

Alvaro Lins: The Formation of the Modern Brazilian Poetry Canon in the Work *Os Mortos de Sobrecasaca*

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Abstract

This essay explains about the modernist canon of Brazilian poetry by the studies of Álvaro Lins. Alvaro Lins was a literary critic who marked the Brazilian scene of the twentieth century, because with their studies premeditated what would be the great poets who remained immortalized in Brazilian literature over time. In the year of 1963 he published the work *Os Mortos de Sobrecasaca: obras, autores e problemas de literatura brasileira. Ensaios e estudos 1940-1960*, wherein he built in the first part of the work a panorama of Brazilian modernist movement in the poetry. The critic selected the poets from a set of values established on critical judgments on those who represent the modernist canon of national literature. For the confirmation of the study, this essay also analyzes the most important aspects from the work of Álvaro Lins that highlight the real significance of the writers analyzed by him and how important is his personality for the Brazilian literature.

Keywords: Álvaro Lins, Literary Criticism, Modernism, Poetry

1. Introduction

Álvaro de Barros Lins was one of the greatest thinkers of Brazil because his work consists of a rich source of culture to the national literature. The critic had an arduous task of analyzing hundreds of books, not of the past or rarely from the past, but, current books, because he worked for the newspaper, and had the craft to analyze works when they were published. The question requires multiple characteristics of those who prepare the criticism, because is necessary to produce it with agility, propose choice of works, help to clarify some important concepts of the book in analyses, and one of the most important criteria: judge the "aesthetic value", as greater it is, more the method will be applied, more the work can be understood in itself, more it embodies a universal vision and becomes an immortal classic. The criticism of Lins took refuge mainly in newspapers and magazines, responsible for the weekly footer literary criticism of the *Correio da Manhã* from Rio de Janeiro and as a collaborator of the critical sections of several other newspapers, he wrote weekly articles that followed step by step the Brazilian literary production of the period. According to the scholar Jean Yves Tadié (1992), Alvaro Lins fits in the journalistic criticism that has as one of its main features serve as an intermediary between the author and the public, present and promote new writers, to review the books of the week and make periodic reports. However, Alvaro Lins was not restricted to a commentator of books, he became a former of public opinion in his time, influencing the literary hierarchy and, consequently, the canon of Brazilian literature.

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Concerning the influence of the critic in the national literary scene a published note illustrated this phenomenon: "The day after the publication of Alvaro's footer about Sagarana, the work of Guimarães Rosa became very sought in bookstores; and that demand continues more and more intense" (SUSSEKIND, 1998, pg.18). After the publication of Alvaro Lins, the work Sagarana had a sudden commercial success, which made evident the prestige gained through the press by the critic, resulting from its well-trained and well-oriented personality. It is impossible to think about a history of Brazilian literature that include the decade of 1940 without the critical analysis of Álvaro Lins. The 1940s was the most productive for the criticism of Alvaro Lins; in the 1950s he began to work directly in politics and in the 1960s he dedicated himself to republish his work. In the year of 1963 he published a collection of essays and studies on literary criticism *Os Mortos de Sobrecasaca: obras, autores e problemas de literaturabrasileira. Ensaio e estudos 1940-1960*. In this work the critic brought together several articles from the *Journal de Crítico* to build the modernist literary canon based on their conceptions of analysis and value judgments. In the call anthology, the critic formulated a literary panorama with twenty years of modernist productions, choosing the writers who should remain immortal in the canon of Brazilian literature. Gathering his previously articles published in newspapers, Álvaro Lins achieved a great feat: to take his criticism to the posterity, because the book means trying to win time, slow down its course, and a writer like him with such willingness to continue, did not exist another choice but to escape from newspaper for the book and go down in history with their convictions. It can be said that the work of Alvaro Lins in question analyzes the Brazilian cultural context and its relationship with literature and in the title, the author anticipates his purpose: the dead with frock coat refer to the poem by Andrade (2012) which tells the story of an old photo album where all leaned "on joy to mock the dead with frock coat"; later, a worm bit the frock coats, the pages, the dedications and nothing remained of the old album, only one thing: a hiccup immortal of life. The metaphor of the title entitles perfectly the work of Alvaro Lins, because the critic selects the best writers of the time that according to their greatness managed to overcome the mishap of time and survive immortally in the Brazilian literature scene over the years. In this anthology the critic also analyzes works and writers of the period who did not achieve the ideal aesthetic value, and he classifies them as "problems of Brazilian literature."

2. The Modern Poetry

For understanding the critical path of Alvaro Lins about poetry will be considered the first part of the work *Os Mortos de Sobrecasaca*, entitled *Roominess of Frontier for Modern Poetry*. In this part of the work the critic analyzes the poets, their respective work, the cultural and aesthetic legacy that they provided for the literature. The modern poetry that occupied the literary scene between the years 1940 to 1960 was characterized precisely by a vast, and disorderly use of all themes, asserting itself through the destruction of all that was formal and conventional in ancient literary schools and by an use as a impetus for the continuity of all that was in itself more alive, artistic and genuine. This modern poetry evidences many sources of expression that were already in the past movements in romanticism and symbolism mainly, whereas in modern poets is fully realized the symbolism foundation which is the symbol; from the romanticism the modern poetry inherited the power of liberation, placing it in a much wider and larger sphere. A characteristic of modern poetry is the absence of limits and frontiers, however, the repudiation of the metric and the rhyme is not the main revolution of this poetry, because it is in the own bases that this poetry put his roots of renovation. The verses of this poetry transmit the imperfect and unfinished, because the poets were always willing to browse, search, and experience: "His state of mind is the restlessness; his method is the permanent attempt to renovation" (LINS, 1943, p.6). The modern poetic form consists of a formulation that requires from each poet a style, a way to create, a unique and personal complete system that unites the poetic substance and the particular form of expression. The modern poets studied by Alvaro Lins are: Carlos Drummond de Andrade (the definition of our age), Mário de Andrade (the imagination of a man and the image of a literary movement), Murilo Mendes (the positive and the negative in the originality), Vinícius de Moraes (the greatest poet), Ribeiro Couto (the minor poet), Cecília Meireles (artistic consciousness and formal beauty), João Cabral de Melo Neto (an original poet of his generation), Jorge de Lima (regionalist, nationalist and Brazilian poet), Raul Bopp (another regionalist, nationalist and Brazilian poet), Bueno de Rivera (a modernist latecomer), Augusto dos Anjos (modern and alive poet) e Thiago de Mello (the newcomer).

2.1. Carlos Drummond de Andrade

The most representative and symbolic poet of modern poetry is Carlos Drummond de Andrade, a poet who defined a time and a whole period. His poetry is widely held because it is in motion, in a permanent restlessness plan and perky experience; in the poetic substance, in the themes, in the historic position, he stands out as the most representative poet of Modernism by a characteristic reason: when he write verses, he uses its own way and also his own language. Drummond demonstrates in his poems in the work *Sentimento do Mundo* every kind of social and human concerns that absorbs himself. The work is characterized initially by the presentation of a language and a really poetic form; the language has a magical character, as in all poetry, not exactly logical character. And this magic language makes every word have a multiple and oscillating meaning; makes every word, a small universe extending in the reader, which forces him to participate in it, sharing of the experience and knowledge of the poet. In the work *Sentimen to do Mundo*, Drummond became his language most beautiful and more firmly, and the work reveals the poet more human, fraternal and interested in the fate of men. The work manifests a kind of inner revolution operated in the poet production processes, the title indicates every kind of social and human concerns that absorbs the poet. The poet creates a human atmosphere, and he has the decision: to make the work more universal, with a communicative message, presenting a less hermetic language, less rigid than it was before.

2.2. Mário de Andrade

Mário de Andrade has the imagination of a man and the image of a literary movement in his poetry. The poet appears as a representative figure of the modernist movement, in which he acted as leader, as a preacher, as a theorist and as a director. His works reveal the spirit of a collective movement: their concerns, their truths, their mistakes, their hopes, their disappointments, demonstrating that Mário de Andrade symbolizes the whole movement in its good and bad points at the same time. The poetic work in conjunction from Mário de Andrade studied by Alvaro Lins has the title *Poesias*, that brings together poems from 1920 to 1940 and contains beside their most recent poems, books published before, since *Paulicéia Desvairada* until *Remate de Males*. The poetic work brings all the fire and the nonconformity of the poet's youth, because at this time, the poet was with fifty years old. It is observed that the intention of the poet was to produce a Brazilian art, a national art, reflected simultaneously in the subjects and in the vocabulary.

2.3. Murilo Mendes

The poet has as main feature an originality that brings positive and negative points. As stated previously, Álvaro Lins advertises the writers about the question of the form and he exposes clearly his position of literary critic: "I don't have different purpose than to collaborate with modern poets, when I am suggesting to them the importance of the form for safety and the resistance of a poetic work" (LINS, p. 46, 1963). The critic calls attention to the problem of the form when he writes about Murilo Mendes. The work of Murilo Mendes *O Visionário* is composed with poems of the years 1930 to 1933, and it serves as documents of the trajectory of the poet. The main merit of his work is the restlessness of the poet, and the work has an intense poetic potential. However, *O Visionário* is below other author's works, it doesn't find its form of expression, because what is more constant is the unique feeling of poetry without its corresponding formal expression. The main book and one of the most significant works of contemporary poetry is the work *Poesiaem Pânico*, that collected poems by Murilo Mendes in the period of 1936 to 1937. In this work the poet reached an appropriate and accurate expression for almost all the poems, and it is the high point of his poetic existence.

2.4. Vinicius de Moraes e Ribeiro Couto

Alvaro Lins highlights a contrast between one fully realized poet and a poet who has not reached the aesthetic ideal, they are Vinicius de Moraes, a greater poet and Couto, a minor poet. It can be distinguished on the grounds that a greater poet has the power to penetrate in the innermost of the essential core of the phenomenon, and a minor poet for the permanence in superficial, external, incidental aspects of the objects; the same theme will be treated differently: the greatest poet reveal the essential mystery of his reality, and the minor poet fix the surface of its outer physiognomy. Vinicius de Moraes is a typical figure of the greatest poet, and shows that feature in the work *5 Elegias*. The poet execute with security and firmness his the principal mission: to make us forget the conventional aspects of the phenomena by presenting their transcendent, essential and authentic realities playing with images and symbols representative of the encounter between a major poet and poetic forces of the world; the poetic nature of Vinicius de Moraes is best suited in the big situations of life.

Already Ribeiro Couto is the minor poet, that presents his poetry a colorless and indistinct tone; it lacks poetic force, organicity, temperamental greatness, to achieve the higher areas of poetry because he is a poet of accidental things, the delicate feelings, and the words without mysteries. The work *Cancioneiro do Ausenteis* not one of the best results of the poet: the technique is empty, also the lack of content, featuring poems with little or no meaning. Alvaro Lins makes clear his impressions about Ribeiro Couto, showing that by their criteria the poet does not belong to the maximum canon of modernist literature: "It seems to me that, on behalf of Mr. Couto, see being thrown excessive praise. A review of natural values, however, already puts today, within the general framework of modern poetry, in place of a minor poet" (Lins, 1963, p.55).

2.5. Cecilia Meireles

Alvaro Lins highlights the artistic consciousness and the formal beauty in Cecilia Meireles, because the poet is not subordinated to any current of modern poetry, creating a significant and characteristic production. Her work *Mar Absoluto* has multiple aspects in the formal construction: rhythm, musicality, assonance and cadences, that ordering her verses technically in the scale of the artistic beauty. The theme of the author is not original, it presents often conventional, with the use of common themes. What gives an air of novelty to the themes is the form, the firm and calm assurance of poetic construction; the poet dominates the form with singular mastery, builds her poems with the science, technology, energy and the peaceful calm of someone who exerts an authority.

2.6. João Cabral de Melo Neto

João Cabral de Melo Neto is the first original poet in his generation: "In the universal literature, the models of this young poet are Mallarmé and Valéry; in the Brazilian literature, the model is Mr. Carlos Drummond de Andrade" (LINS, 1963, p. 58). At the time that Álvaro Lins wrote the anthology, the poet still initiated his poetic production, but the critic sensed that João Cabral de Melo Neto would be one of the best of his time. João Cabral is innovator, this is explained by the title of his first book: *O Engenheiro*; In this work the poet disdains from what is common and conventional, he seeks to create the secret and unique aspects of things, and he pretends to reveal only the essential use of the words. This makes his art hermetic and difficult, the poem approaches to the purity and mathematical precision. It can be seen in the verses of João Cabral, an area of originality, an irreducible individuality, a rigorously particular characterization, where the real artists are developed. The poet has its own space, his unique form, his poems are recognized even if they are not signed. Undoubtedly João Cabral de Melo Neto created his own space within the literature, without poets like his, so independent, the generation of twenty years of the modernist movement would be unrealized.

2.7. Jorge de Lima e Raul Bopp

Jorge de Lima is one of the characteristic and renowned poet of the modernist generation, because he represents, especially, the regionalist and nationalist tendencies of Brazilian literature. The Modernists committed themselves to see and feel the Brazilian life, unveiling ignored faces or little known of the past and the present, the poets search for regional themes and they look for a way of expression as much as possible nationalized. The book *Poem as Negros* contains the naturalist and pagan poetry of the second phase of Jorge Lima and it is the most representative part of his work. The poetry of this book expresses in a precise and artistic manner some genuine aspects of Brazilian life, revealing how much the poet understood and felt, both the man and the land of northeast. Jorge de Lima will always have a big place in Brazilian literary history. Also Brazilian poet, nationalist and regionalist is Raul Bopp that marked his work with nationalism in the subject and language. His most famous book is *Cobra Nora* to that represents excellently the Antropofagia group - one of the modernist currents - for what it reveals of "cult of instinctive aesthetic of Newfoundland". *Cobra Nora* to has visible importance, as one of the most individualized and representative productions of the last modernist movement, illustrating primitivism, the barbarian, the Amazonian world, stories and legends, an existing world and an imaginary world; furthermore, it is always possible to feel in this bizarre and vital book, an image of Brazilian things through the expressionist vision of a very original artist.

2.8. Bueno de Rivera

Bueno de Rivera was a modernist latecomer in Minas Gerais, but his production was contemporary with the aesthetic of the movement.

The work of the poet that has great awareness artistic and literary dignity is Luz do Pântano, his second collection of poems, imposes itself as book with high literary quality, and it is one of the best publications in verse of the year 1947. The poet is a dominant of the poetic illuminations, an originator of the sentimental chaos, a fashion artist, because his verses has a clear verb, conquered rationally; for him poetry is something essential and deep. According to Álvaro Lins, Bueno de Rivera did not achieve appropriate notoriety, even if the author of a valuable and characteristic work of contemporary poetry, which approached the great line of older modernist poets. His work is not exposed at first sight, the critical needs to analyze the verses with insight and sensitivity, examine them thoroughly, and then it is possible to realize the symbolism they represent in poetic experience, in conscious work, emotional and intellectual maturity.

2.9. Augusto dos Anjos

The aesthetics of Augusto dos Anjos, more than in any other national poet, is directly linked to his human adventure. The singularity of his poems makes it difficult to reach all the secrets of his artistic phenomenon, because the substance of his thought is matter of his verses. He is among all the deceased Brazilian poets until the time, the only really modern, the poet is illuminated by a projection of continuing relevance; with his appropriate verse, he is able to touch directly the intelligence, the heart and the senses of men at all times. The most significant work of Augusto dos Anjos is *Eu e Outras Poesias*, the book indicates universalization, integration into the cosmos, as if the poet contained all the pains and miseries of the human species registered there.

2.10. Thiago de Mello

Thiago de Mello already with his first book *Silêncio e Palavra* reached one of the highest positions in quality. The poet began the literary career in the 50s, but was released by Alvaro Lins because of the stylistic quality of his art, the formal technic, the vocabulary and the visible capacity in his compositions. The poet not only has a rare lexical science, a firm and elegant syntactic structure, but also very conscious employment values and rhythmic processes of the verse, the metric instrument offers him a lot wonderful formal solutions. Thiago de Mello has demonstrated that even with only one published book, he had perfect conditions to situate on the first line of contemporary poetry according to Alvaro Lins: "Major poets of our modern literature: I'm fine tempted to ask you one place, at your side, for the poet who wrote *Silêncio e Palavra*" (LINS, 1963, p.96).

3. Conclusion

Therefore, according to the literary critic considerations, the poetry produced by the active generation of the time started from the form to the substance, of the exterior construction for interior thematic richness. Is possible to perceive that the poetry of the modernist generation initiated the creation of a particular aesthetic order, with a conscious artistic construction and the improvement of the art of writing. Thus, Alvaro Lins introduces as the main representatives of modern Brazilian poetry, authors that demonstrate a renewed poetry, each poet with essential characteristics for the Brazilian literature. According to Bolle (1979) a studious about Alvaro Lins, the critic studied the modernist poets with cunning and depth of analysis, because he had extreme literary sensibility and sharp intuition, a critical inherent personality, intellectual and moral maturity, multicultural education and careful supervision to the literary value. Alvaro Lins is an important resource for those who wish to understand with clarity the marvelous work of Brazilian modernist poets.

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