

Between the short story and the graphic novel:
comparative literature and reader education based on ‘The Third
Bank of the River’ /

*Entre o conto e a graphic novel: literatura comparada e
formação do leitor a partir de “A terceira margem do rio”*


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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comparative analysis between the short story "The Third Bank of the River", by João Guimarães Rosa, and the graphic novel adaptation of the same name, with a script by Maria Helena Rouanet and art by Thaís dos Anjos. The comic is part of the collection of the National School Library Program (PNBE) sent in 2013 to public high schools, thus corresponding to yet another text present in the reading rooms and libraries of schools with the aim of promoting access to culture and encouraging reading. The aim of the study is to reflect on the approach to the canonical literary text from the point of view of dialog with the contemporary language of the comic book (HQ), embarking on literary comparativism and reflection on the relationship between literature and other languages in the formation of the reader. To this end, we revisit current conceptions and critical perspectives on reading, literature, comparative literature and comics, in order to show, through the comparative analysis of different artistic and literary languages, a powerful and thought-provoking reading approach. To this end, we use Bordini and Aguiar (1988), Scliar (2008), Colomer (2007) and Pinheiro (2020) as our theoretical support, with regard to reading, reader education and literary reading in secondary education; Abreu (2006) with regard to the concept of literature as a historical and cultural practice; Carvalho (2006) on comparative literature and Eisner (2010), Vergueiro (2020) and Ramos (2019) on the language of comics.

KEYWORDS: The third bank of the river; Short story; Comics; Comparative literature; Reader education.

RESUMO

O artigo apresenta uma análise comparativa entre o conto "A terceira margem do rio", de João Guimarães Rosa, e a adaptação homônima em graphic novel, com roteiro de Maria Helena Rouanet e arte de Thaís dos Anjos. A HQ é parte do acervo do Programa Nacional Biblioteca da Escola (PNBE) enviada em 2013 para as escolas públicas de ensino médio, correspondendo, assim, a mais um texto presente nas salas de leitura e bibliotecas das escolas com a finalidade de promover o acesso à cultura e o incentivo à leitura. O objetivo do estudo é refletir sobre a abordagem do texto literário canônico a partir do diálogo com a linguagem contemporânea da história em quadrinhos (HQ), enveredando pelo comparativismo literário e pela reflexão sobre as relações entre literatura e outras linguagens na formação do leitor. Para tanto, são revisitadas concepções e perspectivas críticas atuais acerca da leitura, da literatura, da literatura comparada e da HQ, no sentido de mostrar a partir da análise comparativa de linguagens artísticas e literárias diferentes um viés de leitura potente e instigante. Para tanto, servem-nos de aporte teórico os/as estudiosos/as Bordini e Aguiar (1988), Scliar (2008), Colomer (2007) e Pinheiro (2020), no que concerne à leitura, formação de leitores e leitura literária no ensino médio; Abreu (2006) no tocante à concepção de literatura como prática histórica e cultural; Carvalho (2006) sobre literatura comparada e Eisner (2010), Vergueiro (2020) e Ramos (2019) sobre a linguagem dos quadrinhos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: A terceira margem do rio; Conto; História em quadrinhos; Literatura comparada; Formação de leitor.

1 Introduction

The text "The Third Bank of the River", by João Guimarães Rosa, is part of the collection *Primeiras Estórias*, published in 1962, made up of twenty-one short stories. As Castro (1993) observed in the book *Primeiras Estórias: roteiro de leitura*, the narratives have madness, childhood, violence, mysticism and love as their main themes. The short story selected in this study is included by the author in the group of texts with mystical themes.

This is a well-known text from Rose's short stories, which has inspired many other productions. One of them was the creation of the song "A terceira margem do rio", lyrics by Caetano Veloso and music by Milton Nascimento. Rose's narrative has also been adapted numerous times for film and theater. The first movie version dates from 1993 and was directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos.

In the short story, as in the entire collection *Primeiras Estórias*, we come across the characteristic trait of Rosa's style pointed out by Candido, referring to the novel *Grande sertão: veredas*, "the absolute confidence in the freedom to invent" (Cândido, 1991, p. 294). Just as in the novel, we are swept away by the "gush of creative imagination in language, composition, plot and psychology" (Candido, 1991, p.294). In addition, similar to the novel, there are three structural elements in First Stories that support the compositions: the land, the man, the struggle.

The third shore can be read as man's/being's search for original completeness, integration with nature, the river, hills, paths, palm trees, flowers, but the crossing is one of struggle, loneliness, loss, paths and detours: "Our father didn't come back. He hadn't gone anywhere. All he did make the invention of staying in those river spaces, halfway across, always inside the canoe, so as never to jump out again" (Rosa, 2005, p. 78).

This study also focuses on the comic book adaptation, published in 2012. The *graphic novel* version has a script by Maria Helena Rouanet and illustrations by Thaís dos Anjos. Released on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the short story, unlike João Guimarães' narrative, the comic book adaptation is not widely covered in basic education, but has been studied by different

heoretical-critical approaches, mainly as a corpus for undergraduate course completion work - TCC⁴ and paper for periodicals⁵.

In this paper, the aim of the study is to reflect on the approach of the canonical literary text from the point of view of dialog with the contemporary language of the comic book (HQ), embarking on literary comparativism and reflection on the relationship between literature and other languages in the formation of the reader. To this end, we revisit current conceptions and critical perspectives on reading, literature and comics in order to show, through the comparative analysis of different artistic languages, a powerful and thought-provoking reading approach.

To this end, we have organized this paper into three sections. In the first, entitled "Widening the margins: some considerations on reading and reader education", we reflect on the term reader education and the role of the school in literary reading practices; in the second, entitled "Beyond the margins: o viés comparativista na abordagem do texto literário no ensino médio", we revisit official documents such as the BNCC and the Paraíba Curriculum Framework, as well as studies about the conception of literature and the comparative approach in the dialogue between the literary text and other languages; in the third section, called "O SER-tão por entre margens, cores e traços: construções do personagem e do espaço na graphic novel", we analyze some scenes from the comic book based on the language of comics, discuss how the relationship between character and space takes place, especially through colors.

2. Widening the margins: some thoughts on reading and reader education

The subject of literary reader education refers to a field of research that began in the 1970s in Brazil, with the creation of law 5.692/71, which reformed primary and secondary education and proposed the use of literary texts for children in school reading, and which served as the basis for

⁴ In this regard, we would like to highlight the guidance given to the TCC "Reading the comic book The Third Bank of the River: from the visual to the linguistic", by Luciana Gomes da Costa. <http://dspace.bc.uepb.edu.br/jspui/handle/123456789/18222>

⁵ With regard to the studies carried out on The Third Bank of the River in comics, we highlight the article "Adaptation as criticism: a reading of The Third Bank of the River, by Guimarães Rosa, in graphic novel" by Maria Gabriela Wanderley Pedrosa in the digital journal *Intersemiosis* v. 5 n. 8 (2018): In the article, from a "feminist perspective", according to the author, the focus is on the figure of the mother and the home, as opposed to dominant analyses that center on the figure of the father and the street/river.

many other studies, such as those by Marisa Lajolo, Regina Zilberman, Maria da Glória Bordini, Vera Teixeira Aguiar,

Eliane Yunes, among others, who began to exhaustively study the process of building the reader in the school context. In recent years, the subject has also prompted a great deal of research in postgraduate courses. Ferreira (2004), in a study on reading as an object of investigation, presents a detailed observation of the field of knowledge on reading, produced in the period between 1989 and 2000 in Brazil, through a set of summaries of master's dissertations and doctoral theses that show a significant growth in the number of research studies on literary reading in the country.

Therefore We are faced with a paradox: never before has so much research been done on literary reader training, and we have seen countless public policies emerge in favor of this process at the same time as there is a lack of institutional projects focused on this aspect in the school context. In this context, it is worth highlighting the federal government's creation of the PNBE (National School Library Program) in 1997, which was abolished in 2015 and is considered to be a large network for distributing books to schools across the country, although we are aware that distributing books alone does not train readers. We must also remember that the discontinuity of programs of this nature ends up hindering the process of reader formation, although we recognize that to this day, we can still reap the rewards of this program through the countless books that have reached schools. We draw attention in this research above all to the adaptation of the classics into comic books, perceived as a way of democratizing reading, made possible through this program, whose aim it was to encourage reading by making it more accessible and attractive to young people. In this way, despite all the initiatives around the subject, the topic is still topical and necessary, and it is a complex issue that requires new reflections on the places occupied by reading in schools.

2.1 From obligation to the pleasure of reading

Considering that the school should be a place where readers are trained, the following question arises: is the school fulfill this obligation, given that the school environment is responsible for promote reading? We believe that by controlle what, when and how to read, the school ends up create barriers that hinder the process of building a reader. What we see in the school context is a lack of defined objectives and an understand of the function of literature, aspects that have

contributed to young people's lack of interest in literary reading and have increasingly alienated students from this activity.

The school needs to fulfill its role of training readers and, to do this, it must offer opportunities that go beyond the utilitarian function of texts and that can go beyond the school walls. In the classroom, we almost always read to teach something or to cover some pedagogical content. In this case, there is a predominance of analytical practices, in which the only thing left to do is answer the questions in the text, which are focused on reading models and skills, as compulsory practices in the school context. This teaching model is based on protocols that have the practical aim of filling in forms, producing summaries and answer textbook interpretation exercises, purely technical practices that are followed to the letter by many teachers. Bordini and Aguiar (1988, p. 35) define these types of activities as "unoriginal" because they present predictable proposals that meet a school requirement. But if we want to train literary readers, we need to go beyond formalism, giving space to the reader's subjectivity.

It is in this sense that Scliar (2008, p. 40) argues that reading should be presented to the student "as a kind invitation, not as a chore, as an obligation which, in the end, undermines the very symbolism of reading, transformed into an arid if not painful chore"⁶.

Autonomy goes hand in hand with freedom, as it allows the literary text to be constituted in the reader's experience, based on the polysemic nature of literary language. This freedom allowed by such a genre can generate pleasure in reading, since it requires the participation of the subject, without being tied to an everyday reality, nor to a school requirement, in which the student needs to say what they have understood. On the contrary, this activity needs to be experienced as an aesthetic experience. Thus, for Bordini and Aguiar (1988), "pleasure arises from the fact that literature is not subordinated to an immediate practical need, but rather to a gratuitousness that brings the literary text closer" (Bordini; Aguiar, 1988, p. 27).

This is a nod to a paradigm shift in which it is no longer a question of knowing literature, but of reading literature. It is therefore no longer a question of elitist practices in which the classics were considered models of good language use, based on the historical axis and the exercise of grammatical analysis, which made up an instrumental view of literature, in which there was no interest in the experience that the literary text made possible for the reader. Regarding the

⁶ All translations of quotes are ours.

difficulties of reading the classics, Machado (2012) argues that "the first contact with a classic, in childhood or adolescence, does not have to be with the original; the ideal is a well-made and attractive adaptation" (Machado, 2012 *apud* Feijó, 2012). After all, we're talking about going much further than just needing to read in order to comply with a writing model of the time, you have to enjoy reading; that's why the adaptation must appeal to the target audience. In this respect, we see adaptations of the classics into comic books as a new form of expression that enables pedagogical positions capable of making reading the classics more enjoyable, consequently influencing the formation of literary readers, in a way that allows the two manifestations - Classics and Comics - to coexist.

In this direction, the researchers defend three basic principles that regulate the teaching of literature: meeting the interests of the reader, provoking new interests and preserving a playful character. Together, these principles enable a permanent reading behavior, in which the literary text is presented as a challenging activity that will require the subject to actively participate throughout the journey, allowing them to take their experiences into their lives. Therefore, by recognizing and valuing the reading references that students bring with them when they arrive at school, a predisposition to this activity is created. Based on this principle, you can gradually awaken their interest in coming into contact with works of an emancipatory nature, thus broadening their cultural universe. It's worth noting, however, that the literary indications in the context are not always such that they can share their anxieties.

From this perspective, Colomer (2007) argues that it is essential for students to be encouraged, from an early age, to create expectations about what they are going to read, learning to evaluate a work and to continue or give up reading a particular book. We mustn't forget the extraordinary success of works such as Harry Potter (J. K. Rowling) and The Lord of the Rings (J. R. R. Tolkien) among young people, which can therefore serve as a starting point for other, more challenging readings. We should also add the emergence of multiple configurations of the literary text, such as cinema, popular songs, graffiti as visual poetry, etc., which have gained ground among young people. In this respect, Pinheiro (2016) argues that dialog between the arts should be encouraged, but without forgetting that the focus should always be on the literary text.

3 Beyond the margins: the comparativist approach to the literary text in secondary education

As Professor Pinheiro (2020, p.126-127) points out, the challenges of working with literary texts in schools, especially secondary schools, have been pointed out and discussed for a long time:

[...] research into teaching content and methodologies, we have the work of Maria Teresa Fraga Roco (1981), who diagnoses issues that will become more acute, especially in view of the growth of public schools at the end of the 1970s. At the beginning of the 1980s, Ligia Chiappini de Moraes Leite's book *A invasão da catedral* (The Invasion of the Cathedral) (1983) tackles controversial and highly topical issues, such as the problem of the "didactic manual", teaching methodology (which leaves out any participation by the reader in the teaching-learning process) and political-economic issues, such as the working conditions of teachers, who are almost always unable to undertake ongoing training (Pinheiro, 2020, p. 126-127).

The professor also points out that despite the valuable reflections of the discussions held at least four decades ago, as well as the contribution of official documents such as the National Curriculum Parameters (PCN) - Secondary Education, Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Education - OCEM-2008 and the creation of the National School Library Plan - PNBE, there are still many difficulties today in relation to the formation of adolescent and youth readers. According to the professor, based on research carried out in postgraduate studies, this difficulty is not just about the lack of books:

In other words, the books arrive at school, but in the vast majority of cases there is no work to train readers or, previously, to train mediators. As a result of this situation (or a consequence of it), the collections are almost always unknown to teachers at the various levels of education. At primary level, there is still minimal use of these works in many schools (Pinheiro, 2020, p.131-132).

It is in this sense that we have included in this article a point of reflection on the approach to the literary text based on the contributions of comparative literature in order to highlight the valuable contribution that this reading approach can make to the reader by broadening their critical view of the dialog between different texts, whether in terms of language, support, genre, among other aspects.

This approach is based on a critical perspective that doesn't focus solely on canonical works, in other words, the established texts, legitimized by "universities, the cultural supplements of major newspapers, specialized magazines, textbooks, literary histories, etc., i.e. the so-called

'instances of legitimation'" (Abreu, 2006, p.40). On the contrary, it is based on a conception of literature as a "cultural and historical phenomenon and therefore subject to different definitions at different times and by different social groups" (Abreu, 2006, p. 41).

Abreu recalls, for example, that "the image one has of the author's place in culture is one of the elements that strongly affects the way in which his texts are read and his works are evaluated" (Abreu, 2006, p. 50). Novels that were not considered literature in the 19th century, today the literature teacher would like his student to read. As for texts that are considered less prestigious, there is little incentive to read them:

Nowadays, young people are encouraged to read old novels - precisely those that were so persecuted - while the reading of comic books or newsstand novels is condemned, using arguments very similar to those used to condemn the reading of novels. You shouldn't read comic books, because they keep young men and women away from serious reading; you shouldn't read Sabrina, because the plots stimulate the sentimental imagination [...] (Abreu, 2006, p.106).

Thus, the comparative methodological approach is based on changes ranging from the conception of literature not as something objective and universal, but something cultural and historical; the inclusion in planning and classes of less prestigious texts and authors, decentralizing the gaze from the canonical to the margins; respecting the specificities of each text, of each writing⁷ and not employing "erudite values to evaluate works of another nature" (Abreu, 2006, p.110).

Official documents guide school curricula to approach languages from the perspective of the subject's relationship with different cultural and artistic manifestations. The BNCC establishes that in secondary education the focus of the Languages and their Technologies area should be on

[...] in the expansion of autonomy, protagonism and authorship in the practices of different languages; in the identification and criticism of the different uses of languages, explaining their power in establishing relationships; in the appreciation and participation in various artistic and cultural manifestations; and in the creative use of various media (BRASIL, 2018, p.471).

As in this quote, several passages in the document emphasize the need for work that guarantees young people the role of protagonist in the critical identification of the practices of

⁷ In the text "Post-autonomous Literatures", Josefina Ludmer uses the term scriptures in reference to writings that "appear as literature, but cannot be read with literary criteria or categories such as author, work, style, writing, text and meaning."

different languages, pointing to the observation of the interactions that are established between them based on knowledge of the existing relationships.

These relationships are specified in the competences of the area of languages and their technologies for secondary education and include: the functioning aspects of the different languages and cultural practices (artistic, bodily and verbal); identity processes, conflicts and power relations that permeate the social practices of language; a (geo)political, historical, cultural, social, variable, heterogeneous and sensitive phenomenon to the contexts of use; processes of production and negotiation of meanings in bodily practices; the local, regional and global characteristics of the various artistic productions; language practices in the digital universe, considering the technical, critical, creative, ethical and aesthetic dimensions (BRASIL, 2018, p.490).

From this perspective, the teaching of literature comes to be thought of as a new place that enables a broad and diverse view of the text, language and literary construction, with the aim of "forming readers of literary works. Readers capable of placing themselves in front of the text, of establishing, even in a sometimes precarious way, a dialog with what is there based on their perceptions" (Pinheiro, 2020, p.86).

Based on this line of reasoning, the Paraíba High School Curriculum Proposal (2021) reaffirms the recommendation already present in the Paraíba Curriculum Referentials (2006)⁸ to change the approach to literature in high school from one centered on the chronology of period styles to "the development of a reading of literature that results in dialogues between students and texts that are not so distant in time from them and that also foster political and historical awareness about diversity and the strengthening of identities and rights" (PARAÍBA, 2020, p. 67).

It can be seen in the documents that the approach to languages, both in the BNCC and in the Paraíba Curriculum Guidelines and Proposal, is based on the guidelines and contributions of Bakhtin (1895-1975), based on the concept of dialogue as an interpretative key that makes it possible to interrelate the different languages (literature, music, theater, sculpture, painting and dance) and the different historical contexts.

According to Carvalhal (1986), the procedure adopted by Bakhtin is similar to the thinking of the formalist Tynianov, who belonged to the Moscow Linguistic Circle, because like Tynianov he escapes the "closed in the text" conceptions of the more orthodox formalists and rescues their links

⁸ The Paraíba Curriculum Guidelines (2006) propose that instead of starting literary studies in a chronological and linear way based on literary schools, we should start with contemporary authors and from literary genres (2006).

with history. The author includes Bakhtinian studies as comparative and cites as an example the study of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, whose aim is not to elucidate "how the work is made", but to situate it "within a typology of signifying systems in history" (Carvalho, 1986, p.49).

According to Carvalho (1986), the contributions of Tynianov's and Bakhtin's studies, as well as those of other scholars in the 20th century, led to significant changes in concepts such as originality, affiliation and hierarchy. One example is the notion of "intertextuality" formulated in 1969 by Julia Kristeva to designate the process of productivity of the literary text. Based on this concept, there was a change in the understanding of the relationship between texts, leading to a questioning of the concept of the influence of one text on others, in which there was a sense of debt owed by later texts to earlier ones.

Despite the advances in comparative studies, Carvalho points out in the very first chapter of her book that there is "[...] difficulty in reaching a consensus on the nature of comparative literature, its objectives and methods". In addition, for the author, the manuals present a great divergence of notions and methodological guidelines (Carvalho, 2006, p. 6-7).

According to the author, "it is gradually becoming clearer that comparative literature cannot be understood simply as a synonym for 'comparison'". She states that "comparison, even in comparative studies, is a means, not an end" (Carvalho, 1986, p. 7).

In this sense, we have used a comparative approach in this work, seeking to explore the dialog between the short story and the *graphic novel* by identifying points of thematic, linguistic and cultural tension, without overpowering one language in relation to the other, but respecting the specificities of each. In addition, we intend to show the potential of the language of comics in the adaptation⁹ of the short story by João Guimaraens Rosa.

⁹ We are using the term adaptation based on Linda Hutcheon's conception in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2011). She defines the work of adaptation as: "Stories are not immutable; on the contrary, they also evolve through adaptation over the years. In some cases, as with biological adaptation, cultural adaptation leads to a migration to more favorable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and media. In short, stories both adapt and are adapted (Hutcheon, 2011, p.53).

4. The BEING-so between margins, colors and lines: constructions of character and space in the graphic novel

The Third Bank of the River is undoubtedly one of João Guimarães Rosa's most studied short stories.¹⁰ There are many perspectives on the reading of this short story. Several develop comparative approaches, some with other texts by Guimarães Rosa and others explore the dialog between the short story and literary texts by other authors.¹¹

With regard to the comparison between the short story and the comic book of the same name, we intend to analyze aspects that reveal the aesthetic beauty of Rose's poetic prose, which, with the reinvention promoted by the adaptation selected in this article, are treated in different ways, but without losing their aesthetic force.

The adaptation of *A terceira margem do rio* into the graphic novel format¹² (2013), published by Ediouro and featuring a script by Maria Helena Rouanet and art by Thaís dos Anjos, begins with a brief presentation of the story's plot, situating its inclusion in the collection "Primeiras histórias" by João Guimarães Rosa (2005). In this invitation to read, written by Alberto da Costa e Silva, there is an indication of the inter-media dialog that the narrative allows: the film of the same name, directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos (1994) and the song, also of the same name, by Caetano Veloso, which was the soundtrack for the film.

In this sense, adapting a work into another format presupposes various motivations, including greater visibility for the traditional text and targeting different audiences. In the field of comics, a number of literary classics have been adapted, such as the present work, which bears the label "Great classics in graphic novel" and which, as part of the PNBE collection, reaches the libraries of the public school system, aimed at high school students.

Thus, we can say that there is an intrinsic and strict relationship between comics and the formation of readers, given that it is one of the first textual genres that readers come into contact

¹⁰ As an example, we can mention the number of studies in the Annals of the Guimaraens Rosa International Seminar, held in Belo Horizonte at PucMinas (2000). Of the 140 essays, 10 are on "The Third Bank of the River".

¹¹ Most of these studies undertake a thematic investigation. For example, the articles "The question of identity in "The mirror" and "The third bank of the river": identification and individuation, by Annette Ursula-Menouar; *Between margins* - Guimarães Rosa and Mia Couto, the possible encounter, by Cláudia Márcia Vasconcelos da Rocha.

¹² Aware that there are various discussions about the conceptualization and translation of the term graphic novel or graphic novel and the other meanings that this expression denotes, we have opted to keep the *graphic novel* nomenclature throughout the work, given the presence of this expression on the catalog card of the work, by choice of the authors.

with in childhood. Comics such as "Monica's Gang", "Hagar the Terrible", "Calvin and Harold" and many others make up the social imaginary in this formative process, denoting the relevance of the genre for building effective readers. Its choice is based above all on its possibilities for articulating verbal, non-verbal and verbal-visual texts, promoting a series of reading skills that find in the hypergenre (Ramos, 2019) a fruitful space for constructing meaning.

In literary studies, when placed in a dialogical perspective with the text, comics have a highly relevant effect, given that

the interconnection between text and image in comics broadens the understanding of concepts in a way that any one code alone would have difficulty achieving to the extent that this text/image interconnection occurs in comics with its own complementary dynamic, it represents much more than the simple addition of one language to another - as happens in illustrated books, for example of a new level of communication, which broadens the possibility of students understanding the syllabus (Vergueiro, 2020, p. 23).

By stating that comics have their own dynamic, we confirm Vergueiro's (2020) view that it goes beyond a simple addition or transposition of languages, because, as Ramos (2019) states, comics have built their own autonomous language, even though they have dialogues with cinema, theater, literature and other artistic expressions. Thus, we point out that, by constituting themselves as a hyperfield, comics do not become an easy way of reading or even replacing the original work, as is sometimes thought. A game of possibilities opens up with each reading, by mobilizing the elements of comic book language to interpret the representations constructed and evoked by it.

In this way, we've tried to provide a brief reading of two fundamental elements in the construction of the narrative: character (being) and space (backlands crossed by the river and the land), understanding certain movements that are responsible for adding more expansive dimensions to Rose's tale. The use of colors, the recurrence to rustic features in the composition of spaces and characters from different framings culminate in an aesthetic, poetic, sensitive and ontological work. Right from the cover, we can already see some of these aspects:

Figure 1: Cover of the *graphic novel*



Source: ROUANET, Maria Helena; ANJOS, Thais dos. *A terceira Margem do Rio em graphic novel* (2012).

From the imagery on the cover, we can see some elements that will recur throughout the comic, such as the use of two main colors: blue and ochre, in different shades, evoking representations of water and the backlands. The technique used to color the images is watercolor, which consists of diluting the paints in contact with water; in a way, we can say that the adoption of this resource has a direct impact on the aesthetic composition and, consequently, on the narrative construction, in view of the meanings established based on the symbolism of the river, as we will go into a little more detail later.

In fig. 1, we also see the presence of predominantly circular lines, promoting the idea of water movement, while the character, whose feet are the only ones represented, remains static. In this sense, the cover already hints, in dialog with the short story, that the graphic narrative will make use of elements common to literary texts, such as the presence of the static in the construction of displacements that are not necessarily physical, but symbolic and subjective. From the features, we can deduce that the character on the cover is the son, in the short story, the narrator-character, as we follow his journey to maturity throughout the plot.

At other times, these demarcation lines follow other paths and look more like graphics. In the top left-hand corner, below the ochre coloring, we see "river" scrawled; in the bottom right-hand

corner, just above the word "river", the word "below". We therefore draw attention to the relevance of taking a critical look at comic strips, understanding their structure more precisely, taking into account the arrangement of elements and the constitution of their languages. It is no coincidence that the words "river" and "below" appear on the cover of the book, as they become recurring words throughout the plot.

On the first page of the comic, we see some important elements for the construction of the character and the space:

Figure 2: First page of the comic



Source: ROUANET, Maria Helena; ANJOS, Thais dos. *A terceira Margem do Rio em graphic novel* (2012), p. 11.

In the construction of the two vignettes¹³ we see that the father is portrayed alone on the left, while the mother and children are portrayed collectively on the right. This arrangement already points to the duality that is presented as a somewhat dichotomous element in the plot: the presence of masculinity and femininity, represented by the father and mother. Throughout the narrative, with the exception of a single passage, the captions¹⁴ are placed just like the literary text. At first glance,

¹³ "The comic or vignette is the representation, by means of a fixed image, of a specific instant in an interconnected sequence of instants, which are essential for understanding a particular action or event" (Vergueiro, 2020, p. 35).

¹⁴ "For Eguti (2001), it would be the narration of someone external to the action in which either they open "the narrator is omniscient and the verbs are presented in the third person close" we argue that it is not only the omniscient narrator

it may seem that this feature brings the comic closer to the illustrated book, but the images are constructed in such a way as to extend and enhance the meanings of the written word, going beyond an accessory or illustrative term.

In this construction of the initial scene, the father walks towards the door, tracing a movement to leave, while the mother is already in a static position, next to the stove, making it possible to read the layout of the external and internal space associated, respectively, with the masculine and feminine. In addition, the representation of the space of the house and other environments above the vignettes is an important graphic resource, as there is no frame, denoting an idea that the space also acts as a character, given the symbolic representations evoked later by the river.

Throughout most of the narrative, the space of the gutters¹⁵, which is traditionally represented in white or another solid color, is permeated by elements of the space itself, as if it were entering and standing out from the comic structure itself. We also notice that these initial scenes are arranged on a kind of old paper, which seems to blend in with the narrative itself, in a memorialistic tone.

As the plot progresses, just as in the story, the father orders a canoe and says goodbye to his family. At this point, the comic constructs the following scene:

Figure 3: *Close-up of the mother's face*



Source: ROUANET, Maria Helena; ANJOS, Thais dos. *A terceira Margem do Rio em graphic novel* (2012), p. 14.

who has the right to use the subtitle of the point the narrator and finally character can also appropriate the resource. It is common in some stories for the character's face to appear, in order to identify them as the narrator of that passage, usually by mentioning the fact in the past (or flashback)" (Ramos, 2019, p.43).

¹⁵ The empty space between one vignette and another "generates different levels of inference on the part of the reader. The reader articulates visual cohesive elements sociocognitively between one vignette and another" (Ramos, 2019, p. 148).

From a *close-up*¹⁶, we can see a complex and rich construction of the image of the female character's face. There is a strong presence of expression lines, hair in a stronger shade of black, closed eyes and a great recurrence of the color ochre, in different earthy tones. In this sense, we emphasize that "the face, of course, also gives meaning to the written word. Its gestures are more subtle than those of the body, but more readily understood" (Eisner, 2010, p. 114). In this scene, we also see the first use of the speech bubble: "You go, you stay, you never come back!" This is the only moment when there is a *closeup* of the mother's face, which not coincidentally is when her speech is delivered, including verbs in the imperative, as if it were a kind of ultimatum to the male figure. Thus, we understand that "the dizzying change of planes, of point of view (focus) and the search for unusual forms energize the story and attract the reader. The dynamism of each image, already so great, grows in the sequence" (Cagnin, 1975, p. 110).

When using colors to build the female character, we notice, as mentioned, a recurrence of earthy tones, which can be read as a strong expression of the predominant hue in the sertão, but there are also recurrences of blue tones in the aesthetics of some characters, such as in the mother's cap and the son's clothes. In this way, a reading can be made of the ways in which the illustrator chose to arrange the blue and ochre colors throughout the work. Waters are commonly expected to have a bluish hue and traditionally there is a mythical construction that associates waters with feminine mysticism, in addition to the color itself:

According to ancient tradition, blue symbolized the feminine principle. Blue is placid, passive, introverted; in symbolism it belongs to water, which is also a feminine attribute [...]. Blue as a feminine color was of fundamental importance in ancient painting, as it was the symbolic color of the Virgin Mary, the most prominent woman in Christianity. Mary was the most painted figure of the Christian trinity. Blue is her color (Heller, 2013, p. 64).

However, in the construction of the female character, the predominance of earthy tones places her in a movement that displaces the representations evoked by the color blue. In the scenes in which the river appears, we see a kind of inversion, as the waters now become a strong representative symbol of the male figure, while the land and the sertão outline the features of the female character. Furthermore, the river is represented in ochre and its earthy tones or even in black, and almost never in blue, with the exception of the father's movement towards the center:

¹⁶ "It limits the space around part of a human figure or a particular object" (Vergueiro, 2020, p. 42).

Figure 4: River in earthy tones



Source: ROUANET, Maria Helena; ANJOS, Thais dos. *A terceira Margem do Rio em graphic novel* (2012), p. 32.

Once again, we see the relevance of the watercolor technique in materializing the meanings of the image and, consequently, the plot. The earthy tones seem to merge with the banks of the river, which in turn are constructed from a web of lines, almost entirely vertical and parallel, in a kind of tangle, representing the forces and irregularities of nature itself. There are no kinetic lines in the river, indicating that the movement is promoted by the canoe, which, as it makes its way through the sertão-river, reveals a timid blue that will soon be covered again by ochre.

Thus, we argue that, although the river is a strong exponent in both the original work and the *graphic novel*, the sertão stands out on the pages of the comic, becoming almost an entity, not restricted to the natural environment, but above all permeating the characters, who are constructed by the experiences and movements of this space. From this perspective, then, the Ser-tão is a space of possibilities and potential, which promotes reflections of a philosophical, existential and ontological nature, while becoming becomes an effective element of (re)creations of self and other, so that it is inseparable to conceive of the character outside the construction of spaces, because the space itself also becomes a character.

Throughout the plot, as in the short story, the father remains static in the river, seemingly ignoring all requests to return. Almost always, the character is depicted in a bent posture, with a greater intensity of demarcating features, his face obscured by shadows and firm gestures. In the last moments of the narrative, when the son cries out for his father to return, willing to replace him

in the mysterious undertaking, the aesthetic construction of the scene brings us back to a pertinent question in the context, once again, of the relationship between colors and the presence of the sertão:

Figure 5: Father's return



Source: ROUANET, Maria Helena; ANJOS, Thais dos. *A terceira Margem do Rio em graphic novel* (2012), p. 57.

Throughout his childhood and into adulthood, the son is constructed as a character who is totally available to his father, from taking his food and clothes and leaving them on the riverbank, to clamoring for his return several times. In his aesthetic construction, he has always been represented as having white skin and blue clothes. He is the only character whose skin tone is not colored, while all the others have the earthy tones of the sertão.

However, when he reaches old age and loneliness, in his last attempt to convince his father to return, the character is invaded by an ochre hue and his skin, which used to be composed only of black features, is now permeated by an earthy tone and the blue, which used to be so present, becomes softer and softer. We can understand this process as a strong symbol of the power exerted by space and the movements undertaken by the characters in relation to their father, who, although static, mobilizes the narrative in different ways.

In his last meeting with his son, we notice that, unlike in fig. 4, where the movement of the canoe reveals the blue of the river, now the movement is not capable of showing anything other

than the hinterland that has invaded the sea. The mixture of the elements of water and earth are reflected in the construction of this character, who now experiences, through fear and the unknown, the forces exerted by the mother-earth, in a recovery of the feminine maternal figure.

The *close-up* focuses on the eyes in the same scene, but at different times, highlighting the dynamism of the frame. According to Umberto Eco (2006):

In terms of framing, the comic is clearly indebted to cinema for all its possibilities and all its turns. But in terms of editing, the discourse would be more complex if we took a closer look at the aspect, already mentioned, that comics, unlike cinema, create a *continuum* thanks to the juxtaposition of static elements (Eco, 2006, p. 147).

In this sense, we realize that the juxtaposition of static elements, in this case the same graphic representation of the face in *close-up*, manages to produce the senses of movement and continuity, as Eco (2006) points out. In the first vignette, the character's eyes reveal an expression of surprise and/or fear, perceived by the arched eyebrows and more open eyes, as well as the contraction of the pupil, which usually occurs in the presence of too much light. The strong presence of black to the detriment of blue could have several meanings, including a kind of reflection of the shadows of the father who was now coming to meet him. In the second vignette, the expression reveals disappointment, as there is a relaxation of the eyelids, as well as the absence of black and the predominance of white in the eyes and an entirely blue pupil, as if her gaze were no longer focused on her father, but on the horizon or even on emptiness.

As in the short story, the graphic narrative ends with the character fleeing from the man who, in theory, would be his father, but who has caused him a series of fears and misgivings. There is the return to the family home, and the coexistence with the eternal weight of guilt for fear of the unknown and a possibility of reading that culminates in an image of the river-sertão entirely in earthy tones and filled with a tangle of lines, adding a turbulent atmosphere to this space that, during the narrative, had been the scene of a strong representation of the static: "And, me, down the river, out the river, in the river - the river" (Rosa, 2005, p. 82). The son, therefore, brings with him the (im)possibilities of his relationship with the space-river-sertão and expands himself as a subject.

Final considerations

The paper started by reflecting on the formation of readers in basic education, confirming the importance of the school's role in encourage students to read literature. It was also pointed out that this is a challenge task, especially in high school, due to the presence of practices focused on the study of period styles, even though, as we have shown, official documents such as the BNCC and the Paraíba curriculum references already guide other methodologies for approaching the literary text in the classroom.

Among these methodologies, we highlight the comparative approach, based on dialog between different languages, media and cultures. In this sense, we proposed a comparative analysis between the canonical text "The Third Bank of the River", by João Guimarães Rosa, and the *graphic novel* adaptation of the same name, with a script by Maria Helena Rouanet and art by Thaís dos Anjos. The comic was chosen mainly because it is a little-known text, although it is part of the collection of the National School Library Program (PNBE), sent in 2013 to public high schools.

Reflecting on the approach to the canonical literary text through dialogue with the contemporary language of comics proved that the dialog between different artistic languages, short stories and comics, provides a powerful and thought-provoking way of reading. We thus realized that the mishmash of written and visual text promotes a space for the construction of multiple meanings that add various other nuances to João Guimarães Rosa's short story, enhanced by the imagery, which is also poetic in the comic's composition.

Finally, we would like to point out that the colors and the use of certain techniques have an impact not only on the mode of production, but mainly on the final result of the work, which, in a comparative dialogue, is not superior or inferior to the classic text, but appears as another one, among many possible readings.

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