

Fantastic literature written by women in Brazil: “Mãe Natureza”, by Natércia Campos de Saboya /

Literatura fantástica de autoria feminina no Brasil: “Mãe Natureza”, de Natércia Campos de Saboya

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ABSTRACT

Through the paths of the fantastic, this article aims to analyze the short story “Mãe Natureza”, by Natércia Campos de Saboya, in *Iluminuras* (1988). Circumscribed in a literary niche in the northeast of Brazil, the writer from Ceará is subject to a context of erasure and oblivion on the horizon of contemporary criticism, even though she stands out in prose, especially in fantastic literature, with narratives full of unusual manifestations that provoke a transgression of reality. Based on theoretical conditions that confirm the aesthetic effectiveness of the fantastic in her short stories, it was possible to investigate how this analytical category is represented in the author's fiction, which is intrinsically linked to cultural traditions, popular knowledge, the legends and myths of the Northeast and the stories borne out of the value of orality and generational transmission. In the story under investigation, the daily working life of the characters, the grandfather and the boy, is transformed by the telling of stories from the forest, which conjure up folkloric and legendary mysteries typical of nature and the world of superstition. With the patterns of day-to-day life and the human types that come from simple customs, there is a fictional journey that leads to magic based on a habitual world governed by the belief in secret beings and events.

KEYWORDS: Fantastic literature written by women; Fantastic literature; Illuminations; Natércia Campos de Saboya.

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RESUMO

Pelas veredas do fantástico, este artigo objetiva analisar o conto “Mãe Natureza”, presente na obra Iluminuras (1988), de Natércia Campos de Saboya. Circunscrita em um nicho literário nordestino, a escritora cearense é tributária de um contexto de apagamento e esquecimento no horizonte da crítica contemporânea, mesmo se destacando na prosa, principalmente na literatura fantástica, com narrativas eivadas por manifestações insólitas que provocam uma transgressão da realidade. Com base em condicionantes teóricos que confirmam a eficácia estética do fantástico em sua contística, foi possível investigar como essa categoria analítica é representada na ficção da autora, que se mostra intrinsecamente vinculada às tradições culturais, aos saberes populares, às lendas e mitos do Nordeste e às histórias frutificadas pelo valor da oralidade e da transmissão geracional. No conto investigado, o cotidiano laboral das personagens, o avô e o menino, é transformado pela contação de histórias da mata, que arquitetam mistérios folclóricos e lendários próprios da natureza e do universo das superstições. Com as estampas do dia a dia e tipos humanos carregados de simples costumes, tem-se um percurso ficcional que leva à magia sedimentada em um mundo habitual regido pela crença de seres e acontecimentos secretos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Literatura de autoria feminina; Literatura fantástica; Iluminuras; Natércia Campos de Saboya.*

1 Introduction

“Eu, mal sabendo manejar a pena, / Confiava ao papel meus pensamentos, / Que, como um crime, a todos ocultava!” (Brandão, 1853, p. 3)¹. With these stanzas, the poet from Minas Gerais (in Brazil), Beatriz Francisca de Assis Brandão, points out about the challenges faced by women writers in the 19th century, in a world whose female right to exercise some intellectual or cultural activity has been historically violated or denied. It took, however, another centenary for the literary space in Brazil to have more gender representation, indicating the echo of sexism that runs through the history of national literature, in which men have always occupied a prominent role.

Over time, women writers have been hosting artistic places and have established themselves in the Brazilian literary canon, such as Rachel de Queiroz, Clarice Lispector, Cecília Meireles, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Adélia Prado, Hilda Hilst, Néida Piñon, among others. This panorama also obtained identity and Afro-Brazilian cutouts, either by the harshness of life impregnated in the narrative of Carolina Maria de Jesus, or, in contemporary times, through the *escrevivências* (writing-living) that grant the history of black women in the plots of Conceição Evaristo. From this context, invisibilities, forgetfulness and erasures of authors who, due to peripheral or regional ideas, were outlined, with a literature active in the extremities of the country, they cultivated cultural, imaginary and folkloric

¹ The free translation was not possible in some passages, especially in literary ones, to avoid modifying the aesthetic or poetic sense of the text.

manifestations of the people in their aesthetic project, as is the case of the writer from Ceará who focuses on this article: Natércia Campos de Saboya (1938-2004).

Circumscribed in a northeastern literary niche, she traverses the novel, short story, essay and report, authenticating an intellectual place that, although it has gone through silencing on the horizon of contemporary criticism, earned him national views: in 1999, the Award Osmundo Pontes de Literatura, for your novel *A Casa* (1999), and, the following year, the award at the 4^a Bienal Nestlé de Literatura Brasileira, by the book of short stories *Iluminuras* (1988). Not surprisingly, her storytelling sets her apart: to the extent that the country's fantastic fiction took slow steps in the second half of the 20th century, including male representations, as Murilo Rubião, Saboya is an important figure in the so-called literature written by women, whose narratives deal with the fantastic, the marvelous, the folkloric, the haunted, the mythical and the religious. These themes are adopted under a prism that is dear to modernity: with the means of technology shaping the way individuals perceive themselves in the world, exploring the imaginary and cultural traditions of the people singularizes the writer's fiction.

The aesthetic result of the predominance of the fantastic in the short stories in *Iluminuras* permeates the objective of this article: to analyze the fantastic in the narrative “Mãe Natureza”, in connection with characters, narrators, space, action, plot and time, leading to values and beliefs that demarcate socio-cultural axes. With the patterns of everyday life, human types full of customs, oral tradition and popular knowledge, there is a fictional path that leads to magic based on fantastic literature. Although the text does not fit peacefully into the defining presuppositions of the fantastic, a transversal reading is appropriate here, with the aim of interpreting a world full of mysteries that, in search of answers, has a dawn of deciphering in the realm of aesthetics.

2 Literature written by women: the fantastic in Natércia Campos de Saboya

At the height of the second half of the 20th century, feminism was resonating in intellectual debates and in the way modern society was perceiving the world, the literary tradition turned to an important rescue: literature written by women. We looked at ideological paradigms that have eclipsed and erased women's writing, questioning historically based patriarchal culture and values, as well as revising a canon that has predominantly demarcated as masterpieces those made by Western, white,

middle- and upper-class men. On this horizon, two aspects came into play: women began to criticize, as well as having their productions featured in artistic spaces, breaking down conventions and valuing their work and aesthetics.

As you say Lúcia Osana Zolin, in “Literatura de autoria feminina”, critical feminism, while recovering works by women, revises categories of literary criticism and expands the vision of artistic particularities, previously not highlighted by the male point of view, as well as reflecting on a *status quo*. The impetus provided by the cultural revolution of the 1960s led Brazilian literature to add “other voices”, in a change of mentality, from the social world to aesthetics, which reveals the condition of women, with narratives that reveal a (self)consciousness in different times and places (Zolin, 2005).

Among the revisions of concepts that emerged from sex and gender relations, especially in the feminist theoretical debates in the French and Anglo-American strands, whose core became to reflect on the misogyny of masculine practices in literature, literary research by female authors was strengthened, in the light of discourses that think about this “subject of feminism”. Thus, academic initiatives have been created with a multicultural approach to the study of this subject, combating the exclusion or silencing of aesthetic, social and historical voices and discourses (Zolin, 2005). The result is a double achievement in fiction: “the conquest of identity and the conquest of writing” (Schmidt, 1995, p. 187, our translation), that is, the progress of a feminine form of self-approach in literature, guided by a discourse that announces gender representativeness and, at the same time, imposes a new way of approaching critical thought, reinterpreting its forced muteness.

In this context, although some women writers have had opportunities in the arts, others, especially those who come from other parts of the country, continue to receive little or no attention, reinforcing the need for tireless work to legitimize narratives. Tributary to this context of erasure is the writer from Ceará Natércia Campos de Saboya. Daughter of the Brazilian short story writer Moreira Campos, your first narrative, “A Escada” (1978), won first place in the short story category of the Prêmio do Banco Sudameris. But 10 years later, his reputation in this genre was reinforced with the publication of *Iluminuras*, which has at its core the tones of the fantastic and the marvelous, combined with a sensitive treatment of everyday occurrences and the relationships between the characters. Bringing together folklore, beliefs and myths, the narratives explore an imaginary rooted in popular traditions, making aesthetics an instrument of communication with cultural representations of society.

It's no coincidence that the characters featured are old, like symbols of popular wisdom that spans generations. This is the case in “O Pagão”, that cultivates the knowledge and practices of *rezadeiras*: “Terminara por habituar-se aos pedidos, feitos à altas horas da noite, para ela ir rezar em crianças atravessadas, que não nasciam, benzer e ajudar a morrer em paz os doentes de mal incurável” (Saboya, 1988, p. 14). This generational focus also accompanies the story “O rio”, whose driving force lies in the transmission of a belief by an old Indian, telling twin brothers about the mysticism of the river world, especially about the myth da *Boiúna*: “O velho dissera-lhe que irmãos gêmeos nem perdiam-se nos caminhos, nem morriam afogados. E o retardado havia sido atraído pela boiúna, a mãe do rio (...)” (Saboya, 1988, p. 35).

In “Crisálida”, it is in the relationship between the grandmother and her granddaughter that aspects of popular faith and belief are explored: “Nessa noite, a avó rezou aflita, amedrontada, com o que se avizinhava das suas vidas. Procurou lembrar-se dos ensinamentos de sua mãe. Ela lhe falara das doenças vindas no ar-de-vento (...)” (Saboya, 1988, p. 84-85). Furthermore, the narrative “*Illuminuras*”, which gives the work its title, has older characters who act on the slopes of the supernatural, exalting the telluric force of the superhuman and religiosity: “A velha dissera que aquilo nele era encosto. Estava possuído pelo Maligno. Falaram que ela profanava a Igreja, afirmando essas coisas” (Saboya, 1988, p. 21).

In all, there are 15 short stories which, as writer Hélio Pólvora points out in the book's cover, are located on the edge of the fantastic and the marvelous, “nos símbolos de uma imagística sedutora, as histórias curtas de *Illuminuras* são vinhetas apostas ao Livro da Vida” (Pólvora, 1988). This is what researcher Margarida Pontes Timbó also reinforces, by emphasizing the research and intellectual work that falls on the aesthetics of Saboya:

We can say that the stories written by Natércia Campos did not arise from mere fantasy; there is always an attempt at reinvention, a work of reading and research, consultation and notes, rewriting and countless corrections. Through contact with the writer's drafts, manuscripts and research, we can see how much she drew on cultural material, stories and legends from the folklore of the Brazilian Northeast, sometimes recreating them, sometimes adapting them through her imagination (Timbó, 2011, p. 59-60, our translation).

The narratives have the cultural and folkloric force of the northeastern material experienced and researched by the writer, as she reinforces Timbó. For this reason, his work is dedicated to Luis da Câmara

Cascudo, whom the author has always admired. João Soares Neto (2006, p. 242, our translation), bringing together unpublished excerpts by Saboya, highlights what she says about the folklorist: “Through his books, i delved into the customs, popular traditions, fables, *cantigas*, *acalantos*, hauntings, games, round dances (the millennial *ciranda*), handicrafts, superstitions of ancient cultures that preceded us and those that colonized us”. It is clear, therefore, that Saboya was influenced by Câmara Cascudo, and with this, she produced fictional texts that traveled through the cultural magic of a fantastic based on superstitions, legends and myths present in society.

To a large extent, this aspect, which links her narratives to the sources of culture and the human imagination, sets her apart. When mention is made of fantastic literature written by Brazilian women, especially in the second half of the 20th century, it is up to names like Lygia Fagundes Telles and Clarice Lispector to represent this category of fiction. In fact, in a broader context, even though Latin American literature has a diversity of female writers dedicated to exploring literary territories guided by the varied strands of the fictional unusual, in Brazil this had its creative limitations in the last century. Therefore, Saboya soon became a writer whose book is essentially applied to the fortresses of worlds that go beyond the normality of everyday life and feed on popular wisdom and culture to increase the enchantment that is the fantastic. It can be seen that it turns to a fantastic Latin American, as pointed out by the Brazilian researcher Iaranda Jurema Ferreira Barbosa:

(...) in Latin America, the Fantastic found its home in the diversity of oral stories transmitted by peoples who resisted genocide, torture and kidnapping. Linguistic, religious and cultural coexistence fostered the fusion and dissemination of legends and mythological characters from both indigenous and foreign peoples (enslavers and enslaved) (Barbosa, 2020, p. 5, our translation).

While he promotes the presence of the fantastic in fiction, his work has been forgotten in literary criticism over the last few decades. In a brief search on the internet, few works have currently been dedicated to studying their narratives. This begs the question: what justifies the erasure of Natércia Campos de Saboya? Although it's not easy to answer this question, it may be important to assume one thing: If issues of gender and literature, in other words, women in literary writing, have taken a long time to be addressed by Brazilian critics, one cannot be naïve enough to understand that, from the regional extremities of this country, the space of the female figure in literature has become more complicated, especially with such cultural and specific themes, in the latter case, one could say, with a

fantastic allied to the tones of folklore in the Northeast of Brazil. However, albeit belatedly, it's time to give back a place: Natércia Campos de Saboya is one of the main representatives of fantastic literature written by women in Brazil.

3 “Mãe Natureza”, by Natércia Campos de Saboya

As it is often presented in the narratives of *Iluminuras*, in “Mãe Natureza”, the presence of an old man guides the plot along with the relationship with his grandson. In short, the story begins by revealing the story behind the two characters: the boy was abandoned by his father and witnessed his mother's death, leaving with his grandfather for the “sertão afastado, onde o sol crestava terra e vidas” (Saboya, 1988, p. 52). Working together, the child learns about nature, the secrets, the struggles and the tricks of the soil. As the holder of popular wisdom, the old man tells the folkloric mysteries of the “pai-da-mata”, as well as the enigmas that surround the savannahs in the solitude of the night. Finally, time passes, and with it the childhood of that boy, who one night hears with surprise the song of the “mãe-da-lua” coming from the woods (Saboya, 1988, p. 52-58).

As the reader enters the narrative, individual stories and feelings are explored, accompanied by knowledge of the ecosystem that surrounds that green world:

O velho notava a tristeza na alma do neto, e isto causava-lhe um aperto no coração. Foi só com o tempo que o menino melhorou a expressão de desamparo. No entanto, nunca mais conseguiu pronunciar sequer uma palavra. O avô recorrera a rezas, mezinhas e até água de chocalho dera-lhe para beber, mas por fim resignou-se, passando a entendê-lo pelos seus momentos. Trocavam gestos, sinais e se compreendiam. Aprendera a conhecer, pelo brilho dos seus olhos, como o neto gostava de ouvir histórias e de aprender as magias da natureza. O avô contava-lhe os enredos e casos quando o dia terminava, nas viagens por dentro da caatinga ou no caminho da feira. Era estranho ouvir aquele homem velho a falar como se estivesse sozinho. (...)

O neto também aprendera a conhecer sinais de inverno e de seca. Quando o João-de-barro construía a casinha com a abertura para o poente, era certo que ia haver chuva boa, copiosa. Florando o juazeiro no começo do ano era também um bom prenúncio de internada, assim como o sinal no carreiro-de-santiago, o caminho sacrossanto do céu. Aparecendo no final de dezembro, com manchas pálidas e indecisas, seria fraco no inverno. A seca acontecia quando os teiús emagreciam, as formigas-de-roça abriam imensos formigueiros, e os ventos sopravam vindos de toda a parte com certa fúria (Saboya, 1988, p. 53-54).

The story highlights the reason for the boy's unhappiness: his mother's death. With this, the grandfather resorts to popular knowledge to reverse his grandson's sadness: prayers, *mezinhas* and rattle water. It is known that this practice alludes directly to the folk medicine of northeastern Brazil, whose superstitions and beliefs, passed down from generation to generation, rely on practices of prayer and the use of organic and inorganic products that explore the science of the people, pointing to cultural, therapeutic and folkloric techniques. This way of looking at the world of healing, through beliefs, is typical of the elderly, who preserve customs and practices as material for collective memory and symbolic, identity and spiritual knowledge.

It is important to remember that the development of these healing practices and beliefs in Brazil “dates back to the colonial period, when a type of syncretic religiosity was formed, stemming from the mixture of beliefs of African, Portuguese (colonizers) and indigenous peoples” (Lima, 2020, p. 44, our translation). In this context, knowledge of the natural and mystical universe is consolidated, laden with rituals that seek, above all, to illuminate people's beliefs through sacred mechanisms, which are coated with symbolic and cultural values that are perpetuated over time. It's no coincidence that the elders are the intermediaries of this popular and historical culture, which mixes elements of ancestral wisdom, crossing the individual's ways of being and believing with their values.

Knowledge passes through the wisdom of transmission and, in the narrative, the grandfather becomes the person who tells the stories of nature. It is the reinforcement of a knowledge of time and experience, as well as having memory as an aspect intrinsically related to this exercise, after all, telling a story is a mnemonic practice. It is worth mentioning that, as Maurice Halbwachs, in *A memória coletiva*, when memories are shared, it is difficult to forget the stories; the activity of sharing orchestrates collective memory and highlights the power of testimonies in an almost magical recomposition of knowledge (Halbwachs, 2006). In this record, the oral tradition also resonates, evidenced by the old man's task of reporting, on trips into the *caatinga* or on the trail to the fair, the imagery of where live. *Exempli gratia*, the belief involving the *joão-de-barro* bird, which in the narrative announces the arrival of rain by nesting towards the west; and the *juazeiro* tree, which foreshadows a good winter in the region.

In this transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next, one can see the marks of the permanence of an oral tradition, which certifies testimonies and experiences lived by those who

narrate and those who listen to them. In the narrative, this support for the transfer of knowledge is evident and proposes a dialog with the reflection of Walter Benjamin, in essay “The narrator – Considerations on the work of Nikolai Leskov”, in which he points out that this practice is on its way to extinction, along with the figure of the narrator: “it’s as if we were deprived of a faculty that seemed secure and inalienable to us: the faculty to exchange experiences” (Benjamin, 1984, p. 198, our translation). The heart of this art, the experience of narrating, is said to be ending or declining because of modernity. Thus, the emergence of the novel, based on the materiality of the book and which neither comes from the oral tradition nor feeds it, and the new information vehicles, with unprecedented forms of communication, are responsible for this decline of the narrator. The preservation of the oral tradition is essential to avoid the fading away of those who are among the masters and sages, who “assimilate into their innermost substance what they know by hearsay” (Benjamin, 1984, p. 221, our translation).

In the narrative “Mãe Natureza”, the orality that recovers stories of the grandfather, wise in the secrets of the place where he lives, and who transfers his knowledge to his grandson, is reconfigured based on a rememorative procedure that combines experience, knowledge, memory and tradition, as Benjamin says. These aspects are unique when thinking about the narratives of the writer Natércia Campos, since her texts have cultural elements and value interpersonal relationships, despite the world being increasingly fragmented and individualized; despite the socio-economic condition that slips into human types and proposes reflections on social inequalities: “O menino aprendera com o avô a arte de fazer com destreza estas armadilhas. Os dois trabalhavam juntos, acorados, ligando com cipós os paus longos e curtos” (Saboya, 1988, p. 54). Above all, there is richness in the teachings and in the nurturing of an identity that ensures beliefs and the imaginary, which walks through the spaces of the fantastic:

Acendeu a lamparina de querosene, acomodou-se no banco, e o menino, atento, esperava na rede as histórias que viriam. O avô contou-lhe sobre o “pai-da-mata”, que vivia dentro dos cerrados, defendendo a caça nas solidões noturnas. Ele cavalgava um porco-do-mato, numa carreira desesperada, empenhando uma vara de ferrão. Fazia então infinitas diabruras, surrava os cachorros, afugentava os caçadores e por fim embrenhava-se nas matas. Levava assim uma vida solitária e errante povoando as horas escuras com seus assobios agudos e longos. Disse também ao neto que evitava assobios de noite, pois assim ele estaria arriscando-se a chamar cobra. Nunca que ele errasse o golpe, ao se atrever a matar uma cobra, pois ela, ficando machucada, esperaria meses, anos, na sua tocaia, até conseguir dar o bote vingativo e mortal. Contou a história de que o menino mais gostava, começando devagarinho a dizer: “Da trovoada sai a chuva, sai o vento,

sai a pedra”. “Acontece sempre nas noites de muitos trovões, raios lampejando a escuridão, e quando a chuva se despeja forte. Cai dos espaços disparada pelo trovão a pedra-de-corisco que é roliça e preta. Aprofunda-se no chão sete metros e leva sete anos para desaparecer. Uma dessas pedras atingiu uma árvore, fendendo-lhe o imenso tronco, enterrando-se nas entranhas das raízes. É sempre nas noites de tempestade, com trovoadas e coriscos, que a pedra ressurgia na terra, faiscando fogo, como se o raio a quisesse de volta” (Saboya, 1988, p.55-56).

In the story, the reference to the legend of the “Pai-da-mata” endorses the character of an oral tradition narrative and, above all, the fantastic nature of the plot. As Câmara Cascudo says, this folkloric figure from the Northeast of Brazil, in the customs of the Alagoas region, “is a huge animal, taller than all the sticks in the forest, with huge hair, 10-meter nails, horse ears” (Cascudo, 2000, p. 659, our translation), with a roar that rumbles through the forest, that swallows people, and neither knife nor bullet can kill him. His characteristic, often referred to as ugly and with big hair, is used in popular maternal daily life as an endorsement of his children's appearance of poor care. What's more: for some, this being is violent; for others, a hunter who scolds those who don't respect the secrets of the woods or destroy the forest in a vague way (Cascudo, 1976, p. 189, our translation). In a similar way to Natércia Campos' narrative, what the grandfather tells the boy refers to this legendary character from the folklore of the Brazilian Northeast, who protects the forest from hunters, also deepening the connection between the writer from Ceará; and the universe of Câmara Cascudo guided by folkloric research.

Tributary of social and cultural factors, fantastic fiction is linked to superstitions, legends and popular beliefs that have nourished civilizations for generations, disseminated orally, such as the narrative of the “Pai-da-mata”, present in the story. Just as it guarantees Louis Vax, in *A arte e a literatura fantásticas*, The fantastic was already known to people many centuries ago, with stories of souls from another world, werewolves, vampires and the evil eye among the gathered peasants. It's just that ancient audiences are not the same as modern ones: the latter doesn't ask if the story is true, because he knows it's imagined by an author; the former has experienced an ambiguous state of mind, with no pretensions to parapsychological or scientific research. In the end, a seductive narrative is one that is well presented, told from the point of view of the art of oratory, with the narrator's tone of conviction. Each era has known its own history of doubt, with an oral literature that is later presented

in written form: the popular soul is “credulous at midnight, skeptical at nine in the morning, likes to believe in order to enjoy the fear it gives and offers itself” (Vax, 1974, p. 11, our translation).

The connotation that the fantastic governs a reality that is familiar to individuals, through legends, beliefs and myths that cross generations, has gained theoretical discussion in literary studies, inviting reflection on the ways in which this category is realized as an aesthetic effect in modernity. This required systematic reading about unusual manifestations, such as the seminal discussions by the author Tzvetan Todorov, in the book *Introdução à literatura fantástica*. Without allowing a strict meaning, the critic assures a concept for the genre: in the face of supernatural beings and events, the fantastic subsists in the ambiguity that falls on the adventure, so that the character and the implied reader question themselves about the veracity or untruth of the occurrences: “reality or dream? truth or illusion?” (Todorov, 1975, p. 30, our translation). Furthermore, on this border between the probable and the improbable, it is associated with two neighboring genres: the strange, which justifies phenomena through reason, and the marvelous, which accepts and naturalizes the supernatural. On the other hand, there are dangers to the permanence of the fantastic in the narrative: in the case of poetry, due to the variety of semantic combinations, and in the case of allegory, which has multiple meanings (Todorov, 1975, p. 47-82).

If it is from uncertainty that the fantastic survives, as Todorov's presuppositions maintain, how can we characterize texts in which this vacillation is not evident? With this in mind, other theoretical debates provide new insights, without invalidating previous ones. David Roas, in the book *A ameaça do fantástico*, adds that it is essential to combine the narrative with the socio-cultural context, so that the extratextual pragmatic referent conflicts with the supernatural present in the plot, threatening the stability of everyday life, governed by observable aspects. Thus, the closer it gets to the reader's cultural horizon, the greater the effect of the fantastic in changing the perception of reality, presenting the strange phenomenon and revealing an entirely unstable environment. Without the link between literature and society, the narrative cannot be called fantastic, because the problematic relationships between language and the lived experience need to be in evidence: “the fantastic narrative is set in an everyday reality that it constructs with realistic techniques and at the same time destroys, inserting into it another reality, incomprehensible to the first” (Roas, 2014, p. 54, our translation).

David Roas points out, therefore, that the fantastic uses techniques from realism in order to transgress reality, contradicting Todorov to a certain extent, since he understands hesitation as part of the fantastic, but not determinant for the manifestation of the genre. The critic's perspective allows for a fantastic fiction that, in dialog with a society full of beliefs, superstitions and legends, has its natural laws threatened by mysterious, magical, supernatural and incomprehensible forces. This is what happens in the narrative by writer Natércia Campos: the grandfather tells the boy the fantastic stories of the forest and, in doing so, places in that setting the markers of a reality that could be threatened by unusual manifestations that disrupt the normality of the place. Therefore, the boy is a social receiver who plays an essential role in perceiving the possibility of a rift caused by the supernatural.

The story of the stone that hits a tree, always on stormy nights, reappearing in the earth glowing with fire, as if the lightning wanted it back, is another story from writer Natércia Campos' narrative told by the old man, which enhances the place of instability of reality, both for the characters and for the reader. Regarding this belief and superstitious bias of stones, Câmara Cascudo emphasizes that there are beliefs of “Pedra-de-raio”, in various countries, in different ways, as if they were brought by lightning and buried by the force of a meteor: “the stone is brought by lightning, and the thunder is precisely the rumor of the stone passing through the air” (Cascudo, 2000, p. 699, our translation). According to some people, it falls from a thunderstorm, cracks trees, sinks seven rods and returns to the surface seven years later. In the backlands of Rio Grande do Norte, in Brazil, it was common to hear people asking after a storm if they had found the “pedra-do-raio” (Cascudo, 2000, p. 699). If in life this stone becomes a strong manifestation of popular culture and superstition, developing according to society and passed down between generations, in the plot of “Mãe Natureza” also appears with these characteristics, having a fantastic reinforcement: it reworks the perception of the mysteries that surround fictional daily life, or, as David Roas said, “overcomes the limits of language” (Roas, 2014, p. 55, our translation).

Following the path of the plot, the day-to-day life of the characters continues to be permeated by the knowledge and mysteries of nature, expressed in a narrative delicacy that signals the richness of the passage of time:

A noite que o menino mais esperava com alegria era quando com o avô faziam a guarda em redor da fogueira. Eles a preparavam no terreiro, na vigília santificada do Dia do Batista. Início também da colheita das plantações e da quebra do milho. Os dois assavam nas brasas e o avô ensinava-lhe as adivinhações. Tarde da noite, o velho jogava na cacimba uma moeda com arca da cruz. Dizia ao menino que

assim evitava que a água desta secasse, desaparecesse, sendo roubada e por arte de algum encanto indo brotar em outra fonte.

O tempo passou pelos dois com verões, secas prolongadas e cigarras, no seu canto rascante e constante. Houve raros invernos e, agora, já o neto era mais alto que o avô, e caminhava ao seu lado puxando o jumento (Saboya, 1988, p. 56-57).

Still at the “heart” of the superstitions of the elders, the grandfather tells a story based on the idea that throwing a coin into the ark of the cross prevented the water from drying up. At this point, there is a reading that requires the idea of enchantment falling on an object that has a symbol characteristic of the supernatural world: the cross. In Antiquity, when people wandered the length and breadth of the continents and found water, they would throw the coin in return for a divine gift. The coin, the fountain and the cross, aspects present in the narrative, are a set of elements that evoke a superstitious and ritualistic narrative. This tone of belief indirectly postulates the vacillation so defended by Todorov in his studies on the fantastic: is this story about currency and the whole enchanted universe hosted in the text true or an illusion? In the narrative, it is not possible to delimit this process of hesitation on the part of one of the characters, but by requesting an implicit reader, we can validate a possible doubt or uncertainty about the veracity of the fact. This being the case, and not only for this reason, but also to ratify: to be faced with the paths of the fantastic.

Felipe Furtado, in *A construção do fantástico na narrativa*, assimilates that the fantastic, insofar as it makes imaginary, mysterious worlds coexist with their own laws, raises a discussion about reason and its opposite, presenting the congruences between man's understanding of the universe and its limitations (Furtado, 1980, p. 134-138). In this sense, in the terrain of the fantastic, there is knowledge that escapes comprehension because it occupies a lethargic space in rationality. Superstitions, legends and myths reside in a place of extranatural phenomenology that is incapable of fully rationalizing what is believed. In this way, in the narrative, the stories told by the characters, from the old man to the boy, the fruit of oral tradition, refuse a simplified reading of everyday life and promote a transgression of socially and scientifically accepted norms. As Irene Bessièrè says (2009, p. 4, our translation): “the fantastic, in the story, arises from the subject's dialog with his own beliefs and inconsistencies”.

At the end of the plot, the connection between the characters and nature, as well as its mysteries, becomes even more visible:

O velho falou que, desde cedo, sentia nos ossos que o tempo ia mudar. No caminho, ajoelhou-se, de ouvido colado no chão, e anunciou que “a mãe-terra estava avisando que se preparava para mais um inverno”. Voltaram no fim da tarde, ensopando-os um chuvisco peneirado. (...) O neto fora dormir, sentindo o renascer da terra molhada pelo cheiro almiscarado, que lhe entrava pelas narinas. Parecia até pairar em sua volta, como uma névoa a cobri-lo. Acordou no meio da noite, aturdido, ouvindo a chuva, e ao longe, vindo da mata, um canto impressionante. Ele conhecia que era a mãe-da-lua, uma ave que ficava a se lamentar dorida, na infinita caça noturna, a engolir mariposas e insetos. Nesta noite, mais que nunca, o som triste e monótono era igual à voz de uma mulher a chorar de dor. Ele levantou-se e gritou roucamente várias vezes, chamando pela mãe com infinita mágoa. O avô acordou e, abraçados os dois, ficaram chorando no prazer inesperado de escutarem o som da sua voz (Saboya, 1988, p. 58).

The characters' daily lives lead to a direct connection with the world in which they live, whose nature explores the limits of the possible and impossible, of conversations and superstitions and, above all, of human relationships. Nature is more than a simple aspect of the ecosystem, it becomes something sacred, which has its own laws, secret and incomprehensible to the eyes of reason, above all, which must be respected. The bird “Mãe-da-lua” appears in the story as enhancing the mystery of that nocturnal environment, whose sound reverberates in a moment of the character's fragility and bond with her mother who passed away, as mentioned at the beginning of the narrative. Not without reason, this bird in biology and society is known as a “ghost bird”, due to its ease of camouflage, typical of remaining on tree trunks that resemble its body, spending part of the time standing still until it remains unnoticed by humans, daytime predators. Above all, a “haunted” character in this animal that, in the mysterious charm of the night, triggers an unknown world. From the perspective of a fantastic setting, in which a night and a bird with an inexplicable sound are presented, the characters are faced with order and disorder, the “obsession with a legality that, despite being natural, can be supernatural” (Bessière, 2009, p. 13, our translation). Finally, there is a fantastic that is invisible or hidden in the darkness behind the woods, forests, trees, in dark nights, endorsed by the beliefs and superstitions of individual beings culturally exposed to the “supernaturalization” of reality.

Final considerations

In the reflections exposed in this article, a purpose was outlined: to problematize the assumptions that define the fantastic in the narrative “Mãe Natureza”, present in the book *Illuminuras* (1988), by Natércia Campos de Saboya, based on cultural, folkloric and superstitious frameworks that inform the fiction of the writer from Ceará, whose oral tradition and popular knowledge are supporting points. Based on this premise, a fantasticality was recorded that refuses a simplistic vision of the day and proposes a subversion of social norms, with the relationship between the characters and their mysterious knowledge being the main amplifiers of the fantastic in that rural world of the narrative. Character and reader are faced with unknown laws, in which rational judgment has no place, giving space to the telling of stories that modify a peremptory notion of reality and establish an experience of mysteries of nature that passes from generation to generation, in the case of tale, from grandfather to grandson.

The fantastic in the narrative is not that which exposes a ghost, a vampire or a monster to haunt individuals, but, rather, that uses culture, imagination and superstition to develop the strangeness that violates the apparently cohesive terrain of the world. It is a genre that remains discreet: incognito and indecipherable, which when subjected to human beliefs, shows the intriguing universe, under the testimony of those who use orality so that it can be perpetuated. To the extent that it provides this cultural and social reading of the fantastic, Natércia Campos ensures that new readings of a conceptual, methodological and methodological nature are investigated regarding the fantastic and all other genres and subgenres that surround it, intensifying reflections on the scope the limit of literary theory. But, more than that, the author strengthens literature written by women and also a perception: that of a cultural and social fantastic, which arises from the appropriation of knowledge and the preservation of society's imaginative power.

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