

Round of hours: the train and the river as images of time in

João Cabral de Melo Neto's poetry /

Roca das horas: o trem e o rio como imagens do tempo na poesia de João Cabral de Melo Neto

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ABSTRACT

In 2020, we celebrated the centenary of one of the greatest Brazilian poets of the twentieth-century: João Cabral de Melo Neto (1920-1999). Acknowledged by a rationalist writing and averse to confessional lyricism, Cabral unveiled the fundamental concepts of his composition process in his poetic and essayistic texts. In this pugilistic relation with language, the poet admitted the imponderable as an opponent, which is materialized, as an example, in the ideas of death and, as the object of this study, of time. Through a qualitative research supported by theoretical underpinning about the poetic text (BACHELARD, 2018; BORGES, 2000; BOSI, 1977; CHKLOVISK, 1976), conceptions of time (AGOSTINHO, 2019; ELIAS, 1998; WHITROW, 1993) and specialized criticism about the poet from Pernambuco (ARAÚJO, 2016; CANDIDO, 2002; SECCHIN, 2020), we aim to analyse the figuration of time in his poetry, considering, for this, the centrality of the text as material for analysis (CANDIDO, 2006), without evading, however, the incorporation of multidisciplinary contributions to the

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construction of meanings. Based on the effective reading of Cabral's work, for the constitution of the corpus of analysis, we chose the images of the river and the train, once that, in our perspective, they are paradigmatic to reflect on the chronological intricacies in Cabral's production. Albeit the two figures resemble in their long-line geometry, they can be distinguished by the rhythm that characterizes them, contrasting the immediacy of the locomotive with the fluidity of the river water. In this regard, the poet assembles his textual framework through the different hues that constitute the threads of time weaved in his verses.

KEYWORDS: João Cabral de Melo Neto; Image; Time; River; Train.

RESUMO

Em 2020, celebramos o centenário de um dos maiores poetas brasileiros do século XX: João Cabral de Melo Neto (1920-1999). Reconhecido por uma escrita racionalista e avessa ao lirismo confessional, Cabral desvelou em seus textos poéticos e ensaísticos as concepções basilares de seu processo de composição. Nessa relação pugilística com a linguagem, o poeta reconheceu como oponente o imponderável, que se materializa, por exemplo, nas ideias da morte e, como objeto deste trabalho, do tempo. Mediante uma pesquisa qualitativa amparada em leituras teóricas acerca do texto poético (BACHELARD, 2018; BORGES, 2000; BOSI, 1977; CHKLOVSK, 1976), das concepções de tempo (AGOSTINHO, 2019; ELIAS, 1998; WHITROW, 1993) e da crítica especializada sobre o poeta pernambucano (ARAÚJO, 2016; CANDIDO, 2002; SECCHIN, 2020), tencionamos analisar a figuração do tempo na poesia do autor, considerando, para isso, a centralidade do texto como material de análise (CANDIDO, 2006), sem elidir, no entanto, a incorporação de contribuições multidisciplinares para a construção de sentidos. Baseando-nos na leitura efetiva da obra cabralina, para a constituição do corpus de análise, elegemos as imagens do rio e do trem, uma vez que, em nossa perspectiva, elas são paradigmáticas para refletir sobre os meandros cronológicos na produção cabralina. Embora as duas figuras se assemelhem pela geometria longilínea, elas distinguem-se pelo ritmo que as caracteriza, contrapondo o imediatismo da locomotiva à fluidez do corpo d'água. Nesse sentido, o poeta erige seu arcabouço textual através dos diferentes matizes que compõem os fios do tempo trançados em seus versos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: João Cabral de Melo Neto; Imagem; Tempo; Rio; Trem.

1 Introduction

The nature of time and its unfoldings constitute unavoidable stones as we go through different moments of the knowledge developed by humanity. Although common sense points to a centripetal and universalistic view of time, this dimension acquired different nuances depending on the analysed sociocultural context, provided that

[...] just as our intuition of space is not unique, because we know that there is not a single geometry that we must necessarily apply to space, there is also no single intuition of time, common to all humanity. [...] In short, time, in all its aspects, has been considered in many conceptually distinct ways (WHITROW, 1993, p. 23)¹.

¹ Versão original: “[...] assim como nossa intuição de espaço não é única, pois sabemos que não há uma geometria única que devemos necessariamente aplicar ao espaço, não há também uma intuição única do tempo, comum a toda a humanidade. [...] Em suma, o tempo, em todos os seus aspectos, foi considerado de muitas maneiras conceitualmente distintas” (WHITROW, 1993, p. 23).

Since individual and community lives are axes of possibilities with specific delimitations, having a point of departure and an uncertain point of arrival, the measurement of the interval between these two moments emerges as a constant concern for the human species. With this, discursive fields that, apparently, turn to disparate research objects converge for the exploration and reflection about chronological issues, as is the case of Physics, Biology, Philosophy, Religion and, being a cutout of this study, Poetics.

In literary studies, time is a conditional element within narratives, being widely discussed and systematized. In turn, in poems, the actions of Chronos are not restricted to the thematic content of the texts, being a constitutive element of poetic architecture. In his book *O ser e o tempo da poesia* (1977), the literary critic and professor Alfredo Bosi begins his study on the recesses of the network between time and poetic text by defining what distinguishes the image from the discourse:

The creative word does indeed seek to reach the heart of the figure in the lightning of the instant. But since it only does so by working on the flow of language, which is sound-and-thought, it ends up surpassing the forms of imaginary matter. The poem - *cosa mentale leonardesca* - transforms into duration what was given at first as an atimo (BOSI, 1977, p. 36, emphasis added)².

As Bosi points out, the image possesses something immediate, moving towards the limit of the instant; meanwhile, the very nature of the linguistic sign defines for it the inseparability in relation to time. Thus, we understand the imagetic dimension of poetry as the search for the moment undertaken within the literary text.

The poetics of João Cabral was crystallized by critics as linked to the adjectives "rational", "cerebral" and "exact", to the point of receiving the epithet of poet-engineer, because of the formal concern purified by him in his writing path. Regarding the theme of time, we share the ideas in the criticism developed by Araújo (2021), who defends the primacy of the image in Cabral:

² Versão original: "A palavra criativa busca, de fato, alcançar o coração da figura no relâmpago do instante. Mas, como só o faz mediante o *trabalho* sobre o fluxo da língua, que é som-e-pensamento, acaba superando as formas da matéria imaginária. O poema — *cosa mentale leonardesca* — transforma em duração o que se dava a princípio como um átimo" (BOSI, 1977, p. 36, grifos do autor).

Through the image, João Cabral manages to describe time in different ways: the *animal-time*, the *time-chiclets*, the *river-time*, the *museum-time* and so on. The image, creative process of the poet, seems to be the beginning of everything - the basis of construction of poetry (ARAÚJO, 2021, p. 34)³.

In this work, we intend to analyse the imagetic contours of time in the poetry of João Cabral de Melo Neto (1920 - 1999) - author who received the title of Doctor *Honoris Causa* by the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (1982) and whose centenary was celebrated in the year 2020. From this pavilion of concrete forms, we highlight the river and the train, elements that resume the idea of linear time in its geometry. We are interested in investigating, specifically, these images, because, although they present some similar formal traits, under the perspective of the theme of time, we delimit the hypothesis that it is possible to identify differences between the values attached to each one of them. To carry out this investigation, we constituted a *corpus* with texts published in different periods of Cabral's production, seeking, thus, "to show" some excerpts of the author's temporal tapestry.

2 Time web

The work of João Cabral de Melo Neto, both in poetic production and in essayistic reflection, is percolated by a constant concern with discursive control, wonderfully figurativized in "Fábula de Anfion" (1947). In this sense, themes and questions that surround the confrontation with the imponderable become recurrent, materialized, in turn, in confessional lyricism, in death and in time itself.

With the release of the poet's first book, *Pedra do sono* (1942), the critic and Professor Antonio Candido (2002) identified constructivist contours in the author's production due to the material and concrete presence in the linguistic framework of his texts. In later books, this perspective would be exercised with tenacity, as if the poet was following the primer learned from the "Catecismo de Berceo":

³ Versão original: "Por intermédio da imagem, João Cabral consegue descrever o tempo de diferentes formas: o *tempo-bicho*, o *tempo-chiclets*, o *tempo-rio*, o *tempo-museu* e assim por diante. A imagem, processo criativo do poeta, parece ser o começo de tudo – a base de construção da poesia" (ARAÚJO, 2021, p. 34).

1.
To make the light word
weighs like the thing it says,
in a way to isolate it from between
the amount of pages in which it was lost.

2.
To make the word loose
to the body of its thing:
To fuse it into a thing, thick, solid,
capable of clashing with the contiguous.
[...]
(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 465)⁴

In the set of teachings attributed to the Castilian poet, we identify the craving for the concrete word in the author's verses. Instead of surrendering to abstract terms, Cabral forges his texts through the tireless work of linguistic inputs, like "O ferrageiro de Carmona" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 677). On this aspect, the poet himself expressed his lexical preferences, preferring the word "sadness" in favor of "apple" (MELO NETO, 2020), or even, the image of the knife devoid of handle instead of the vacuum of Absence. How to think, then, the presence of an abstract dimension such as time in Cabral's material gallery?

We recognise that one of the steps taken by this craftsman of the word was the construction of images capable of framing the ticking of the clock. If "There is no umbrella / against time, / river flowing under the house [...]" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 74)⁵, the poet develops figurations that allow us to seize, through different sensory channels, the chronological fragments. Thus, in Cabral's texts, this dimension condenses into figures, giving density not only to the linguistic matter, but also to the temporal matter.

In the history of chronometry, that is, in the development of mechanisms to measure time, we observe, at first, the use of elements of nature as a parameter for measurement. This was due to the

⁴ Versão original: "1. Fazer com que a palavra leve / pese como a coisa que diga, / para o quê isolá-la de entre / o folhudo em que se perdia. // 2. Fazer com que a palavra frouxa / ao corpo de sua coisa adira: / fundi-la em coisa, espessa, sólida, / capaz de chocar com a contígua. [...]" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 465).

⁵ Versão original: "Não há guarda-chuva / contra o tempo, / rio fluindo sob a casa [...]" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 74).

need for empirical evidence to attest the passage of time, as explained by Elias (1998, p. 74). The Moon, the Sun, the river floods and droughts were signs from which this change was speculated. For the sociologist, social changes required a greater degree of independence in the establishment of temporal markers. Thus, instead of the eventual phenomenon, susceptible to variations, we began to consider regular intervals as measuring tools, such as the units hour, day, month and year.

We underline that time is not a tangent and sporadic element in Cabral's work. It constitutes recurrent formal and thematic concerns in his production. If it is possible to draw a parallel between the means that humanity has manipulated in the stipulation of time and the author's production, we verify a coincidence. If the first human groups looked at the Moon, taking it as a reference for their aspirations and projects of action; in later periods, the Sun is imbued with chronological importance. In the poetry of João Cabral, we also see the passage from the lunar to the solar, which will mark his compositional procedure.

Also in *Os três mal-amados* (1943), a prose-poetic inspired by the verses of "Quadrilha", by his friend and master poet Drummond, Cabral created the discourse of three poetic subjects (João, Raimundo and Joaquim) facing their respective objects of desire, one of them being love itself, in its anthropophagic manifestation. When reading this text, Secchin (2020) identified these objects as certain conceptions of poetry and, consequently, certain postures of artists in the face of the creative process. In this sense, the constructivist voice of Raimundo would be the one that would produce more intense resonance in Cabral, being, with the passing of the years and the works, refined by the poet. Similar to a saline, which allows the entrance of the seawater (of the dream, the experience, the memory) to then generate salt, the poet from Pernambuco allowed the incidence of the sun's rays on his work, enabling the formation of the poetic crystal.

2.1 Time-train

In this study, it becomes relevant to resume the transition from sleep to vigil in the author's work, since one of the images analysed, the time-train, is present in these two moments. We refer specifically to the texts "Infância" (Childhood), "A moça e o trem" (The girl and the train) and "O

alpendre no canavial" (The porch in the sugarcane field), present, in this order, in the books *Pedra do sono* (1942), *O engenheiro* (1945) and *Quaderna* (1960).

Regarding the first, we identify the memory as a resource for the construction of the text. Instead of focusing on a specific and singular aspect of the past, the poetic subject in the process of annulling himself misaligns the mnemonic mechanism:

Childhood

On the odd side of memory
the guardian angel forgot
questions that cannot be answered.

Would propellers
aeroplanes locomotives
timidly precocious
captive balloons B-flat?

But my ten indifferent years
spun once more
on the same endless merry-go-rounds.
(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 38)⁶

The circularity attributed to memory in this text takes shape from a series of objects that, although dynamic and capable of movement, are conditioned by barriers - the propellers and the axle, the planes and the routes, the trains and the railways, the carousels and the rotating structure. One of these objects is precisely the locomotive, the driving force of rail traffic, which has its mobility conditioned by the destination laid out on the rails. In contrast, in the two other poems cited, we recognize the relevance of experience in capturing the chronological dimension.

The second highlighted text fits in a moment of the writer's production on which the light of the three suns of *O engenheiro* already shines. After all, "[...] the engineer thinks the just world, / world that

⁶ Versão original: "Sobre o lado ímpar da memória / o anjo da guarda esqueceu / perguntas que não se respondem. // Seriam hélices / aviões locomotivas / timidamente precocidade / balões-cativos si-bemol? // Mas meus dez anos indiferentes / rodaram mais uma vez / nos mesmos intermináveis carrosséis" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 38).

no veil covers." (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 64)⁷. Unveiled, the train and the time are presented in the text as possible objects of apprehension by different sense organs:

The girl and the train

The iron train
passes through the field
between telegraphs
without being able to flee
without being able to fly
without being able to dream
without being able to be a telegraph.

The girl at the window
sees the train run
she hears the time go by.
Time is so much
that one can hear
and she hears it pass
as if another train.

The hidden
elastic of gestures:
the girl at the window
sees the plant grow
feels the Earth turn:
that time is so much
that it lets itself be seen.
(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 65 - 66, emphasis added)⁸

In the short verses that make up the poem, ranging between four and seven poetic syllables, it describes the perception of time by a girl after the passage of the train. In the text, time itself comes to be considered a second train, because, similar to the body of wagons, awakens the senses of the

⁷ Versão original: “[...] o engenheiro pensa o mundo justo, / mundo que nenhum véu encobre” (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 64).

⁸ Versão original: “O trem de ferro (4) / passa no campo (4) / entre telégrafos. (4) / *Sem poder fugir* (5) / *sem poder voar* (5) / *sem poder sonhar* (5) / *sem poder ser telégrafo.* (5) // A moça na janela / vê o trem correr / ouve o tempo passar. / O tempo é tanto / que se pode ouvir / e ela o escuta passar / como se outro trem. // Cresce o oculto / elástico dos gestos: / a moça na janela / vê a planta crescer / sente a terra rodar: / que o tempo é tanto / que se deixa ver” (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 65 - 66, grifos nossos).

subject of the enunciation. The temporal dimension, previously invisible and inaudible, becomes capable of being perceived, moving away from an abstract characterization and configuring itself as a concrete dimension. If the presence of the train *defamiliarizes* the landscape cut by it, alluding to the well-known term used by Chklovski (1976), the rupture in the metric of the text reflects the modification in the perception of time, highlighting the ideas of movement, agility and mobility with which the train is placed in the landscape from the successive syntagmatic reiterations (verses highlighted by us).

While the 1945 text cuts only a few sensory paths, in a later text, published in *Serial* (1961), the lyrical self undertakes an itinerary through the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. As a reminiscence of a *locus amoenus*, the porch, an area common to country houses, in front of the landscape taken by the sugarcane plantation, is configured as a pleasant space to contemplate time. In the journey that makes up the four sections of the poem, time comes to be understood as a dimension possessing: i) taste and smell, ii) sound, iii) texture, and iv) image.

For the poetic subject, there are two possible responses to the atypical behaviour of time. The first one scrutinizes the landscape as a justification, since the spatial characteristics allow the perception devices to become sharper, capturing elements that, previously, would be insipid. The second possibility, on the other hand, sees reason in the very nature of time, which thickens as it passes through the region. Respectively, we identify a subjective and an objective posture in relation to this dimension.

These cases presented resonate with two theoretical positions that, historically, involve the issues of time (ELIAS, 1998). One sees this aspect as a given of nature that, like other elements, is dissociated from a subject's experience. In turn, the second perspective conceives time as "[...] a way to capture together events that are based on a particularity of human consciousness" (ELIAS, 1998, p. 9)⁹.

Like the vision of the girl at the window, the rhythm of time on the porch is discontinued by the appearance of the train in the third part of the poem. As characteristic in Cabraline poetry, typographic considerations are a prominent element. As a result, we analyse the section in two moments: the first

⁹ Versão original: "[...] uma maneira de captar em conjunto os acontecimentos que se assentam numa particularidade da consciência humana" (ELIAS, 1998, p. 9).

dedicated to the part without parentheses, the second to the parenthetical part. At first, the locomotive causes the chronological flow to lose its continuity:

The porch in the cane field

[...]

3

If the porch is the time of the train
that goes to the station of the place
time stops running
it begins to deposit itself.

Then, one would say that time
interrupts every career,
numbed by the tension
of the world on the prowl and on the lookout.

Then, one would say that time
cramps, or becomes crisp
prevented from flowing free
between waits, vacuum pockets. (p. 338)

Then it makes so thick
that its substance is palpable
so thick that to touch it
one would take it for a membrane;

so thick that it even seems
that it will never dissolve again
as thick as if the wait
was not for a train but for death.

[...]

(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 338 - 339)¹⁰

¹⁰ Versão original: “3 / Se no alpendre é a hora do trem / que vai à estação do lugar, / o tempo para de correr: / começa a se depositar. // Então, dir-se-ia que o tempo / interrompe toda carreira, / entorpecido pela tensão / do mundo à esperta e à espreita. // Então, dir-se-ia que o tempo / tem cãibras, ou fica crispado, / impedido de fluir livre / entre esperas, bolsas de vácuo. // Então, ele faz tão espesso / que é *palpável* sua substância; / tão espessa que ao apalpá-la / se tomaria por membrana; // tão espessa que até parece / que já nunca mais se dissolve; / tão espessa como se a espera / não fosse de trem mas de morte [...]” (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 338 - 339).

In the dilettante space provided by the landscape of the sugarcane plantation, the train emerges as an element of rupture. The chronological dimension in the text conjugates linearity and fluidity as characteristics that are interrupted by the presence of the machine, memory of another rhythm alien to the movement of the sugarcane (rhythm of the city, not of the countryside), thus forming a temporal clot. If on the one hand, the train breaks the syntax with which time was presented to the sugarcane plantation; on the other hand, its passage is the reason for the solidification of time and, consequently, the possibility of shaping it. In this sense, the train is a condition for the warp of time in the verses.

In dialogue with History, we find the train as an element that propitiates a change of paradigm in our relationship with time. According to Whitrow (1993), the invention and subsequent spread of the steam locomotive revolutionized the transit of people, goods and information. One of the consequences of the new way of traveling through territories was the standardization of schedules, changing the way human beings acted towards their daily tasks.

As described above, the three final stanzas of the third section of the poem are arranged within brackets:

[...]
(When thicker, behold the train
with the explosion, the hysteria
rough and iron, of city
ruptures the distended membrane.

And only after it departs
with its maniacal exaltation
is that the ruptured hard lint
Of time curdled up in a bladder

are again diluted in the emptiness
that goes on diluting, day by day
junkyards of a landscape
put to the side, off the track).
(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 339)¹¹

¹¹ Versão original: “[...] (Quando mais espessa, eis que o trem / com a explosão, a histeria, / bruta e de ferro, de cidade, / rompe a membrana distendida. // E só depois que ele reparte / com sua exaltação maníaca / é que os rotos fiapos duros / de tempo coalhado em bexiga // voltam a diluir-se no vazio / que vai diluindo, dia a dia, / ferros-velhos de uma paisagem / posta à margem, fora da via.)” (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 339).

In the case analysed, these elements delimit a change of moment, in contrast to what is placed outside the typographic marker. Until then, the poem followed the formation of vacuoles of time, however, the final part points to the dissolution of these structures, which means the return to the initial state of the landscape.

2.2 Time-River

Before we move to the second image analysed here, the time-river, we emphasize that the idea of time as fluid is present in one of the central texts when thinking about this issue in Cabral's poetics. In "O relógio", also published in *Serial*, the poetic subject begins a search for the fuel that feeds the engine of the machine-life, "[...] (heart, in another language)" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 336)¹². One of the questions that runs through the text is the nature of this material:

[...]
what fluid is nobody sees:
of the water does not show the hitches:
besides being equal, it is continuous,
without tides, without seasons.

And because it is also inappropriate
to think that it is the wind,
it must be another fluid
that moves it: who knows, time.
(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 335)¹³

We realize that the poem places water as an eminently volatile element and, therefore, subject to fluctuations and nuances. Although another fluid feeds the gears of the clock, it is for the river image that converge the tributaries of time in Cabral's writing. Thus, Cabral allowed the Capibaribe outflow, the river of his childhood, to leak into the texts, carrying elements of an imagery of time.

¹² Versão original: "[...] (coração, noutra linguagem)" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 336).

¹³ Versão original: "[...] que fluido é ninguém vê: / da água não mostra os senões: / além de igual, é contínuo, / sem marés, sem estações. // E porque tampouco cabe / por isso, pensar que é o vento, / há de ser um outro fluido / que a move: quem sabe, o tempo" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 335).

In his *Confessions*, Augustine of Hippo drew a relationship between time and change. Unlike the divinity, which inhabits the eternal, human beings are temporal creatures, that is, they are immersed in a transient dimension. For the philosopher, time is seen, then, as consisting of three aspects: the present of the past, the present of the present and the present of the future. In this order, according to the thinker, "The present of the past is memory; the present of the present is vision; the present of the future is expectation." (AGOSTINHO, 2019, p. 227)¹⁴.

State and change are aspects discussed since Classical Antiquity, as in the thought of Heraclitus of Abdera, for whom flux is the core of reality. Seeking to give form to his reflection, the Greek philosopher used the famous fluvial image. Resuming this thought, the Argentinean writer Jorge Luís Borges conceived the river as a metaphor, *par excellence*, of time:

The mere conjunction of the two words suggests the metaphor: time and the river, both keep flowing. And there is also the famous sentence of the Greek philosopher: "No man bathes twice in the same river". Here we have the beginning of terror, because at first we think of the river as something that flows, of the drops of water being diverse. And then we are made to feel that we are the river, that we are fleeting like the river (BORGES, 2000, p. 34, emphasis added)¹⁵.

We notice that the river in Cabral has a name and its course, from upstream to the mouth, is described in verse. It is the Capibaribe river and its tributaries, whose fluvial landscape is part of the memory of the young child João, which emerges towards the foreground of his production in *Escola das facas* (1980). According to Secchin (2020), this book sets up a family museum, "a museum from Pernambuco". In one of the texts published in the volume, the river waters are affectionately treated by the "family dialect" as "the tide" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 524)¹⁶, inhabitant of the landscape contemplated by the lyrical self and that taught him lessons in poetics:

¹⁴ Versão original: "O presente do passado é a memória; o presente do presente é a visão; o presente do futuro é a expectativa" (AGOSTINHO, 2019, p. 227).

¹⁵ Versão original: "A mera conjunção das duas palavras sugere a metáfora: tempo e o rio, os dois seguem fluindo. E há ainda a famosa sentença do filósofo grego: "Nenhum homem se banha duas vezes no mesmo rio". Temos aqui o início do terror, porque a princípio pensamos no rio como algo que flui, nas gotas de água sendo diversas. E então somos levados a sentir que nós somos o rio, que somos fugidios como o rio" (BORGES, 2000, p. 34, grifos do autor).

¹⁶ Versão original: "a maré" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 524)

Prose of the tide in Jaqueira

[...]

6.

Tide of Capibaribe

between Jaqueira and Santana:

From the quay, as time and space

go from one to the other, is caught up.

Time slows down

(lake that the breeze chills)

The roll of massive water

That fills and empties the Reef

until it slows down, all space

(lake with no breeze on its face),

to stop at all, dead water,

paralytic, of a well.

(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 526)¹⁷

The didactic prose of the river tide represents the dialectic between space and time. In João Cabral, we realize that the distinction between these dimensions, although they are intertwined, is given by the presence or absence of movement. The thickening of the waters of the Capibaribe due to the waste accumulated since its source and the presence of the sugar cane mills, reduces, consequently, the progress of the river. We can think, then, the idea of water as a universal solvent, due to its ability to dissolve the elements in its environment.

We accept, in this way, the perspective of the "imagination of matter" of Gaston Bachelard (2018), whose writings dedicated to water do not avoid the slow and dense aspect of this substance: "[...] everything that, in nature, runs heavily, painfully, mysteriously, be like a cursed blood, like a blood that carries death. When a liquid is valued, it appears to an organic liquid" (BACHELARD, 2018, p.

¹⁷ Versão original: "6. / Maré do Capibaribe / entre a Jaqueira e Santana: / do cais, como tempo e espaço / vão de um a outro, se apanha. // O tempo se vai freando / (lago que a brisa arrepie) / o rolo de água maciça / que enche e esvazia o Recife, // até frear, todo espaço / (lago sem brisa no rosto), / frear de todo, água morta, / paralítica, de poço" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 526).

63)¹⁸. The entrance in the flooded mangroves of Recife attributes organicity to the river, like a ripe fruit that is "[...] - still working its sugar / after being cut - [...]" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 110)¹⁹.

In the poem from the 1980 volume, we recognise the procedure already identified in other poems of placing elements in parentheses. The parenthetical verses contain comments on the appearance of the waters and the modifications it undergoes along the way. To the compassed current of the Capibaribe, responsibility is attributed for the pleasure of observing time:

[...]
when on the ruined quay
I followed your dense passage,
I became addicted to hearing
and feel time passing by.
(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 527)²⁰

As we saw in the previous poem, space and time are treated poetically as two sides of the same coin, two sides of an inseparable dichotomy. The distinction between them, in this sense, is given through the verification of the apparent movement. This same perspective is found in the figuration of water in other texts, such as this one from the book *A educação pela pedra* (1966):

A woman and the Beberibe

She moves with the movement of the water
(undecided between being time or space)
of those rivers of the Northeast coast
that geographers call "weak rivers".
Languid; that leave themselves through the mangrove
to a sandbank of the incoming sea;
vegetated; of space water and without time
(without the cable by which time drags it).

*

To the river Beberibe, when adolescent river

¹⁸ Versão original: "[...] tudo o que, na natureza, corre pesadamente, dolorosamente, misteriosamente, seja como um sangue maldito, como um sangue que transporta a morte. Quando um líquido se valoriza, aparenta-se a um líquido orgânico" (BACHELARD, 2018, p. 63).

¹⁹ Versão original: "[...] — trabalhando ainda seu açúcar / depois de cortada — [...]" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 110).

²⁰ Versão original: "[...] dos quandos no cais em ruína / seguia teu passar denso, / veio-me o vício de ouvir / e sentir passar-me o tempo" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 527).

(hastily time, not space),
nothing stops his feet; if the river is mature
if it's a mature river, it takes on a more walking gait.
As an adult in the mangrove, it imitates the motion
that a woman had imitated him a short while ago:
indolent, of space water and no time
(apart from that of the rut and the pregnant tide).
(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 368-369)²¹

Within the editorial and aesthetic project of the book of poems, "Uma mulher e o Beberibe" is located in the Northeast section (a). As well notes Secchin (2020), the mention of the Brazilian geographical region cuts the landscape from which emerge the themes worked and the lower case letter in parentheses delimit, quantitatively, the sixteen verses with something around ten poetic syllables. The block structure that characterizes the rocky teachings produced by Cabral, in the poem under discussion, reflects the comparative procedure between these two characters, the woman and the river.

If in the first stanza, the woman's walk is translated in river terms, in the second stanza, the relationship is inverted, and the river is humanized by a typical description of human life - again, the poem takes up the fragment of Heraclitus. In its youth, the Beberibe River, confluent of the Capibaribe River, advances noisily, but when it arrives at the coastal outlet, it reduces its pace, similar to the female figure that allows herself to contemplate the landscape. The contemplative aspect of space gradually acquires more intense hues than chronological avidity.

Immediately, in the title of the poem, we identify that the simile between the elements compared in the text does not follow a full parallelism, because, while the human character refers to a category, "woman", preceded by an indefinite article, "a"; the non-human character, the river Beberibe, acquires identity and uniqueness. This aspect is an index of Cabral's posture towards what is elusive to the molds of humanity, a perspective recognizable in other texts. In this sense, in the poems of the author,

²¹ Versão original: "Ela se imove com o andamento da água / (indecisa entre ser tempo ou espaço) / daqueles rios do litoral do Nordeste / que os geógrafos chamam "rios fracos". / Lânguidos; que se deixam pelo mangue / a um banco de areia do mar de chegada; / vegetais; de água espaço e sem tempo / (sem o cabo por que o tempo a arrasta). // * // Ao rio Beberibe, quando rio adolescente / (precipitadamente tempo, não espaço), / nada lhe para os pés; se rio maduro, / ele assume um andamento mais andado. / Adulto no mangue, imita o imovimento / que há pouco imitara dele uma mulher: / indolente, de água espaço e sem tempo / (fora o do cio e da prenhez da maré)" (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 368-369).

the stone, the sea, the river, the goat and the vulture are some of these beings to which, sentient or not, is allowed to inhabit the verses of the poet.

Final considerations

The long subtitle of the poem *O rio*, 1953, indicates the route taken by the body of water of the river from Pernambuco: “or the relationship of the journey that the Capibaribe makes from its source to the city of Recife”. According to Secchin (2020), this poem remarks Cabral's concern with the communicability of the poem, however, “[...] the more fluent discourse that underlies the will to ‘communicate’ does not mean the neglect of the ‘doing’” (p. 117)²².

In the textual journey undertaken, we are faced to several waypoints. At a certain point in the journey, the Capibaribe is interpellated by the figure of the iron train, an index of a modernity alien to its rumbling. After adding to the current other rivers found in paths of water and migrants, the aqueous lyric self tells us the intersection with the rails, in a section whose heading is “The iron train”:

Now I am leaving
the town of Limoeiro.
Inside the city
I had found the iron train.
It makes the journey from the sea,
but it won't be my companion
despite the paths
that almost always run parallel.
On its smooth bed,
with its iron breath
there in the sea of the Arrecife
he'll arrive much first.
I'm a floodplain river,
I cannot go so swiftly.
Even if the sea calls them,
the rivers, like oxen, are sluggish.

²² Versão original: “[...] o discurso mais fluente que embasa a vontade de ‘comunicar’ não significa a negligência do ‘fazer’” (SECCHIN, 2020, p. 117).

(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 124)²³

Although the paths of the two images analysed, both the natural and the iron machine, converge at a certain point of the lyric/narrator's journey, the lines do not touch for a long time. This is due to the divergence between the walking rhythms of each one.

[...]
Different from those of trains
is the journey made by rivers
They live together with the things
between which they flow;
They linger in the pools
to rest and sleep;
they live with us
without hurrying to flee.
(MELO NETO, 2020, p. 125)²⁴

While the train rushes across the land of Pernambuco in order to cross as fast as possible, Capibaribe river allows itself to enjoy the map it travels over, allowing its body to be molded to the space, constituting it. Thus, we identify the emphasis on the difference in speed between the figures of the two elements analysed. Since this magnitude is the result of the relationship between space and time, we can recognize the modalization of the chronological dimension through the different ways in which the train and the river are set in motion.

Previously, the two images under analysis in this study are worked in isolation. However, the river and the train are placed side by side in *O rio*, generating the possibility of comparing these constructions of phanopeia that, previously, only appeared in distinct texts. If it is certain that the form brings them closer, we also recognize divergences between the wagons and the meanders. While the

²³ Versão original: “Agora vou deixando / o município de Limoeiro. / Lá dentro da cidade / havia encontrado o trem de ferro. / Faz a viagem do mar, / mas não será meu companheiro, / apesar dos caminhos / que quase sempre são paralelos. / Sobre seu leito liso, / com seu fôlego de ferro, / lá no mar do Arrecife / ele chegará muito primeiro. / Sou um rio de várzea, / não posso ir tão ligeiro. / Mesmo que o mar os chame, / os rios, como os bois, são ronceiros” (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 124).

²⁴ Versão original: “[...] Diversa das dos trens / é a viagem que fazem os rios: / convivem com as coisas / entre as quais vão fluindo; / demoram nos remansos / para descansar e dormir; / convivem com a gente / sem se apressar em fugir” (MELO NETO, 2020, p. 125).

train is covered with metonymic values of modernity, such as speed and development, the Capibaribe follows its course at its own pace, alongside migrants, animals and other rivers.

In this way, the pair of images form a kind of dystic in tension, in which the two lines represented by the rails and by the course of the river, as well as a pair of verses, are related both by similarities (form) and by dissonances (content). We also highlight that, within the poetic production of João Cabral, time is not a separate issue and has thematic and aesthetic relevance in the compositional path of the author. By choosing the train and the river as objects to be analysed, we do not prevent, therefore, the investigation of other chronological images in Cabral's poetry.

A recurrent figure in Cabral's poetics and criticism, the word rock, in Spanish is *roca*. Removing the italics from the term, we would have spelled the word "roca", a tool used in the craft of spinning. In our reading, we consider that, when architecting the meeting between the train and the river in the verses of the long poem, the poet assumes the mask of a spinner that, linguistically, braids imagetic lines, enabling the exercise of the poem as convergence of times.

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