

Absurd Heritage: A dialogue between Horacio Quiroga's literature and the philosophy of Albert Camus / *Herança Absurda: Um diálogo entre a literatura de Horacio Quiroga e a filosofia de Albert Camus*

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ABSTRACT:

Horacio Quiroga is one of those authors whose work can be also understood through the biography of its author. A life crossed by accidents, tragedies and suicides gave the writer a landscape of misfortune, disappointments, obsessions and madness on which the phenomenon of death hangs every time in his stories. Through this work, we propose to analyze the story *O Homem Morto* by Horacio Quiroga, building a relation between the character of the narrative and the concept of an *absurd man*, by the writer and philosopher Albert Camus, making use of the philosophical essay *The myth of Sisyphus*, in which the French-Algerian author talks about the existential absurd and the human condition.

KEYWORDS: Horacio Quiroga. Albert Camus. Absurd Man. The myth of Sisyphus.

RESUMO

*Horacio Quiroga é um desses autores cuja obra pode ser compreendida também pela biografia de seu autor. Uma vida marcada por acidentes, tragédias e suicídios deu ao escritor um panorama de desgraças, decepções, obsessões e loucuras pelas quais o fenômeno da morte paira a todo momento em seus contos. Através deste trabalho nos propomos a analisar o conto *O homem morto*, fazendo uma relação entre a personagem da narrativa e o conceito de homem absurdo do escritor e filósofo Albert Camus, utilizando-nos para isso do ensaio filosófico *O mito de Sísifo*, no qual o pensador franco-argelino disserta sobre o absurdo existencial e a condição humana.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Horacio Quiroga; Albert Camus; Homem absurdo; O mito de Sísifo.

1 Introduction

We cannot avoid highlighting that Latin America has produced great names of world Literature, such as Cortázar, García Márquez, Clarice Lispector, Alejandra Pizamik, Vegas Llosa, Machado de Assis, only to mention some of them. Horacio Quiroga may be the most enigmatic of them all. Being influenced by the Gothic of Edgar Allan Poe, Quiroga had a life as troubled and mysterious as the author of *The fall*

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of the house of Usher. He is one of those writers whose work can be understood by reviewing the author's biography, not only through that.

Relentless, Quiroga's stories disturb with uncanny situations, tense dialogues and a tragic and violent universe, deeply marked by the mysterious and shady forest of Northern Argentina. The tragedy is always present, always latent, distilling itself slowly and inexorably, waiting only for the moment to unleash itself in absurd contingences. Death comes up as a poison, a parasite sting, a serpent, an accidental stab, showing men the unquestionable certainty of the ephemerality of existence.

Loves that do not work, betrayals, diseases, disappointments, disillusiones, tragedies are intertwined and surprise the characters that, beyond anything, cannot find a way out in the face of death. The literary universe of Quiroga disturbs the reader with its cruel laws, its wild beauty and an almost nihilist certitude of the human agony when facing the phenomenon of death, which cannot be explained or avoided.

Given this, we seek to analyze a narrative of the author, *The dead man*, showing how the character in its respective limiting situation matches the concept of *absurd man*, by the philosopher Albert Camus. For this, we use of the essay *The myth of Sisyphus*, by the French-Algerian author, published for the first time in 1942, in which Camus condensates all his philosophy, a philosophy of the absurd, of the human unflagging search for an existential meaning and the complete lack of answers in face of a universe whose meaning, if there is any, men will never find out.

2 Horacio Quiroga: a biographical summary

Horacio Silvestre Quiroga was born in Uruguay, in 1878. According to Golachecha (2011), at two months old he lost his father, Prudencio Quiroga, who killed himself with an accidental shot on the head, fired by the shotgun he was carrying while unloading, back from a hunt, in front of his wife who carried little Horacio on her arms. However, the shot was not accidental. As a widow, Pastora Forteza once again got married, this time with Ascencio Barcos. Years later, when he suffered a stroke that left him half-paralyzed, he also killed himself with a shotgun shot on the head in front of Horacio, who was eighteen at the time.

From an early age, Horacio showed interest in literature and in the country life, what would lead him to live almost his whole life in Misiones, a jungle inside a province in Northern Argentina. In 1897, he traveled to Paris, however, he returned disappointed, tattered and distressed, using a robust black beard which he would never shave. In 1901, his best friend, Federico Ferrando, also a poet, after receiving harsh criticism from a journalist from Montevideo, decided to get into a duel. Horacio, who has worried about his friend, asked him to personally check and clean the gun that would be used in the event. Unexpectedly, by an absurd contingency, the gun accidentally fired while Horacio was handling it, shooting Federico's mouth and killing him immediately.

The guilt for the friend's death led Quiroga to abandon Uruguay and go to Argentina. He got married to Maria Cires, who bore him two children, Eglé and Darío. Later, Maria Cires committed suicide by poison after several episodes of depression, leaving him inconsolable. According to Flemming (2010), Horacio, who was disturbed by the idea of taking care of his two children by himself, destroyed everything that belonged to his wife and fell into deep depression.

He got married a second time with Maria Helena Bravo, who abandoned him, taking with her their daughter Pitoca. Back to Buenos Aires, suffering from cancer, Horacio was hospitalized at the Clinic Hospital where he would commit suicide by drinking a glass of cyanide on February 19, 1937. Faraco (2002) tells us that Quiroga's children, following their birth date order, also committed suicide later; Eglé, two years after, in 1939; Darío in 1954 and, in 1989, Maria Helena, the second wife and the daughter Pitoca also killed themselves. The obscure destiny that seemed to pursue him was finally fulfilled, even after his death.

A follower of the Modernist School, Horacio Quiroga was interested in the most unusual aspects of human nature, terror, disease, madness, suffering and death. His style would evolve to a realistic, disturbing, and desperate portrait of the forest around him, the nature in conflict with men. His almost obsession with death is undoubtedly owed to his tragic existence and made him leave to the world one of the most disquieting, brilliant and transcendental literary production of Latin America in the 20th century.

3 Albert Camus and the Absurd Man

Albert Camus was born in Mondovi, in Algeria, on November 7th, 1913, son of a French man and a female Spanish descendent. He lost his father during the World War I, in the Battle of Marne, in 1914, and he was raised by his unlettered and deaf mother and his grandmother, who led the family with an iron hand. He graduated in Philosophy in Algiers.

In 1942, at the height of the World War II, Albert Camus published two of his most important books: *The myth of Sisyphus* and *The Foreigner*. He was graced with a Nobel Prize in 1957, three years before his early death at 46 years old in a car accident while he was returning to Paris, on January 4th, 1960. In his suitcase, it was found the manuscript of *The first man* (1994). Through a casualty of destiny, Camus affirms in the notes of this last novel that that book would remain unfinished and that he believed that the greats absurd of existence was to die in a car accident.

In *The myth of Sisyphus*, whose subtitle is *An essay about the Absurd*, Camus talks about the human existential condition and establishes that human efforts made to find a meaning for existence, the absolute meaning of the universe, will always fail, for such meaning is inexistent. This idea characterizes the complete skepticism of Camus about the universal and absolute principles of existence.

He has proposed the elaboration of a particular signification as the creation of an existential meaning that would give humans logic for existing, even though this individual meaning could not, under any circumstance, be compared to any absolute or supreme signification, even if it exists, because the human individual will never be able to know it. This particular elaboration of a meaning for existence is not seen as negative, it is the opposite, for it shows that every human specimen is free to shape his existence and build its future, an idea also shared by the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre.

The 20th Century brought a disastrous break of values and hopes on the progress of humanity, from the point of view of economy, late capitalism and the industrial and scientific revolution. The romanticized belief that progress would bring happiness to each individual is annihilated. As Barreto (1976) emphasizes, everyday reality could not help but be included in the pages of the authors of that time, “making them forget the ideals of beauty, truth, morality that served as point of reference for the previous

generations”, because with the experiences of the two great wars, it was not possible to narrate such facts as if telling anecdotes anymore. To this literature, it was given the name of, according to Mounier (1972), “literature of the desperate”, a generalized feeling of existing at a time of contradictions, collapse of absolutist values and fragmentation of identities, a feeling of “foreignism” in the very environment in which one lives:

A consciência de que existe um abismo entre a sua vida profunda e suas ações faz com que tenha o sentimento nítido de que é impossível definir-se sobre ele próprio. [...] O homem existe independente do homem; e este constrói a sua realidade. Como disse Malraux, a única compreensão que o homem pode ter do universo é “o de uma diferença”. (BARRETO, 1972, p.41)³.

The emptiness of values made humanity, for the first time deprived of the idea of transcendentalism, abandon the absoluteness and seek for individualizations, not idealizing the world as it should be anymore, but describing and accepting it as it truly was, or rather, how it was now presented to each individual, the experience of what one was really living. In a certain way, for the good or for bad, existentialism has put the human being in the center, above and beyond, in charge of the phenomenon lived by someone.

The concept of absurd in France was born at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, attached to the recognition of the idea that the universe and everything that it holds is not logically, intelligently or rationally settled. There is not an absolute essence lying behind the relative phenomenal world. As Barreto (1972) investigates, instead of order, the human individual faces the chaos. The absurd would be, therefore, the human feeling when understanding that the meaning or signification to which it aims to reach, of existential order and rationality, simply does not exist. For Camus, the absurd shows up as this feeling of divorce between the human individual and the world, never as a metaphysical category. As Camus tells us:

³ The awareness of the existence of an abyss between your deep life and your actions emerges the clear feeling of being impossible to define yourself by it. [...] The man exists independently of man; and he erects his reality. As Malraux said, the only comprehension that man may have about the universe is “the one of a difference”. (Tradução nossa).

Esse mal-estar diante da desumanidade do próprio homem, essa incalculável queda diante da imagem daquilo que somos, essa “náusea”, como diz um autor dos nossos dias, é também o absurdo. Tanto quanto o estranho que, em certos instantes, vem ao nosso encontro num espelho, o irmão familiar e no entanto inquietante que encontramos nas nossas próprias fotos também é o absurdo. (2017, p.29)²

The absurd would be the confirmation of the feeling of ambiguity between the human attachment to the existence and the complete indifference of the universe. The gratuity of life, the strife between the human appetite for clear and rational answers and the supreme distortion of things. The absurd would be, thus, “the lucid reason that confirms its limits” (CAMUS, 2017, p.56), being born of the confrontation “between the human appeal and the world’s irrational silence” (CAMUS, 2017, p.39). It is this sensibility of the absurd that Camus tries to apprehend in his philosophical essay and his literature, showing the human individual in experiences that defies him to extreme situations, such as fear, agony, frustration and death, for each individual lives these many probations in different ways, bringing, however, the same restlessness in front of all these facets: is life worth living or not?

Só existe um problema filosófico realmente sério: o suicídio. Julgar se a vida vale ou não vale a pena ser vivida é responder à pergunta fundamental da filosofia. [...] Julgo, então, que o sentido da vida é a mais premente das perguntas. Como responder a ela? [...] Sempre se tratou o suicídio apenas como um fenômeno social. Aqui, pelo contrário, trata-se, para começar, da relação entre o pensamento individual e o suicídio. [...] Começar a pensar é começar a ser atormentado. A sociedade não tem muito a ver com esses começos. O verme se encontra no coração do homem. Lá é que se deve procurá-lo. Esse jogo mortal que vai da lucidez diante da existência à evasão para fora da luz deve ser acompanhado e compreendido. (CAMUS, 2017, pp.19-20)³

² This discomfort in face of the inhumanity of man itself, this incalculable fall in front of the image of this that we are, this “nausea”, as says an author of our time, is also the absurd. As much as the stranger that, in certain moments, comes towards us on the mirror, the familiar, and, yet disquieting brother that we find on our own pictures is also the absurd. (Tradução nossa).

³ There’s only one philosophical problem which is really serious: suicide. To judge if life is worth living or not is to answer philosophy’s fundamental question. [...] I believe, then, that the meaning of life is the most imperious of questions. How to answer it? [...] Suicide was always treated only as a social phenomenon. Here, on the contrary, it is about, to begin with, the relation between the individual thinking and suicide. [...] To start thinking is to start being tormented. Society has not much to do with these beginnings. The maggot can be found in man’s heart. It is there where you must search for it. This mortal game that goes from lucidity in face of the existence to the evasion out of the light must be watched and understood. (Tradução nossa).

Camus' philosophy is the one of the absurd, that arises from the human relation with the world around it, the human search for an existential meaning and the irrationality of existence itself. The absurd is the existential contingency, but it is not its essence. The absurd is unjustifiable and it cannot exist outside human's experience, neither can it exist outside this world. For all this, the absurd ends with death.

3 Absurd filiation: Dialogue with the philosophy of Albert Camus

Literature has always been and it will always be related to other fields that has the human condition as its purpose. To make it allied to philosophy does not mean not to observe it in its specificities, its own truths, not to establish a hierarchical order of importance or values, but to establish a relation of mutual comprehension and mutual contribution that these two perspectives may offer to each other.

Quiroga's Literature, direct heir of Edgar Allan Poe's Goth fantasy, brings in it characteristics that, on the other hand, would fit it into the modernist style, such as the ability of synthesis, the everyday life narrative, the subjectivism, fragmentation, nationalism, the appreciation of space, the colloquial language. In Brazil, Europe and Spanish Latin America, Modernism had a character of destruction of past absolute values, breaking all academic standards and creating a literature which was current and nationalized. All these facets can be found in Horacio Quiroga's literary production and, in particular, in the story that is being used to this analysis.

The short story *The dead man* is set in the forest of Northern Argentina, in the province of Misiones, the place where Quiroga lived almost his whole life. There is a presentation of local nature as a consubstantial scenario of human condition and of the climax of the narrative here in analysis. The nature is shown not only as a scenario in conflict against the human individual, but as the very answer of the universe to the human rational demands for existential meaning.

Our intention, however, is not linked to an aesthetic analysis of Quiroga's poetry. Instead, our focus befalls in the verification of the philosophical concepts previously exposed in the selected story. The main argument of the tale is reduced to a

single, simple action: the agony and desperation of a man that, for absurd contingences, is faced by the inexorable phenomenon of death, his own death.

In *The dead man*, we have a nameless character, identified only as the "man", which suggests that this individual could be anyone, even the reader. This tool fosters a greater empathy in the reader for a character whose destiny is revealed throughout the narrative. As Brait (2006) theorizes, it is the metalinguistic game that points a confusion in the relation between the person - real being - and the character - fictional being, because the characters "represent people, according to fiction modalities" (2006, p. 11). The character of the story, a rural worker for many years, wishing to rest for a few minutes laying on the sward under the midday sun, slips over the knife that he carries every day and, falls to the ground over it, and ends up with the work tool buried in his own guts.

We cannot forget that, even though it is possible to interchange the individual with the character, the character lives in a fictional world, a created reality, whose similarity with reality is due to, according to Brait (2006, p. 13), "the memory of an image, captured in a particular moment, under a particular angle and conditions of light", although these two realities keep a relationship of mutual recognition, which, therefore, will grant veracity to the narrative.

The author seeks for strategies to recreate reality, taking the reader to his own view of the world and making possible that the receptor, through this reconfiguration, report to reality, for the narrator is also a character of the story. There is, thus, an indefinite character who in ordinary conditions, that could easily occur in the rural reality in which the character is inserted faces the ultimate situation of human existence: the confrontation with death itself, the indubitable certitude of the end. Quoting this excerpt, we read:

O homem e seu facão acabavam de limpar a quinta rua do Bananal. Faltavam-lhes ainda duas ruas; mas como nestas abundavam as ervas daninhas e malvas silvestres, a tarefa que tinham por diante era muita pouca coisa. O homem lançou, em seguida, uma olhada satisfeita aos arbustos roçados e cruzou o alambrado para estender-se um instante no gramado. Mas, ao baixar o arame farpado e passar o corpo, seu pé esquerdo resvalou num pedaço de cortiça desprendida do poste, ao mesmo tempo em que o facão lhe escapava da mão. Enquanto caía, o homem teve a ligeira impressão de não ver o facão inteiramente no chão. Já estava estendido no gramado, deitado sobre o lado direito, tal como ele queria. A boca, que acabava de abrir-se em toda a sua extensão, acabava também de fechar-se. Estava como havia desejado

estar, os joelhos dobrados e a mão esquerda sobre o peito. Só que detrás do antebraço, e imediatamente por baixo do cinto, surgiam de sua camisa o cabo e a metade da lâmina do facão, mas o resto não se via. (QUIROGA, O homem morto, 2003, s/p)⁴

During the first elements of the narrative, the narrator presents to the reader the protagonist that will be present in the drama about to be developed: the man and his machete, making use of the least possible number of expressions, characterizing the conciseness of the modernist and also naturalist narrative. He describes ordinary situations, present in the everyday life of any individual who lives in rural regions and that, thus, do not cause any unexpected reaction on the reader at first. There is only the unusual sensation of a natural presence of death since the spelling.

From this point on, it is unleashed a tragic and agonizing process that will culminate on the character's death. After that, the narrator deftly triggers in the reader, by means of manipulating the reader's mind and fostering empathy for the character, the feeling of a fate that will irrevocably be fulfilled, being the man unable to do anything to prevent it.

About this, Camus described the absurd as being the conflict of human limited rationality with the irrationality of the universe. The absurd, in order to exist, will depend on the human individual and their conscience and on the world faced by them. After all, it is this very conscience, this reason that separates man and nature, that throws him into an existential condition about which the only certainty is death. Therefore, the absurd, or better, the feeling of absurdness, is exactly the confrontation between the intellect and the cosmos.

The experience with the absurd can be found in the very daily existence of the human individual, and it is faced by his rational action when facing this absurd feeling that cannot be explained when lived. This "divorce between man and his life, the actor

⁴ The man and his machete had just finished cleaning the fifth row of the banana plantation. Two rows still remained; but these were only filled with weeds trees and mallows, the task ahead would not take them long. The man, therefore, casted a satisfied glance at the trimmed shrubs and crossed the fence to lie down in the grass. However, as he lowered the barbed wire to cross it, his left foot slipped on a piece of bark which had become detached from the fence, causing the machete to slip out of his hand at the same time. As he fell, the man had the distant impression that his machete was not on the ground. He was already lying in the grass, on his right side, just as he wanted. His mouth, which was previously wide open, had closed again. He was how he wished to be, knees bent, and his left hand resting on his chest. Except that behind his forearm, and directly below his belt, the handle and half the blade of his machete protruded from his shirt, the rest could not be seen. (Tradução nossa).

and his scenario" (CAMUS, 2017, p. 21) is exactly the absurd sensibility. An understandable world, possible of being explained even though by means of an illogical thinking, is a familiar world, however, in a universe, as says Camus (2017), unexpectedly deprived of any illusion, man will inexorably feel like a foreigner.

As Camus (2017) highlights, the feeling of absurd may slap any individual on the face at any moment, and this feeling is indescribable and incomprehensible. We can observe this sensation in the narrative at the moment in which the character notices his own situation and becomes aware of his certain death. The main character knows for sure that he is going to die, but he denies this evidence at all costs since the beginning, looking for desperate possibilities of rationalizing the circumstances and finding other answers to explain the obvious phenomenon which was in course: that he was about to die. We can observe this in the following excerpt and in the reflection that follows it:

O homem tentou mover a cabeça em vão. Deu uma olhada de relance na empunhadura do facão, úmida ainda do suor de sua mão. Apreciou mentalmente a extensão e a trajetória do facão dentro do seu ventre, e adquiriu fria, matematicamente e inexoravelmente, a certeza de que acabava de chegar ao término de sua existência. A morte. No transcurso da vida, se pensa muitas vezes em que um dia, depois de anos, meses, semanas e dias preparatórios, chegará a nossa vez nos umbrais da morte. É a lei fatal, aceita e prevista; tanto que costumamos nos deixar levar prazerosamente pela imaginação a esse momento, supremo entre todos, em que lançamos o último suspiro. Mas, entre o instante atual e essa derradeira expiração, quais sonhos, transtornos, esperanças e dramas presumimos em nossa vida? O que nos reserva ainda esta existência cheia de vigor, antes de sua eliminação do cenário humano? É este o consolo, o prazer e a razão de nossas divagações mortuárias: tão distante está a morte, e tão imprevisto o que devemos viver ainda! Ainda?... (QUIROGA, O homem morto, 2003, s/p)⁵

According to Camus (2017), the man lives a controlled and methodical life, whose meanings and significations in which doubts and questions are not able to spread.

⁵ The man tried to move his head in vain. He glanced sideways at the hilt of the machete, still damp from the sweat of his hand. He mentally pictured the extension and the trajectory of the machete inside his stomach. Coldly, mathematically and inexorably, he came to the conclusion that he had reached the end of his life. Death. In the course of one's life it is often thought that one day, after years, months, weeks and preparatory days, he will reach his turn at the threshold of death. It is the fatal law, accepted and foreseen; so much so that we usually allow ourselves to be carried by our imagination, to that supreme moment in which we breath our last breath. But between the present moment and that last breath, what dreams, what disruptions, what hopes and dramas we imagine in our lives! This vigorous existence holds so much for us before our removal from the human realm. This is the consolation, the pleasure and the reason for our mortuary ramblings. Death is so distant, and so unpredictable is the life we still have to live. Still? (Tradução nossa).

We live an existence guided by the rhythm and the obligations of work, family, study, friends, fun, social, professional and personal life. Day after day, month after month, year after year, existence remains unchanged. But one day, the "why" question arises and everything starts.

Da mesma maneira, e em todos os dias de uma vida sem brilho, o tempo nos leva. Mas sempre chega uma hora em que temos de levá-lo. Vivemos no futuro: “amanhã”, “mais tarde”, “quando você conseguir uma posição”, “com o tempo vai entender”. Estas inconseqüências são admiráveis, porque afinal trata-se de morrer. [...] O amanhã, ele ansiava o amanhã, quando tudo em si deveria rejeitá-lo. Essa revolta da carne é o absurdo. (CAMUS, 2017, p.27-28)⁶

The reason cannot, satisfactorily, attend to the human purposes of providing a meaning to these experiences. The experience of death, as seen in the character, does not actually exist, because it is only possible to consider as experience something that is objectively lived and consciously understood. We cannot, then, live the death of someone else, nor our own. And under the light of this merciless destiny, it is shown the face of existential uselessness and the unusual sensation felt by man as the end of its very existence, since life is lived as if death would never come, it is the illusion of immortality. It is possible to verify this idea in the thoughts of the character:

Não havia passado dois segundos: o sol estava exatamente na mesma altura; as sombras não avançaram um milímetro. Bruscamente, acabam de se resolver para o homem estendido as divagações a longo prazo: está morrendo. Morto. Pode se considerar morto em sua cômoda postura. Mas o homem abre os olhos e observa. Quanto tempo passou? A que catástrofe sobreviveu no mundo? Que transtorno da natureza manifestou o terrível acontecimento? Morrerá. Fria, fatal e inescapavelmente, morrerá. (QUIROGA, O homem morto, 2003, s/p)⁷

⁶ The same way, and every day of a dull life, time takes us. But it always comes a time in which we have to take it. We live in the future: "tomorrow", "later", "when you get a position", "in time you'll understand". These consequences are admirable, because, after all, it means to die. [...] Tomorrow, he would long for tomorrow, when everything inside should reject it. This revolt of the flesh is the absurd. (Tradução nossa).

⁷ Not two seconds had passed: the sun was exactly at the same altitude; the shadows had not advanced one millimeter. Suddenly, the long term musings have been solved for the man: he is dying. Dead. He could be considered dead in this comfortable posture. But the man opens his eyes and looks around. How much time has passed? That cataclysm has survived in the world? What disturbance of nature exudes this horrible event? He's going to die. Cold, mortal and inescapably, he is going to die. (Tradução nossa)

The character, in order to escape the absurd that happens before his eyes, keeps his attention on the environment that surrounds him, as if looking for a reason in the universe, for a meaning for his current situation. The familiar world, rationally unexplainable, even if through mistaken and inauthentic ways, is still the world in which the individual tries to live, for being the one his reason is able to understand. The feeling of separation, of the split between the main character and the scenario in which he is inserted, happens exactly in the reflection that he does about the cosmos. Let us observe it:

O homem resiste: - “É tão imprevisto este horror!” – e pensa – “É um pesadelo! É isto!”. O que mudou? Nada. E observa. Não é por acaso este bananal? Não vem todas as manhãs limpá-lo? Quem o conhece como ele? Vê perfeitamente o bananal, bem desbastado, e as largas folhas despidas ao sol. Ali estão, bem próximas, desfiadas pelo vento. Mas agora não se movem... É a calma do meio dia, mas devem ser 12 horas. Entre as bananas, ali acima, o homem vê desde o duro solo até o telhado vermelho de sua casa. À esquerda entrevê o monte e a capoeira de canelas. Não alcança mais a visão, mas sabe muito bem que atrás de suas costas está o caminho para o porto novo; e que na direção da sua cabeça, ali abaixo, jaz no fundo do vale o Paraná adormecido como um lago. Tudo, tudo exatamente como sempre; o sol de fogo, o ar vibrante e solitário, as bananas imóveis, o alambrado de postes muito grossos e altos que logo terão que trocar... (QUIROGA, O homem morto, 2003, s/p)⁸

To understand existence in the human world, as Camus (2017) tells us, to understand reality is to reduce it to the human being. There is an abyss between what we believe to know and what we really do, "the practical acceptance and the simulated ignorance " (CAMUS, 2017, p. 31) that makes us live in illusion, facing a dichotomy, a divorce that takes us away from our elucubrations. The greatest insanity, according to Camus (2017, p. 34) is "the confrontation between the irrational and the frenzied desire for clarity whose appeal echoes at the bottom of a man's soul". It is necessary to surrender the construction of familiar illusions that bring us serenity and safety, in order

⁸ The man resists - this horror so unforeseen! And he thinks: this is a nightmare; that is it! What has changed? Nothing. And look: is not that plantation your plantation? Do you not come here every morning to clean it? Who knows it like himself? He sees the plantation perfectly, evened out, and the broad, bare leaves under the sun. There they are, very close, frayed by the wind. But now they do not move... it is the calm of midday; it must be 12 o'clock. Among the bananas, up there, the man sees from the hard floor to the red roof of his house. To the left, he glimpses the mountain and the grown vegetation. He cannot see more, but he knows very well that behind his back is the way to the new port; and that in the direction of his head, down below, Panamá lies at the end of the valley, asleep like a lake. Everything, everything as it always was; the sun of fire, the vibrant and solitary air, the motionless bananas, the wire fencing of the thick and tall poles which would soon need to be changed. (Tradução nossa)

to lucidly give in to the absurd. Death is the very awareness of the agony and it appeals to conscience through a plausible denial to the obviousness of the phenomenon.

Thus, the awareness of the absurd and the revolt against it emerge as opposite to renunciation. All humans are going to die, however, each with its own death. This is always going to be a great arbitrariness, which we will never agree with. The absurd man is the one that does nothing for the eternal, he doesn't believe in it. Heart and reasoning are his preaching sermon; he is satisfied with what he possesses and recognizes the limits of his human reason. On the following excerpt, it is possible to observe this idea:

Morto! Mas é possível? Não é este um dos tantos dias em que saiu ao amanhecer de sua casa com o facão na mão? Não está ali mesmo com o facão na mão? Não está ali mesmo, a quatro metros dele, seu cavalo, seu malacara, farejando, parcimoniosamente, o arame farpado? Mas, sim, alguém assobia! Não pode ver, porque está de costas para o caminho; mas sente ressoar na pequena ponte os passos do cavalo... É o garoto que passa todas as manhãs na direção do novo porto, às onze e meia. E sempre assobiando... Do poste descascado que quase toca com as botas, até a cerca viva de montes que separa o bananal do caminho, há quinze metros compridos. Sabe-o perfeitamente bem porque ele mesmo, ao levantar o alambrado, mediu a distância. O que passa, então? É esse ou não um simples meio-dia dos tantos em Misiones, em seu monte, em seu potreiro, no bananal ralo? Sem dúvida! Gramado curto, cones de formiga, silêncio, sol a pino... Nada, nada mudou. Somente ele é distinto. Há dois minutos, sua pessoa, sua personalidade vivente, não tem nada a ver com o potreiro, que moldou ele mesmo à enxada, durante cinco meses consecutivos, nem com o bananal, obra de suas únicas mãos. Nem com sua família. Foi arrancado bruscamente, naturalmente, por obra de uma lasca notável e um facão no ventre. Há dois minutos: morre. (QUIROGA, O homem morto, 2003, s/p)⁹

The universe has no rationality in itself, and this is all that human rationality is able to apprehend. Humanity revolts against the irremediable that would turn existence into a humiliation. The absurd, as Camus highlights (2017), is neither in the human individual nor in the world, but in the relation of common existence. There is the human wish and there is what the universe offers. There cannot be the absurd outside human

⁹ Dead! Is it possible? Is this not one of those days when he has come out of his house at dawn with his machete in his hand? Is that not his horse, Malacara, four meters away from him, parsimoniously smelling the barbed wire? What happens then? Is this not a simple noon like the many of Misiones, in its mountain, in its pasture, in its sparse plantation? Without a doubt! Short grass, ant nests, silence, scorching sun. Nothing, nothing has changed. Only he is different. For two minutes, his person, his living personality has nothing to do with the pasture that he created himself for five consecutive months, nor with the banana plantation, the work of his own hands. Or with his family. He has been abruptly ripped away, naturally, by the work of a glossy shell and a machete. Two minutes ago, he died. (Tradução nossa)

consciousness or outside this knowable world. The absurd ceases, therefore, with death. For more certain we may be about the objective and correct idea of death, we always wish to preserve our existence and, consequently, the absurd feeling that oppresses us.

Such conflict, as Camus (2017) says, supposes the complete absence of hope, but that does not mean despair, the continuous denying of the certain future, death, the non-renounce and a distressing insatisfaction, that could not be mistaken by a teenagers restlessness, once the absurd only has a meaning when it is being denied, never when admitted. The absurd man, when aware of his condition and hopeless (but not in despair, not appealing to the transcendental), one does not belong to the idea of future anymore, but lives inextricably in the present, with intensity and aware of these experiences. According to Camus:

O absurdo nasce desse confronto entre o apelo humano e o silêncio irracional do mundo. Isto é o que não devemos esquecer. A isto é que devemos nos apegar, porque toda a consequência de uma vida pode nascer daí. O irracional, a nostalgia humana e o absurdo que surge do seu encontro, eis os três personagens do drama que deve necessariamente acabar com toda a lógica de que uma existência é capaz. (2017, p.39)¹⁰

The character of the story focus his attention towards the world around him, which is familiar and rationally explicable, trying to find in the universe a logic that would make him understand his new real situation. His wishes of understanding the absurd, the silence and the complete indifference of the universe in which he is inserted about his demands for explanations. The main character, however, when facing this absurd experience does not ask for divine help, he does not seek for answers or consolation outside his reality. He does not show any desperation, just a feeling of powerlessness that guides his reasoning through the logic of human rationality. In front of his own and the world's ephemerality, the absurd man focus his attention towards what seems safe to him, that is, what is at hand, what is expected, because the least illusory world is the one where he lives.

¹⁰ The absurd is born from this conflict between the human plea and the irrational silence of the world. This is what cannot be forgotten. This is what we need to hold on to, because every consequence of a life can arise from this. The irrational, the human nostalgia and the absurd that arises from their encounter, these are the three characters of the drama that must necessarily end with every logic that an existence may have. (Tradução nossa)

The character starts remembering his everyday life, his routine, his horse, the machete with which he has worked for so long and that he was thinking about replacing, the boy that always passes by whistling, the scorching sun in the sky, the new port, ordinary elements that express the continuity of existence, therefore, the absurd feeling that found him, once nothing had changed, only he was different for being aware of this split between the universe and himself. A succession of present moments that characterize the absurd man. The following paragraph expresses this question:

O homem, muito esgotado e estendido no grama sobre o lado direito, resiste sempre a admitir um fenômeno desta transcendência, ante o aspecto normal e monótono de quem observa. Sabe bem a hora: às onze e meia... O garoto de todos os dias acaba de passar a ponte. Mas não é possível que tenha resvalado!... O cabo de seu facão (logo deverá trocá-lo por outro; resta-lhe pouco uso) estava perfeitamente oprimido entre sua mão esquerda e o arame farpado. [...] Somente está muito cansado do trabalho desta manhã e descansa um momento como de costume. O sol sobe a pino, e a calma é muito grande, pois nem uma franja das bananas se move. Todos os dias, como esse, tem visto as mesmas coisas. Muito exausto, mas descansa, só. Deve ter passado já vários minutos... e às onze e quarenta e cinco, desde ali acima, desde o chalé de telhado vermelho, descerão até o bananal sua mulher e seus dois filhos, buscando-o para almoçar. [...] Que pesadelo!... Mas é um dos tantos dias, trivial como todos, claro está! Luz excessiva, sombras amareladas, calor silencioso de fornalha sobre a carne, que faz suar o malaraca imóvel perante o bananal proibido. (QUIROGA, O homem morto, 2003, s/p)¹¹

The human agony in front of the phenomenon of death seems to be the core of this narrative, in which the man, his machete and the environment that surrounds them are mere tools. Even though the story does not belong to the fantastic genre, once the laws of nature are not broken, the feeling of strangeness about this natural phenomenon removed from its naturality, reminds us of what Todorov says about the relation between the reader and the character of the fantastic gender:

¹¹ The man, tired and lying on the grass on his right side, always resists accepting a phenomenon of this transcendence, faced with the normal and the monotonous aspect of what he looks at. He knows the time well: eleven-thirty... the boy just crossed over the bridge as he does every day. But it's not possible that he could have slipped! The handle of his machete (which, due to its wear, would soon have to be changed for another) was perfectly pressed between his left hand and the barbed wire. [...] The sun goes down, and there is a great calmness, for not even a fringe of the banana trees move every day like this, he had seen the same things. Very tired, but he's only resting. Several minutes must have already passed... and at a quarter to twelve, from up there, from the red-roofed house, his wife and two children will come out to the plantation to fetch him for lunch. [...] what a nightmare! But it's one of many days, trivial as any other. Excessive light, yellowish shadows, silent furnace heat on the flesh which causes the motionless horse to sweat next to the forbidden plantation. (Tradução nossa)

O fantástico implica pois uma integração do leitor no mundo das personagens; define-se pela percepção ambígua que o leitor tem dos acontecimentos narrados; esse leitor se identifica com a personagem. É importante precisar desde logo que, assim falando, temos em vista não tal ou tal leitor particular e real, mas uma “função” de leitor, implícita no texto (da mesma que está implícita a de seu narrador). A percepção desse leitor implícito está inscrita no texto com a mesma precisão que os movimentos das personagens. (2008, p.150-151)¹²

Therefore, about the fantastic inside this narrative in analysis, it can be observed the existence of an unusual, unexpected and strange event, even if completely inserted into the natural laws, which causes hesitation both in the character and in the reader, making the reader consider, according to Todorov (2008), the fictional world as a world of living people and falter between a rational and natural explanation and a supernatural one about the experienced events and that this sensation is shared with the character, that will not be completely sure about what explanation or argumentation will give to the facts.

In the story, the main character, facing the unusual feeling of this unexpected obvious fact that all his worldly problems were over, tries to revive a familiar and ordinary past, trivial, as if it was the present projecting itself towards the future through actions, such as exchanging his machete for a new one, the fences that would have to be changed or the family that soon will come to fetch him for lunch, culminating in the insistence on affirming that he is just very tired and resting as he normally would. Through this device, the narrator shows the complete indifference of nature about the individual tragedy of a man who was dying. The fantastic, following Todorov's thoughts (2008), lasts only long enough for a hesitation of reader and character, that need to rationalize and decide if what is being lived is the reality or not.

In the referred story, this decision is made. The narrative is guided fluently to its end, in which, subjectively, this character is able to rationalize the objective reality. However, the natural, untouched laws remaining, it is admitted, by both the character and the reader, the feeling of the uncanny in face of the struggle against the absurd. A phenomenon perfectly explained by the laws that guide the limited human reasoning,

¹² The fantastic implies then in an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; defined by the ambiguous perception that the reader has about the story which is being told, this reader feels identified with the character. It is important to readily establish, therefore, that we do not aim at this or that reader particularly, but at a "function" of reader, implicit in the text similar to the implied narrator's function as it is implicit its narrator. The perception of this implicit reader is inscribed on the text as precisely as the movements of the characters. (Tradução nossa)

even when facing the absurd between the human demand for clarification and the world's irrationality, that remains unusual, strange, eerie and singular. This divorce, that Camus (2008) talks about, becomes even clearer during the final moments of the tale and in its outcome:

[...] Quantas vezes, ao meio-dia como agora, cruzou voltando para casa esse potreiro, que era capoeira quando ele chegou e antes havia sido monte virgem! Voltava então, muito fatigado também, com seu facão pendente na mão esquerda, a lentos passos. Pode ainda distanciar-se com a mente, se quiser; pode, se quiser, abandonar um instante seu corpo e ver desde o quebra-mar por ele construído, a trivial paisagem de sempre; o pedregulho vulcânico com gramas rígidas; o bananal e sua areia vermelha; o alambrado apequenado na ladeira que se incorpora até o caminho. E, mais longe ainda, ver o potreiro, obra única de suas mãos. E, ao pé de um poste descascado, deitado sobre o lado direito e as pernas recolhidas, exatamente como todos os dias, pode ver a ele mesmo, como um pequeno vulto ensolarado sobre o gramado – descansando porque está muito cansado. Mas, o cavalo raiado de suor, imóvel de cautela perante o esquinado do arame farpado, vê também o homem no solo e não se atreve a vaguar pelo bananal como desejaria. Diante das vozes que já estão próximas – Papai! – volta um longo, longo instante as orelhas imóveis em direção ao vulto e, tranquilizado enfim, decide passar entre o poste e o homem estendido que já descansou. (QUIROGA, O homem morto, 2003, s/p)¹³

We can observe, through the analysis, the relation of the narrative with the natural denatured and taken to the category of supernatural, being this the element that, according to Todorov (2008), would modify the previous balance of the narrative. Both the character and the reader need to decide if the fact belongs to the reality or to the imaginary. This feeling of hesitation before death, in this particular narrative, refers us to the feeling of absurd and to Camus' absurd man.

¹³ So many times, at noon just like now, on his way back home, had he crossed this pasture that was overgrown when he first came, and that was a virgin forest before. He returned then in slow steps, very tired too, with his machete hanging in his left hand. He can still move away in his mind, if he wants. If he wants, he can abandon his body in an instant and observe from the dam that he had built, the trivial everyday landscape: the rigid grass between the volcanic gravel, the plantation and its red sand, the wire fence appearing smaller as it slopes towards the road. And, further still, see the pasture, the work of his hands alone. And at the foot of the peeled post, thrown on his right side with his legs swept up, just like all the other days, he can see himself, like a small sunny bundle on the grass, resting, because he is very tired... But the horse, streaked with sweat, and cautiously motionless next to the corner of the wire fence, also sees the man on the ground and does not dare to enter the plantation, as he would wish. Before the voices that are approaching - papa! - the horse turns its motionless ears to the bundle for a long, long time and calm, at last, decides to pass between the post and the lying man - who had already rested. (Tradução nossa).

This relentless pursuit for a rational explanation of existence and the complete lack of answer by the universe, evoking the irrationality of the world, the human agony and the absurd that arises from these compels the subject to divorce from his environment, as it is verified in the story, nature is always in conflict against the human individual. The absurd shows us that the objective experiences are unimportant within which the absurd man, as Camus (2017) highlights, observes a cold and indifferent universe in which the end is the annihilation and emptiness.

Final Considerations

According to Camus to be considered truly authentic, an author's literary work needs to be the reflection of the experiences lived and taken to consciousness by the writer. Only the absurd is capable of making us live our lives intensely, lucidly and consciously of our own existential condition. Only by facing the absurd, the split between oneself and the world, it is possible to appreciate the feeling of being able to, finally, search inside the world, and not outside it, for happiness.

Throughout this research, we presented a biography of the Uruguayan writer Horacio Quiroga and we showed how his life experience influenced his art. The blunt presence of death gave him prematurely this one indisputable certainty, the only one capable of being reached by human rationality: the end of life and everything else. We write, secondly, about the concepts of absurd, of the feeling of absurd and of the absurd man referring to the thoughts of the French-Algerian philosopher Albert Camus, pointing the main characteristics of the philosophy on the absurd.

Finally, we analyze the work through the point of view of Camus' concepts, delineating the feeling of absurd experienced by the character when facing the phenomenon of his own death, an impossible experience for those that go through it, and reveal the absurd man in the main character who – even though hesitating before the strangeness of that event, which was natural despite its removal from its naturalness by the whole social and cultural context of the western society – does not appeal to the divine nor to an illogical answer in order to comfort himself. He does not show any despair, but rather tries, in a rational way, inside the limits of human reasoning, to understand what he so obviously had already understood, although he could not accept

it: he was going to die. As Camus shows us, human flesh's revolt against the death is the absurd.

The absurd, so clear and also so difficult of being apprehended, invades one's existence and troubles the quiet harmony that there was between oneself and the world. The absurd takes from the universe this being aware of his existence and finitude and makes him face, with a lucid effort, what one is in fact: nothing. In this symbiotic relation, the individual may find the absurd and the indifference that constitute its sovereignty.

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