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## The intertext of fact and fiction in the prose of Lúcio Cardoso

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### Introduction

One of the most important literary theories of the modern period has called special attention to the topic of fiction, autobiography and memoirs, with the posing of implicit contracts between the writer and the receiver in the process of reading. But this difficulty in seeing the difference between the personal narration of the true facts of the past as we find in the autobiography and in the memoir and the fictional processing of many of these same events and experiences in a novel or short story have long been a topic of theory for literary critics.

While reading *Sons and lovers*, *A portrait of the artist as a young man* and *Heart of darkness* with the students, we perceive that all three novels deal with real periods in the life of the three writers and demand that we make a distinction between a factual narrative of the life of the writer and a fictional recreation of the events. This implies not just a beauty of language but a change in the content: it must be an adaptation from life, which produces art and not just reproduces life. While thinking about these problems, some quotations from the essays of T. S. Eliot kept coming back to memory and despite the warning of Eliot himself that: "when a poet theorises about poetic creation, he is likely to be generalising one type of experience" (Kermode, 1975, p. 86), and so limiting his observations to one small field, we felt that maybe his ideas might allow the critic to make a distinction between fiction and autobiography.

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There were two extremes to be avoided: one school said that all was fiction and the other said that all was autobiography. Both were true in a certain way and both the post-structuralists and the romantics had elements in their favour. The truth lay as always in *via media*. Since the use of the ideas of Eliot permitted a middle course, we felt encouraged to pursue his guidance and offer a tentative suggestion of the distinction. According to Eliot, experience will become fiction when there is a transmuting and an ordering of personal experience.

## 1 Transmuting

Eliot tells us that the development of the poet goes on two different levels. On the one level, there is the technical development allowing him to master the difficult and painstaking techniques of poetry writing. On the other level, there is the human development and the accumulation and digestion of experience (and experience which is accepted as the consequence of doing what one likes). He tells us: "By experience, I mean also the results of reading and reflection, varied interests of all kinds, contacts and friendships as well as passions and adventures" (Eliot, 1978, p. 165).

This concept of experience is therefore an expanded one and includes not just first hand experience acquired second hand, so to speak. This is less than the post-structural concept and more than the Romantic idea. However, Eliot demands that this experience has to be processed in order to become literature. Speaking of Shakespeare, he states: "Shakespeare, too, was occupied with the struggle — which alone constitutes life for a poet — to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal (Hayward, 1953, p. 55).

The essay on "Tradition and the individual talent" repeats the same idea in another way: "The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together" (Eliot, 1978, p. 9).

Eliot, then, maintains that the experience of the poet which goes into poetry has to suffer a process of amalgamating before it becomes poetry and it would seem that this is exactly what happens with experience which goes into novels.

We have a privileged insight into this transmutation of the events of life shown in a biography into the molten strength of the prose of fiction. The sister of Lúcio Cardoso, Maria Helena, wrote a fine autobiography in which she deals with some of the events transmuted in the fictional text of Lúcio.

In the novel *Dias perdidos*, the narrator describes the great failures of the character Jacques in everything he attempted:

Oh, os empreendimentos que tentara... Os negócios que ideara, em que comprometera dinheiro, esperança, desejo de viver. Não havia, naquelas redondezas, terra que não tivesse palmilhado, sociedades que não tivesse tentado, especulações que não tivesse ousadia. No princípio, aproveitando os recursos da zona pastoril, lançara-se no comércio de gado. Mandara construir balsas para facilitar o transporte pelo rio, escrevera dezenas de cartas, arrendara pastos e fazendas. Mas tudo desaparecia misteriosamente em suas mãos. Os capatazes fugiam com o dinheiro, as mercadorias eram desviadas, a peste se abatia sobre o gado. Para fugir à ruína, ele passara a outras mãos o que ainda lhe restava (Cardoso, 1980, p. 136).

Maria Helena Cardoso gives us the same type of description of her own father:

Faz-se comprador de gado para revenda em Santa Cruz, uma idéia que lhe ocorrera num dia de grande cismar, solucionando a situação. O sucesso foi enorme, pois até então ninguém tinha pensado nisso: comprava grandes partidas de gado diretamente dos criadores e levava-as ele próprio para negociar em Santa Cruz. Começou a ganhar dinheiro, a esperança voltou-lhe a coração, mas a inveja começou também a medrar. Ao fim de algum tempo, ninguém mais queria vender-lhe bois. Não. Iriam eles mesmos a Santa Cruz e fariam também bons negócios. Todas as portas se fecharam, tinha de pensar em outra coisa (1968, p. 19).

Here we have the same basic facts but in the transmuted version of Lúcio, the facts take on a greater significance in the life of Jacques, and in a finer text with more amplitude and with more vigour and a finer style, and under a different name, the basic facts take on a new significance.

Both texts also talk of another experiment. Jacques tries something else to make money after he returns to the city where Clara and his son Silvio:

E recomeçava com um negócio de carvão, comprara maquinismos, abria um escritório na capital. Mas o carvão rendia pouco, a terra se mostrava avara de mineral. Liquidara tudo às pressas, lançara-se noutra negócio que já o atraía. E assim montara uma fábrica de sabão, construíra estradas, chegara mesmo a tentar uma empresa de transporte e navegação (Cardoso, 1980, p. 137).

Maria Helena tells us the same sort of thing about her father:



Abriu uma pequena fábrica de sabão, que também redundou em fracasso. Os comerciantes locais fizeram vir de fora sabão em tal quantidade e por preço tão íntimo que a fábrica faliu por falta de compradores da mercadoria que ficava amontoada nos prateleiras. Não era dali os da terra tinham-lhe má vontade. Qualquer possibilidade de sucesso de um empreendimento seu era longo encarado como um prejuízo para os filhos do lugar (1968, p. 14).

What has happened to the events that young Lúcio witnessed in the life of his own father, back with the family in Curvelo has been transformed into something more impersonal, given a wider meaning and presented in a prose of excellent quality. This raw, crude material of the personal experience of his observed father has been transmuted into something universal and impersonal. The personal experience of Cardoso becomes the experience of Clara looking with darkness in her heart in all its senses and Jacques pulls together many different strands of experience and centralizes in many ways the essence of the family life. The resulting book is something strange and rich.

Nevertheless, the type of experience transmuted is not in itself a guarantee of greatness, although it conforms to the criteria that Eliot himself sets out for the nature of true poetry. The private experience of Eliot, like any other poet, at its greatest intensity becoming universal is potentially great poetry. But it has to be transmuted. It has to be universalised in order to become the experience of the age and it can only do this if this experience finds its perfect objective correlative.

In *The waste land*, it was in the myth of the Fisher King and the sterility of his lands that Eliot found "the set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (Hayward, 1953, p. 107-108) as Eliot himself defines the objective correlative.

Milton found in *Samson Agonistes* and Byron in *Don Juan* the chain of events that allowed them to transmute their personal experience into something rich and universal. Milton found in the blind Samson betrayed by his wife a situation that would allow him to deal with his own experience as defeated puritan and a blind imprisoned poet impersonally. The Scotsman Byron found in the character of Don Juan, the perfect mouthpiece to air his irreverent views about the hypocrisy and falsity of the British and European ways of life.

Eliot tells us that *The waste land* was a relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse. But since this grouse is impersonalised, we will never know the true nature of the grouse and we do not need to know. It may have been as some say that Eliot felt that post-war London was a sterile place full of sordid aspects, that his personal life was dead and sterile because of a tiring monotonous job in a bank and because of a bad marriage with a neurotic wife in which neither found emotional and sexual fulfilment. It may have been this, of course, but one must be aware of Eliot's warning:

I admit that my own experience as a minor poet may have jaundiced my outlook: that I am used to having cosmic significance, which I never suspected, extracted from my works (such as it is) by enthusiastic persons at a distance [...] and to having my personal biography reconstructed from passages which I got out of books or which I invented out of nothing because they sounded well: and to having my biography invariably ignored in what I did write from personal experience (1951, p. 64).

Therefore the assertion that Eliot's personal problems resulted from the awful daring of a moment's surrender is even more risky. Nonetheless, Eliot obviously had the sensibility to "feel the disorder, the futility, the meaninglessness and mystery of life and suffering" (Eliot, 1936, p. 168) in post-war London. But it was the myth of the Fisher King that allowed Eliot to get his personal feelings across in an impersonal way: "to see beneath both the beauty and the ugliness, to see the boredom, the horror and the glory" (Id., 1933, p. 106). But it was also the vision of London and Europe as the equivalent of Dante's twentieth century hell full of sexual frustration as well as the figures of the Tarot pack seen in terms of modern characters that allowed Eliot to find his full objective correlative. So Eliot presents a series of cameos in rapid succession expressing the futility of the age. But it is the intensity and the clarity and the overall unity of the fragments welded into the terrible clearness of vision that makes *The waste land* into a masterpiece, a parallel to the visions of Picasso on canvas. All critics agree on finding this overall unity in the poem. Matthiessen speaks of the poem as "a quest for salvation in contemporary London" (1958, p. 37), Kenner of the "picture of perverted nature and automatic lust" (1959, p. 132). Heading sees in the poem "the struggle for physis fulfilment or maturity" (1964, p. 89). Richards sees the poem as "the expression of the disillusionment of the age" (1925, p. 520) and Glover Smith sees that the unity of the poem must be found in a slightly different perspective.



In the case of Lúcio Cardoso, in *Dias perdidos*, he manages to distance himself from the biography of his father. While in *Maleita*, it was very much the direct experience of the father that was the substance of the narrative, in *Dias perdidos*, there is an objective correlative. But it will be in *Crônica da casa assassinada* that this objective correlative will be perfect for the expression of the most intimate emotions of Lúcio.

## 2 Amalgamating

The other process that Eliot mentions is that of amalgamating. He mentioned in his famous essay on "The metaphysical poets", the experience he understands as the experience of the poet amalgamating different elements of the human experience and putting them all together in a new whole, which comes out of his life, but is not autobiographical:

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes (Hayward, 1953, p. 117).

This is how the writer deals with his own experiences. But we must note that Eliot intends by experience, not only the personal experience of the writer, but all types of second handed experience acquired through conversation, through reading, through going out and around. By a process of distancing, the writer turns all this into literature, crossing the frontier between personal experience and fictional narrative. The quality of this literature will not be based on the quality of the personal experience of the writer, but on the intensity of the process of amalgamating which unites many disparate elements in a new and intense unity fused by the process of creation.

This we can see happening in the first of the urban stories of Lúcio Cardoso, "Inácio". The writer deals with a father figure and he tells us how the character was formed in his mind. We have the good fortune of seeing how this happened in the chapter that Lúcio wrote for the little book *10 romancistas falam de seus personagens*. The work was organised by João Condé and in this book Lúcio speaks of Inácio forming in his mind. The publication in question had only 220 copies of which 20 were not commer-

cialised, being separated two copies for each of the ten writers involved. The result was very difficult to find but of great importance for those who work with the process of literary creation. Lúcio tells us how he came to imagine Inácio:

Não me lembro de quando vi Inácio pela primeira vez. Sei apenas que foi há muito tempo, há tanto tempo mesmo que já estava perfeitamente familiarizado com a sua figura, assim que resolvi lançá-la através de uma novela. Inácio é um velho pesadelo de infância. Em muitas noites seguidas, enquanto o sono não vinha, sonhei com esse singular indivíduo de casaco de xadrez, flanando em ruas que em sempre imaginava limpas e bem cuidadas. Não sei de onde me veio essa sugestão: sei apenas que a todas as impressões de crime ele se achava misturado e que às histórias horripilantes narradas pelos jornais, Inácio estava sempre presente. Se disser que sonhei noites seguidas com esse tipo, que o via em crimes hipotéticos, sempre com a mesma roupa e a mesma atitude ostensiva, talvez não me dêem crédito. Mas ainda que mal realizadas através dos romances, certas figuras não têm necessidade de crédito para serem reais (Condé, 1946, p. 115).

But despite having the character clear in his mind while he was living in the interior of Minas Gerais, the perfect setting for the appearance of Inácio took more time to become clear to Lúcio. He continues his explications of how he finally came to find the ideal place for this type of person "eminente suburban":

Vila Isabel, Madureira e Méier foram durante meses os cenários ideais para a narrativa que eu planejava. Parecia-me fácil perceber Inácio no "bulevar" 28 de Setembro, entre jovens discutindo partidas de sinuca e mocinhas gritantemente na moda. Mas não sei por que, indo certa noite na Lapa, compreendi que ali era o reduto ideal dos Inácios. Frequentadores do desaparecido "Mère Louise", esses impenitentes solteirões que tantas noitadas fizeram no "Assírio", jogadores profissionais, jogadores de bicho, prostitutas, gente sem ocupação definida, todo aquele mundo misterioso e fácil me pareceu instantaneamente o cenário ideal para localizar o meu personagem (Condé, 1946, p. 116).

Lúcio give here a clear example of how this amalgamating of experiences goes on in the mind of the writer during the process of literary creation:

The result of this process of transmuting and amalgamating is clearly stated by Eliot: "The great poet, in writing himself, writes his time" (Hayward, 1953, p. 55). The process allows the poet to state a general truth just as Yeats manages to do according to Eliot: "The second impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense



and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol" (Ibid., p. 201).

In *Dias perdidos* and "Inácio", the personal experience of the writers has undergone a process of impersonalisation through transmuting and amalgamating and become the general symbol of the father figure seen from different points of view while the sun of the absent father struggles with the psychological digestion of the facts of his own early life.

### 3 Ordering

T. S. Eliot tells us in his essay "Poetry and drama" that: "It is a function of all art to give us some perception of an order in life, by imposing an order upon it" (Hayward, 1953, p. 85). And he concludes the essay with one of his profoundest and most memorable statements on literature and art in general: "For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order *in* reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation" (Ibid., p. 85-86).

It is precisely this that Eliot praises James Joyce for doing in *Ulysses*: "It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Kermode, 1975, p. 177).

The writer has as his principal task to order and make meaningful the immense chaos and confusion of experience, lived moment from moment, hostile, without significance and without moments of vision in which its meaning becomes clear and consoling. This chaotic experience has to be moulded and shaped into a meaningful whole which is perceived as such by the reader. This is the slow painful task of the writer and one which Eliot compares to an exorcism of a dark demon.

Lúcio Cardoso in *Crônica da casa assassinada* orders the experience of his profound discovery of inherent decadence of life style of Minas Gerais. There is a type of mythical unity given through the constant symbols and symbolic descriptions of the old mansion of the Meneses. The physical surroundings of neglect and finality reflects the spiritual and moral decadence of the characters involved, narrated with such objectivity by the chemist and the priest. The gradual revelation of the putrid underlying hypocrisy and falsity of the characters involved, from the dramatic exaggeration of the figure of the third brother to the evilness of Ana and the

pathetic figure of the tragic Nina, dying with the physical cancer, symbolised the spiritual cancer that was eating away the vitality of the interior of Minas with all its falsity and hypocrisy.

By the end of the novel, we see clearly what Lúcio himself affirms in his statement to Fausto Cunha in 1976. He tells us:

Meu inimigo é Minas Gerais. O punhal que levanto, com a aprovação ou não de quem quer que seja é contra Minas Gerais. Que me entendam bem: contra a família mineira. Contra a literatura mineira, contra o jesuitismo mineiro. Contra a religião mineira. Contra a concepção de vida mineira. Contra a fábula mineira. Contra a espírito judaico e bancário que assola Minas Gerais. Enfim, contra Minas, na sua carne e no seu espírito (Cardoso, 1991, p. 764).

The reader who sees this order in the experience of these characters from Minas Gerais feels the satisfaction with the intellectual clarity of the ordering. It leaves the reader in a state of contemplation and silence, of perception of this decadence, portrayed with disturbing clarity. It suggests a transcendent order of reality without offering any knowledge of such an order. It offers some intuition, some feeling, and some vision, which is characterised by the absence of practical desire by the self-forgetfulness of contemplation and by unique tranquillity. The reader feels an "intense and vivid revelation — a tearing of the veil, an epiphany of creatively discovered values and meaning" (Vivas, 1963, p. 120).

### Conclusion

When the writer has the patience, the honesty and the courage to forge in the smithy of (his) soul the uncreated conscience of (his) race by a process of transmuting and ordering of his experience, then he creates a work of fiction from the autobiographical facts of his life. He will give us not ideas, not a vision of life, not a philosophy nor a message about good living, but he will give us the rich, unsifted human experience of his race and generation at the moment it is becoming universal — a record of humanity ignored in the syllogisms of philosophy, the facts of history and the theories of science.

His fiction will be "a radiant body of everliving" and "a creation of a sensuous embodiment" as Eliot tells us in one of his essays. Therefore the difference of fiction and autobiography has observable frontiers.

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