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Entre o leito e a margem: plural de águas, singular identidade –
um diálogo entre Guimarães Rosa e Mia Couto

Between the riverbed and the banks: multiple water flows, single
identity – a dialogue between Guimarães Rosa and Mia Couto¹

Abstract

This study is set in-between the torrent and the swamp of senses in different places. To this end, we propose a comparative reading of two short stories: *A terceira margem do rio*, by Guimarães Rosa (*Primeiras Estórias*, 1962), written shortly after the construction of the new capital, Brasília, and *Nas águas do tempo*, by Mia Couto (*Estórias Abensonhadas*, 1994), shortly following the end of the Mozambique civil war. The Brazilian short story analysis – about a son and his life-long wait on the riverbank for his absent father who doesn't return and his guilty feeling for betraying the role model and not filling the father's empty place is compared with the Mozambican tale. Here, an old present grandfather decides to take his grandson sailing into “forbidden territory”, which dramatizes, in fictitious waters, the innovative methodology of Comparative Literature. Free from the paradigm of continuity and subservience to the standard model, no longer tracking sources or dependence on previous understandings or debt, it becomes rewritten (Carvalho 1986). Our interpretation intends to review debts owed, which implies questioning the concept of the model's superiority (Silviano 1979) and its counter-face: the submissiveness to the model – here the father and tradition - by converting the new text-son and grandson into another point of reference, liquefied and in which marginalized subjects and descendants meet, regardless of their own impotence and/or ban and yet still constitute a privileged observatory. While the Mozambican

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tale unfolds, in the comfort of the grandfather's presence, there is the possibility update a tradition based on community values, the Brazilian short story dramatizes the split between subject and language and the breaking of the knowledge transmission circuit. In rivers that look like the sea, between the river bed and its banks, life and death, reason and myth, there, in that insulated space, plural of waters, you can emancipate yourself: sail in a canoe-cradle/coffin-and create unique identities in plural contexts.

Key words: Comparative Literature; Guimarães Rosa; Mia Couto; Margin; Tradition.

Resumo:

O presente trabalho transita no fluxo e no pantanal de sentidos circunscritos à água em lugares distintos. Para isso, visamos a leitura comparativa de dois contos: *A terceira margem do rio*, de Guimarães Rosa (*Primeiras estórias*, 1962), escrita após a construção da nova capital, Brasília, e *Nas águas do tempo*, de Mia Couto (*Estórias abensonhadas*, 1994), logo após o fim da guerra civil em Moçambique. A nossa leitura do conto brasileiro - a história do filho esperando, na margem do rio, o pai que não volta e sofre a culpa por trair o modelo e não preencher a vacância daquele lugar; - e do moçambicano - um velho avô que, presente, resolve levar o neto para navegar em "interditos territórios" dramatiza, nas águas da ficção, as inovações metodológicas do comparativismo. Livres do postulado da continuidade e subserviência ao modelo, não mais rastreamos fontes e o antes entendido como dependência, dívida, torna-se reescritura (Carvalho, 1986). Nossa leitura pretende rever a dívida, o que implica em questionar o conceito de superioridade (Silviano, 1979) e sua contraface, o assujeitamento ao modelo - aqui o pai e a tradição -, convertendo o novo texto - filho e neto - em outro ponto de referência, espaço liquefeito em que marginalizados e descendentes se instalam, a despeito da própria impotência e/ou interdição e ainda assim constituem um observatório privilegiado. Enquanto o conto moçambicano encena, no conforto da presença do avô, a possibilidade de atualização dos veios de uma tradição pautada em valores comunitários, o brasileiro dramatiza a cisão do sujeito com a linguagem e a quebra do circuito de transmissão do saber. Nos rios que parecem mar, entre o leito e a margem, a vida e a morte, a razão e o mito, ali, naquele espaço insulado, plural de águas, é possível emancipar-se: navegar numa canoa - berço/ataúde- e constituir identidades singulares em contextos plurais

Palavras-chave: Literatura comparada; Guimarães Rosa; Mia Couto; Margens; Tradição.

1. Introduction – Rosa and Couto, a memorable encounter:

If the past reaches us deformed, the present flows into our lives in an incomplete form. Some live this as a drama. And set off in a nervous rush searching for what they call our identity. Most of the time that identity is a house furnished by ourselves, but the furniture and the house itself were built by others. (Couto 2005:14).

We are here to promote a dialogue between Guimarães Rosa (1908 -1967) and Mia Couto (1955). This dialogue includes contrasts, consensus, confrontation and a network of relationships. Focusing on the work of these authors in terms of language, we intend to read *A terceira margem do rio*, a tale from the book *Primeiras estórias*, published in 1962, shortly before the military coup in Brazil and *Nas águas do tempo* the narrative that opens *Estórias abensonhadas*, published in 1994, shortly after the end of the civil war in Mozambique.

The dialogue featured here reflects a comparatist approach. As understood in the last decades of the Twentieth century, comparative literature constitutes a dynamic field of study that reviews «the core issues of cultural identity, construction of literary canons, policy implications of cultural influence, periodization and literary historiography (...) being averse to any kind of binarism» (Coutinho, 2011: 9). The turning point of comparativism, especially from the 1970s on, put in check the old universalized posture and the resulting homogenization of the literary and artistic productions, which extended to cultural and identity issues. Thus, the theoretical universal discussions conceded space to localized issues, which focused directly, according to Coutinho and Carvalhal (2011), on local and imported tradition, on the political implications of cultural exchanges – the need to review old stigmas such as the literary canon - and even more so the criteria of periodization.

Here, therefore, we no longer trace sources and, previous understandings such as dependence and owed debt (based on the belief in the superiority model) become rewriting (Carvalhal, 1986). This

procedure implies questioning the concept of superiority (Silviano, 1978) and its counter-face, the submissiveness to the model, converting the new text into another reference point, liquefied space in which marginalized and descendants meet, regardless of their own impotence and/or ban, and yet still constitute a privileged observatory.

According to Couto's declaration, Rosa is his poetic inspiration:

[...] it was poetry that gave me the prose writer Guimarães Rosa. When I first read his work I experienced a feeling I had felt when I heard childhood storytellers. Faced with the text, I did not just read it: I heard voices from childhood. Rosa's books threw me out of the wording as if, suddenly, I had been converted into a selective illiterate. To enter those texts I should make use of another act that is not "read", but that begs a verb that still has no name. (Couto *apud* Keys 2008: 43, *free translation of the author.*)

The quote leads us to an important caveat: despite the admiration of Couto for Rosa, for the Mozambican to take on the Brazilian as an inspirational source, yet the two authors and their respective texts are free, by which we mean: free from assumed continuity and subservience to what is taken as a model – rereading that becomes 'misreading'.

Harold Bloom (1973) demystifies the procedures by which a poet helps form other poets through what is called misreading, a chain process of re-cutting and appropriation, Oedipus backwards. In this perspective of reversal of continuity, the new recreates tradition. Well before Bloom, Jorge Luis Borges (1956) speaks in an exemplary manner of the articulation between the texts and defends reading as an endless rewriting, authorial overlay, uneasiness of voices not always orchestrated – as we can read in the admirable *Pierre Menard, author of Quijote*, tale of *Ficções* (1956).

The combination of authors, cultures, texts and procedures that we are bringing together occurs because, in reading like this, we can have a dialogue beyond dichotomous schemes and preconceived hierarchies. That is to say, our proposal demystifies the theoretical-methodological reflective comparativism of the literary text itself: a two-way street is that

which, in the course of reading, offers us as appropriate *modus operandi* for research. Thus, our research trajectory through the two tales, the Brazilian - the story of the son waiting his whole life, on the river bank, the father who didn't return; this son suffers guilt for betraying the role model and does not fill the vacancy of that place -; and the Mozambican - an old grandfather, who is present, resolves to take his grandson to sail in "forbidden territories", a grandson who fears to follow tradition and finds it hard to see his own marginal context - dramatizes, in the waters of fiction, methodological trends of comparativism today.

In rivers that look like the sea, between the riverbed and its banks, life and death, reason and myth, in that insulated space, plural of waters, it is possible to be emancipated: sailing a canoe-cradle/coffin - to create unique identities in plural contexts. By immersing in both tales, we confide in this in-between-place, privileged observatory, clandestine illicitness, the studied authors operate, each in the same/different way, with the invention of language.

2. *The invention of language*

To read and analyze the work of Rosa, one discovers that the minting of a new term does not replace an existing one. Its function is to try to un-condition verbal habits of common sense, seeking to create an unusual micro-universe in which there are unique shapes to see, feel and interpret the world founded on innovative visions. (Lisboa, 2010: 60 *free translation of the author*).

Mia Couto, poet, storyteller, resumes the literary-linguistic heritage of the elders, of the various, urban, suburban, rural street-talk and adds to them her personal "*imaginâncias*" *peçoais*, a "*imaginática*", "*escutante*" *de uma "escrevência"* "*inocorrente*" and "*lumbrativa*"² (Leite, 1999: 8).

² These neologisms, which in Portuguese refer to "imagination", "listening", "writing", "stream" and "wonder" cannot be appropriately translated into English.

The epigraphs above and also Arrigucci (1994), Bach (2008) Chaves and Macedo (2006) and Bizarri (2003), the Italian translator of Rosa, point to the procedure of language invention proposed by the two writers in dialogue. We realize that both imprint to the lexicon a non-mimetic or representative dimension, but rather search for a condition beyond the specularity between the words and things, possible by the constitution of a signifier that, at the same time alludes to the known meanings, yet dissolves and reassembled them.

That is to say: dissolve and create meanings, revolutionize the shape (syntactic-semantic structure) are practices, which, in the context of speech, we understand as transformation. This is our understanding of 'invention'. Specifically, the attitude of both authors promotes triple concussion in language: (1) a process of dissembling language imposed through colonization, which brings to the readers of different contexts, the effect of rethinking the complexity of language in a social-political-cultural situation riddled with contradictions; (2) a relationship of the word with the referent rather than mimesis or mimetic representation, but transformation and invention, namely the creation of a language that breaks free from its grammatical, syntactic and semantic rules; and, (3) on the broader level, the importance that the writer may not be a writer (among other events of biographical order, the experience of transiting in and hearing other contexts makes room for verbalism in the written word).

Laura Padilha, scholar of African literature, underscores the political character of verbalism in these cultures. Referring to the 'missossos' of Angola, the author confirms (says) that verbalism is a foundation upon which is erected the building of Angolan national culture. «To practice it was more than an art: it was a cry of resistance and a form of self-preservation of their native references, in the face of the overwhelming force of the Portuguese colonialism» (Padhila, 1995: 17).

In the case of Guimarães Rosa, we realized that the Brazilian Sertão semi-arid desert is a not a world that can be mimetically described,

assuming a real world as a reference, but rather built in the language, through recovery and oral expression. Couto (2005), referring to Rosa, notes that he writes as if it was his own semi-arid desert country, and thereby dispels borders, geographic marks, language rules, and syntactic-semantic compositions. On the other hand, we don't know what Rosa would have said about Couto's Mozambican savannas, but maybe the Cordisburgo miner would have tried a closer look more to the rhetoric of dreams in the text of the Mozambican lyrics companion, rather than a strictly geographical dimension of scenarios and circumstances which populate his stories. In this sense, the hypothesis of reality (normative) to be taken as an absolute referent, through the correlated function of language, would become, for both writers, a rational prison clamoring to have the walls and bars removed.

Guimarães Rosa, who claimed to love language as you would love a person, developed a *modus operandi* that allowed him to treat the unutterable veracity through paradox, an integral procedure and very often a creation of speech and of the (dis)integrity of his characters. By sliding from the antithesis and becoming installed in an interstitial region beyond the dichotomic, the Rosanian paradoxes appear to express something for which the known words are not enough, as in the short story *A terceira margem do rio*.

In the words of Mia Couto (2005):

To get to that relationship with writing you need to be a writer. However, it is essential, at the same time, to be a non-writer, to delve into the side of verbalism and escape from the rationality of writing codes as thought system. This is the challenge of the un-balancer - having a foot in each world: the text and the verb (gr. Our, *free translation of the author*).

We say that Guimarães Rosa, in the context of Brazilian literature, wrote in a 'Rosanian' language, composed of neologisms, clumps of words of various nationalities, rhythm and musicalities of the Sertão semi-arid desert, of the savannas, a sense of the severinian life and death, of the

hinterland flora and fauna, bringing the reader the unperceived strength of the Sertão, the presence of a third bank in dry riverbeds that look like the sea: « (...) *Largo, de não se ver a outra beira*» (Rosa, 1988: 32). Like the scholars of the Guimarães lexicon, we call his language 'Rosanian' because, among other effects linked together, he establishes various relationships between the meaning and the significance of the words, imploding the known differences between the narrative and the lyric, employing a language crisscrossed by alliterations, onomatopoeias, internal rhymes, new morphological settings and vocabulary compositions, ellipses, cuts, syntactic-semantic displacements, merges of archaisms, foreign words, hotchpotch metaphors, anaphoras, metonymies, together with the disruption of the linear form and space-time configuration of the narrative.

For Lévi-Strauss (1976), tribal people basically think the world has evolved through myths. The myths would form themselves through a process – in the speculative level - which the anthropologist describes as similar to a hotchpotch, which would work in the practical level. The meaning of hotchpotch that we bring here, via Strauss, is a way to create and/or reorganize things from an already established inventory, anyway, a new composition from pre-existing heteroclitous materials. To understand the meaning of things, the mythical thinking acts by combining signs, developing a sort of dialogue to find previous meanings, that is, based on what already existed about it. In this procedure, any change in any part will necessarily change the relationship with the whole.

In the sign, according to Lévi-Strauss (1976), the signifier always exceeds its meaning, and may be related also to other things. At the same time, the constituent units of the myth (*O pensamento selvagem*) are based on language, which restricts the meaning process. When it comes to scientific thought, the abstract concept appears, therefore, to the anthropologist, as operator of the opening thought, which will facilitate new relationships and new meanings. We remember that, in chapter I of *Pensamento Selvagem*, Lévi-Strauss (1976) compares the thought of the

savages (for the anthropologist, more concrete) to the modern thought, according to him, more abstract.

The Straussian contribution makes us understand that the mythical thought orders and reorders the reality until it rediscovers a meaning for things, while the scientific thinking abstracts the concrete, to assign another meaning to the known. To make use of the anthropological reflection to think in the language Rosa and Couto invented, we can glimpse the compositional effort of these authors in seeking, in verbalism, in mythical imagery, in dream, in the meaningful and concrete world, in meaningful experience, we can say, in the savage thought, the anchoring to an expression in freedom, which moves and leaves the referent, recreating it.

In the case of Mia Couto, the mythical representation in the post-colonial context contributes to a unique cultural identity which transgresses the rational European identity, imposed by years of dependency, while at the same time it brings to the proscenium the impacts of colonialism now marked by the suffix 'post '.

In the specific field of dreams and magic (voice of tradition) that establishes a shattered present, prevails «the invention of the spirits or souls, beings of darkness, as a representation of the cosmic world and its phenomena and of the physical world with its dreams and hallucinations» (Tutikian 2006: 60). We must not forget that the mythical appears in the narrative point of view's hinge, sometimes as a lie, sometimes as wisdom, which deserves to be considered for both authors. In the ways of rewriting, obliterate, understand the story, you can read, among other scratched out writing, the most violent social contradictions. We are not partisans to the making a fable of a myth, which promotes exclusively aesthetic reversal of oppressive reality. Our focus is literary and we can say, to the contrary, that the mythical presence corresponds to a resource «particularly apt in denouncing the fragility of archaic communities exposed to the evils that afflict post-colonial societies» (Alfonso, 2007: 552).

In Rosa, the framework of the book *Primeiras Estórias* (1962) is the "modernizing start", the eagerness of President Juscelino Kubitschek's progress, who built Brasília (1960), on the Brazilian Central Plateau and moved the capital there from Rio de Janeiro. Juscelino's strategy was based on a developmental project of "50 years in 5"; this policy focused on the "dilemmas of representation" present in the narrative and structure of this book, produced between the Rosanian propensity for the transcendent and extremely practical contradictions, objectives and for short proposals within easy reach, as was the Brazilian modernization project of that period (Corpas, 2008).

We agree with the fact that in *A terceira margem do rio*, in the crucial moment of the experience-bound son who finally says that he sees his father, the narrative gives rise to the myth paralyzation; but this is because the literary form, not only does not intend to make a historical analysis, it recognizes the proposition of symbolic escapes to historical contradictions not as incongruities, but as an effort to bring to the proscenium the possibility of a symbolic transformation. Furthermore, it is necessary to mention, in the literary text, with the unspeakable, the gaps, the incompletions (in the literary text), that do not lend themselves to a proposed *stricto sensu* historical record. We accept, therefore, that «There is an unintelligibility that crosses and persists in all his writings, to the point that it resists any attempt to decipher» (Vieira, 2011: 233-234). The literary language of Rosa transits in this third margin: «an unspeakable that touches the reader, inviting each one to hear the 'language music» (Vieira, 2011: 233-234). In a parallel line of thought, Couto *the unbalancer* (2005) transits, through the very condition of his African country, a mosaic of pains and colors, in the complex area of mixed races, cultures, and subjectivities – a process that demands you to become decentralized to imbricate oneself in the otherness.

When we talk about mixed races we speak with some reservation as if the hybrid product was anything but "pure". But there is no purity when speaking of the human

species. And if we talk of mixed race, this means that someone else, from the other side, received something that was ours. (Couto, 2007:60, *free translation of the author*)

In this visceral dialogue with each other, their literary language is the result of persistent negotiation, imbricate diversities composing a new textualization in a field so often, literally and metaphorically, mined. In the Conference at the Minas Gerais Federal University (2007), Couto raised the subject, as mentioned, of the condition of Rosanian paradox, but focused on his own works. The triple blow operated in the language – as described before –, unfolds, according to him, in seven approaches. (1) the construction of a fantasy world; (2) the establishment of another time; (3) the rejection of homogeneity; (4) the impossibility of a uniform national picture; (5) the need to counteract the excesses of realism; (6) the urgency of a culturally remolded Portuguese; and (7) the affirmation of verbliness and the magical thinking of stitching together the other items.

On concluding his speech, he brings together the feelings of Brazil and Mozambique in the entwined scenarios – the Semi arid Sertão and Savannah, in repeated contexts of death by extreme poverty and by the civil war. How to sew together so fragmented realities? As described, the idea of re-creating, in the Portuguese language, another language culturally remolded, cements the possibility of mediation between educated and simple social classes by means of speech: «Only by renewing language can we renew the world» (UFMG, 2007)

To typify some differences between GR and MC as people and as writers, we can say that, within the sign, the comfortable practice to associate the signifier to a meaning – an univocal relationship that previously established the meaning –, is dismantled by both authors who implode the sign and, with it, the comfort zone in which the readers routinely situate themselves. We list some words – formed by different processes, which will constitute the lexicon of both studied authors. In these few examples, the agglutination juxtaposes the original senses that

add up to a third, forming fourth and fifth and other understandings. In Mia Couto: *perfumegante, aurorava, mal-desentendidos, timiúdo; estridentou, misantrôpego; hematombos; teatroso, ciunava açucaroso, boquiaberturas, lusco-focaram*. In Rosa: *quilas águas trans; relucidado; obcego; funebrilhos; desnascer; demoramento; brutalhudo; furibundância; excogitei; mortalma; beijaflorou; brumalva; brisbrisa*.³

To the lexicon deconstruction we add up the syntagmas deconstruction. How to read? For the Portuguese and Brazilian reader, how to translate his own language within itself? Dethroning the meaning, how can we take the risk to produce the meanings, only by facing a healthy mind-wandering on the edges of the word?

3. Edges of the word

*Água da palavra/ água de rosa dura? Proa da palavra/ Duro silêncio nosso pai/ Margem da palavra/ Entre as escuras duas/ Margens da palavra/ Clareira, luz Madura/ Rosa da palavra/ Puro silêncio nosso pai.*⁴

To rescue what the orthodox culture pushed to the edges - in the sense of exclusion from the centre, the riverbed and life -, the comparative studies, in decentralizing their watershed, operate a vital job. To establish analogies, to build non-hierarchical identities and to value more the difference that the dependence, allow the cancelation of cultural

³ These neologisms, which in Portuguese refer to : perfume-gate, day-broke, badly-misunderstood, shy-little-one; deafened, misanthropic; bruise-fall; dramatized, sugar-sweet jealousy, jaw-dropping, twilight-gossiped. In Rosa: quilastrans waters, reclarified; blind-obsession; brilliant-funerals; still-born; delay; brutalized; gluttony-of-anger; inward-thought; mortal-soul; flower-kissed; mystified; breaking-breeze can not be appropriately translated into English.

⁴ “The water of the word/ water of the lasting rose? The bow of the word/ Total silence our father/ edges of the word/ Between the two darknesses/ Edges of the word/ Clearing, Mature light/ Rosa of the word/ Pure silence our father”. (free translation of the author)

debt. Rosa already talks about the Grande Sertão, of his love of its big rivers, deep as the soul of man, a place of eternity. And the theme returns, incessant torrents, water that never stops and overflows into what today, the 21st century, mark our existence: a gloomy sense of survival, within space-time discontinuities, such of living on the frontiers of this present paradoxically named by the sliding of the prefix 'post' (Bhabba 2010).

When we think of the third bank (of the river), it is not a question of the left or right bank, or the comfortable synthesis of spaces in game or confrontation; but a setting that can include both sides, be outside of them, everywhere and in every one.

In this tale of Rosa, *A terceira margem do rio*, we find a person - the son - who starts as a boy and exerts, without realizing it, the function of mediating the interests and cultures in confrontation, during an inconclusive crossing; the boy who lives around another person - the father - a balanced man, adept at daily routines, never badly spoken of and who, without any explanations, «deserted to another fate to exist» (Rosa, 1994: 409). We're not talking here of that father who takes control of the scenario, of the imaginary, and is conspicuous by his absence. Before, we want to highlight the fear of he who is, a kind of guardian of the paternal memory and remains on the bank for his entire life, waiting for another that doesn't come, the son, who at the height of his despair, asks himself: «I'm a man after this failure?» (Rosa, 1994: 413). We want to bring to the proscenium he who was posted in apparent immobility. The absent individual, the one that has gone, we are interested in what the deficiency represents, the effects of the parental lacking on their dependents, the mark of a sudden and unheralded orphanhood. In this possible shipwreck on dry land, we will bring to the surface the riverbed full of water, not the flood, but the river bank emptied by the absent presence, the drama lived by that son who, in an effort to read the unreadable, turns into an echo of the paternal image and installs himself on the banks - of the river and of life. If there is indeed an overflow, it is the unshed tears, spilled dreams and the child that passes from childhood

to decrepitude without having heard his own voice. But in wanting to die, complains to the river that unites both ends of life and introduces itself as the cradle and coffin, water that does not stop.

When we sail in the water (of time), we also need to forget the sequential linearity, the predictable continuity of events in the narrative. It is not about yesterday, today and tomorrow, but a fusion of multiple times, the simultaneous presence of different and incompatible dimensions according to a binary scheme of thought. In “Nas águas do tempo” (Couto, 2012) a boy learned to navigate, a routine gesture, with his grandfather, who brought out a smile of teeth, «in him, they were of an indefinite article» (Couto, 2012: 9). They journey to forbidden territories, strange places between the mouth (of a small river) and its source (the Lake), at times when the canoe is «unbalanced with my odd weight» of the child; a boy who, suspicious and fearful, feels «cold shivers» (Couto, 2012: 13), looks at the riverbanks and sees nobody.

What are the riverbanks? Dotted lines, frontiers, interstices. Inaccurate tracings, lines of multiple contacts, including those that separate. The riverbanks have the advantage of touching otherness. At the same time it is the inside and outside, they do not configure a territory, but a way to form a horizon of expectations, able to extend to the point of constituting a privileged observation post. There, between memory and oblivion, between water and the earth, points that sometimes merge into a swamp, it is possible to see the *namwetxo moha*: «the ghost who comes at night, made only in halves: one eye, one leg, one arm». (Couto, 2012: 11). The grandfather said that in his youth «he had interviewed this so-called half-person» (Couto, 2012: 11), identified for his grandson, with the said rags, in the prohibited lake.

When the grandfather tells of the night ghost made only of halves, he is stimulating, in the grandson's imagination, what others say does not exist. He believes that the boy's initiation might give him the condition to see with greater breadth the mythical and the ghost-like, the parts of the remaining tradition of his history, his identity, war-torn halves.

According to Bach (2008) 6, tradition floats against the current, showing the individual that local culture is fundamental in this globalized world because it returns a person to their corporality, their history. In this sense it is desirable to preserve traditions and take advantage of them as a means to develop as an individual and, therefore, as a citizen inserted into the context of his nation.

Following on, in another point of the Couto narrative, there was «the night at the forbidden lake, when finally the fright appeared» (Couto, 2012: 11). By order of the grandfather, after waving and greeting someone invisible with those rags, the canoe stopped being pulled to the bottom and «the whirlwind that despaired us died down in an immediate lull» (Couto, 2012: 11). That's when the old man asked him to keep a secret and explained:

Nós temos olhos que se abrem para dentro, esses que usamos para ver os sonhos. O que acontece, meu filho, é que quase todos estão cegos, deixaram de ver esses outros que nos visitam. Os outros? Sim, esses que nos acenam da outra margem. E assim lhes causamos uma total tristeza. Eu levo-lhe lá nos pântanos para que você aprenda a ver. Não posso ser o último a ser visitado pelos panos. Entende? (Couto, 2012: 12)

The boy pretends to understand. The fact escapes him that the mystery teaches him how to change the focus of observation, go back inside himself, see the dreams and, at this point, the narrative emphasizes the urgency of contact with those waving on the other riverside.

Now, we know that the riverbanks can be indisputably painful places to be and, resuming Eagleton's argument (2005), it is a work worthy of culture students to help create a space in which the rejected and ignored can find a language, a voice. We would say that the dignity of the study lies in understanding that the riverside also points to a desire not only to meet, but even to rewrite their own disfigured identities, even if it is to live with an *unidentified 'half-person'*. Being on the sidelines can be understood also as not having access to the 'democratic' market offers, not being a potential consumer and therefore unable to unite the

objective conditions to be part of the big agitated cyclical frustrations that the globalized market seeks to sell. As with the water, «the seduction of the market is, at the same time, the great equalizer and the great divider»(Bauman, 1998: 55).

Through the prohibited lake we reach the third riverbank. What makes a man wait his whole life on the edge of a river «for there it extends itself widely, deep, as quiet as ever. Extensive, of not being able to see the outline of the other side» (Rosa 1994: 409), Brazilian water, (inter)national, symptoms of fleeting eternity, rivers that resemble seas, oceans of words wherein we have found no limit, the frontier, the precise geographic demarcation?

As we see in Couto, at the end of the Rosa 'story', the son has a profound encounter with his constitutional identity – he reports, to the surprised readers, of a vision of his father, the family and cultural tradition. Before the unusual meeting, after long years of waiting, he says to himself: «I was very much within my senses. I Waited. Then in the end, he appeared, there and then, the form. It was there, seated at the stern. He was there screaming» (Rosa 1994: 411). In both stories, the desired appearance is paradoxically a shock or distrust for those who fed themselves on the waiting.

Chamei, umas quantas vezes. E falei, o que me urgia, jurado e declarado, tive que reforçar a voz: — "Pai, o senhor está velho, já fez o seu tanto... Agora, o senhor vem, não carece mais... O senhor vem, e eu, agora mesmo, quando que seja, a ambas vontades, eu tomo o seu lugar, do senhor, na canoa!...] E, assim dizendo, meu coração bateu no compasso do mais certo (Rosa 1994: 411,*free translation of the author*)⁵.

⁵ "I called, a few times. And I said, what urged me, sworn and declared, I had to strengthen my voice: — Father, you're old, you've done your bit. Now, you've come, do not need anymore... You've come, and I, right now, when it is, to both our resolves, I will take your place, yours, in the canoe!... And, so to speak, my heart beat at the normal rate".

Presenciei o velho a alonjar-se com a discrição de uma nuvem. Até que, entre a neblina, ele se declinou em sonho, na margem da miragem. Fiquei ali, com muito espanto, tremendo de um frio arrepioso (Couto, 2012:13)⁶.

In the parallelism of the scene description, there are differences. In *A terceira margem do rio*, waves from the past shake the character and he tries to recover the family tradition mandate, which suddenly seemed to him more correct - for the son to take the place of the father. The fear, however, is greater than the action and, faced with the 'apparition', he runs away:

E eu tremi, profundo, de repente.(...) por pavor, arrepiados os cabelos, corri, fugi, me tirei de lá, num procedimento desatinado. Porquanto que ele me pareceu vir: da parte do além(Rosa 1994: 412)⁷.

The scene of the encounter that appears in "*Nas águas do tempo*" is a boyish vision, circumscribed with the possibility of magic. In the symmetric of Rosa, here the boy doesn't run away - he stays. And repeats the gesture of his grandfather.

Me recordo de ver uma garça de enorme brancura atravessar o céu. Parecia uma seta trespassando os flancos da tarde, fazendo sangrar todo o firmamento. Foi então que deparei na margem, do outro lado do mundo, o pano branco. Pela primeira vez, eu coincidia com meu avô na visão do pano.(..) Fiquei indeciso, barafundado. Então, lentamente, tirei a camisa e levantei-a pelos ares (Couto 2012: 14)⁸.

⁶ "I witnessed the old man distance himself with the discretion of a cloud. Until, within the mist, he declined into a dream, on the shore of the mirage. I stood there, with much astonishment, trembling with a cold fear". (free translation)

⁷ "And I shook, deeply, all of a sudden.(...) by dread, hair standing on end, I ran, escaped, I got myself out of there, like a wild man. Because he seemed to me to come: from beyond". (free translation)

⁸ "I remember seeing a great white heron cross the sky. It looked like an arrow trespassing on the flanks of the afternoon, causing the whole firmament to bleed. It was then that I perceived on the riverbank, on the other side of the world, the white cloth. For the first time, I coincided with my grandfather in the vision of the cloth.(..)

From there on, we discover the issue of human guilt – Guimarães Rosa - and the hope to be able to transmit traditions – Mia Couto :

Sou homem de tristes palavras. De que era que eu tinha tanta, tanta culpa? Se o meu pai, sempre fazendo ausência: e o rio-rio-rio, o rio — pondo perpétuo. (Rosa 1994: 411)⁹.

E eu acabava de descobrir em mim um rio que não haveria nunca de morrer. A esse rio volto agora a conduzir meu filho, lhe ensinando a vislumbrar os panos brancos da outra margem (Couto, 2012:14)¹⁰.

Rosa in the gerund, ends continuing, «o rio pondo perpétuo...»¹¹ (Rosa, 1994: 411), merges from the cradle to coffin, water which never stops flowing into the eternity of time of the waters of Mia Couto, whose longevity is in the transmission and the contact with each other through the generations.

In the prohibited lake – the boy, «que tinha um pé meio-fora do barco, procurando o fundo lodoso da margem» (Couto, 2012: 12)¹² -, the cosy and disconcerting presence of the grandfather represents an update of the tradition based on community values and comes along with an initiation project: the fluvial ritual to see «o habitual surgimento dos ditos panos» (Couto, 2012: 11)¹³– cloths with which the grandfather, in the great lake into which the small river emptied, waved with commitment. «A quem acenava ele: Talvez era a ninguém. Nunca, nem por um instante,

I was undecided, as stiff as a iron rod. Then, slowly, I took my shirt and lifted it to the breeze”. (free translation)

⁹ “I am a man of somber words. From where did I get so much, so much guilt? If it was my father, always absent: and the river-river-river, the river — perpetually putting” (free translation)

¹⁰ 14. And I had just found in me a river that would never die. This river has come back now guiding my son, teaching him to catch a glimpse of the white cloths on the other shore (free translation of the author).

¹¹ "the river perpetually putting" (free translation of the author).

¹² “who had a foot half-out of the boat, seeking the muddy bottom of the shore" (free translation of the author).

¹³"the usual appearance of the mentioned rags" (free translation of the author).

vislumbrei por ali alma deste ou de outro mundo. Mas meu avô acenava seu pano»(Couto, 2012: 10)¹⁴.

In Rosa's *A terceira margem do rio*, a reflection about the individual's impotence is a necessary step to unmask and overcome. The apparent submissiveness and stagnation – of the water and man-; the grandeur of the river – you can't see the other side-; the invisible father allocation in this same river, in contrast to the visible presence to the son on the other side of the riverbed, everything is a composition that draws a singular scenario. For the grandfather, *Nas águas do tempo* of Mia Couto, the curiosity of the grandson leads him to peek at the forbidden swamps... a word which perhaps alludes to the unfolding of the cloths (panos x pân(tan)os)¹⁵. This search for the banned – peeking at the mudflats of the bottom and step out onto the shoreline, thinking that would put their feet on terra firma -, was understood by the grandfather as a seriously grave act. Faced with the boy's excuse: «I was getting out of the boat, but it was just for a tiny piece of time (...) he fought back: in this place there are no tiny pieces. The whole time, from here on, there are eternities» (Couto, 2012: 12). In this time-space confluence, Rosa's *terceira margem* and Couto's eternity is comprised of interstitial peaks, shaped by obliquity, fluidity, ambivalence. And, precisely because of its imprecision, it constitutes a privileged observation post, a thought based on the sensitive sliding mechanisms of power and whose visibility demands reversal of the canon, of the centre.

¹⁴ "To whom he waved: maybe it was to nobody. Never, even for a moment, have I ever glimpsed there a soul of this or any other world. But my grandfather waved his cloth" (free translation of the author).

¹⁵ It's a discursive game when the portuguese word "panos" (It refers to rags) is inside the portuguese word "pântanos" (swamps).

4. Final considerations.

Coming to the end of this brief study, we know that the comparison was made possible to the extent that our search did not seek to trace influences of a - taken for a model - over another, set as inferior and therefore it would have the desire and mission to tirelessly match itself to the superior. In this exhausting ascension movement, the one that would be 'beneath' would remain forever in debt to that which would be 'above', on account of the non-achieved superiority. For the dialogue to have any value we cancelled the likely debt - i.e. we deal with it in another way to compare the relationship between the texts. The approach allowed us to understand, among other dynamics, the authors' compositional procedures, the scale of their language, the discursive games and its multiple effects.

Rosa and Couto, the latter respectfully immersed in the writer, created for themselves the condition to liquefy language, a process that sprays on reception and sometimes drowns the reader. Safeguarded the differences of time and space in which they were encircled, the "mineiro" writer and the Mozambican - narrative poets, we say that both have the experience of expressing that which cannot be said, to offer readers the unreadable and in this paradoxical transit, they practiced 'scribbling' as 'writing-to-live'. There is a friendly divorce between everyday experience and literary expression, between political project and human commitment. There are divisions, disfigurements, folds, mosaic of pains and colors, halves that survive totally phantasmagorically and haunt the most confident rationalities. Torn out pieces, lost memories, vain desires, capsize and gather on the fluidity of the water – that fill out, drown and unite a hotchpotch composition, the rubble of cultures, of beings and the useless, between life and death, rebuilding thoughts, silences and speeches. Language - invented - constructs history, constitutes identities, even where it doesn't seem possible. If the short story *Nas águas do tempo* presents, in the comfort of the presence of his grandfather, the possibility

of updating the rivulets of a tradition based on community values whose transmission depends on the constitution of identity, the short story *A terceira margem do rio* dramatizes the scission of the individual with language and the knowledge transmission circuit breakdown that, from the inside out, also constitutes identity.

In both stories – as well as in the main work of these authors - we found social practices and cultural legacies that make up a fantasy, which in turn alludes to procedures and symbolic representations of traditional societies marked by verballity. The verbalized speech develops, in the studied narratives, as a record of memory and reconstructed identity, shattered in family or social environments, either by political circumstances, or by late echoes of colonization. By registering, in the stories, their sensitive listening of others, Rosa and Couto bring out the strength of the unpronounced word, the disconcerting sense of exile within the family circle.

Now, we know that belonging and identity don't have the strength of a rock, nor any guarantee of eternity. On the contrary, they are unfinished and revocable conditions, by which the individual transits in the ramblings of the reading, the research and life. The sense of tradition and belonging of those who stay on the river banks may not be the same as those that live, convinced, in the large centers (Eagleton, 2005). In the stories, the spaces metaphorically read as 'Centre' - the riverbed or the point at which the lake empties its water – lose the meaning as such. The water, fickle and invasive, without the precise configuration or palpability of the ground, works as an element of remoteness and attraction.

Rosa's rivers are so wide and deep that we cannot see the other side. The rivers look like seas. There are no borders, no land in sight, the places defined as riverbed and riverbanks, centre and periphery, island and mainland are not visible. In this watercolor scenario, demarcations are diluted; the boundaries intertwine, drowned even for being so lonely, waterlogged territory and expanded by the water. The third bank proposes a space that is difficult to be transposed into an image, because

it is not restricted to the usual binary scheme of the riverbanks not even in its synthesis. Maybe that's the place (forbidden) of the unknown and of our ignorance, our powerlessness and, at the same time, of the (our) significant power, a place of emptiness such as a stronghold always fillable.

The prohibited lake of Mia Couto, on the shore of the mirage, carries the surviving halves of tradition, war rubble, in the amalgam of dreams with the hardness of experience. These are stories that «talk of this territory where we're redoing and wetting with hope in the face of rain, 'blessed-dream' water. This territory is where every man is equal. So: pretending he's doing it, dreaming that it will, inventing that he comes back» (Couto 2012: 5) In the muddy and grayish swamp conditions – a mixture of water and earth at the bottom and on the lakeshore lies danger and possibility. There is the space between loneliness and contact, a greenhouse for the cultivation of identities.

Not only the son's escape, in Rosa, but also the grandson's encounter, in Couto, at the moment when both are glimpsing at the possibility of filling the vacancy of parenthood, are events that impose themselves initially as refusal, revolt and incomprehension. The boy – already aged - of the third riverbank, refuses to take the father's place and the boy - a child - of the forbidden lake, doesn't understand the grandfather's message, which is to see those who are on the other riverside. In a way, at the time of the confrontation - both hallucinate and refuse what would be an initiation, perhaps not wanting to occupy the same space - marginal - of their predecessors and because the narrative leads to a momentary standstill of the myth when faced with the historical experience of the individual. In the two 'stories' – the 'first' and the 'blessed dreams'–, look within, that is, immerse yourself in your own condition and subjectivity as a necessary step to see the other and so constitute a possible identity. This identity consists of a mosaic of incompleteness and expresses in the waving of a cloth rag, as if to say: I exist, I'm here and I want to communicate with someone on the other side. For both authors, we say

that the river goes beyond the boundaries of a metaphor. Condensing and moving images not as merely scenery, but above all it is life, death, a raging space of language invention. The river is each and every one of us. When operating with the (re)signification of images, plots, the narrative temporality, the authors create blessed dream water as in the stories, water that embodies the sinuous, fluid, movement of its prose the outflow – source and mouth, singular plural of voices - in otherness.

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