

Poetry in exodus

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Abstract:

This article analyzes the representation of the images of Ferreira Gullar's childhood and youth in his poem João Boa-Morte, cabra marcada para morrer, investigating how the sertanejo space, experienced by the author in São Luís do Maranhão, is re-signified in the work. Although his formation was marked by elements of the rural universe, the poem does not faithfully reproduce his memories, but becomes a poetic space loaded with new meanings. Demonstrate how the transmutation of these images occurs in the poem, highlighting the construction of the narrative space from a literary perspective. To this end, Gullar's biographical and poetic trajectory is examined, as well as the structure of the poem in question. It is verified that the space in the poem does not correspond only to the author's experiences, but is poetically reconstructed, acquiring new layers of meaning. The backcountry landscape, previously linked to Gullar's childhood, is transformed into a symbolic environment, where social and existential issues are articulated. Memory, therefore, does not act as a reproduction of the past, but as matter re-elaborated by poetic language. It is concluded that João Boa-Morte, a goat marked for death operates a resignification of Gullar's space and memories, transcending individual experience to build a universal narrative about oppression, resistance and identity. Poetry, therefore, reveals itself as a mechanism for transforming reality into art.

Keywords: Ferreira Gullar, Literature and Poetry



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Introduction

Ferreira Gullar lived his childhood and part of his youth in São Luís do Maranhão, which at the time was a small town. Thus, Gullar spent the first years of his life surrounded by elements linked to the sertanejo universe. This scenario will influence your writing in different phases.

In this way, we seek here to draw a general overview of how the representation of these images of the author's childhood and youth emerges throughout the poem *João Boa-Morte, cabra marcado para morrer*, in order to compose its space of the narrative poem.

To demonstrate how the process of representation of these images in the work occurs, we will make a brief observation of the life path, the poetic trajectory of the author and the analysis of the poem in question.

In the poem *João Boa-Morte, cabra marcado para morrer*, more than the representation of the images of the author's childhood and youth, we see that the images of space have their meanings transmuted, that is, they do not present the same space and feelings experienced by the author.

To demonstrate how these resignifications occur within the author's poetics for the construction of the space poem *João Boa-Morte, cabra marcado para morrer*, we resorted mainly to the literary theory about space by Regina Dalcastagnè, on issues about memory in literature addressed by Silviano Santiago, the work of Gullar himself and Adorno.

Ferreira Gullar: from the paths to the poems of cordel

In order to make a study of the issue of spatiality in the cordel poem *João Boa-Morte cabra marcado para morrer* (1962) by Ferreira Gullar, in order to better understand the moment of production and the objectives of this work, it is necessary to trace an outline of the author's trajectory, of the paths that led him to the cordel poems.

Ferreira Gullar was born in São Luís, on September 10, 1930, received the name of José Ribamar Ferreira, starting to use the pseudonym Ferreira Gullar, during his youth the author studies in different schools, which seems to announce his poetic trajectory of ruptures and changes.

The author, in addition to being a poet, played an important role as a theorist of poetry, art and culture in general, as well as being a playwright, screenwriter and painter, which allowed him to experiment with different perspectives on the arts and which demonstrates his desire to innovate.

Ferreira Gullar goes through several artistic currents, these transitions are closely linked to the author's personal phases. In 1951, Gullar arrived in Rio de Janeiro, at which time he intensified his writing and began artistic processes that would lead him to concretism and neoconcretism, and the subsequent rupture of ties with them, for reasons of style and even ideological.

The rupture with the neo-concrete movement resulted in the author's move to Brasília, at the invitation of the then president Jânio Quadros, where he worked at the Brasília Cultural Foundation, which according to the author broadened his vision of social perspectives. In 1961, Gullar returned to Rio de Janeiro and joined the Popular Center of Culture and the National Union of Students, and at that moment he began to write cordel poems with didactic intentions to develop in the workers the awareness of the capitalist processes that involve the labor force, the social injustices." I had a very clear vision of literature, so that when I wrote the poem I was conscious of using my literary knowledge for the political awareness of the people. I wasn't doing literature, but politics." (Gullar, 2013, p. 157).

Thus, in Gullar's cordel novels they compose exemplary cases, stories that must be followed, serving as models of attitudes to be followed by workers, hence the idea of didactic poetry, because in them there are ways to break the chains of labor exploitation that lead to the great problems of poverty and misery, as is the case of *João Boa Morte, goat marked for death*, which will be exploited here.

Didactic poetry: João Boa Morte, goat marked for death

The poem narrates the story of João, a farmer, which can be read as the story of many, many other workers, as well as the fourth and fifth verses of the second stanza "It could be in Sergipe, / Pernambuco or Maranhão", stories that were repeated and are still repeated today in the hinterlands, where poverty, ignorance, Power and strength prevail over the weakest.

I'm going to tell you
about a case that happened
in Paraíba do Norte
with a man who called
Pedro João Boa-Morte
, a farmer from Chapadinha
[...]
João lived on the land
of a very rich colonel,
had a wife and six children,
[...]
He worked night and day
on the farmer's land,
barely slept, barely até,
barely received money;
(Gullar, 2004, p. 111).

The family's situation of poverty is aggravated by the reduction in the price of the harvest that would be paid to João, who questions the colonel and is thus expelled from the land where he lived:

I looked at six children
with eyes dug with hunger,
when one of them had lunch
the others did not, the one who has dinner
the next day does not have lunch.
[...]
The new price was not enough
to guarantee the table,
accepting a lower price
was already too weak
[...]
works on
Colonel Benedito's farm
I had a friction with him
due to the sale price
[...]
"João Boa-Morte is no good,
I don't want
caboclos to be a beast in my lands."
You will have to walk
from here to Maranhão
(Gullar, 2004, p.113).

João travels throughout the region where he lived in search of a place to work, live and provide conditions for survival for himself and his family:

They walked the rest of the day
and when night fell
they arrived at a farm:
"- Your doctor, I have a family,
I am a hardworking man."

[...]
Better to walk
[...]
The sun of the hinterland burned
on the eight walking.
[...]
The many farms were,
always the same result.
(Gullar, 2004, p.117).

Realizing the lack of work options for survival, he thinks about killing his entire family and committing suicide. Shortly before realizing his idea, a man, Chico Vaqueiro, appears who prevents the massacre and calls him to join a group that fights against the exploitation of the landowners.

Arriving at a deserted place
, they stopped to sleep.
They all lay down on the ground
with nothing to cover themselves.
When they were sleeping
, João got up slowly
, immediately taking the machete
with which he was going to behead them.
[...]
But like a madman behind him
Chico Vaqueiro was going,
A farmer like him
Like him without money
to take you to the League
and give you a whereabouts
so that he may follow
the true way.
To tell you that fight
only now will it begin,
that he wasn't alone
he shouldn't kill himself.
[...]
Compadre, don't do that don't kill those who are innocent. The
enemy of the people – Chico Vaqueiro told him – are not our
relatives, the enemy of the people is the colonel farmer.
[...]
John understood
that the peasant will win
by the force of unity.
(Gullar, 2004, p.121-122).

It is inevitable not to refer to *Morte e vida Severina*, by João Cabral de Melo Neto, for the saga of the family in search of survival conditions, in this regard

there are already studies and in interviews Gullar reveals the influence of Cabral in his poetry. The titles of the works themselves dialogue with each other through death.

For our study, it is worth noting that the space and movement in the works are marked as in stations of a pilgrimage. Like the time that in *João Boa-Morte, a goat marked for death*, is marked by the stops at the farms where the family asks for a place to stay and land to work, by the nights they spend in the open and in which they fall due to exhaustion and hunger. All this, marked by the distance from the farm of origin that makes the environment increasingly alien to the characters.

Still thinking about the characters, there is a very great distance from us readers of who the characters are, we know little about the family, we know the name of the father and son Mundico who dies, the names of the other characters and other characteristics, are denied to us. The characters go on their way without protest, without talking, without interaction in an alienated march, a phenomenon that brings us to Adorno's idea that society leads us to circumstances "in which men are separated from each other and from themselves." (Adorno, 2003, p.58). The characters do not live, they simply exist and follow the march in search of landing.

In *João Boa-Morte*, the space changes with the physical movement of the characters, who depart from Chapadinha in Paraíba with an unmarked direction, this undefined movement reinforces the idea that the family is without a destination, they make stops at two different farms, then they make another stop at an unidentified place where a community leader is killed and finally, the last stop where João sees no way out other than to kill his family and commit suicide.

Despite the lack of definition of the place where the family is headed at each stage, the distance from the territory that is home, daily and family, is notorious and grows as the family's despair grows. The characters leave the lands where they lived working for the colonel and pass through a farm and then another and another, in a movement from which we can observe the deterritorialization that the family is suffering.

In this sense, we can think about the issue of rural exodus that permeates social issues and has been thought of by Regina Dalcastagnè as literature

accompanying the movement of migration to large cities. The author sees in the arts, especially in literature, a way of representing the difficulties faced in this process and in adaptation, through the loss of references and the new problems that arose with the movement of populations from the countryside to the cities.

The literature followed the migration to the big cities, representing in a less or more direct way the difficulties of adaptation, the loss of references and the new problems that arose with deterritorialization. (Dalcastagnè, 2018, p.109).

Dalcastagnè also points out that the period of growth of urbanization occurs from 1960 onwards, exactly at the same time as the production of *João Boa-Morte cabra marcado para morrer (goat marked for death)*, which was written in 1962, and with the increase of cities there was also an increase in all the problems of poverty and misery that were accentuated by the lack of structure of the cities to receive the demands of the new populations:

After all, the country urbanized in a very short period - the 1960 census recorded 45% of Brazilians living in cities, a number that would reach 56% in 1970 and 81% in 2000 (the first IBGE data for the last census point to 84% of the urban population in 2010). (Dalcastagnè, 2018, p.109).

Thus, Gullar, through *João Boa Morte*, does not only tell us about the problems of the sertanejo worker of the orders and excesses of the colonels, but also of the cities – where the author speaks of – environments without sufficient infrastructure for all, there is a lack: housing, work options or any other conditions that allow these cities to receive those who migrate there and thus the current of poverty and misery is perpetuated, as occurs in the exploitation of field work.

Another fundamental question about space occurs through the perspective of the third-person narrator, who in many moments appears distant from the thoughts and desires of the characters, and who at other times starts to assume the point of view of the central character, knowing his concerns and desires. "And around him he saw/land and more empty land,/corn and cane greening." (Gullar, 2004, p.116). From this perspective, we readers can also adopt John's point of view, being ourselves, readers, inserted in the same scenarios as him and family, looking through John's eyes.

Still referring to Dalcastagnè, who analyzes some novels that are objects of exemplification in her book *Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, the author

observes: "what can be observed when following the steps of the protagonists" (Dalcastagnè, 2018, p.109), tracing from there a profile of the spaces and images that surround the characters. Which can lead us here, to a similar reflection on space in *João Boa Morte*, which is built around the movement of the characters as they walk on pilgrimage through the spaces of the countryside.

In this way, we ask ourselves the question: "What can be observed when walking with the family? Taking as a basis especially the verses in which the narrator takes for himself the perspective of the central character João, we can observe the use of words such as lavrador, caboclo, fazendeiro, peasant, venda, sertão, coronel, nordeste, machete, mato, hovel, vaqueiro etc., all linked to the universe of the northeastern sertanejo, from where we can observe the marks of regionalism present in the language and that create the setting of the rural scenario where we are inserted in the family pilgrimage.

Let's go back to João Boa-Morte's journey, he leaves the farm in Chapadinha in Paraíba, taking his family with him, from there they move in a geography common to the space they already lived, the space they already lived, but that did not belong to them, the family's work on the property is seen by the farmer as insufficient to pay even for the accommodation and food, let alone becoming owners of part of the latifundium.

Thinking that the family moves within spaces similar to the farm where they lived, it is inevitable not to question: So how does the process of distancing from what is common and familiar to the characters, mentioned above, take place? It takes place in two main ways, the first is through Colonel Benedito's order that no one give the family an inn:

friends, almost relatives,
that could not help,
that they would give him lodging
expensive, had to pay.
What the Colonel orders
It is good not to contradict.
(Gullar, 2004, p.116).

The family is thus alienated from the human relations that could support it, with the colonel being the one who holds the domain of the land, of the locality,

exercising a power that is a mixture of mayor, delegate, holder of land and commerce, making sure that no one dares to disobey his determination.

And the second way of distancing the elements familiar to the characters comes from the first, as no one can give help to João, his wife and children who are on pilgrimage in search of someone to give them a house to live in, land to plant, that is, conditions to obtain their livelihood, they keep walking and walking.

The successive refusals to search for the family cause the movement to distance them more and more, physically and psychologically, from the regions where the family would find known people and territories, because just as Colonel Benedito had declared, in a tone of prophecy and threat: "You will have to walk on foot/from here to Maranhão." (Gullar, 2004, p.115).

The poem portrays the figure of the Northeasterner, emphasizing that the difficulties faced are not limited to drought, we see the worker humiliated, exploited and without rights, in short, the hardships suffered by the victims of an excluding dynamic in the relationship between sertanejos and colonels.

Both in the human images and the images of the landscapes, the suffering and anguish that are almost transforming the figures into concretes is brought to the surface, the family that observes:

But what hurt him the most
was, hungry and homeless,
ver so much land vazia
so much gray hair to be left.
(Gullar, 2004, p.116).

Here we observe, another moment in which the narrator takes João's perspective for himself, pain and land are confused, under the gaze of the protagonist who observes the vastness and fertility of the land, the same land that is denied to him while he and his family go hungry. The scenario contributes to making concrete the pain of the characters, the exploitation and the social injustice that materialize through the observation of the contrast of the productive land in opposition to the misery of the family.

João Boa-Morte: a reinterpretation of the cordels

From the traditional cordels of the Northeast, *João Boa-Morte, cabra marcado para morrer* preserves the representation of the northeastern space and the particular figures of that same space.

Under its formal aspect, *João Boa Morte, cabra marcado para morrer* does not differ in line from traditional cordel poems, having, however, some differences in its stanza and in its system of irregular rhymes, making it not fully follow the model of the classic leaflets sold at fairs.

João Boa Morte, a goat marked for death, has 50 stanzas ranging from 5 to 15 verses, each of them seven poetic syllables, being sepsyllables like many of the traditional cordels. The poem is rich in rhymes and consonants, which appear both inside and at the end of the verses; supported by the fixed length of the verses, they guarantee another rhythmic layer to the work.

Still thinking about the perspective of traditional cordel narratives, the narrator begins the poem with the verse "Vou contar para você" (Gullar, 2004, p.111), in order to refer to the singers and repentistas of the northeast, as well as to the cordels that use this verse with recurrence.

Jerusa Pires Ferreira points out that cordel literature consists of a collection of elements "in which leaflets, engravings, images, dictions are gathered" (Ferreira, 1993, p.42), thus we move *João Boa-Morte, a goat marked for death*, a little more from the traditional cordels of the Northeast, since we have here only the poem, without illustrations, without printing in booklet and separated from all the traditional context of production. The distance becomes even greater when we think about the question of the difference in the figure of João: oppressed and impotent, as opposed to the figure of the knight of the traditional cordels (influenced by European chivalric novels): brave and heroic. In this sense, we can make an approximation between the traditional character of the valiant knight and the character Chico Vaqueiro, who appears only at the end of the poem, but who plays a decisive role in the outcome of the poem, preventing João from killing himself and his own family.

Chico Vaqueiro arrived:
- Compadre, don't do that
Do not kill those who are innocent.
Our enemy
– Chico Vaqueiro told him –

they are not our relatives,
The enemy of us
it is the Colonel Fazendeiro.
(Gullar, 2004, p.121).

Thinking about the relationship between the influences of a colonized literature in which the traditional cordels of the northeast emerge and evolve, one must think about the correlation that exists between the similarities between the traditional/heroic knight and Chico Vaqueiro, both are characters who ride horses, in general they are on journeys and wanderings, exploring territories, and are a crucial element for the dissolution of conflicts within the narratives, They are almost a magical element in the narrative that emerge to save the day.

In João Boa-Morte, cabra marcado para morrer, the use of the knight element serves to break the molds of a chain of exploitation that comes exactly from these relations of colonized and colonizer within social relations.

In general, about this period of cordel and social poetry in which the poem object of our study fits, it is necessary to highlight that there is some controversy among the critics specialized in Ferreira Gullar, due to the fact that the author does not maintain all the elements of cordel literature and according to some theorists such as Lafetá (2004).

From the point of view of Gullar's literary trajectory, Lafetá states that the poems of cordel, which proposes propagandistic, didactic and militant didactic poetry, which portray social ills and poetically describe the worker, is a failure, because the idea of trying to understand and represent the "other" (the worker who suffers) in an effective way and still alter his political consciousness simultaneously is practically impossible. because "the problem was to find the poetic measure capable of learning the other (the dispossessed) in an effective way" (Lafetá, 2004, p. 229). Lafetá uses the term "dispossessed" to designate one who is not aware of the social processes that involve each individual, exactly the category that Gullar wanted to achieve with his poetry at that time. The critic also points out that Gullar's cordels do not reach the originality and quality of the classic cordels of the northeast, even because this was not the objective of Gullar's poems.

However, for other critics, the passage through cordel poems provided Gullar with greater conditions for his poetic production to advance and to be still

punctuated by the same critics as of great quality; for Antônio Carlos Secchin, "in a unique way it makes an amalgam of all these tendencies, revealing an ethical commitment and an aesthetic relevance that consensually place it at the highest level of contemporary artistic creation" (Secchin, 2003, p. 205).

Sertão and sertanejo: the space of memory

Gullar writes the cordel poems in the 1960s, living in the urban space of Rio de Janeiro, having recently arrived from Brasília, given this physical distance from the hinterland in which the author writes the cordel poems, makes the choice of the environment to compose the poems curious. Would it be an attempt to bring the didactic poems he writes closer to the traditional cordels that are mostly set in the hinterland?

We already have the answer to this question, as we have recently observed that one of the greatest criticisms of Gullar about his cordel poems is due to the fact that the author has not preserved all the characteristics of traditional cordel literature.

Thus, it is pertinent to observe that Ferreira Gullar spent his childhood and part of his youth in São Luís in Maranhão, his hometown, which at that time was a country town and due to its geographical location presented characteristics of the sertanejo space described in *João Boa Morte, cabra marcado para morrer*.

Small towns, by preserving the proximity to rural spaces, allow their residents to move and get to know the particularities of these environments, as a result, Ferreira Gullar, who had his father as the owner of a fruit and vegetable business, spent the first decades of his life immersed in this environment close to nature, plantations, the daily life and dynamics of the environments of the sertanejos.

To bring this question to light, we turn to Silviano Santiago, who in his fictional and theoretical production addresses a lot about the interventions of memory in the procedures of writing. In the article *Meditation on the craft of creating*, the author explains to us about the memories of memory:

they serve as a foundation when it comes to idealizing and composing writings, and eventually, they can serve the reader to explain them. They translate the

reflexive contact of creative subjectivity with the facts of reality. (Santiago, 2008, p. 173).

Thus, it is demonstrated that there is an interaction between the figures of Ferreira Gullar's childhood and youth memory, the experiences in the space of the past, an environment of intersection between the author's life and the environment of the traditional cordels, become the backdrop for the period of Gullar's didactic poetry.

Let us return to the images constructed in João Boa Morte, *cabra marcado para morrer*, words such as verdejam, cana, sertão, coronel, cabra, nordeste and Maranhão, far beyond marking the space from which the story is narrated, denote the author's past that emerges from within poetry. Regarding the relationship between language and memory, Silviano Santiago points out that there are affective relationships in this process.

Memory dominates language more – that is, the outpouring of feelings into words – than what is part of each one of us. Than we were used to believing. Memory is mystery and travels through language like the boat sails through the sea, driven by the predictable and unpredictable wind of dawn." (Santiago, 2008, p. 390).

The approach to the paradigm of language and memory, from the perspective that Silviano presents to us, seems to emerge unconsciously in the process of writing composition, a process that seems to have occurred in the composition of the figures of Ferreira Gullar's childhood and youth in the work *João Boa-Morte, cabra marcado para morrer*, it should be emphasized, however, that the meaning of no words remains unchanged from the context in which it is inserted, as Adorno already observed about lexical choices.

No word that is inserted in a literary work is completely detached from the meanings it has in the communicative discourse, but also in no work, not even in the traditional novel, does this meaning keep unchanged the same meaning that the word had outside the text. (Adorno, 2003, p. 52)

There is, therefore, the use of images of childhood and youth by the author Ferreira Gullar, which makes us hope for a relationship of nostalgia and affection in the representation of these figures, however, due to the context in which these

images are inserted, which is an example of exploitation, poverty and hunger, the relationship becomes hostile and sad.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis is based on the literary theory about space, as proposed by Regina Dalcastagnè, on reflections on memory in literature elaborated by Silviano Santiago, and on the studies of Adorno and Gullar himself about the relationship between personal experience and artistic creation.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This work sought to follow the paths that the authors Ferreira Gullar went through to compose the space of the narrative poem *João Boa Morte, cabra marcado para morrer*, starting from the author's personal trajectory and the experiences of rupture with artistic currents that led the poet to the production of didactic poems.

Through this route and the brief analysis of the poem in question, it can be demonstrated how the composed space is not a mere imitation of traditional cordel poems, but rather the result of processes of experience and artistic production.

It is a fact that every artistic production suffers the effect of influences from the experiences of its authors, but it is remarkable how the figures and experiences of Ferreira Gullar take on new contours when applied to cordel poems.

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