVES

Lima Barreto organized, through literature, a contestation to the sensations produced by the various institutional archives that formulate temporalities in the metropolis. Showing that he was aware that there was a global process under way – “by any chance, are the ideas, the precepts, the institutions that govern Europe different from those that govern us? Absolutely not” (BARRETO, 1956b, p. 213-4), he chose to let subjectivity stylistically work the sensational complex collected in his meditations on Brazilian historical reality.

In the interpretation of the ruins left in the metropolis space by the clash between past

and present, one of his reactions found in his literary text the elaboration of a historical point of view capable of communicating other possible temporalities. To this end, Lima Barreto carried out a treatment of the historical past far from a triumphant and lasting vision. Thus, in his proposal, there is no reverence for the official versions or even an acceptance of a reality that was already concluded, finished.

Instead, the author invested effort in making a very individual look to separate the old from the new, allowing the hybridism and dissonance experienced at every moment in the multifaceted Brazilian reality to subsist in them. We will argue that such treatment translated into the idea of orienting its text to produce other sensations, qualitatively different from those propagated by the institutional apparatus. They are memories and rewritings of the past, “assumptions of what that had been”, that is, they are all ways of extending the chronicler’s observation of events beyond the mere present moment of the enunciation.

At the beginning of May 1911, for example, when, traditionally, the journalistic section that took care of periodicals was occupied with remembering, almost always in a festive and laudatory way, the treatment of the anniversary of the abolition of slavery, Lima Barreto chose to write for *Gazeta da Tarde*, in the chronicle “May”, a very particular representation of the event of the promulgation of the Lei Áurea. This initiative of his serves us as a relevant stylistic marker of an alternative to the news elements that normally celebrated such an event.

Indeed, the abolition of slavery in Brazil, in May 1888, was a fact marked by great media mobilization and, in the face of the elaborate spectacle, by important popular support. Brazilian historiography has recorded the upheavals of an uprising almost unanimously in the Rio press around the festivities that

surrounded and shaped the event. It was a real effort to establish in a collective memory the events of a lasting truth, political representation relevant to the national imagination that was under construction.

If, in the case of Lima Barreto's narrative, the chosen point of view was different, it was not without appealing to this recognized feeling of communion with the festivity of historical events that the chronicler opened his production. A text that started with a strong affective charge with the month of May starts with a description of the events surrounding the abolition from the reminiscences anchored in his childhood and in his birthday month. From the outset, he would not pose as a mere witness of the events, but as a subject who had lived them actively, but also limited by a more structured understanding of the events, since he was young at the time. The impressions gathered from the experience are made from a less privileged narrative place, but they are enough to produce an atmosphere of a certain candor in the story:

We are in May, the month of flowers, the sacred month for poetry. It is not without emotion that I see him enter. There is a renewal in my soul; ambitions bloom again and, again, flocks of dreams come to me. I was born under your sign, the thirteenth, and I believe on Friday;

and, therefore, with the emotion that the sacred month brings me, memories of my childhood are mixed.

Right now I am remembering that, in 1888, days before the golden date, my father came home and said to me: the law of abolition will pass on your birthday. And indeed it passed; and we went to wait for the signature at Largo do Paço. (BARRETO, 1956b, p. 255)

Thus, even if the chronicler's narrative is presented in the details of his reminiscences - assimilated from the events interpreted by the perspective of the present of those who would now know how to point out the slavery vices

that were added to the memory of his birthday, the text seemed, a priori, to be illuminated by feelings of historical triumphs, by this time already well evidenced by the reader of the periodical in the present of the chronicle.

In an expression of the same chronicle, a "scent of nostalgia" (BARRETO, 1956b, p. 257) triggered the perceptual field for the events of childhood. However, the rhetoric of presenting the facts sought, in fact, to capture the reader in the ir retrievable of past times that will be written, in a sui generis way, from a sensory stimulus that would unleash that pleasant memory. This way, we delve into the reflective and affective relationship that the chronicler maintains with sensation. In a way, we experience something farther from the media spectacle and closer to the chronicler's confessional.

The predictability of the event, announced days before by the father - but also largely planned by the periodicals of the time, appeared as an indicator of the infallibility of the arrival of "angels breaking shackles" (BARRETO, 1956b, p. 256). Now, the text was filled with a form of intensity to affect the reader for the perception of the past from the present feeling, described, however, in the pen of those who legitimately reacted to the racism inherited from the slavery of African peoples. This way, Lima Barreto shaped the present of emotional memories to lead the energy that he will effectively dispense to the past, giving himself and his reader the means to accept it or not.

In such perspective, it is possible to affirm that the writer, on the one hand, operated a recognition of the festive atmosphere in his text, tuning it with the way accustomed to the standard register around the abolition in the printed, however, it could also be said, on the other. On the other hand, the chronicle allowed the past to be filled by the present, in which the feeling of dismay, subtly, will sprinkle a

content willing to carry out a true movement of stopping thoughts in their universalizing and allegedly civilizing historical march.

When the apex of the lyricism of the text was filled by the words of the teacher who explained the meaning of the run: “free! free!” (BARRETO, 1956b, p. 257); only then, the emptying of such expectations was precisely occupied by the distance of those who always had their point of view established between the differences between what was reported and what was experienced in a society with a slave-holding past that was still so recent. The chronicler vents: “But how far we are from being free! How we still get entangled in the webs of precepts, rules and laws!” (BARRETO, 1956b, p.257).

An atmosphere of fading, then, produced with the passage of time, draws another landscape for the events. It was not a pamphlet content against racism or eugenics, but a conscious attempt to collect in the fragments of memory impressions that were destroyed by the cruelty of the present. In Benjamin’s formulation of the “angel of history”, “who seems to prepare to move away from anything that stares” (BENJAMIN, 2013, p. 14), progress is a gale that drags the angel in a violent blow to the future. Here, once again, the chronicler’s gaze resists simplifications, seeking in the rubble of events the representation of another temporality for the historical fact:

Oh! The time! The inflexible time, which, like Love, is also the brother of Death, is reaping aspirations, removing presumptions, bringing discouragement, and only leaves in our soul this nostalgia for the past, sometimes composed of futile things, whose remembering, however, always brings pleasure.

How much ambition he does not kill! First are the dreams of position: with the days and the hours and, little by little, we go down from minister to amanuense; then are those

of Love - oh! how do you get down on those! Those of knowledge, of erudition, fall until they are reduced to the kindly *Larousse*. Travel... Oh! The travels! We made them in our poor rooms, with the help of Baedeker and other complacent books.

Works, satisfactions, glories, everything fades and fades. At the age of 30, people who thought of themselves as the Shakespeare are convinced that he is nothing more than some “Evil of the Vineyards”; tenaciously, however, we remain living, waiting, waiting. . . what? The unforeseen, what could happen tomorrow or the day after. Waiting for the miracles of time and looking at the sky empty of God or Gods, but always looking at it, like the philosopher Guyau.

Waiting, who knows if it’s big luck or a hidden treasure in the backyard? (BARRETO, 1956b, p. 257-258)

In the example on screen, it is complex to describe the link between the present now criticized, a traumatic past, the frayed memory of childhood and the narration of the encounter of these times in the confessional reality of the chronicler with his frustrated dreams. We think, with the sensualist philosopher Christoph Türcke, that “every memory is an image of the unrecoverable” (TÜRCKE, 2016, p. 57). Thus, we consider that “making the facts present again”, when reported by the author, informed us that the past was incomplete, still processed by the feeling of impotence of the present. Thus, in life accelerated by modernization, the literary text could propose a new rhythm to the word that dealt with lived things, displaying the rules of subjective experience that would determine its reading and interpretation. As a result, the irretrievable of memories appears in the chronicler’s text with a different treatment of the news character about abolition that mainly surrounded the columns of the chronicle in the newspaper.

In his confession as a writer, we think it

is important to consider that, no matter how lucid his intervention proposal was, Lima Barreto was well aware that the spirit of a man of letters was never a practical spirit. Although the fantasy of fiction had allowed him to elaborate revising images of our official temporalities, producing sensations different from the triumphal spectacle or the irresolute tragedies, his feelings expressed the recognition of the personal pains of being incomplete, whether in the composition of the drama of a life or of a country's history. This stood out in his writings both covertly and explicitly, as in the following passage, in which he mourned the death of a friend:

All these reminiscences bring me a feeling, an inexpressible pain. It doesn't come to me from the fear of death, absolutely not; but the approach of old age that will be very atrocious for me, of someone who has fled the fatalities of life through the false door of fantasy and stupor. (BARRETO, 1956b, p. 262)

The fact, finally, that we try to articulate in this exhibition about "May" is that of a chronicle that presents historical time treated with creativity, giving lyricism to events that we did not want to erase from a collective memory. However, the handling brought criticism, as the discursive volume against what was not wanted to remain standing or even emptying the naive reverence for "better" times, innocently expected with Abolition or with other events related to the Republic.

With such a stylistic composition, amidst the exalted volume of stimuli coming from political, scientific and journalistic discourses, it was possible for the author to propose images that described with stenographic brevity complex historical situations. These images that produce force because they manage to act significantly in a complex social situation, resuming Christoph Türcke's appreciation, act in such a way "that the immediate imagery shock is contorted into a reflection shock;

of images they become thought-images" (TÜRCKE, 2010, p. 316).

Thus, the writings of Lima Barreto are recurrent, intended to produce, through images, a reflective environment. In his chronicles, there are descriptions in which the landscape is delayed and in which the reader wants to fixate, organizing dissonant portraits for the perception of a nervous system accustomed to the ferment of events that were spectacularized in the press:

At times, I pause reading the newspaper for a longer period of time, and stretch my gaze over the soft green carpet of the endless grass that stretches out in front of me.

Dreams of a rural life come to me; Assuming what that had been, I started to make Indians, sugarcane plantations, slaves, logs, kings, queens, emperors – all this comes to my mind in view of those mute things that speak nothing of the past.

Suddenly, a tram tinkles, an automobile honks, a truck arrives loaded with cases of beer bottles; then, all the bucolic nature of the place dissolves, the emotion of the early eras in which Dom João VI's coaches passed through there, fades and I start to hear the tinkle of tinned iron, a factory that is built very close.

But the burial of a child comes; and I dream again. (BARRETO, 1956b, p. 288)

In the present that wanted to be reassessed, the form of the dream that delirious a "country life" alternates its attention between the diagrammed environment of the daily news and "the soft green carpet of the endless grass that stretches out" in front of the chronicler and the reader. A wary image that ruminated on the tumultuous violent winds of progress over "assumptions of what that had been." In the fixed gaze, the temporal landscape moves, gaining the dynamism of a cinematograph in the montage that alternates bucolicism with the iron tinkle of a factory. Finally, we are surprised by the interaction of images that

synthesize the contrasts of the new times.

With compelling naturalness, Lima Barreto's prose described an order of details that combined isolated impressions with the image of relevant facts from the national imagination. In order to say what the simple facts did not say, the thought is instigated by the sensorial exploration for a visual field that brought together temporalities of the "new" Brazil. These were sensations that were not restricted to the spectacle insofar as the text becomes a symbolic counterpoint to the mediatized myth of republican progress.

Therefore, in terms of historical reference, the dubious and unstable portraits made gained coherence in the authentic way in which they communicated with our senses and emotions. The combination of the past and the present left contradictions on display, but also highlighted them as a structural part of our ambiguous and uncertain daily life. They were, therefore, effective portraits to dialogue with our diversity without resorting to boastful gestures or unrealistic portraits of a triumph of progress.

Bringing new meanings to the lives that were represented there, the chronicler's text fulfilled its declared mission (meta) of communicating "one souls with the other". Lima Barreto made the literary text a legitimate space for experimentation to bring the communicative functions of his work closer to the reality of the feelings he cultivated. In his text, an engaged proposal to redesign existing realities based on feelings captured by the exercise of solidarity seemed to emerge. In these terms, the author defended:

This in general within that precept of Guyau¹ who found in the work of art the destiny of revealing souls to others, of reestablishing between them a link necessary for the mutual understanding of men. I call and have called works of art that have a similar

¹ The French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau was a strong reference in Nietzsche's thought. In the work of Lima Barreto, it seems to be evoked to reinforce the social character of our reality and the moral conscience of the influence exerted by the ideas declared in the work of art.

scope militant. (BARRETO, 2017, p. 129)

In this approach, Lima Barreto seemed to recognize that theoretically debating the past amidst the exalted volume of stimuli arising from merely political and scientific discourses would be to participate in a sterile discussion – "Their law is a dead thing: it has no more soul" (BARRETO, 1956b, p. 254). Presenting himself in the debate through the discursive elaboration that collected apparently disconnected forms of resistance seemed to him an intrinsic commitment to the work of art.

It was even this realization that gave him freedom in relation to the aesthetic-formal bases proposed by the academic tradition and the naturalist currents in force at the time. So, as an alternative to stylistic disputes, the reader's attention immersed in the discursive and sensorial tensions in progress would be sought by the literary handling of time in the form of images; without a clear informative anchor, it is true, but with a lot of narrative sensitivity in asserting itself through elaborate ways of reaching the human senses. In this case, this ability to visually amalgamate distinct times.

Taking advantage of the explicit reference we made to Jean-Marie Guyau, when he made a practical defense of these stylistic marks of his, Lima Barreto explained his approach with the search for a feeling that affirmed the solidarity of an identification with the other, especially in his pain. If at times a virulent reaction on the part of the author was necessary; in others, the painful sharing seemed to seek reverberation with the reader in an intimacy of spirits, "because confessed pain is already half pain and less torture" (BARRETO, 1956c, p. 52). In such an enunciation, the shared suffering was also part of the sensorial handling around the literary

treatment of the historical and political situation, demonstrating itself in the hope that both that suffering and the humiliation arising from it could one day be mitigated.

Before moving on, as an example, it is worth mentioning a record that seems even more confessional to us, in which the author reverberates, apparently convulsed by socialist and anarchist social movements, another relevant political event of his time: the death, in 1919, of the Russian activist Vera Zasulich, remembered here in the militant aspect of her complicity with the pain of her peers and expressed in solidarity with the anguish of the oppressed:

She, in the opinion of the author of the article I am summarizing; she was not disgraced by her own disgrace. She suffered for all the oppressed, for all the disinherited; or, rather, she did not suffer, she was indignant, she rebelled. Vera was irritated at the same time against her impotence and against the happiness of these people out there, calm, fat and satiated, despite knowing that millions of people were moaning and were persecuted in every way.

Moved by these feelings, she, who had never seen Bogoluboff, so ferociously reviled and demoted from his manhood, vows to avenge the offense and torture inflicted on her. She arms herself, looks for Trépoff and kills him, unloading all the revolver she was carrying on him.

He went to the jury, confessed that he had acted with all discernment, with premeditation, ambush, etc., etc.; and she is acquitted.

The rest doesn't interest us; what interests us is the character of this woman, it is her selflessness, it is her sacrifice for the suffering of others that she absolutely did not know. (BARRETO, 1956a, p. 76)

2 Vera Ivanovna Zasulich (1849 – 1919), Russian revolutionary, of wealthy origin, who shot and wounded General Fyodor F. Trepov, governor of St. Petersburg. Arrested and acquitted by the jury in a famous trial in 1878, Vera Zasulich became a symbol of workers' mobilization. She was a founding member, in 1883, of the first Russian Marxist organization, having corresponded with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. With strong political positions, Zasulich opposed the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in 1917.

The identification of the chronicler with the guiding values of the Russian revolutionary² seemed to override his own literary intentions by mixing his description of suffering and indignation: “In Brazil, whoever is, in fact, a writer, a man of letters, who loves letters for the sake of letters, will suffer mercilessly and climb his Calvary of glory and love [...]” (BARRETO, 1956c, p. 91). That said: coincidence or an indicator that the images created by the chronicler were born through his commitment to reverberate through art the pain caused by suffering?

In this counterpoint, we find an image of resistance that is truer than the dream of a revolutionary triumph. We were faced with a chronicle of opposition to the dullness caused by the cruelty imposed by the official institution of progress. However, we consider that it was not a reflex reaction to the stimuli, but rather, reiterating: an elaborate intervention that intended to produce alternative sensations through the literary artifact committed to the social.

A true counterpoint to the criticism of the backwardness of the past, Lima Barreto's chronicle opposed the march of progress by illuminating a not so idyllic present en route with historical memories that affected the reader's present existence. With such an expedient, the time experienced in the city by the institutional discourse of the Republic found in the work of the carioca writer a kind of republican disillusionment elaborated in the form of a creative trait capable of awakening the solidarity and laughter of the present to rethink the false advances in the march of the universal history.

This elaboration of a historical point of view capable of communicating other possible

temporalities was justified, for example, in the writer's commitment to solidarity with the marginalized. There would be no utopian space for large projects in the face of the toxicity arising from the greed of the powerful and the exploitation of enslaved peoples. In

an engaged way, for him, the current state of things, both individually and collectively, "asks for dreams, for art, for culture, for charity, for mercy, for love, for happiness" (BARRETO, 1956a, p. 164).

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