

ABSTRACT

Some of the most recent developments in short fiction have resulted in texts full of indeterminacies, which, according to a few contemporary theorists, cannot be interpreted only as “imperfections” that obscure the understanding of the text as a “whole”, that is, as “fractures” on the smooth surface of the meaning. This article puts forward the idea that the indeterminacies do not constitute traces of “inconclusiveness” that make it difficult to understand in a “harmonious” manner the cultural products, but, on the contrary, the indeterminacies, through numerous strategies such as ellipses and the constructions in paratactical style, suggest narrative meanings. Thus, through examinations of short stories by Sam Shepard and by João Gilberto Noll, our work attempts to show how the indeterminacies can contribute to the construction of a fictional subject, who experiences instability and the crises of his own identity.

KEY WORDS: indeterminacy, parataxis, narrative, Sam Shepard, João Gilberto Noll.

NO EARTHLY CLUE: THE ELLIPTICAL AND INDETERMINATE NARRATIVES OF SAM SHEPARD AND JOÃO GILBERTO NOLL

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RESUMO

Alguns dos investimentos mais recentes no gênero conto têm rendido textos repletos de indeterminações, que, de acordo com alguns teóricos contemporâneos, não podem ser interpretadas apenas como “imperfeições” que abalam a compreensão do texto como um “todo”, isto é, como “fraturas” na superfície lisa do sentido. Este artigo parte da idéia de que as indeterminações não constituem “incompletudes” que dificultam a compreensão “harmoniosa” dos produtos culturais, mas, ao contrário, valem-se de diversas estratégias como as elipses e as construções paratáticas para produzir sentidos em termos de narratividade. Por meio de análises de Sam Shepard e de João Gilberto Noll, nosso trabalho tenta mostrar como as indeterminações colaboram para a construção de um sujeito ficcional instável, em crise com sua própria identidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: indeterminação, parataxe, narrativa, Sam Shepard, João Gilberto Noll.

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Some of the fiction produced in the United States during the last three decades attempts to map the increments of textual contraction introduced in the everyday life of society by technological gadgets such as e-mails, cell phone messages, instant online communication, among other “products of an accelerated culture of distraction” (BIRKERTS, 2001, p. 68). Examples of such a trend can be found in the fiction of writers as diverse as Raymond Carver, Bobbie Ann Mason, and, more recently, the short stories by Sam Shepard. Acknowledged as one of the major American dramatists of his generation (COHN, 1988, p. 1118-1119; ZELLAR, 2002, p. 1; JAMES, 2002, p. 30), Shepard has recently decided to employ his playwright skills in a new genre: the short story. While the texts by Carver and Mason deal with the bafflement of working-class people consumed by alcoholism and/or alienation, the short pieces by Shepard seem to capture “not only the dissonances of familial life, but also the fundamental loneliness of the human condition” (KAKUTAMI, 1996, p. 23).

The human subject is also a realm of constant experimentation in contemporary narrative. In his latest volume of stories, *Great Dream of Heaven* (2002), the prose of Sam Shepard, for example, seems to project an imaginary world where frustrated, confused characters wander an arid territory inspired by the landscapes of the Wild West while trying to find some kind of graspable anchorage to construct their own identities. The eighteen stories in the book are written in deadpan style, full of epigrammatic sentences and characters that experience somewhat indeterminate situations in a world in rapid transformation.

This trace can be detected in stories like “Coaling ½ Way”, in which a man leaves his wife and son and crosses a barren landscape in order to reach his lover, but he is the one who is eventually to be left completely lost in a hotel room in Los Angeles (2002, p. 11-18). As the story is very concise, the reader is not provided with a detailed account of the characters’ motivation, which might explain their attitudes since who they really are or feel is not readily graspable. There are many “facts” hidden in the omissions of the story and these ellipses are not illuminated by the surface facts presented in the text (SOBREIRA, 2006, p. 1693). Thus, it seems to be clear that this story, among other texts encompassed in this volume (“Tinnitus”, “Betty’s Cats”, and “Blinking Eye” come to mind), employs the technique of inconclusiveness and indeterminacy to suggest deeper dimensions of interpretation. As Stephen J. Bottoms puts it, “Shepard’s work is dominated, and indeed distinguished, by patterns of internal tension and contradiction, by loose ends and uncertainties, which – far from obstructing the [...] creation of meaning – operate to generate a plethora of possible readings” (1998, p. ix).

Although ambiguity, indeterminacy and omission have been employed before and they constitute ageless features inherent to the art of all time, these techniques aim at different artistic effects nowadays. Umberto Eco identifies this indeterminate, ambiguous feature of contemporary poetics as an overt objective of these works of art, a value to be achieved in detriment to others (1969, p. 22-23). Thus, some artistic products in recent decades can take on forms ranging from concrete poetry to partial, minimalist forms, which contribute to their indeterminacy or “indeterminance”, as defined by Ihab Hassan, for whom this artistic style tends, basically, to promote “a playful plurality of perspectives, and generally shift the grounds of meaning on audiences” (1987, p. 72-74).

On the other hand, some theorists regard this contingent (or sometimes called minimalist) kind of short fiction as a superficial, laconic and depressive form of writing (HALLETT, 1996, p. 487-488) that does not tell a story in a satisfactory manner because it lacks too much information and, for that reason, could not be viewed as a work of art because it is a “storyless” story.

However, if a story “lacking” clear time-space references is really an unfinished sketch produced by a lazy and/or incompetent author and, for that matter, it cannot be regarded as an artistic work, what can one say about, for example, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting For Godot* (1952), whose only references to time and space consist of “A country road. A tree. Evening” (1982, act I, p. 1)? What can one say about this play in which two seemingly homeless characters yak about nothing except the apathy of waiting at an indeterminate spot where nothing, in terms of “real” action, happens?

To treat such a piece of writing as an unfinished sketch is to refuse to look beyond the surface of words and images, to see the amplitude of possible meanings condensed in a piece of writing. It is tantamount to taking this play, which has inspired Shepard (BOTTOMS, 1998, p. 4-5) as well as many other artists, as a barren territory in which the characters (apparently) do nothing but wait for someone who will never come while trying to fill up the awkward silences with nonsensical, everyday talk.

But the notion that a rich text is one that has many patterns of action and a large amount of information derives, before any masculine obsession about size or the capitalist logic of accumulation of goods, from Aristotle. In the definition of the Greek philosopher, a plot should possess a certain extension or greatness and, thus, it must not be excessively small (2005, VII, p. 39-40). Such notion, based on reason and harmony, has inspired the styles of artists and audiences alike and, mainly during the nineteenth century, when books became more popular, the novels and short stories written according to realist conventions of causality and narrative progression called the attention of the readers and helped to consolidate their appreciation for

traditional forms of plot. Thus, the common reader tends to have difficulty accepting a vague and very short story as an interesting work of art.

Some of the pieces collected in Shepard's *Great Dream of Heaven* rely on those strategies of emission and subtle suggestion, but one of the stories that perhaps resists the conventional impulse of the reader to totalize and rationalize the elements of the fictional world is "Tinnitus". In this particular story, an unnamed narrator struggles to prolong the life of a dying race mare "long enough to save the foal she's carrying" (2002, p. 113).¹

To begin with, this narrative presents the reader with a surface tension due to the fact that the story is told by an unreliable voice that keeps changing his own personal data and other information concerning his life in a chameleon-like style. Thus, the identity of the narrator does not seem to be unified around a coherent whole, but a fractured mirror which reflects multiple disguises and contexts surrounding each of these fake identities.

The textual structure itself contributes to that sense of fragmentation for it is composed of four different segments of what seem to be messages sent by fax or perhaps left on an answering machine. Although each of these four parts begins with an entry containing the date and the place where the narrator says he is, these diary indications that cover the first three days in February and may seem to ground the narrator's vision in reality are elusive because they lack much information about the situations and the characters involved. And even though it is suggested that the narrator attempts to report *all* the events that happened during those days to his supposed boss, every time he brings Palmer up to date, his account of the events is still incomplete because there is much left unsaid between the fax messages. In the first entry, for example, the narrator mentions that the weather conditions in Normal, Illinois, are really bad and he tells Palmer that an intense blizzard is "heading up from the Gulf", bringing "ice, snow, sleet, driving winds, and minus zero!", and that it feels like "the wrath of God or something" (p. 114). Then, in the following phone mail, he fails to make any reference to the "monstrous" snowstorm that was looming nor does he mention anything about his trip to Lexington, Kentucky. Such omissions speak for the elliptical nature of this delicate piece of fiction.

In this same message, the narrator mentions a woman, Martha, with whom he had a relationship in the past. Though vaguely outlined, this character seems to be interesting because, by evoking her, the narrator reveals a bit of his own intimacy:

1 All further references are to this edition.

All those years ago when I first met Martha. It was right here at Keeneland, 1959. Hard to believe. You remember, Palmer – you were the one who dared me to ask her out for a highball and steak. That was just the beginning. Twenty-two years of pure hell. Actually, I miss her, truth be known. I don't know why. Maybe too much road. (p. 115)

The events surrounding Martha are expressed in paratactical style and they suggest the emotional bond between the narrator and his significant other is extremely problematic. But the reader is denied access to their affair because the narrator describes a few surface facts involving this character, but the message is so truncated that it sounds incoherent, unlike the character mentioned previously, Arcaro “Banana Nose”, who can readily associate with the reader because this passage refers to an actual person, the American thoroughbred Hall of Fame jockey Eddie Arcaro (1916-1997). By doing so, the story also shows some adherence to reality, which is, as in Shepard’s plays like *True West* (1980), subtly destabilized as the narrative unfolds.

However, the way the narrator approaches external reality in this specific passage does not apply to his remarks on Martha and, as a result, the reader faces difficulties interacting with such disjointed information: who is this woman really? Was she married to him? Did they have kids? What happened to her? Why does he miss her? Did she die or did she leave him? Why does he describe his relationship with her as “pure hell”? Or, the most important detail of all, did he kill her? Because that would explain why the narrator behaves as a fugitive, who constantly relies on assumed names and lies. As the evocations of Martha are indeterminate, the reader cannot piece together these fragmentary, subjective elements given the gaping, “porous” structure of the narrative.

The syntactical organization of the Martha passage contributes to dissolve any conclusive resolutions by employing paratactical style. Instead of rigorously selecting the aspects of the world in an explicative mode, subordinating information and perceptions into a hierarchy, the use of parataxis, according to Hayden White, favors insubordination and linear disjunctions (1971, p. 69). The extreme tension and emotional vulnerability faced by the character during these three crucial days are represented in paratactical style because this non-selective mode of expression best conveys “the language of emotion: everything comes at the same time, everything rushes in the spirit and in the mouth of the character” (ARNOULD, 1992, p. 3).²

2 La parataxe [...] est le langage de l'émotion: tout arrive en même temps, tout se presse dans l'esprit et dans la bouche du personnage (The author of this paper is responsible for all the translations).

In the passage, the narrator seems to embed his narrative in a coherent space-time frame: he first met Martha a long time ago (1959) “here” in Keeneland. However, the next sentence does not follow the same pattern of exactitude. It sounds intriguing because the narrator confesses that it is hard to believe, but what exactly is he referring to? Is it hard to believe how fast time has gone by? Or does the narrator have difficulty believing in the events that took place around that time? Rather than adding extra information to that statement, the next sentence focuses on the addressee, the mysterious Palmer: “You remember, Palmer – you were the one who dared me to ask her out for a highball and steak”. Why did not anybody, except Palmer, encourage the narrator to ask Martha out? Was there something about Martha that the narrator and Palmer seemed to ignore? Instead of explaining what he meant by that, the next sentence states: “That was just the beginning.” What exactly is being talked about? The beginning of a love affair or a tormented relationship? Was that just the beginning of the “pure hell” he alludes to in the next sentence? Why did the narrator share “twenty-two years of pure hell” with Martha? What did she do to turn their relationship into “pure hell”? Or, most importantly, did their life together resemble hell because of the narrator’s tendency to lie? What exactly does he mean by this oxymoron? And if it was “pure hell”, why does he say something like: “Actually, I miss her, truth be known”?

But, in this case, *truth* cannot be known because the reader lacks information to interact with such a message that precludes resolution. Actually, the narrator himself seems to have difficulty understanding his experience with Martha because he confesses he does not know why he misses her, “maybe too much road”. Although the text is perfectly coherent to the speaker and the addressee, after all, they possess a previous narrative together, the message sounds emblematic to the reader, who is caught between the short paratactical sentences. The text is arranged in apparently linear sentences, but there’s no syntactical connection between them. Rather than narrative sequences, as Hayden White puts it, this “paratactical consciousness” presents a “language of linear disjunctions” that tends to avoid privileged representation (1971, p. 69). As a result, the reader is not granted the privileged position of mere *voyeur*, for his or her active participation is required in the process instead. According to Bottoms, by often ignoring conventions of ultimate resolution, Shepard invites his audience “to fill in the gaps for themselves, to draw their own conclusions” (BOTTOMS, 1998, p. 2).

Such kind of narration resembles the indeterminacy and unreliability surrounding the narrator of “Blackbird Pie” (1988), by Raymond Carver (BETHEA, 2001, p. 175-180; SCOFIELD, 1999, p. 266-280). As both stories unfold,

the reader is unable to piece together the subjective fragments and the blank spaces of the imaginary world represented by both narrators. Their attempts to reconstruct experiences are subject to doubt because they are either contradictory or indeterminate. Carver's narrator presents traces of mental confusion, while Shepard's is even more problematic given his constant lies and transformations designed to push forward the secret plot to induce the dying mare to give birth to the precious foal.

Besides confessing he has become "a professional liar" (p. 117), he changes his name several times to the extent that he "lose[s] track [him]self" (p. 115) of his own identity. Firstly, he assumes the name of Guy Talmer (p. 112), then it is Lyle Maybry and, finally, he registers under the name Filson (p. 115), but his actual name and occupation are never mentioned. The narrator is also accomplished in the art of deception: besides checking into the motels with fake identities, his car has "phony plates" (p. 112), he uses fraudulent credit cards (p. 114), and he even lies to the clinic veterinarians: "I told another little fib and claimed I had power of attorney but had left the notary sheet back at the motel" (p. 117). So, how can "truth be known" if the narrator, paradoxically, tells "little fibs" all the time and is often reticent regarding the situations experienced?

Unlike Beckett, whose prose poems contain, as Perloff suggests, a type of "fragility" of words "whose meanings are constantly eroded and reformulated" (1993, p. 200-2001), this short story by Shepard conveys a coherent pattern of action: the surface facts progress, there is a change in the state of affairs, there are no a-grammatical sentences etc. The interesting points of "Tinnitus" are the semantic gaps created by the inconclusive depiction of some characters and situations in the story. This lack of certainty regarding experiences like the "twenty-two years of pure hell", characters like Martha and Palmer, whose whereabouts he complains he has "no earthly clue" of and, above all, the shifty identity of the narrator create a considerable degree of indeterminacy in the story. And it is precisely this undefined aspect that allows the reader to *feel*, rather than *know*, something that he or she cannot quite put a finger on.

Thus, the voice that tells the story in "Tinnitus" can be interpreted as an indeterminate narrator. Although it is suggested he is living under very negative circumstances such as, for instance, the painful reminiscences of the past and his own sexual frustration – otherwise he would not have felt so bothered by the "crazy pair screwing their brains out in the room next door" (p. 114), feelings that could be both due to the mistakes he has made in the past and the guilt he feels, it is difficult to precisely determine the identity of this dissolved "I".

It is also suggested that the narrator's suffering from a constant tinnitus, which he believes is "the direct result of all those years of dove shooting" (p. 115) is not, actually, a problem in his ears, but a symptom of a brain condition, what would explain his memory loss. But then again, this assertion is based only on speculation. As a result, though he uses plenty of disguises and eventually manages to save the defenseless colt, the narrator himself remains unsaved as he is slowly losing his identity and dying.

THE SHAPE OF WATER

Traces of such a dramatic identity crisis can be noticed among us as well, in the book *Mínimos, múltiplos, comuns* (2002), by the Brazilian author João Gilberto Noll. The essential logic of composition of this volume of very short texts evokes the origins of the world. In an attempt to cover the creation of this realm of relativity in which we live, the author has divided his three hundred thirty-eight stories into five sections: genesis, the elements, creatures, the world and the return. Each one of these main sections is subdivided into several other parts like, for instance, the elements, which contains four segments: water, air, fire and earth. Each of these subdivisions constitutes a collection of quite a few stories or, as Noll puts it, "fictive instants" (2003, p. 20).³ But this world projected by his prose is not the empirical universe in which we live or, at least, believe we live. The world suggested by the pages and photographs of *Mínimos, múltiplos, comuns* is a territory governed by its own rules, an entirely imaginary world. The narrated facts, the characters and the situations depicted can only remotely evoke the "real" world. Lacking rigorous temporal and spatial references, his fictive instants can only provide the conventional reader with vague resemblances of the empirical world. Thus, the consequence may only be the indeterminacy of the stories and the emblematic way the author gives life and significance to his characters. One of the texts in which these references seem to have been blurred is "Sangue no Guaíba" ("Blood over Guaíba"), which can be translated as follows:

That blood on the hands that I should wash there, in the Guaíba river. Otherwise, they would suspect. Of what, I wasn't quite sure myself. I remember that, some time before, on a gratuitous occasion, I thought that if I stayed home I would be in a better situation. It was only then that I saw the hands covered with blood. I looked at the river, trying to evade the circumstance. Despite the condition of the water, I waded into the river and had water up to my knees. And all I had to do now was whistle. The

3 "Instantes ficcionais."

imprecise melody, the mild day, looking unharmed. Little by little the whistle deadened everything. The night would shelter me soon. Is there any reason to dream? (NOLL, 2003, p. 107)⁴

Before turning to a closer examination of the translated piece above, it is relevant to mention the fact that Noll initially wrote this short story to fit into the column he ran twice a week in the Brazilian daily *Folha de S. Paulo* from 1998 through 2001. The challenge issued by the newspaper was to have a series of narratives employing less than one-hundred thirty words. Noll's effort resembled, in terms of condensation, the work by the late author Jerome Stern, who edited, among others, the anthology of *really* short stories titled *Micro Fiction* (1996). Thus, one must take into account the strict material limit Noll's work was subjected to. In book form, "Sangue no Guaíba" is inserted into the section "Rivers", which goes into the series "Water", which is part of "The elements".

This radically short story is composed, in its original form, in Portuguese, of only ninety-three words. Instead of obstructing his creativity, such economy of means unleashed the author's capacity to suggest poetic meaning through his minimalist piece. In a recent article, Luiz Gonzaga Marchezan suggests that the texts in *Mínimos, múltiplos, comuns* could be referred to as "hypotexts" since they sustain an internal pattern of tension in their brevity: "A hypotext is a very short text. Brevity, whether in prose or in poetry, produces in the narrative a strong internal tension. Brevity intensifies, when it comes to prose narrative, inner coercion in constructing the plot" (2006, p. 223).⁵

Like "Tinnitus", by Sam Shepard, Noll's text employs a paratactic style of composition: the sentences form fragments of reality, but rather than coalescing into a coherent whole, these poetic fragments represent a variety of perceptions and sensations that resist rational scrutiny. The first sentence brings out an imagistic quality that is not unfamiliar to Noll's earlier work (SEIDEL, 2001, p. 128-130): "That blood on the hands". But whose hands are those and, most significantly, whose blood was shed? The lack of a possessive adjective causes the sentence to sound enigmatic and its undecidability is not quite solved by the following clause. Thus, it is not possible to conclude

4 "Aquele sangue nas mãos que eu devia lavar ali, no Guaíba. Se não, desconfiariam. Do quê, nem eu mesmo sabia. Lembro que, pouco antes, num lance gratuito, imaginara que se tivesse ficado em casa estaria em melhor situação. Foi só então que vi as mãos cobertas de sangue. Olhei o rio, tentando escapar da circunstância. Apesar do estado das águas, entrei até os joelhos. E agora só restava assobiar. A melodia imprecisa, o dia ameno, parecendo ileso. Pouco a pouco o assobio amortecia tudo. A noite logo mais me acolheria. Para que sonhar?"

5 "Um hipotexto é um texto muito curto. A brevidade, quer para a prosa ou para a poesia, provoca numa narrativa uma forte tensão interna. A brevidade intensifica, no caso de uma narrativa em prosa, uma coerção interna para o estabelecimento da sua trama."

if both the blood and the hands are the narrator's or somebody else's. But, let us assume for a moment that these hands belong to the "I" who articulates the text. This provisional assumption poses another seemingly impenetrable question: is the narrator a murderer who has just fled a crime scene? He himself confesses he has no earthly clue to that.⁶ Unlike the narrator of "Tinnitus", this voice cannot be discredited since Noll's text does not provide the reader with any evidence that the narrator is an unreliable source. It is possible to speculate that this particular character is mentally confused, but he is not a "professional liar" like the former.

The narrator states that he should wash his hands in the Guaíba, a river located in Southern Brazil, in order to avoid *their* suspicion. Though very condensed, this hypotext shows a basic tension pattern, which is the "I" confronted with the other, or the world. What does not seem to be clear is what there is to suspect. The hands covered with blood, one might guess. But the text does not specify if this blood belonged to someone else. What if the narrator was assaulted by someone else and, during a violent fight, was hurt? What if, instead of having murdered somebody in cold blood, the narrator is a convict who has escaped from prison and hurt himself in the process? Though possibly absurd, all these perspectives and others seem to be valid here.

As the story unfolds, these semantic gaps remain unresolved since the principle that organizes the text is neither an explicative one nor a narrative sequence that could help to illuminate such indeterminate passages. The following sentence, for example, does not necessarily have to do with the situation alluded to before since it concentrates on a previous moment when the narrator seemed to have foreseen the difficult situations he would get involved in if he left home. Consequently, the hypothesis that the narrator was an escaping convict could be dismissed since he was home "some time before". But how much exactly is that? This notion is too vague to conclude anything about the narrator.

Although the text mentions the Guaíba river, a place that actually exists, like Illinois and Lexington, KY, in Shepard's piece, these spatial references represent less a realist strategy of anchoring the fiction in the empirical world than a poetic locus that invites artistic recreation in an entirely different realm – the imaginary world. The time references in "Sangue no Guaíba" are even more indistinct since the next sentence, for example, states that: "it was only then that I saw the hands covered with blood". The only words that express

6 Although the English translation does not determine the sex of the narrator, the original version does so by employing the Portuguese word "mesmo", which refers to the masculine gender, in such a context.

temporality in the text are “then” and “now”, both adverbs that do not clearly specify when the events have taken place.

The narrator’s vision shows a deadpan attitude concerning the situations because he cannot (or maybe does not even try to) fathom the significance of the events and the objects surrounding him. When confronted with “the circumstances”, he says he prefers to evade them by looking at the river. But what circumstances does he avoid facing directly? The Brazilian scholar Edu Otsuka, who authored a thesis on Noll, among other contemporary writers, suggests that the narrator’s vision in *Rastros do verão* (1986), a novel by João Gilberto Noll, “does not try to search for profound meanings that could reveal the objects that come into sight. As a matter of fact, what is seen does not seem to impact on the narrator in any case because the ‘I’ that narrates is an empty man, an ‘I’ without an integral interior being” (2001, p. 107).⁷ Thus, this procedure differs from the traditional conventions of the novel, according to which the narrator’s perspective adds not only sensorial perceptions to the person or object that is seen, but also “emotional remembrances and metaphoric analogies” (OTSUKA, 2001, p. 106-107).⁸ This notion also holds true for “Sangue no Guaíba” given the lack of introspective reflections about the ongoing situation and the seeming inability to organize perceptions into a coherent (or conventional) closure.

The final gestures are even more emblematic: “Despite the condition of the water, I waded into the river and had water up to my knees. And all I had to do now was whistle”. This passage suggests discontinuity since the reader is not told before what the condition of the water is. So, how can he or she know what he is talking about? Has the blood that covered the hands sullied the water or was it dirty or troubled before? Hence, it appears to be a great amount of blood that covers the hands or, assuming that the blood belongs to the narrator, it has bled through, say, wounds. A few lines later, he says that the “mild day” looks “unharmful”. Can one assume that, though it looks unharmful, in fact, it has been injured? Maybe this passage could suggest that the narrator did not kill anybody, he is only hurt and tries to hide (from his oppressors) his wounds in the flowing water. The river, then, would wash away his blood and ease his pain. Thus, unlike the negative connotations that the water possesses in Raymond Carver’s stories like “The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off”, and “So Much Water So Close To Home”, both published in the book *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), the water in the piece by Noll represents temporary serenity and evasion

7 “O olhar do narrador não intenta buscar sentidos profundos que desvendem os objetos que abarca. Tampouco o que é visto parece repercutir de alguma forma dentro do narrador, pois o Eu que narra é um homem oco, um Eu sem interioridade íntegra”.

8 “Lembranças afetivas e analogias metafóricas.”

from the tense circumstances he vaguely outlined earlier. The frantic situation in which the character is involved and that cannot be fully apprehended by the reader suggests the narrator's psychological vulnerability and his apparent difficulty distinguishing between fact and imaginary hypothesis. Besides, his frequent difficulties knowing things for sure and his allusion to dream in the last sentence raise the question of his very perception of reality.

By transforming water, river, blood, and dream into images of fluidity and instability, the Brazilian author, who has shown in interviews to be very aware of the intricacy of his artistic craft, produces a metaphoric density that embodies the impalpable nature of his short fiction. The reader cannot fully rationalize the discontinuous elements provided by the narrator because they are deliberately indeterminate like the shape of water or the "imprecise melody" the narrator whistles as he wades through the river. Therefore, the elaborate imagery and the complex gestures of the character, as well as the strategies of omission and indeterminacy, serve the artist in representing the narrator's own instability and his difficulty conventionally subordinating and organizing his perceptions of reality in such a way that they coalesce into a totalizing vision.

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