

The visions of the invisible in Murilo Rubião¹

Vera Lucia Andrade and Wander Melo Miranda

"The invisible world walked
through my hands."
Murilo Rubião

Making it be seen the invisible is typical of the fantastic art in which is inscribed, in an illuminating way, the work of Murilo Rubião. To discover new and unexpected relationships between the data of the sensible world, exploring, through transgression, the limits of the human – that is the “strangely unsettling” trajectory traveled by the Murilian narrator and shared by the reader. Between a reality that tends to show itself as coherent and compact and the desire that makes its perspectives of configuration vacillate, the characters that populate the ghostly universe of the text move.

The look that enables or engenders this universe is, therefore, a revealing counterpoint of the vision prescribed to the real by common sense. The "invisible" named and baptized, inserted, thus, in the institutionalized knowledge of Law and Norm, like the dragons from the homonymous tale, or crystallized in fraudulent statue, as in “Not Don José”, starts to belong to the banal and routine field, against which the unusual view of the text seeks to rise. Hence, the irruption of phantasmagoria, of the optical spectacle in the imaginary, which presents itself as a new form of structuring in which the relations between the subject's desire and the objects of the cultural, religious and social world can be expressed, respecting the empty places or letting emerge the anguish that causes the vicarious filling of these voids.

Thus, phantasmagoria establishes a complex relationship between illusion and reality, between the desire to see or to know and the gaps of a narrative modality that overrides, without adjustment, contradictory perspectives, revealing soothing identifications. By operating a decentralization, phantasmagoria frustrates the look at the very moment in which it seems to satisfy it, establishing an incessant movement of come and go, a scramble of clues and references that makes the reader face the truth under the form of an enigma that does not always involve a conclusive answer.

To hide revealing and to reveal hiding, cards of the fantastic game in general, specify, in the Murilian textual game, the relationship between passion to see and passion to know, replete, often, of sexual passion. The obsessive impulse to look, which triggers the process of revealing a possible knowledge, at the same time desired and feared, as in “The Guest”, always runs into an enigma that will have to be unfold: the expectation of unfolding the world looked at points at issue, simultaneously, the subject who looks at it. The curiosity of the two brothers about the enigmatic identity of the "Man in the gray cap", in the tale of the same title, is never satisfied. The progressive disappearance of the object looked at, at the very moment in which it is given to the searching gaze, reinforces the invisibility – the man becomes literally transparent – and leaves a hopeless void in the circuit of the look, since one of the brothers “diminishes to a horrifying degree” and reduces himself, in the other brother's hand, to a “tiny black ball”, until he disappears forever.

On the other hand, the successive metamorphoses of "Teleco, the Rabbit" establish a dubious visual field – "Did you see what I saw? – , which makes the text a

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bewildering spectacle, in which belief and disbelief, skepticism and persuasion are confused. The animal's desire to recognize itself in a fixed and stable human image, which ends its oscillation between being and not being, results in the death that is made visible in the ultimate metamorphosis – "On my lap was a soiled little baby, without teeth, dead", concludes the narrator and the narrative is closed. The empty meaning of the life and the text, uselessly filled by the transmutations that have occurred, reinforces the impotence underlying all the search for knowledge, in a world doomed to the failure of knowledge and desire. Such situation reaches its peak in the grotesque of "Barbara", the devourer of the excess of her own frustration. Asking the world with a begging gaze and feeding literally on it – perverse substitution of sexual desire – gives *ad infinitum* furtherance to the chain of desire and its dissatisfaction, expanding the dimensions of emptiness, as it can be seen from the last demand made: "One night I saw Barbara, staring fixedly into the sky (...) She didn't want the moon after all, just a tiny star, almost invisible, a little off to the side. I went to look for it".

If in "Barbara" the object of desire is constantly displaced, inserted in an uninterrupted series of substitutions – which clarifies, in a certain way, the proliferation of beings and things of many other tales of Murilo –, in "Elisa", this same object is shown as mobile and unreachable, and closely linked to the question of knowledge. The repeated coming and going of Elisa, her inexplicable disappearance and appearance, prevents the character-narrator from freeing himself from the doubt that angers him (who is Elisa?), and from fulfilling his desire (to love and be loved by her). In another story, the desire of the brothers Og and Godofredo – rivals and doubles from name – for Misty points the question of knowing how to see diversity and of perceiving the ambiguity of the boundaries between normal and abnormal. Unlike Og, who sees invisible stars, Godofredo is not able to reveal his desire for Misty – "heavy clouds that now covered the firmament" – and when he manages to do so, after having lost her forever, he sees a red star unfolded in many colors: what was previously invisible becomes visible, although the lack remains.

As it is observed, even the role of guardians of knowledge and of privileged support of desire, performed by female figures, is fulfilled in an unsatisfactory way. Asterope, in "O Convidado"², a woman of an unsettling beauty, by virtue of the "shine of her eyes", stands on a similar plane to the one of the prostitute Viegas, from "The City", a woman with "malicious eyes". In both cases, it is the feminine gaze that acts as an instrument of revelation and, consequently, of condemnation of the subject looked at. It is Asterope's eyes that give José Alferes his identity as the long-awaited guest, since it is she who holds the knowledge, who "knows the way". In the same way, Cariba, the stranger who arrives in town asking questions nobody answers, will be identified by Viegas as guilty of a misdemeanor (asking questions?) that is not known – "fixing her eyes maliciously upon the defendant, now swore: Yes, it's him". Viegas, therefore, is who leads Cariba to condemnation, for being the holder of a knowledge, not manifested: "Bring Viegas here, she knows!".

The unreachable knowledge and the unsatisfied desire, dramatized at the level of the statement, are also manifested in metalinguistic terms. In "Marina, the Intangible", the narrator himself, as a writer, talks speculatively with his double, unfolded in the figure of an unknown. The (im)possibility of fantastic writing is revealed by the agonizing emptiness of blank sheets, which can, however, be filled with "invisible verses", coming from the intruder who appears unexpectedly in the lights of the writer. It presents to him an indecipherable text, composed of "instruments (...) without music" and by voices that

² In free translation, "the guest".

"emitted no sound", situation that reiterates the process of composition of the text that the reader has before the eyes.

The double text and the fantastic text as a double postulate the question of the status of the real, which is configured through a scriptural practice of derealization, but able to bring about what culturally and socially is repressed. In "O bloqueio"³, genesis inside out, such a procedure is metaphorized in the building that, little by little, is being deconstructed, to the astonishment and discomfort of the protagonist, who sees himself "loose in space", uprooted from the ground of social conventions, of which his undone matrimonial relationship is the particular index.

The writer's never-ending and "meaningless" task resembles that of the engineer of "The Edifice", as both move on the unstable terrain of freedom and norm, of misunderstanding and reckoning, of hope and despair, of triumph and defeat, of boredom and euphoria. This come-and-go movement manifests itself, even, at the level of the arrangement of the texts in book: the short stories initially published in *O Ex-mágico* (1947) and in *A Estrela Vermelha* (1953) reappear gathered in *Os Dragões e Outros Contos* (1965), which, in turn, unfolds in *O Pirotécnico Zacarias* (1974) and *A Casa do Girassol Vermelho* (1978). This movement of familiar and strange return, in which the text is constantly the object of revision and rewriting, demonstrates the author's own dissatisfaction with his (in)finite work.

Resulting from such an unusual persistence in the Brazilian literary context, which seems to be satisfied today with rushed and thoughtless achievements, Murilian work carries a unique intellectual and artistic quality, which only increases our contentment, as readers, for Murilo Rubião's seventy years.

³ In free translation, "the blockage".