

**Reading experiences and reader formation in *O fazedor de velhos*, by
Rodrigo Lacerda / *Experiências de leitura e formação do leitor em O
fazedor de velhos, de Rodrigo Lacerda***

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this paper is to analyze the book *O fazedor de velhos* by Rodrigo Lacerda (2008), in the light of the nuanced formation of the reader/narrator through his own experiences. In order to do so, it is necessary to verify how the main character is built throughout the novel and identify to which reading processes he resorts in his formation as a reader. Furthermore, it will be highlighted literature's formative role through the mediation of family and social life by paying attention to such aspects as the relationship between subject and text as marked by their two-way dialogue. It will also be focused on the construction of this narrator by observing how his literary experiences based on his pleasure of reading culminate the solution of his dilemma. To achieve these goals, the study bases itself on Benjamin (1994a) to deal with the matter of subject's experience; on Santiago (1989) to ponder the construction of a narrator who narrates from his own experience; on Zilberman (1985) to study the behavior of literature, and the relationship between the text and the reader; on Barthes (2006) to reflect on the pleasure of the text; and, lastly, on Silva's perspective (2013), allied with Langaro's critique (2015), to analyze the protagonist's literary experiences. The study will run through the aforementioned theories with the purpose of verifying literature's contributions to the construction of the conflicted individual by examining how this narrator is shaped, mostly based on his experiences, especially of literary nature, so as to aver literature's fundamental role in this process.

KEYWORDS: *O fazedor de velhos*; Narrator; Reader formation; Experience.

RESUMO

O objetivo principal deste artigo é analisar o livro O fazedor de velhos, de Rodrigo Lacerda (2008), a partir das nuances da formação do leitor/narrador por meio de suas experiências. Para isso, será necessário verificar como o personagem principal, no decorrer da narração, se constrói e identificar a que processos de leitura ele recorre para sua formação enquanto leitor. Destacaremos o papel formador da literatura através de mediações da família e da vida social, atentando para aspectos como a relação deste sujeito com o texto, efetivada pelo diálogo de ambas as partes. Voltaremos também para a construção desse narrador, observando como se dão suas experiências literárias envolvidas pelo prazer do texto, o que culmina na solução de seu dilema. Para respaldar tais argumentos recorreremos a Benjamin (1994a; 1994b) para tratar da experiência desse sujeito, a Santiago (1989) para se pensar a construção desse narrador, que narra a partir das próprias experiências, a Zilberman (1985) para atentar sobre o proceder da literatura e a relação entre texto e leitor, a Barthes (2006) para refletirmos sobre o prazer do texto; sob a perspectiva de Silva (2013) analisaremos as experiências literárias do protagonista, e para isso contaremos também com a crítica de Langaro (2015). Percorreremos as teorias apresentadas com o intuito de verificar as contribuições da literatura para a construção desse indivíduo em conflito, verificando como esse narrador se elabora, baseado em suas experiências, especialmente, literárias, constatando assim o papel fundamental que a literatura exerce na formação deste sujeito.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *O fazedor de velhos*; Narrador; Formação do leitor; Experiência.

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1 Introduction

We have taken the book *O fazedor de velhos* (2008) by Rodrigo Lacerda as the object of analysis of this paper with the intent of assessing the construction of the referent, the main character, Pedro, as a narrator and a reader, based on his experiences with literary readings. Rodrigo Lacerda was born in Rio de Janeiro to a family of editors in 1969, and is also graduated in history and holds a PhD in literature.

Classified as middle grade literature, according to Silva (2016), *O fazedor de velhos* (2008) was elected the best juvenile book of the National Library in Brazil and was included in the White Ravens 2009 catalogue, having received Jabuti Prize for the best juvenile novel in 2009. Few have been the publications regarding Lacerda's book (2008), with only digests and commentaries available in the literature. The most comprehensive work, however, is "A formação humanizadora pela literatura em *O fazedor de velhos*" by Cleiser Schenatto Langaro (2015), which highlights literature contribution to a humanizing formation and coming-of-age novels, as well as structural issues, such as narrator, language, format, and pedagogical intent.

Narrated in first person, the book tells the story of a teenager through the figure of the protagonist Pedro, a history major with an existential crisis, who, at the age of 16 and in the threshold of adult life, goes through a dilemma: he does not know exactly what he wants to do for he needs to discover his true vocation. During his childhood, his mother, a professor of literature at a university, demanded him to read classic works; his father, a lawyer and a Shakespeare-enthusiast, gave him, on a certain occasion, a copy of the English writer's work, which he discontinues reading. As he starts majoring in history, his crisis begins because he is unsure about what he truly desires.

The solution to his dilemma is mediated by professor Nabuco, a renowned historian who becomes his *mentor*. In order to assist him, the professor gives him some tasks. The first one consists of finding the keywords of Shakespeare's works, having to mandatorily read them in English, which the young man manages to do after a lot of struggle. Next, the professor suggests to the young man to study human nature. However, he does not suggest the means to do it, so Pedro decides to fill out forms with the psychological profile of each character that impressed him in the work *King Lear* by Shakespeare, and eventually he becomes relating to the characters. From then on, Pedro

moves toward the solution to his conflict. In a read-through in which the reader finally finds himself and dialogues with the work, he arrives at the discoveries that define him as his relationship with the reading grows stronger. Hence, Pedro construes himself as an individual in the world and begins a process of discovery and professional choices.

Therefore, in the light of importance of literature to form readers, how does the book *O fazedor de velhos* by Rodrigo Lacerda (2008) articulate *experience* and narration to form a reader? To answer that question, the book *O fazedor de velhos* (LACERDA, 2008) reveals the importance of the insertion of reading during the course of an individual's formation, which, in a gradual process, will contribute to his maturation as a critical and shrewd reader. According to Zilberman (1895), regarding the behavior of literature, once a dialogue between text and reader is established, it leads the reader to relate himself/herself with some aspect at some point. Thus, literature will aid in one's formation and even contribute in the search for answers to the referent's inquiries, as it did in the case of our object of analysis,

It's important to assess the issues surrounding the reader formation through literature, as seen in *O fazedor de velhos*, as it leads us to realize the contributions of reading to the construction of the referent through experience. Our primary objective here consists of analyzing the aforementioned book based on the nuances of the formation of the reader/narrator through his own experiences. We also intend to verify how, during the narration, the main character construes himself during situations, and identify which processes of reading this referent calls upon for his formation as a reader and for the construction of his own identity.

To meet our goals, we have drawn on a few theories that support our argumentation. We will base ourselves on Benjamin's (1994a; 1994b) claims related to the transition from the referent's *life lessons* into the narrator's *experiences*. Additionally, we will apply Santiago's (1989) hypothesis to understand whether the one who narrates does so because he has experienced such actions or transformed them into knowledge through observation, since the author also shares Benjaminian's ideas regarding the narrator. The hypothesis (1989, p. 39) is that the post-modern narrator "[...] is the one that wants to extricate himself from the narrated action". In addition, we will further base ourselves on Zilberman's (1985) *A criança, o livro e a escola* to comprehend the behavior of literature in a dialogue between the text and the reader,

which results in proving the reading experience impact on the reader's formation. In line with Barthes (2006), we will reflect upon the concept of the pleasure of the text and the issues that stem from an initial process which the author calls *prattle of the text*. Moreover, we will draw upon Silva's (2013) reflections regarding *literary reading and experience* when the author re-evaluates Benjaminian's concept of *experience*, in order to analyze Pedro's literary experiences, the character of the book presently studied. These ideas will be complemented and confronted at certain points with the work of Langaro (2015).

2 The text's experience

In order to discuss *experience*, we will base ourselves on Benjamin's (1994a) theoretical assumption which, in the text *Experiência e pobreza*, draws attention to the low level of the actions of *experience*, critiques the fact that people do not possess the ability to narrate, to tell what they themselves have lived, and highlights the poorness in those who have returned from war and yet are incapable of articulating what they've seen and lived. The author emphasizes that men aspire to free themselves from all *experience* and explains: "They are not always ignorant or inexperienced. Many times, the contrary can be affirmed: they 'devour' everything, the 'culture' and the 'men', and end up satiated and exhausted". (BENJAMIN, 1994a, p. 118). And once exhausted, they are led to dream; since dreams can assuage, they can compensate displeasures and achieve things which, during the fatigue of the day, are unachievable:

To weariness follows dream, and it is not rare for the dream to compensate the sadness and dismay of the day, fulfilling the entirely simple and absolutely grandiose existence that cannot be fulfilled during the day for lack of strength. (BENJAMIN, 1994a, p. 118).

In another text, Benjamin (1994b) states that, at the beginning of the modern period, the birth of the novel results in the death of narrative. The fact that the novel is linked to the book differentiates it from narrative, and it is only the invention of the press that makes the propagation of the novel possible. For him, what distinguishes the romance from all other types of prose "is that it neither comes from the oral tradition

nor feeds it” (BENJAMIN, 1994b, p. 201). And he emphasizes its distinction from narrative:

It distinguishes itself, specially from narrative. The narrator takes what he tells from experience: his own experience or one relayed by others. And he incorporates the things he narrates to the experience of his listeners. The novelist segregates himself. (BENJAMIN, 1994b, p. 201).

As he concludes his thoughts, Benjamin (1994b, p. 221) further asserts that “the narrator stands among masters and sages”, and that like a sage, he knows how to give advice because he can call upon *experiences*, not only his own, but also those of others, of a whole life. It is “the man that could let the tenuous light of his narration entirely consume the wick of his life”, and he stresses that the narrator is “the figure in which the just find themselves”. (BENJAMIN, 1994b, p. 221).

In order to assess the construction of the narrator in the work here analyzed, along with *experience*, we fall back on Santiago (1989), who discloses about a post-modern narrator, one who narrates from his own experiences. In *O Narrador pós-moderno*, in a direct reference to Walter Benjamin’s text (1994a; 1994b), Santiago (1989, p. 38) questions: “is the one who narrates a story the same who experiences it, or is the one who sees it?” In other words, someone who narrates actions from their own experience, thus transmitting a *life lesson*, concedes greater authenticity to what is narrated and that action becomes an experience obtained from it.

Following Benjaminian path, Santiago (1989) deems the classic narrator beautiful, considers the romance narrator problematic, and designates the post-modern narrator as even more problematic. In the author’s words:

It’s not about looking back to repeat yesterday, today (we would perhaps be happier historians because we would restrict ourselves to the kingdom of the beautiful). It’s about, before deeming beautiful what was and what still is, – in this case, the classic narrator –, taking notice of what appeared as problematic yesterday – the romance narrator –, and what seems even more problematic today – the post-modern narrator. I warn Benjaminians: we are using the concept of the narrator in an ampler sense than that proposed by the German philosopher. He reserves this concept exclusively for what we are calling the classic narrator. (SANTIAGO, 1989, p.41)

To support our analysis of the formation of the reader through his experiences, we resort to *A leitura literária como experiência* by Silva (2013), who takes experience as the events that we live through and places through which we pass. Her reflection is based on reading as an experience through the course of time, things, or facts that affect us through what we feel or are feeling, including dreams, and projections for the future that cannot be ignored, forgotten. She revisits Benjamin (1994a), as previously mentioned in this work, in *Experiência e pobreza*, when she discloses about the low level of experiences and the lack of capability to narrate.

In a short analysis of the history of narrative, Silva (2013) highlights that its origin is not exact. As it structures itself in the human condition, it reminds us of the myth, poetry, drama, and the heroic narratives which, narrated and written through a multiplication of identifiable genres, have managed to constitute themselves as memory matter. In this way, the author reflects upon the place that literature occupies in the formation of our mnemonic senses about the manners of reading that invoke memorialist narratives. She also observes the importance of family mediation and social life for the construction of this experience with reading during the formation process. A fundamental aspect to be considered in this process, according to Silva (2013, p. 56), is “the quality of the mediation between the reader during his first trials with literary matter”.

Furthermore, the author emphasizes that it’s important to pay attention to the elements particular to literature such as: “character development, the possibility to stimulate the imagination through the transfiguration of reality into literary matter” (SILVA, 2013, p. 56), and highlights the importance of such elements as they are the ones who instigate the curiosity and awaken reading interest in those who are still developing experiences. According to Silva (2013), in this recollected context, literature constitutes itself as a forming dimension as it gives the reader, in his childhood and adolescence, the possibility to establish relations between concepts and ideologies provided by authors. Another aspect to be considered is the access this reader-in-construction has to an ample literary collection which, according to Silva (2013), is necessary for the construction of the literary experience.

Zilberman (1985), in her reflections, considers that even if the writer overdoes the fantasy or distances himself/herself from the circumstances, s/he is nonetheless able

to establish communication with the reader because the work shares his/her world and makes him/her relate himself/herself to it in some aspect:

How does literature behave? It synthesizes through the resources of fiction a reality that has ample points of contact with what the reader lives daily. So, no matter how exacerbated the author's fantasy or distanced and different the circumstances of space and time within which a work is conceived are, the symptom of its survival is the fact that it continues to communicate with the current recipient because it still speaks of his/her world with its difficulties and solutions, helping him/her to better understand it. (ZILBERMAN, 1985, p. 22).

On the relationship between work and reader, Zilberman (1985) clarifies that it is born from the coincidence between the fictional world and the context in which the reader is inserted. The reader, aware of the real, serves himself/herself from the help that the fiction book offers him/her:

It's from this coincidence between the world represented in the text and the context in which its recipient participates that the relationship between the work and the reader emerges. The more the reader demands an awareness of the real and a position in relation to it, the more aid the fiction book has to offer him/her, because of its social synthesizing virtues, as previously described. (ZILBERMAN, 1985, p. 23).

By assessing this reader-text relationship, which must be a *pleasant experience* to become reality, we resort to Barthes' (2006) considerations in *O Prazer do Texto*. The author introduces the concept of *prattling*, that is, when there is not a mesh between both sides, the text becomes a frigid one. He directs it at the reader for him/her to read it, but this is no more than a direction, but rather a field: "It can finally be said of this text that you wrote it out of any fruition; and this *prattle text* is, in short, a frigid text, as is any search without desire, neurosis". (BARTHES, 2006, p. 10). In addition, the author also discusses about the Oedipal pleasure, which, according to him, is a more intellectual pleasure consisting in discovering, understanding, knowing the origin and the end; searching for the context and getting to know the story.

It is not as an element of the text that Barthes (2006) defines the pleasure of the text, but rather as a drift, that is, as anything that, while it can be revolutionary, is also asocial. The pleasure of the text, according to him, is scandalous, not for being amoral, but for being atopic:

Pleasure, however, is not an *element* of the text, it is not a naive residue; it does not depend on a logic of understanding or sensation; it is a drift, anything that is, at the same time, revolutionary and asocial, and that cannot be fixated by any collectiveness, any mentality, any idiolect. Something of *neutrality*? It is easy to see that the pleasure of the text is scandalous: not because it is amoral, but because it is *atopic*. (BARTHES, 2006, p. 30, highlight by author).

In a reflection about dreams, Barthes (2006, p. 70) defines them as “an impolite anecdote made with sentiments far too civilized”, so dreams would be civilizers that surface the extreme subtleties of moral sentiments:

The dream allows, sustains, maintains, shines light on an extreme subtlety of moral sentiments, at times even metaphysical, the subtlest sense of human relations, of refined differences; a knowledge of the highest civilization, in short, a logic of *awareness*, articulated with an unparalleled fineness that only a work of intense vigil should be capable of obtaining. (BARTHES, 2006, p. 70, emphasis in original).

Among the considerations made by the aforementioned theorists, we have noticed some similarities therein, such as the assertion that a narrator pulls his/her narrations from *experience*, as argued in Benjamin (1994) and Santiago (1989). Silva (2013) and Zilberman (1985) discuss about the literary experience and its results based on mediations between family and social life, and, linked to those aspects, the pleasure of the text mentioned by Barthes (2006), which will be responsible for the effectiveness of the relationship between text and reader that Zilberman (1985) observes. These are the elements that we intend to observe in the next section of our work on *O fazedor de velhos*.

3 The narration that stems from experience

By paying attention to the narrative of *O fazedor de velhos*, specially its character-narrator, we see a narrator that is closer to the *narrative* than the *novel*, as suggested by Benjamin (1994a) when he discusses the birth of the novel. What he tells, he takes from his own *experience*, he shares facts lived by himself:

I confess; for a moment, I nearly cried. Luckily, when the first tear was about to fall from my eyes, I noticed a grumpy bearded old man watching me. I held in the tears through guts alone. Contrary to what that moron from the ticket office and the nosy old man might imagine,

I was nearly an adult, and perfectly capable of controlling my feelings. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 20).

This narrator narrates from the *experience* he has of the facts. He imparts a *life lesson*, narrates an action within it, reports what he has lived and felt; these factors thus lend authenticity to what is narrated. Now, as an adult, Pedro tells his own story by reporting facts from his teenage life. When he tells about himself at the time he was less experienced, we can observe a process called *maturation*, a historic narrative in which the narrator has a vision of the past in the present. As we revisit Benjamin (1994a; 1994b), we can claim that what this narrator does is transform *life lessons* into *experiences*.

The Pedro who now reports the facts is no longer the same that lived them, but a more experienced and mature individual, capable of observing them from another perspective. We can classify him as a post-modern narrator, as put by Santiago (1989), as he narrates from *experiences* and imparts a *life lesson*, thus lending authenticity to his narrative since he tells his own story in first person, shares his *experiences*, what he himself has experimented:

I was sixteen years old and had a trip scheduled with my sister to São Paulo. It was the last week of vacation, but there was still enough time to visit our cousin from São Paulo and spend a few days at his friend's farm. To SP, she and I used to travel by plane, alone. Later, together, we would travel in the car that belonged to the parents of our cousin's friend. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 17).

The character and narrator from the book analyzed lived an action yesterday that he observes in his narration today, the difference being in the way he observes everything in this moment, as a mature and experienced individual. The *experiences* shared by Pedro are not solely his own, he also calls upon the *experiences* of others, since he reclaims advices. Therefore, we can say that he is a narrator who, as argued by Benjamin (1994b, p. 221), “stands among masters and sages”. The figure of the sage is represented here by professor Nabuco, who guides him in his discoveries:

— Emotion, Pedro, is the only thing you wish to impart. To you, knowledge, philosophy, erudition, none of it matters. It is not that you condemn them, you need and value them. But not as an end. For you, they are but tools to unravel the core that you search for in everything. The stories you need to tell are not made from methodological

procedures. They depend on you relating to others peoples' feelings. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 116).

The narrator shares his *experiences* which are born from a conflict with himself, an existential crisis that is solved through literary reading. What he at first repudiated, becomes now the solution to his problem.

At first, reading was unpleasant for Pedro, it did not flow. He read because he saw himself forced to do so. There was no dialogue between text and reader, only a prattling text in the sense that Barthes (2006) uses the term. He was overcome, as he himself says, by a *boredom* which made him give up on moving forward:

I recall the poetry reading sessions that my sister and I were put through by our mother, and which she only allowed to be interrupted when one child, usually me, kneeled before her with fervent praying motions, and the other, normally my sister, grabbed her hand with the intensity of a dying man making his last wish. She would give us a thwarted look, but she'd laugh at our exaggerated despair: 'Stop, mom, for the love of God, stop!'. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 7).

However, Pedro starts to become interested in the context, in the story that the texts brought him. Slowly, the so-called *Oedipal pleasure* is born, as brought up by Barthes (2006), and so his first literary experiences take shape when he begins to take interest in the then imposed, obligatory readings. It is only by understanding their origin that the poems spark his interest. He then starts to define preferences, attracted by the story the texts showcased:

I did not know how to explain why this or that poem became my favorite. Suddenly, I would catch myself remembering the same verses which, some time ago, I'd suffer to listen to. Slowly, I'd start liking the strong music the words composed. The rhythm of 'I-Juca-Pirama' and of 'O Monstrengo' imparted something I didn't know how to define, but it was good. In hindsight, I see there was something else in common in my favorite poems: the story. I liked them better if they told a story. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 11).

With the birth of his interest in reading, the texts stop *gabbing* and Pedro begins to establish a dialogue with them. Literature thus actualizes its path, as pointed out by Zilberman (1985), leading him to an *experience* that will change him. It is notorious when the character-narrator reports his *experiences* through the reading of *King Lear*,

by Shakespeare, in which he ends up relating to the characters, finding them real, and establishing his own relationship with them:

I went on working; one, two, three weeks. I started enjoying myself. The characters were so real. Slowly, I established my own relationship with each one of them. I recriminated the good guys when they messed up, when they were naive, when they judged everyone as good as themselves and, of course, ended up getting screwed. I understood the motives that led the bad guys to commit their bad deeds. Some of them were true abysses of emotion [...] When I finished making his profile, I was taken by an unpleasant sensation. I was at once horrified by Edmund's cruelty and extremely drawn to his life philosophy. I condemned each of his acts, but I related to his ideology, to all his essential motives. Although he was practically a human monster, something in him was a mirror of me. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 62-63).

This moment is important because it is when there is a dialogue between one and the other, text and reader, as the tasks that were once a chore become pleasurable. This is when Pedro starts to find himself, and it is clear in this moment the contribution of literary reading as it points out a path for the construction of this referent's identity.

It is interesting to observe Pedro's reaction to the reading of *King Lear*. He is so impressed by Edmund's personality, which, at the same time it causes him horror, it also strikes him admiration; he is charmed and even relates himself to the character despite the character's condemnable acts. We can note that in spite of the negative attributes, there is a pleasure produced by reading, a scandalous one, as Barthes (2006) named. Pedro then reports:

When I finished making his profile, I was taken by an unpleasant sensation. I was at once horrified by Edmund's cruelty and extremely drawn to his philosophy of life. I condemned each of his acts, but I related to his ideology, to all his essential motives. Although he was practically a human monster, something in him was a mirror of me. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 63).

In search for his vocation, Pedro tries to explore the world through reading and, in this battle, overcome by fatigue, surrenders to the dream which, as Benjamin (1994a) puts it, induces a sensation of relief. In his dream, he manages to accomplish something grandiose, a task given to him he did not know if he could manage to accomplish: travel in time, proposed by professor Nabuco. Pedro was confused, not knowing how to do so, and so he starts to report his childhood and adolescent *experiences* and, imagining the

future, he embarks on an amazing journey that he cannot comprehend, and only realizes as he wakes up that it was just a dream:

I woke up to the sound of the alarm, on my bed, crying. No longer in the future or the past. I was me, back to the present. My shadow had disappeared. Why was I crying? Hard to say. They weren't sad tears. It was a bigger emotion, one I didn't understand well. As if the future and the past were inside me.

So, it was all a dream! I didn't travel to the future, didn't see my son's school, and the keys on my computer hadn't worked on their own. How strange and wonderful the realistic sensations of our deliriums. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 114).

This dream is like an answer to his questions. Based on what he had shared with professor Nabuco the latter guides him on which path to take. Through this travel, he walks toward the final verdict to the question proposed by his existence and, while he travels or dreams, he crafts images and facts that have yet to happen: "As if in a hallucination, I felt in that trip my travel to the future. Bewitched by a shadow, high up, I crafted images and feelings yet to come" (LACERDA, 2008, p. 111). According to Barthes (2006, p. 70, emphasis in original) this is "a very legible anecdote with *impossible* feelings", at the same time that there is logic to the events of the travel, it is only a dream, something that's impossible, there's no way to travel to the future, it's not a normal or trite thing that we can do whenever we feel like it.

Pedro's primary yearning is to discover his identity, find a solution to his existential crisis, and he manages to do so through reading. Barthes (2006, p. 73, emphasis in original) comments that "there's a certain pleasure in the way a person imagines herself an *individual*, invents a final fiction of the most rare kind: the fiction of identity". When professor Nabuco, Pedro's mentor, reaches a consensus on the matter, he suggests that he is "a historian of subjectivity and his reality is fiction" (LACERDA, 2008, p. 117). So, from then onwards, Pedro begins to write a novel.

4 From reader to author

To start, it is worthwhile to note the allusion made by Langaro (2015) to the work's title. It brings attention to the fact that the term *old men* is used by the author in a polysemic manner, as a synonym to maturity, life lessons and wisdom. Both literature

and professor Nabuco *give birth* to the old while they are still in adolescence, thus, according to the author, the term indicates the process of the reader's maturation through literature.

Langaro (2015) classifies *O fazedor de velhos* as a *coming-of-age novel* (*Bildungsroman*)¹, since the book contains traces that are typical of this kind of novel, such as the presentation or mention of the formal education period, allusion to romantic issues, and emphasis on the process of self-education and the protagonist's professional determination, and also the hero's search for a life philosophy and a vocation. All these events in Pedro's life define him as an individual in conflict who tries to overcome his problems and, in doing so, falls back on his childhood literary experiences which, slowly, transform him, making him evolve as a reader.

By paying attention to Pedro's experiences with literary reading, backed up by Silva's (2013) considerations concerning the place occupied by literature in the formation of our mnemonic senses, we highlight the protagonist-narrator's recollection of his literary reading experiences in *O fazedor de velhos*. First, he recovers fragments from his childhood, a time when reading was a chore, and the text and reader only *gabbled*, as put by Barthes (2006). Later on in adolescence, when he begins to take interest in the works and starts to read them of his own volition, the behavior of literature starts to work, as defended by Zilberman (1985), when, instead of *gabbing*, the text and reader converse.

The cycle of the construction of Pedro-the-reader has a couple of mediations: from family, specially his mom who encourages him to read by actively participating in this activity; and from social life, the circumstances and context in which he is inserted, represented by professor Nabuco, his mentor. These mediations are fundamental because, according to Zilberman (1985), children need to know themselves and the environment in which they live: firstly, the familial one; next, the spaces that surround them; and finally, History and social life.

¹The origin of the term is synthesized by Maas (2000) in *The minimum canon: the Bildungsroman* in the history of literature. The author reminds us that the term was first used in 1803 by the Professor of classic philology, Karl Morgenstern, in a conference concerning "the spirit and the correlations of a series of philosophical novels". Years later, in another conference in 1820, this author will associate that term to Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*.

The importance of parents' mediation as a contributor to *reader formation* is reinforced by Langaro (2015). She concludes that Pedro becomes a reader and a literature appreciator because of the *life lessons* that marked his memory and subjectivity, and that *reader formation* is not immediate and stagnant, it is a process that demands mediations in order to come to life. Another aspect reinforced by the author regarding the formation process is literature's role to destabilize and provoke the reader, making him question and reflect on life since he can have his values and behaviors modified or confirmed by the text. The character-narrator, Pedro, shows this kind of awareness of this and recognizes that the story acts upon his way of thinking and acting:

When I finished making his profile, I was taken by an unpleasant sensation. I was at once horrified by Edmund's cruelty and extremely drawn to his philosophy of life. I condemned each of his acts, but I related to his ideology, to all his essential motives. Although he was practically a human monster, something in him was a mirror of me. [...]

My luck was that by studying the positive characters, the good guys in the story, I was equally moved. For example, Kent, king Lear's best friend, is clever, brave, sincere, absolutely loyal, and extremely affective with the poor, dethroned old man. [...]

There's a scene which, for me, was the apotheosis of all good feelings in the play. The kind which, whenever I see or read it, I cry. And find peace within me, believing there's hope in everything. It's when king Lear meets the good daughter again. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 63-64).

The course of this *experience* starts in childhood with the parents' mediation. At first, the imposed reading is received as a chore, something Pedro makes clear at the beginning of the narrative: "I can't properly remember when my mom and dad started to shove books down my throat. But it was early on." (LACERDA, 2008, p. 7). However, after much insistence, he himself admits that:

After years of lovingly wrestling with her children's inclination toward mental laziness, my mother finally managed to reap results. Slowly, we didn't just get used to the names and verses that we listened to in annoyance, but we also started to develop preferences, here and there, elect which ones, for one reason or another, assuaged the tortured boredom of our reading sessions. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 7).

Sustained by memories, Pedro, as put by Langaro (2015), reveals his initial process of contact with literature, citing his preferences and reporting them, analyzing the works he read like the poem "I-Juca-Pirama", and shows his mother's mediation:

“My mother read aloud with rhythm, marking the rhymes”. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 8). Another poem he cites is “O Monstrengo” and he also shows himself charmed by the author:

Another poem I ended up liking and nearly learning by heart was ‘O Monstrengo’, written, according to my mother, by a Portuguese poet that claimed to have four personalities. I found that impressive. Can you imagine, four Portuguese in only one person? (LACERDA, 2008, p. 10).

In these reading exercises, over time, Pedro manages to acquire an esteem for literature and starts to know the pleasure of the text, in Barthes’s (2006) terms. As his interest for this or that author starts to grow, he searches for the reasons why the authors composed and questions the context, and his interest grew bigger when it concerned a story. This may be noticed, for instance, when his mother establishes the connection of the historical context of Portugal, king D. João II, with the poem by Fernando Pessoa:

The poem reproduces a dialogue between a sailor and a horrid creature. The sailor is in the middle of the ocean, alone on deck, manning the helm on a Portuguese king’s boat when he is threatened by a macabre figure, which flies around him, like a ghoul of the seas. [...] And at the end of each stanza, the man at helm, trembling in fear, always answers that he is there by order of king D. João II (who really existed). [...].

I didn’t know how to explain why this or that poem became my favorite. Suddenly, I would catch myself remembering the same verses which, some time ago, I’d suffer to listen to. Slowly, I’d start liking the strong music the words composed. The rhythm of ‘I-Juca-Pirama’ and of ‘O Monstrengo’ imparted something I didn’t know how to define, but it was good.

In hindsight, I see there was something else in common in my favorite poems: the story. I liked them better if they told a story. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 10- 11).

Later, we see the father’s mediation as he suggests prose books, novels, short story collections written by his favorite author, Eça de Queirós, who also becomes very appreciated by Pedro. Queirós charm was in the plurality of the stories and characters he created:

Maybe because of that, when my dad started to recommend me prose books, novels or collections of short stories, I liked his favorite author so much. Another Portuguese called Eça de Queirós. This one, in addition to having a typical large moustache, curled at the tips and everything, had rhythm, music, jokes, love and tragedy. But, above

all, he didn't simply create a story for each novel, he created thousands and thousands of characters too. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 11).

A fundamental aspect to be considered in this process, according to Silva (2013, p. 56), is “the quality of the mediation between the reader during his first trials with the literary matter.”. She highlights that it is important to pay attention to the elements that are particular to literature, such as: “character development, the possibility to stimulate the imagination through the transfiguration of reality into literary matter” (SILVA, 2013, p. 56) and emphasizes the importance of such elements for they instigate curiosity and awaken the interest in reading in those who are still developing experiences.

In this remembered context, literature constitutes itself as a forming dimension, according to Silva (2013, p. 56), since it allows the reader, during his childhood and adolescence, to establish links between concepts and ideologies provided by the authors, which, in Pedro's case, beyond charming him, instigate his imagination which results in a creative capacity. For example, he highlights how impressed he is with Eça de Queirós. For him, the suffering of certain characters becomes fun, and his way of writing becomes his life philosophy. In this way, he establishes a closeness to the author, defining his reading process as a friend's conversation:

I spent many years obsessed with that blend of great art and fun, of adult themes and lightheartedness, with the combination Eça made of good characters with flaws and bad characters with qualities, always treating everyone with equal love, equal irony, as if from the outside, the writer had a jokester outlook on everything and everyone, an outlook that didn't condemn anyone, but laughed at everyone. And that joke, that way of 'pulling everyone's legs', became the conversation of a friend to me. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 15)

With *experience*, the reader gains autonomy, even when faced with more complex readings. He reads the classics of literature with the effort of a capable reader, having no difficulties with more elaborate language, and without startling at heinous facts. He feels drawn by the humor and, primarily, by the author's creativity. He has fun, as he shows us when he reports his *experiences*:

When I started, at thirteen years old, my mother thought it was too soon. She feared I'd end up calling Eça 'Eca' de Queirós. After all, his novels are not only long, 250 pages at least, but are also full of unscrupulous men, cheating wives, envious, cruel figures, etc. But I was never too lazy to read them, and I was never shocked with absolutely anything; on the contrary, I loved to laugh at the situations

that grown-ups could get themselves into. It was like a life lesson, but backlit by humor. (LACERDA, 2008, p. 15)

Another aspect to be considered is this reader's access to an ample literary collection, which, according to Silva (2013), is necessary to the construction of experience through literature. Zilberman (1985) also defends that the quality of literature widens the horizons of a reader-in-formation. Pedro has these contributions, which, at first, is offered by his own family, and later by professor Nabuco, who represents the mediation of life in society. Nabuco puts in effort not only to help him find himself, but also offers him back up by supplying books from his own library, which, by Pedro's accounts, was vast:

Overcoming shyness, I used to go over and over. As I burrowed through the house, I saw walls and more walls covered in books. Books of all kinds and subjects. In one corridor alone, I saw from canary breeding manuals to classic philosophy treaties. (LACERDA, 2008, p.46)

Pedro's existential crisis is solved through literature, and it is through reading that he discovers his vocation: fiction. He is then challenged by professor Nabuco to write a novel, which is a milestone to see the importance of literary reading and the role of mediation played by the family, specially the parents, and later in life in society by a professional, all added to the effort of the reader himself who is committed to beating his *boredom* and developing his abilities as a capable reader.

Final considerations

In light of the aspects analyzed throughout this work, we find in *O fazedor de velhos* the shaping power that literature exerts on the reader, making him a critical one, as we noticed that literature not only instigates him to question the world, but also widens his horizons, leading him to grow and mature as a shrewd reader.

We find a character-narrator that articulates *experience* and narration through dialogue he manages to establish with the texts. The insertion of literature since childhood is the starting point which ends with the formation of this referent's identity who once was in conflict with himself. What was initially a chore for Pedro becomes the path to solving his dilemma.

The construction of this conflicted individual's identity goes through a process of evolution, from a reader of *prattle texts*, as put by Barthes (2006), to a dialogue with the texts, as suggested by Zilberman (1985). This dialogue, according to the author, arises from the coincidence between the fictional world and the context of the reader's insertion, where he relates to the text, making his experience with reading pleasant, as named by Barthes (2006) as the *pleasure of the text*. We also found, in this author's perspective, that this happens with Pedro from a place of *Oedipal pleasure*, the search for context, when he begins to construe preferences.

We conclude that the construction of this referent's identity based on *experience*, as suggested by Benjamin (1994a; 1994b) and revisited by Santiago (1989), is of a narrator that construes the text through his own experiences, lending greater authenticity to the narrative, sharing the transformation that reading caused him, transforms *life lessons* in *experience*.

We also highlight the importance of the *quality of literature* which the individual has access to, as suggested by Silva (2013), and the mediation employed to actualize this formation process through an effective participation from a family that always contributes, not only granting access to good books, but also participating in reading activities. Later, from the social life standpoint, the mediator that represents this sphere, professor Nabuco, also participates with a vast and good-quality collection. These contributions, as we have seen throughout the analysis in this work, are fundamental to the formation process of the reader.

In this sense, we notice in our society some misconceptions concerning the formation of readers in which it is expected, or hoped, to be solely the teacher's. However, based on this work, we can reflect and even verify that, long before school, these initiatives should stem from the family. As we see with Pedro, his first contacts with literature happened in a family environment, mediated by his parents, and while at first he was very resistant, his progenitors' perseverance led them to reap results, and he came to a solution for his own conflict without the school's mediation in his literary formation, contrary to what is believed to be solely the school's obligation.

The shaping role of literature is of utmost importance for one's formation not only in a literary sense, but also in a humanizing one for it transforms, leads one to

think, question one's behaviors and reflect on life and one's choices, allowing for *life lessons* and *experiences* only possible in the universe provided through reading.

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