

Water, people and milieu according to Guimarães Rosa

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IN ENVIRONMENTAL matters, the main legacy of the twentieth century was the intense and extensive pollution that has irrevocably jeopardized the landscape, water resources and the health of populations. Admittedly, there has been an extraordinary progress in cybernetics, with the shortening of distances and instant access to information. These achievements have been enabled by bipolar processes over time: war and peace; dictatorship and democracy; economic growth and social inequality; development and environmental destruction.

In the twenty-first century, judging from the first decade, the planet becomes dangerous; environmental destruction seems an inevitable apocalyptic scenario. The speed of communication increases, but the message is concentrated in monotonic, uneasy catchphrases and clichés. It is a vocabulary of few words and phrases: global warming; greenhouse effect; climate change; climate risk; sustainability; sustainable development; low carbon economy; risk society; governance; certainly.

We seem to be on a scaffold and what is on the verge of being decided is on the one hand the fate of humanity and on the other the transformation of the Earth. This separation did not exist before; processes were mediated by a certain dose of dialectics. Now it is all or nothing; it is danger and fear. There is no use in seeking culprits: predatory economic groups; maintenance of obsolete technologies; retrograde production relations; competition for water. No; we are definitely all culprits.

In these times of confusion and fear, it is advisable to resort to enlightened spirits other than climate scientists. Over the centuries, writers have always been the ones who best understand the signs of the times, the revolutions and the human soul. In this case, Guimarães Rosa's literature is an antidote to the evils of the world; it enables injecting of a dose of humanity in the relationship between people and the environment.

Water, people and milieu make up a universal chain. People, however simple they may be, have their dignity recognized –Zeguilherme the cowboy, Mainarte the cowboy; water flows through a “shabby creek” before reaching the São Francisco river; and the landscape is populated with wine palm trees, evergreen grass, little partridges and flocks of macaws that resemble “a blue or red cloth spread out, rolled, on the back of the hot wind.” The world has unity and is fixable. Enough terrorism.

Next we offer readers 12 excerpts from the stories of the great writer, selected on the basis their ecologic bias.

1

*“Há uma hora certa,
no meio da noite, uma hora morta,
em que a água dorme. Todas as águas dormem:
no rio, na lagoa,
no açude, no brejão, nos olhos d’água,
nos grotões fundos.
E quem ficar acordado,
na barranca, a noite inteira,
há de ouvir a cachoeira
parar a queda e o choro,
que a água foi dormir.”*

“There is a certain time,
in the middle of the night, a dead hour,
when the water sleeps. All waters sleep:
in the river, in the pond,
in the dam, in the marsh, in the springs,
in the deep hollows.
And those who stay awake,
in the gorge, all night long,
will hear the waterfall.”
stopping the fall and the weeping,
because the water went to sleep.”

(From *Magma* / Sono das águas)

2

*“E assim seguiam, de um ponto a um ponto, por brancas estradas calcáreas,
como por uma linha vã, uma linha geodésica. Mais ou menos como a
gente vive. Lugares. [...] Queriam subir e ver. O mundo disforme, de
posse das nuvens, seus grandes vazios. Mas, com brevidade, desciam outra
vez. Saíram a onde a estrada é reta, bom estirão. Até que, a pouco trecho,
enxergavam, adiante uma pessoa caminhando.”*

“And so they followed from point to point, through white limestone roads,
as if through a void, a geodesic line. More or less as we live. Places. [...] They
wanted to go up and see. The shapeless world, in possession of the clouds, its
large voids. But they soon came down again. They came out where the road
is straight, a long walk. Until, soon after they saw, ahead, a person walking.”)

[From *Corpo de baile* / O recado do morro]

*“Porque, dantes, se solambendo por uma grotta,
Um riachinho descia também a encosta, um fluviol,
Cocegueando de pressas, para ir caindo, bem em baixo, no Córrego das
Pedras, que acabava no Rio de Janeiro,
Que mais adiante fazia barra no São Francisco.
Dava alegria, a gente ver o regato botar espuma e oferecer
Suas claras friagens e a gente pensar no que era o valor daquilo.
Um riachinho xexe, puro, ensombrado, determinado, com regojeio e suazinha
Algazarra – ah, esse não se economizava: de primeira, a água,
Pra se beber.”*

(“Because, before, rejoicing through a dark valley,
A little creek also ran down the slope, like a river,
Ticklish with haste, to fall, deep down, in the Stone
Stream, which ended in Rio de Janeiro,
Which farther ahead met the São Francisco.
It was a joy, to see the creek pouring out foam and offering
Its clear chills, and we think about what was the value of that.
A little shabby, pure, overshadowed, determined, and happy creek, having
such Fun - ah, that one spared no effort: first class, the water,
For drinking.”)

(From *Corpo de baile / Uma estória de amor*)

*“Boiada boa ...
[...]
as ancas balançam, e as vagas de dorsos,
das vacas e touros, batendo com as caudas,
mugindo no meio, na massa embolada,
com atritos de couros, estralos de guampas,
estrandos e baques, e o berro queixoso do gado
junqueira, de chifres imensos, com muita
tristeza, saudade dos campos, querência dos
pastos de lá do sertão...”*

(“A good herd...

[...]

hips swaying and the waves of backs, of the cows and
bulls, their tails swinging, mooing

in the middle, in the tangled mass, friction of hides, horns crackling,
rumbles and thumps, and the querulous scream of the cattle, huge horns,
with great sadness, missing the meadows,
the favorite graze in the backland ...”)

(From *Sagarana / O burrinho pedrês*)

5

“Gritos: eleléia dos vaqueiros, terminando a apartação.

No eirado, são vistos: o vaqueiro Cicica, o vaqueiro Tadeu, o vaqueiro Doim, o vaqueiro Pedro Franciano, o vaqueiro Sãos, o vaqueiro Noró, o vaqueiro Abel, o vaqueiro Mainarte. Os vaqueiros Calixto, José Uéua, Raymundo Pio, Zeguillherme, João Jipió, José Proeza, Zazo [...].”

(“Screams: joy of the cowboys, all the herd put aside.

On the roof, we see: Cicica the cowboy, Tadeu the cowboy,

Doim the cowboy, Pedro Franciano the cowboy,

Sãos the cowboy, Noró the cowboy, Able the cowboy,

Mainarte the cowboy. Cowboys Calixto, José Uéua, Raymundo Pio Zeguillherme, João Jipió, José Proeza, Zazo [...].”)

(From *Corpo de baile / Cara de bronze*)

6

“[...] ela me acordou, tava me cheirando. [...] aí eu fingi que tava morto, podia fazer nada não. [...]

Muito tempo ela não fazia nada também. Depois

botou mãozona em riba do meu peito, com muita fineza. Pensei – agora eu tava morto: porque ela viu que meu coração tava ali. Mas ela só calcava de leve, com uma mão, afogado com a outra, de sossoca, queria me acordar. Eh, eh, eu fiquei sabendo... Onça que era onça – que ela gostava de mim, fiquei sabendo... Abri os olhos, encarei.”

(“[...] She woke me up, sniffing me. [...] Then I pretended

I was dead, could do nothing. [...]

Long time she didn’t nothing either. The

She lay her big hand on my chest, with much finesse. I thought - now I was dead: ‘cause she saw my heart was there. But she only pressed

Lightly, with one hand, fluffed with the other, she wanted to wake me up.

Eh, eh, I learned ... It was a jaguar - she liked me,

I learned ... I opened my eyes, I stared at her.”)

(From *Estas estórias / Meu tio o Iauaretê*)

7

“Sua fúria e ira derramaram-se tão prontas, que as escamas do corpo, que nem arroz em casca, ramalharam e craquejaram, num estremeção escorrido até os ocos apêndices córneos da cauda, erguida a prumo, que tocaram sinistramente. [...]

Uns homens, que trabalhavam mais abaixo, não tinham escutado o crotalar da tétrica fanfarra, não podiam saber da presença de Boicininga, latente na erva, junto da lata d'água. [...] e sendo pois assim, seis homens e uma cobra; e o daqueles que tivesse sede primeiro, provavelmente teria de morrer.”

(“Its rage and anger spilled over so promptly, that the scales of the body, like rice in the husk, rustled and and spread, in a convulsion towards the hollow horny appendages of the tail, raised upright, fatally whistling. [...]

Some men, who worked down below, had not heard the rattling o the gruesome fanfare, they could not be aware of the presence of Boicininga, latent in the grass, next to the water tin. [...] end it is, thus, six men and a snake; and the first of them to be thirsty would probably have to die.”)

(From *Estas Estórias / Bicho mau*)

8

“- *E os capins, os capins bonitos, que os boizinhos e os cavalos pastam? – sempre verde, aristides, luziola, maquiné, zabelê, cobre-choupana, dandá, cortesia, mimoso-de-cacho, frei-luiz, major-zé-inácio, pernambuco, cocorobó, são-carlos, marianinho [...]*”

(“- And the grasses, the beautiful grasses, where little bulls and horses graze? - aristides, luziola, maquiné, zabelê, cobre-choupana, dandá, cortesia, mimoso-de-cacho, frei-luiz, major-zé-inácio, pernambuco, cocorobó, são-carlos, marianinho [...]

(From *Corpo de baile / Cara de bronze*)

“– *E os bichos, os bichinhos, os pássaros?*
 – *seriemas gritando e correndo, ou silenciosas. Emas correndo às tortas. seriema voando. Os anús, pretos e brancos. A alma-de-gato. A codorninha-buraqueira. os joãos-de-barro. A maria-mole. A pomba-do-ar. A juriti-do-peito amarelo. a doidinha. A maria-faceira, em beira de lagoa. O sofrê, veredas dos Gerais avante.*”

“– And the animals, the little animals, the birds?
 - The crested caracara screaming and running, or silent. Ostriches running wild. Crested caracara flying. The ani, black and white. The alma-de-gato bird. The little partridge. The ovenbirds. The maria-mole bird. The pomba-do-ar bird. The yellow-chested dove. The swallow. The maria-faceira bird, by the pond. The oriole, along the swamp plains of Minas Gerais.”)

(From *Corpo de baile / Cara de bronze*)

10

“Pelos frinchas, entre festões e franças, descortino, lá em baixo, as águas das Três-Águas. Três? Muitas mais! a lagoa grande, oval, tira do seu pólo rombo dois córregos, enquanto entremete o fino da cauda na floresta. Mas, ao redor, há o brejo, imensa esponja onde tudo se confunde: trabéculas de canais, pontilhado de poços, e uma finlândia de lagoazinhas sem tampa.”

(“Through the cracks between garlands and franks, I see, down there, the waters of the Three-Waters. Three? Many more! The big, oval pond, takes from its depths two streams, while squeezing it thin tail through the forest. But around lies the marsh, a huge sponge where everything merges: trabecula of channels, dotted with wells, and an endless row of uncovered little ponds.”)

(From *Sagarana / São Marcos*)

11

“se viam bandos tão compridos de araras, no ar, que pareciam um pano azul ou vermelho, desenrolado, esfiapado nos lombos do vento quente. Daí, se desceu mais, e, de repente, chegamos numa baixada toda avistada, felizinha de apazível, com uma lagoa muito correta, rodeada de buritizal dos mais altos: buriti-verde que afina e esveste, belimbeleza.”

“We saw such large flocks of macaws in the sky that they resembled a blue or red cloth spread out on the back of the hot wind. From there we de-

scended again and suddenly came to a lowland, all there, happily pleasant, a fine pond surrounded by the tallest buriti palms: slender, green-clad, all dandy. “

(From *Grande Sertão: Veredas*)

12

“Nosso pai era homem cumpridor, ordeiro, positivo; [...] Mas se deu que, certo dia, nosso pai mandou fazer para si uma canoa. [...] e esquecer não posso, do dia em que a canoa ficou pronta.

Sem alegria nem cuidado, nosso pai enalçou o chapéu e decidiu um adeus para a gente. [...] Nossa mãe, a gente achou que ela ia esbravejar, mas persistiu somente alva de pálida, mascou o beijo e bramou: ‘Cê vai, ocê fique, você nunca volte!’

[...] Nosso pai não voltou. Ele não tinha ido a nenhuma parte. Só executava a invenção de se permanecer naqueles espaços do rio, de meio a meio, sempre dentro da canoa, para dela não saltar, nunca mais.”

(“Our father was an honorable, organized, positive man; [...] But it happened that one day our father had made for himself a canoe. [...] and I cannot forget the day that the canoe was ready.

With no joy or care, our father put on his hat and said goodbye to us. [...] Our mother, we thought she was going to rant, but remained only white and pale, chewed her lips and bellowed: “Ye go, ye stay there, you never come back!”

[...] Our father did not come back. He hadn’t gone anywhere. He just came up with the idea of staying in those spaces of the river, half and half, always on the canoe, of which he never came out.”)

(*Primeiras histórias / A terceira margem do rio*)

Note

1 The free translation of the texts contained herein aims at helping the reader capture the idea of the source text; it does not aim at a correspondence in words. (TN)

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