


Experimentalism in Brazilian contemporary prose: an analysis of
the short story *Corações ruidosos*, by Alex Sens /
*Experimentalismo na prosa brasileira contemporânea: uma análise
do conto Corações ruidosos, de Alex Sens*

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ABSTRACT

We elect as corpus of this article the short story *Corações ruidosos*, by Alex Sens. The story focuses on a bus trip, in which the characters are explored in order to reveal their life in the brief moments that are embraced by the narrative. This simple plot is strengthened by the techniques used by the author, which echoes the experimental urge from the early English modernism. We intend to clarify the narrative strategies used by Alex Sens, with a special regard to the narrator, and to

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weave semantic bridges between form and content, components that are closely related on the story. For this purpose, we held a bibliographic review on discussions about the narrator and the stream of consciousness. At the end, we noticed that the author, exploring multiple narrative voices, imbricates death's motif – which goes through the existence of all characters – in the text's signifier, defying crystallized notions of literature theory.

KEYWORDS: Brazilian contemporary literature; Alex Sens; Stream of consciousness; Short story.

RESUMO

Elegemos como corpus deste artigo o conto Corações ruidosos, de Alex Sens. Na obra, uma viagem de ônibus abre margem para o desvelamento das inquietações de diversos personagens, que são explorados de maneira a revelar a vida nos instantes brevíssimos que são abarcados pelo conto. Esse enredo simples é potencializado pelas técnicas empreendidas pelo autor, que ecoam o ímpeto experimentalista do início do modernismo inglês. Objetivamos elucidar as estratégias narrativas utilizadas por Alex Sens, com um olhar especial para o narrador, e tecer relações de sentido entre forma e conteúdo, intimamente relacionados no conto. Para tal, realizamos uma revisão bibliográfica que engloba discussões sobre o narrador e a tendência do fluxo da consciência dentro da literatura. Ao fim, percebemos que o autor, valendo-se de vozes narrativas múltiplas, imbrica o motivo da morte - que perpassa a existência dos personagens - no significante do texto, desafiando noções cristalizadas na teoria literária.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Literatura contemporânea brasileira; Alex Sens; Fluxo da consciência; Conto.

1 Introduction

What does it mean to experiment in literature nowadays? It is well known that, taking the West as a point of view, the literary tradition dates back to millennia, in a trajectory marked by successive ruptures that end up consolidating themselves as creative standards to, moments later, be tested by a new generation of writers. The 20th century was particularly marked by iconoclasm, by the avant-garde, in an impetus of rupture never seen before. Therefore, it is possible to inquire: is there still room to experiment with literary structures? The answer, as we will see, is affirmative, considering the paths taken by literature in the 21st century.

As advocated by Leyla Perrone-Moisés,

[...] some of modern values are currently overlooked by writers. [...] most current novelists no longer seek, like Joyce or Guimarães Rosa, an innovative transformation of language or narrative technique. [...] the contemporary novelist continues to use traditional narrative techniques, only subtly renewed.^{1 2} (PERRONE-MOISÉS, 2016, p.36).

¹ Translator's note: The translations of texts quoted herein that are followed by footnotes indicating the original text have been done by the translator of this article.

² Original text: “[...] alguns dos valores modernos são atualmente menosprezados pelos escritores. [...] a maioria dos romancistas atuais não busca mais, como Joyce ou Guimarães Rosa, uma transformação inovadora da língua ou da



Thus, in the face of a current scenario of returning to the traditional, experimenting does not necessarily mean presenting something new, but, rather, positioning oneself in the line of modernism, against the *status quo*. In other words, experimenting in contemporaneity, in terms of literature, is associated with the questioning of ways for conceiving the text, in a deepening of the ruptures undertaken by writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce at the beginning of the 20th century.

It is in light of this modernist impetus that the short story *Corações ruidosos*, by the contemporary Brazilian author Alex Sens, present in the book *Corações ruidosos em queda livre* (2018), develops. The book presents three short stories that, under the aegis of an epigraph by Hilda Hilst (“There are corpses here.”), bring different meanings for death. In the text chosen as the *corpus* of this article, a bus trip opens the door to unveiling the concerns of different characters. From a priest, who represses his carnal desires, to a young man, who reflects on ways of killing himself, each stormy heart³ is explored in a way that life is revealed in the briefest moments that they are embraced by the story. In the end, the bus overturns and everyone dies.

With a plot that already breaks the traditional notion of this category, the story is a true experimental laboratory. In this sense, we intend to elucidate the experimentalism undertaken by Sens through narrative structures, with special attention to the figure of the narrator, and to point out relations of meaning between the experimental form (signifier) and the content (signified) of the story. To this end, we conducted a bibliographic review that includes discussions about the narrator and the trend of the stream of consciousness within the literature (HUMPHREY, 1958; WOOLF, 1984; AUERBACH, 2003) and some concepts of narrative studies (REIS, 2018). In addition to the introduction and final considerations, the work is divided into three sections: in the first, we bring some considerations about the aesthetics of the stream of consciousness; in the second, we made some formal notes on the story under analysis; finally, in the third, we present the culmination of our understanding of the piece of writing, the marriage between form and content in the text.

2 The modernist heritage

técnica narrativa. [...] o romancista contemporâneo continua usando técnicas narrativas tradicionais, apenas sutilmente renovadas.”

³ A reference to the translation of the title of the story, *Corações ruidosos*, which are hearts full of angry or violent outbursts of feeling.



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The story under analysis is heir to the experiments carried out by great modernist writers. Virginia Woolf, in the essay *Modern fiction*, reveals the *zeitgeist* of that moment, the way she and some of her peers believed that literature should be produced: “Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions [...] From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; [...] Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall [...].” (WOOLF, 1984, p.160-161).

The author was suspicious of the plots full of comedy and drama sequences that permeated the 19th century novels. For her, there was nothing but a falsified life, in which the apex of human experience was not reached. The truth, or rather, the truths would be contained in the inner states of the characters, which would rise to the center of the modernist narrative. For the authors of that moment, each character is a cave to be explored; the intricacies of this cave are revealed in common situations, which arouse existential reflections on the subject. In the excerpt above, Woolf evidently calls for this examination of the ordinary mind on an ordinary day; that is where, for her, lies life.

This aesthetic perpetrated by such authors was crystallized by literary theory as a stream of consciousness. With a sharp view of the topic, Robert Humphrey wrote an essay analyzing vigorous novels that fall into this form. This is how Humphrey (1958, p.4) defines this literary ingenuity: “[...] as a type of fiction in which the basic emphasis is placed on exploration of the prespeech levels of consciousness for the purpose, primarily, of revealing the psychic being of the characters”. The author perceives certain recurrences of the novelists and, from that, he discourses on a series of techniques used by those to constitute the aesthetics of the stream of consciousness.

The most relevant for the analysis that we will carry out here is that of the interior monologue, which is made evident in the text as “the psychic content and processes of character, partly or entirely unuttered, just as these processes exist at various levels of conscious control before they are formulated for deliberate speech.” (HUMPHREY, 1958, p.24), in order to create an elliptical and sometimes chaotic structure, which mimics the incoherence of mental processes.

The interior monologue is evidenced by literature directly or indirectly; in the first, there is no omniscient heterodiegetic narrator mediating the reader's contact with the character's conscience, placing guides such as “she said”, “she thought” or summarily organizing the current of thought. We



see everything directly from the character's mind, the way he conceives his psyche, which results in a discourse that may border on the illogical; an example of the use of this technique is the last chapter of *Ulysses*, by James Joyce, in which we observe only the interior monologue of Molly Bloom without any interference from an omniscient narrator.

In the second form, there is a heterodiegetic narrator who “presents unspoken material as if it were directly from the consciousness of a character with commentary and description that guides the reader through it [...]” (HUMPHREY, 1958, p.29). The main novels by Virginia Woolf (*Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*) use it. Thus, as much as we follow the mental processes of the characters, they appear with the interference of an omniscient narrator, in a kind of narrated monologue.

In any of the forms, what is perceived is an erasure of the figure of the classic narrator, the one who arranges and harmonizes the material of the story told, either by its complete disappearance or by the decrease of its presence in the speech. Such phenomenon is a result of the path of the art of fiction, which, in the search for the story that it tells itself, that began with fervor in the 19th century, moved towards the objectification of narratives.

As Erich Auerbach (2003) points out, it is in Gustave Flaubert's work that a way of dealing with the fictional object is found which would break with the Romanesque tradition that had been woven during previous centuries. In Flaubert's narratives, the narrator's opinion of the events is not expressed, and the characters' impressions are never confused with value judgments of the narrative voice. The use of free indirect speech allowed the author to show the judgments of the characters shaped by the narrator's language, without the narrator, in fact, commenting on the story told. This was because there was a conviction that the clean and complete expression of any event “interprets itself and the persons involved in it” in a more effective way “than any opinion or judgment appended to it could do.” (AUERBACH, 2003, p.486).

Such a posture before the narrator's positioning engendered an omniscient realism, in which “subjects are seen as God sees them, in their true essence” (AUERBACH, 2003, p.486), through a non-judgmental diction of the enunciating voice, which only gives univocity to the characters' impressions. This objectification was deepened in the hands of modernist writers, who transformed this omniscient realism into a relative realism (MOISÉS, 2013, p.378). It was no longer intended to show objects as they are seen by God, but rather as they are seen by subjects. Thus, the omniscient



heterodiegetic narrator is marginalized and the subjectivity of the characters comes into play. The aesthetics of the stream of consciousness, using the techniques described by Humphrey mentioned above, is the result of this focal displacement, which captures a fragmented and multiple reality dismantling the harmonic and delimited reality so cherished by 19th century realists, but incoherent with the effervescence of the 20th century political ideas, historical events and ways of life.

The typology of the point of view drawn by Norman Friedman (2003) demonstrates this movement of objectification of the narrative, going from the category of “editorial omniscience”, a centralizing voice of the discourse, a storyteller who not only showed, but also expressed opinions and dissertated; passing through the “multiple selective omniscience”, in which the narratives of stream of consciousness are found; until the “camera” mode is reached, an almost utopian point of view, in which the narrator is totally excluded. It is the passage from *tell* to *show*, a dichotomy initially explored by the theorist Percy Lubbock, which synthesizes this path of the art of fiction.

As we will see below, the short story *Corações ruidosos* is in the line of the stream of consciousness, being a descendant of this process of marginalization of the heterodiegetic narrator in favor of the flourishing of the characters' psychic movements. While making use of the techniques crystallized by Woolf and Joyce, the author of the story also perpetrates innovations that drive the effect of meaning in his work. In the next section, we will make some considerations about the form of the short story in order to later understand how it endorses the mentioned effect.

3 Formal considerations about *Corações ruidosos*

As we have already explained, the tale revolves around the mental exploration of a series of characters who travel on a bus until it goes off the road, and everyone dies. It is, therefore, a short story without a traditional plot, that is, without “a set of singular events that unfold in a logical and internally linked way, leading, in a certain context, to an irreversible outcome.”⁴ (REIS, 2018, p.221). It is possible to perceive, therefore, a similarity with what is proposed by Virginia Woolf in the essay

⁴ Original text: “um conjunto de acontecimentos singulares que se desenrolam de forma lógica e internamente encadeada, conduzindo, num determinado contexto, a um desenlace irreversível.”

mentioned above: reducing the plot to the minimum in favor of deepening the existential experience of the characters.

In total, the tale has twelve unnamed characters, recognized only by the afflictions they face: a man nostalgic for a trip, a mother who lost her son, a young gay man who travels to meet his boyfriend, a writer, a maid, a repentant bride about to get married, the driver, a young man with suicidal thoughts, a woman in love, a homosexual priest, a madwoman and, finally, in contrast to all the others, a young woman who is happy and dances in the bus aisle.

The story is organized into fifteen paragraphs. In each of the first twelve, we follow the indirect interior monologue of each of the characters, in the order exposed previously, with the mediation of a heterodiegetic narrator, who assumes a focus of multiple selective omniscience, according to Friedman's traditional typology (2003). In these monologues, we know the determinations, expectations and trajectories of each character, as well as a sample of their worldview. In the thirteenth paragraph, in which death comes forth, there is a mixture of the consciences of all of them, and in the last two paragraphs, we have only the voice of the heterodiegetic narrator.

Having made these considerations, let us observe how the narrator (s) is/are configured in the story. We have chosen, for the purposes of analysis, excerpts from the paragraph dedicated to the mental exploration of the character-writer, due to the considerations he makes about literary creation.

Perhaps the only fruitful effect of these trips is observation, *he thought*, more deeply, from the third to last seat. One hand holding the face carved by time, the other a cream donut, bitten right there in the center, where it seemed to have been dipped in snow; an eye focused in the aisle accounting for the heads he could see; the other in the window, through which he saw a series of trees and pieces of land, spotted with cows and sheep. *Everyone wants the window. Nonsense. There is more to see on the inside, at least it is what I think*⁵ (SENS, 2018, p.17, emphasis added).

In this excerpt, we have the beginning of the interior monologue of the character-writer. We immediately observed the presence of a heterodiegetic narrator by the guide “he thought”, who also

⁵ Original text: “Talvez o único efeito profícuo dessas viagens seja a observação, *pensou ele*, mais ao fundo, na antepenúltima poltrona. Uma mão segurando o rosto talhado pelo tempo, a outra uma rosquinha de creme mordida ali no centro, onde parecia ter sido mergulhada na neve; um olho no corredor até as cabeças que podia enxergar; outro olho na janela através da qual via uma série de árvores e sítios pontilhados por vacas e carneiros. *Todo mundo quer a janela. Bobagem. Há mais para se ver aqui dentro, pelo menos eu acho.*”

describes certain spatial circumstances (such as the position of the character's hands and what he observed). The presence of this narrator is therefore marked by the use of the third person when referring to the character. However, in the last three periods, there has been a change of voice, of an enunciating instance. It is no longer the discourse of the heterodiegetic narrator, but that of the character itself that is put in the text, without the noise of the external voice, perceived by the sentence "at least it's what I think".

This process of alternating voices happens in all the first twelve paragraphs of the story. Therefore, we can configure a text narration structure: an omniscient heterodiegetic narrator who guides the reader through the travelers' consciences and twelve narrators-characters who expose their monologues, sometimes assuming the discourse, sometimes through the heterodiegetic narrator. It is a polyphonic narration that is constituted from a radicalization of free indirect speech: the voices of the characters abruptly penetrate the structure of the omniscient narrator's speech.

In the common free indirect speech, there is a hybridization of the voices in a milder way, without the character inserting itself with an "I" in the narrator's speech. A classic example of this technique is found in *Barren Lives*, by Graciliano Ramos. For comparison, let us see the excerpt: "The boy lay down on the straw mat, curled up, and closed his eyes. *Fabiano filled him with awe. On the ground, stripped of his leather garments, he was less impressive, but astride the sorrel mare he was a frightening spectacle.*" (RAMOS, 1999, p.48, emphasis added). The excerpt in italics may be understood as a value judgment by the boy, son of Fabiano. However, this thought is not marked by quotation marks or dashes, in a delimitation between what is the voice of the narrator and that of the character. They come naturally intertwined, whereas, in Sens' text, there is clearly an abrupt intrusion of the character's voice into the narrator's speech, especially when it stands out with an "I think".

In *Barren Lives*, it is clear that the boy is not a narrator, but that there is only a glimpse of his thought in the omniscient narrator's discourse; in the short story, the characters can also be considered narrators, as they produce an autonomous and situated discourse, well delimited in relation to that produced by the omniscient narrator.

This strategy opens the way for a pulverization of the narrative structure, which, by fragmenting into different voices, decentralizes the discourse, allowing a multiple reading of the situation that is narrated, according to the subjectivity of each character-narrator, contrary "to the narrative tradition for



which the task of the narrator is the complete objectification of a narrated matter entirely delimited.”⁶ (GINZBURG, 2012, p.212). This formal aspect in *Corações ruidosos* destroys any totalizing determination of the meanings from the text.

In addition, it should be noted that the presence of a character-writer brings a metalinguistic shade to the piece, since this character confesses in his speech the very functioning of the short story of which he is a part of. In saying that there is more to see inside the bus than outside the window, this character endorses Virginia Woolf's previously analyzed view on literature, namely, that it should turn to the ordinary mind in an ordinary situation (that we can associate with “seeing inside”) to the detriment of typical scenarios (which would be associated with what is outside the bus, outside the consciousness of those characters). The insertion of this character is a way for Alex Sens himself to profess his creative faith, his way of conceiving literature and thus assuming the line of thought that he is a part of, which is that of the stream of consciousness⁷.

As the character-writer thinks ahead, “Each passenger on the bus was a unique story, therefore, a universe that could be explored without their knowing it.”⁸ (SENS, 2018, p.17), the short story being analyzed is a combination of these unique stories without, at first sight, a common thread of action among them. The characters are united, initially, by the space in which they find themselves: the bus. It is a transitory, mobile space that takes them to a destination in common, which, at first, would be the city where everyone wanted to arrive at, but, in the end, death turns out to unite them in their one single destination. Thus, we find that the causal link typical of traditional plots, responsible for drawing conflicts between characters, disappears and leaves a space that becomes occupied by death, a motif that becomes part, therefore, not only of the content, but also of the narrative structure.

Having made these formal notes, it is important to raise some considerations about them so that we can properly enter the meaning of the story. First, what would be the role of the heterodiegetic narrator in the text? Second, how does the alternation of voices contribute to the effect of meaning

⁶ Original text: “à tradição narrativa para a qual a tarefa do narrador é a objetivação completa de uma matéria narrada inteiramente delimitada.”

⁷ This is even more evident with the mentions made about Virginia Woolf by other characters during the story (the suicidal character recalls the author's death) and in other works by Alex Sens. In *O frágil toque dos mutilados* (2016), we have a protagonist who lives in a mental instability which resembles Woolf's psychic state; and more, one of the characters studies the work of Virginia Woolf and another one is called Orlando, in a reference to the homonymous work of the English writer.

⁸ Original text: “Cada passageiro dentro do ônibus era uma história única, portanto, um universo que podia explorar sem que soubessem.”



from the story? In fact, what effect would there be behind this sudden death of the characters?

To try to answer these problems, let us observe this other excerpt, extracted from the same initial paragraph, still around the interior monologue of the character-writer:

If he could, even if his misanthropy instilled in his spirit a justifiable fear and disgust (or almost: *in exactly one year and seven months he would develop a severe agoraphobia*), he would talk to each of those people. [...] *He watched in amazement as that figure danced down the aisle and disappeared into the restroom. Nobody dances while traveling. Nobody is really happy while traveling, only when they reach their destination. He thought so because he didn't know the boy in shorts. Part of that boy's happiness was the journey to meeting his boyfriend again. Someone could be really happy in there [...]* The human being is a strange thing.⁹ (SENS, 2018, p.18-19, emphasis added)

Before the first “[...]” we emphasized a part in parentheses. This excerpt is a speech by the omniscient narrator who attests to an interesting fact: if the character-writer were not to die in a moment, he would develop a severe agoraphobia in a year and seven months. This means that the heterodiegetic narrator is aware of what would happen in the lives of those characters if death did not intervene in their trajectory in that moment. In this sense, while enunciating his speech mostly from an internal focus on the characters' consciousness, this narrative voice also occasionally uses an omniscient focus to show an unlimited cognition about the history of those characters, not restricted only to what they know.

The mention of a fact that would happen if that character did not die opens the door to an idea of death not as an event with a date and time defined by fate, as it is so propagated by religious common sense, but, rather, as a fact that interrupts a trajectory which would continue if that person were not in that place, at that moment. Death, therefore, is not predetermined, but depends on the free will of the human being, that is, on his choices preceding the end.

Thinking in such a way, we can see the bus as a microcosm of life, which travels a road until death interrupts it. The bus (life) by overturning (dying) abandons a path that would go on. The

⁹ Original text: "Se pudesse, ainda que sua misantropia instilasse em seu espírito um medo e uma repulsa justificáveis (*ou quase: dali a exatamente um ano e sete meses ele desenvolveria uma grave agorafobia*), conversaria com cada uma daquelas pessoas. [...] Viu com espanto aquele corpo dançar pelo corredor e desaparecer no banheiro. *Ninguém dança enquanto viaja. Ninguém é feliz de verdade enquanto viaja, só quando chega ao destino. Pensava assim porque não conhecia o rapaz de bermuda. Parte da felicidade dele estava no caminho para reencontrar o namorado. Alguém podia ser feliz de verdade ali dentro [...]* O ser humano é um trem estranho."

omniscient narrator is not only aware of the imminent death of those characters, but also knows of the possibilities of continuing their lives if they did not die.

For having this notion, the narrator presents a discourse of valuing the path, the trip, in detriment of valuing only the destination. In addition to being present to minimally organize the voices of each character, he is also there to endorse a discourse that is opposed to others. While the character-writer (and almost all the other characters) believes that it is impossible to be happy on the way to reach the destination of the trip (if we think in symbolic terms, he does not believe that it is possible to reach fullness during the process of building something, but only when a goal is reached), the omniscient narrator, for having, at first, this divine condition and understanding the fateful trait of death (that is, that it can happen – and it will - at any time), suggests another consideration, which is the valorization of the path walked, the crossing of our existence whose end remains unknown, being up to the one who walks it to live in the present time, aware of the impossibility of having access to the future.

As we know, the character's dangerous journey is an archetype, a pattern that is repeated in the story of many heroes, in different times and nations. If we think about the journey of Odysseus (leaving for a battle in Troy), or even in the crossing of Riobaldo (a journey through the backlands), leading to the characters in the story studied here (a bus trip), we witness the adventurous journey of the heroes, whose crossing is the uniqueness of each of their lives. The travelers in the story, however, seem not to recognize the beauty of simply being there, traveling, or rather, living.

There are, therefore, discourses that clash. While the notion of the narrator is endorsed by the happy girl who dances in the aisle and, in part, by the young man who is going to meet his beloved one, all the other characters (who, this is worth remembering, also constitute themselves as narrators in our reading) join the thought of the character-writer, projecting their happiness, expectations and achievements to the moment of the arrival, which, as we know, will never come, meaning, in this way, that they will die frustrated.

Thus, the presence of the omniscient narrator and the alternation of narrative voices, within the structural scope of the text, are associated with the alternation of these discordant discourses within the scope of the short story. Thus, we have already found a meeting point between signified and signifier, associated with the way the author experiments with the figure of the narrator in the text; in



the next section, we will see how this marriage between form and content is sealed at the conclusion of the story.

4 The unity of meaning: death as an interruption

As Edgar Allan Poe teaches (apud GOTLIB, 1991, p.35), “The short story, like any literary work, is the product of conscious work, which is done in stages, towards this intention: the achievement of the unity of effect.”¹⁰. In order to achieve the unity of effect, the short story has as its basic characteristic the economy of narrative techniques, that is, taking advantage of all possible resources (keeping in mind the story's length limit) in order to endorse the meaning that one wants to reach. Obviously, we are facing a more traditional conception of this genre, which, like the novel, has acquired a new guise in the hands of experimental writers.

The short story by Alex Sens breaks, in a first analysis, with several of the classic commandments of this textual type: the 36-page length, the large number of characters, the absence of a central conflict. In addition, the polyphonic structure already exposed tends to extinguish an authoritarian unity of meaning, leaving room for the verification of different meanings according to each reader. Therefore, when we point to a unity of meaning in the story, we do not intend to settle the various possible readings, but only to point out the culmination of our analysis of the story. In short, seeing the multiplicity of discussions found in the interior monologues of each character (love, mourning, desire, religion, social norms), we perceive a semantic terrain on which they all meet, to which we will associate the unity of meaning of the short story. This unity of meaning, it is worth mentioning, exudes not from a totalizing narrator who takes over the ideological function of the text, but from the perception of all its elements by the reader, with special attention to the form of the narrative.

In this way, the meaning that hovers over *Corações ruidosos* is that of death as an interruption. The human being lives on a trajectory and is constantly making plans, projecting expectations and aiming at goals, but sometimes one forgets that this crossing can be interrupted by death without being

¹⁰ Original text: “O conto, como toda obra literária, é produto de um trabalho consciente, que se faz por etapas, em função desta intenção: a conquista do efeito único.”.



able to finalize one's determinations, without reaching the object of desire, the intermediate destination. For not enjoying the path until one's projections are reached, one ends up leaving life without realization, like most of the characters in the story. Let us see how this meaning will be consolidated in the text.

The moment when death indeed emerges is found in the thirteenth paragraph. In it, each character has its interior monologue presented in some periods, before being abruptly interrupted:

[...] It was very rare, beautiful and elusive, like hundreds of amber beads slipping through his fingers, this instant, and he wanted to feel it in his essence, in his heart, he wanted to have it whole, to take its core in his hands, with his eyes closed *and*. [...] The trip never ends. Never ever ever. One thing was certain: *that*. [...] How would Death's voice sound like, when the passage begins to merge, when worlds collide and what remains is just a fragment of. [...] (SENS, 2018, p.34-38, emphasis added)¹¹

As we were facing the psychic states of the characters, even if, at times, mediated by a heterodiegetic narrator, the most credible way of showing that they died would be by obstructing these mental movements. And that is what the author accomplishes, causing death to overlap in the language itself by interrupting the discourse. Discontinuity creates a semiotic void¹², which is filled with the reader's assumption that those characters died. Once again, there is a meeting point between the content of the piece of writing and the author's experimental form: just as death extinguishes the life of the characters, it also extinguishes the verbal language.

However, it is important to remember that in the text there are not only the voices of the characters, but also that of a heterodiegetic narrator of the omniscient kind. Where did that voice go? Let us have a look at the last two paragraphs of the text, in which this narrator shows itself for the last time:

And. That. Fu. Perhaps. Of. Itself. Finally. She. Through. So. Like this. Least. Aggregates of fine strata of crystal and dreams, bodies and thoughts were shattered when the bus went off the road and.¹³ (SENS, 2018, p.46)

¹¹ Original text: “[...] Era raríssimo, belo e fugidio como centenas de contas de âmbar escapando pelas mãos, esse instante, e queria senti-lo em seu imo, em seu íntimo, queria tê-lo inteiro, pegar seu núcleo nas mãos, de olhos fechados e. [...] A viagem nunca acaba. Nunca nunca nunca. Tinha uma certeza: a de *que*. [...] Qual seria a voz da Morte, quando a passagem começa a se fundir, quando os mundos entram em colapso e o que resta é apenas um resquício *de*. [...]”

¹² In the sense that, although nothing is written, there is a meaning in that nothing, in that interruption.

¹³ Original text: “E. Que. Fo. Talvez. De. Se. Finalmente. Ela. Pela. Tão. Assim. Menos.

In the penultimate paragraph, the narrator gathers the last words of each of the characters; in the last one, he finally confirms their death, pointing to the fragility of life (“strata of crystal and dreams”), but, like the characters, he is also unable to finish his speech. Finally, the marriage between the experimental signifier and the signified of the story is sealed: just as death interrupts the trajectory of the characters, it also interrupts the omniscient heterodiegetic narrator. Sens, therefore, kills an omniscient narrator, a formal element of the story. With that, he calls into question this category of literary theory, which is erected by classical academic discussions as a narrator of divine omniscience, situated beyond the limits of time and space, who knows and arranges everything, in order to project “an attitude of demiurge in relation to the story that it tells [...]”¹⁴ (REIS, 2018, p.296).

At first, this narrator incorporated the divine parameters: he alternated through the monologues of each character, at times mediating them, at others allowing each one to assume the narrative voice; commented on certain points of view from the characters, even advancing a future that would not come due to their death (the development of agoraphobia by the character-writer, as we showed earlier). However, its divine character is put to the test with its death. In a traditional story, it would have the opportunity to say that everyone had died, to finish his speech, but, in order to consolidate the meaning of the story, the author decides to connect death even to the narrative structure: by killing the heterodiegetic narrator, it also kills time and space simultaneously, thus ending with all the basic categories of the narrative (narrator, characters, plot, time and space).

Experimental texts like this make us reflect on the framework of analysis provided by literary theory. Can it regulate such innovations? Jaime Ginzburg, on this issue, states:

The “historian” narrator from Lukács’ and Norman Friedman’s descriptive structures are not sufficient to characterize part of the contemporary literary production. On the contrary, the Theory of Literature needs, in order to understand its specificity and give it a fair value, a methodological renewal.¹⁵ (GINZBURG, 2012, p.216-217).

Massas de finos estratos de cristal e sonho, os corpos e os pensamentos foram estilhaçados quando o ônibus saiu da pista e.”

¹⁴ Original text: “uma atitude de demiurgo em relação à história que conta [...]”.

¹⁵ Original text: “O narrador “historiador” de Lukács e as estruturas descritivas de Norman Friedman não são suficientes para a caracterização de parte da produção literária contemporânea. Pelo contrário, a Teoria da Literatura precisa, para compreender a sua especificidade e atribuir a ela valor justo, de uma renovação metodológica.”



In this sense, as much as we have carried out this analysis with terms coined under the structuralist/formalist bias of literary analysis, it is evident that the categories proposed by this theoretical arsenal, by themselves, do not allow us to deplete the manner in which contemporary authors approach the literary form.

Final considerations

In conclusion, it is clear that Alex Sens incurs in an aesthetic that values the psychic states of the characters, which comes from the experimentalist impetus of the 20th century so evident in this contemporary prosaist. By reducing the plot to a minimum, the author creates a crack in the text from which a series of existential questions from the characters escape, especially those related to death. This motif spreads throughout the text, not only in terms of content, but also of form, intermingling in the structure of the text as a connection between the characters, thus replacing the traditional causal link of the notion of plot, as well as it is present in language, by the sudden interruption of the interior states of the characters. At the apex of the marriage between signified and signifier, ruled by death, we are faced with the termination of a basic structure of the narrative, the omniscient heterodiegetic narrator, in a way it breaks with an entire literary tradition that points to its divine trait.

Therefore, death is used by the author as a literary form to enhance the effect of his piece of writing. As put by one of the characters in the tale, “[...] “Life and fragility, always a malicious couple that surrounds and threatens everything.”¹⁶ (SENS, 2018, p.32). In proceeding with his experiment, Sens demonstrates that the narrative is also a fragile body surrounded by death. From the text, only the reader remains, survivor of a narrative-death, even more aware that, in the surroundings, their demise also lurks. As the professor Umberto Eco teaches (2001), “Stories that are “already made” also teach us how to die.”¹⁷

References

¹⁶ Original text: “Vida e fragilidade, sempre um par malicioso que a tudo cerca e tudo ameaça.”

¹⁷ Original text: “As histórias ‘já feitas’ nos ensinam também a morrer.”

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