

The present as a tradition time: the contemporary cordel of Maestro Rafael Brito¹

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-5844202119>

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Abstract

This paper is an initial propose about the present in the discussion of tradition, from the reflection on the poetry of *cordel* in Maestro Rafael Brito, poet from Fortaleza-CE. Rafael is young, writes many kinds of poetry, but is best known for his *cordéis*, which he refers to in traditional ways, though he performs it using the media resources of the present. We discuss the idea of tradition, traditions and traditionality from Ricoeur's (2010) narrative proposals and analyze Rafael's work through interviews and the content of his blog on the Internet. We observe that the Maestro is seen as a promise of the future of this "traditional" *cordel*, although it brings innovations of the poetry historiography. But it is still far from the transformations and political clashes that would destabilize official narratives claiming unchanging traditions.

Keywords: *Cordel*. Memory. Tradition. Present. Maestro Rafael Brito.

Introduction

Themes related to tradition are usually associated with past phenomena. But this direct relationship excludes the dimension of the present time, the continuity for a phenomenon to be considered "traditional". Being traditional does not imply a plastering of such phenomena, which would keep them fixed, "original" and "pure". Instead, they are traditional in the transformations that make them possible to remain.

The phenomenon of *cordel* poetry is constantly strained over its transformation by the idea of tradition. What defining elements need to be maintained and what changes may or may not be accepted for a poetry to be called *cordel*. What, in a way, configures a conceptual damage to the *cordel*, as a language that is formed by performances, images, sounds, poetic forms and structures, editorial markets and media culture. As a classification, the definition of *cordel* has positive consequences for methodological cuts and delineation, but it prevents a deep understanding of the dialectic between innovations and continuities that reach the phenomenon.

¹ Translation: Damien Ribeiro Maia.

In order to reflect on this temporal dimension and on transformations that expand the understanding of the *cordel*, we follow the productions of the poet, musician and actor who signs as Maestro Rafael Brito. The poet is from Ceará, was born in 1995 and is recognized by other countrymen as “a promise from the Cordel Ceará”. The other poets greatly appreciate Rafael’s production because they find in him an idea of the continuity of a cultural manifestation that had often been “forsaken” by scholars of literature.

In this discussion, we have Ricoeur’s (2010) proposal on tradition, traditions and traditionality as a theoretical reference. From this idea, we approach the dimension of memory, which allows us to understand the *cordel* as a multiple, fluid, living phenomenon that triggers synesthetic ways of experiencing poetry. Then, we conducted interviews with the poet and monitored his insertion in fairs and editorial events, with an emphasis on the São Paulo International Book Biennial, in 2016. Based on his reports on his own productions and our remarks on his activities, we can analyze his practices and the ways he summons the idea of tradition, taking as a reference the commonly known definition of *cordel* as a cultural and communicational phenomenon. Therefore, we observe their relationship with the past and the present.

***Cordel* poetry: a phenomenon of traditions**

Cordel is a cultural manifestation. It can be understood as a literary practice, as a phenomenon of sociability, as a form of (and object of studies in the field of) Communication. It is an art reference that points to the transmission of memories and traditions of the Brazilian Northeast. Nevertheless, its historical, social and political trajectory goes through a great diversity of physical spaces and dialogues with many other cultural manifestations.

Therefore, we can affirm that the *cordel* is the result of a series of dialogues and that it needs to remain open to continue to exist. In spite of that, for many poets and people involved with poetry, there are very strict rules that define its form and that must be followed so that a manifestation can be called *cordel*. In such cases, the transformations are taken as a detriment to cultural purity and the preservation of its existence.

Therefore, in order to understand *cordel* poetry, we move on to understanding the concepts of memory and traditions which are commonly associated with studies of the past but are fundamental for a work of reflection on the meanings of contemporary *cordel*. There is a constant dialectic between present and past as a recurring dispute of meanings about what must be maintained and what can be transformed.

In Fonseca (2019), for example, the improvising poets of Campina Grande explain that to be a good poet, it is necessary to know how to combine the content with a perfect metric. This idea is reinforced by Silva (2014), president of the Brazilian Academy of Literature of Cordel (ABLC). The poet and researcher Gonçalo describe 35 types of verses², whose contents can

² *Quadra, ligeira, parcela ou carretilha, sextilha, gemedeira, setilha, quadrão, quadrão à beira mar, quadrão mineiro, quadrão paraibano, dez a quadrão, décimas, quadrão de meia quadra, mourão de cinco linhas, mourão de seis linhas, mourão de sete linhas,*

be classified as *cordel* literature. For this, the strophes need to follow what he calls “exquisite rhymes, with rhythmic beauty and sonic preciousness” (SILVA, 2014, p. 41). This definition is in line with what appears in the catalog of studies on “Literatura Popular em Verso” of the Casa de Rui Barbosa Foundation (1973), whose authors - Cavalcanti Proença, Orígenes Lessa, Antônio Houais, and Manuel Diegues Junior - are the references for Silva (2014).

Many of those academic poets and folklorists disregard that it is not possible to arrest and plaster a cultural manifestation for it to remain. If it is not lived and therefore reinvented, adapted to the social practices of individuals, it weakens and tends to disappear. Our discussion of tradition focuses on the present and on the poetic transformations that thus place the *cordel* in a line of continuities and innovations.

Brazilian *cordel* is poetry. It can be presented in print, and its basic form happens in the voice. According to studies by Lemaire (2010), Santos (2010) and Abreu (1993), we already had poetic manifestations in the Northeast of Brazil when the Portuguese *cordel* arrived there. There was singing accompanied by a viola that traveled with the poets telling the news from one city to another at the country fairs.

When the Portuguese crown arrived in Brazil, the literary leaflets that circulated in the Metropolis and the printing machines that allowed the creation of a national press were incorporated into the oral poetic form, already common in those lands. What happened then was a dialogue, a hybrid that took place between cultural manifestations and which resulted in what we conventionally call *cordel* today: oral poetry printed in leaflets.

According to Lemaire (2008), the term “cordel” as an Iberian heritage is instituted in the historical context of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship to define by the notion of folklore an original Brazilian culture. Since then, what was called a leaflet, poetry, singing, is now identified by the name “cordel”, as a reference to the strings on which their equivalents were exposed in Portugal. For this idea, the perspectives taken as official and told by the Casa de Rui Barbosa Foundation (1973) and the Brazilian Cordel Literature Academy (2014) consider that the Brazilian *cordel* would be a product of Portuguese origin.

Those definitions³ already accepted about *cordel* tell us of a cultural, communicative product, which integrates text and voice but it would not be restricted to a poetic form. Instead, Carvalho (2002) suggests that *cordel* is more than the verses. It is a way to see the world. Therefore, I affirm here that *cordel* is a narration of the world, a fluid phenomenon. Undisciplined and hence impossible to define in itself. We always have that *cordel* has “something else” that makes it always inaccurate and always bigger than definitions.

It is possible to think of the *cordel* as a media dimension. Understanding that:

mourão trocado, mourão caído, mourão voltado, mourão perguntado, beira-mar mourão, martelo agalopado, galope à beira-mar, galope alagoano, galope miudinho, dez de queixo caído, Brasil caboco, mote, oitavão rebatido, nove palavras por três, nove palavras por seis, toada alagoana, gabinete, dezoito linhas, embolada.

3 Those are the references called in disciplines that study “popular literature in verse” at universities, in their Letters courses.

The media can be presented as a place to point out meaning, to establish interactive ways of creating and to share representations and to (re)interpret experiences, to bind, to join, to form links, to instrumentalize. On the other hand, the media also appears as a feature of transmissivity and reproducibility, a way of establishing temporalities, a sort of request for the subject's availability to share experiences, a way of establishing contacts and structuring senses (ANTUNES; VAZ, 2006, p. 44-45).

The *cordel*, then, appears in that space. The organization of time in its narrative is both a place of transmission and an element of memory. In leaflets, declamations, performances, verses sent by cell phone message or posted on social networks, *cordel* in its various forms is a space for sharing, exchanging experiences and knowledge. And that is why its understanding becomes so relevant to Communication studies.

Cordel is like a hummingbird. That flaps its wings at a speed impossible to be followed by human eyes. Such are the publications of what we call *cordel*, or that we consider to have the so-called *cordel* aesthetic. It is sung poetry, it is lyrics, it is image. It is leaflet, it's voice, it's ambience, it's time. Declamation time, time from which it emerges and what makes it emerge. They are poets, they are listeners, they are researchers and collectors. And each communicative situation from which poetry emerges has those elements materializing in different ways and constituting new narratives (FONSECA, 2019, p. 75).

The *cordel* is a linguistic, semiotic, cultural multiplicity that was conventionally called popular, as if it were something simple, small, minor. Perhaps it really is popular, if we think about the dispute of meanings that embodies its existence and language. A constant search for literary and media affirmation and legitimation. It is a poetry that emerges and registers daily life because even the verses that do not propose to be referential reports of a reality bring the experiential marks of the poets and, in some way, talk inferentially about possible situations.

Our reflections are about poetic forms, which can be printed or not, and which are based on orality. Declaimed alone or accompanied by violas. Created and memorized or improvised. Individual or in group. Complementary or in dispute. Rhymed and rhythmic in blocks, *sextilhas*, *setilhas*, tenths or alexandrine verses. If printed, the cover images are woodcuts (more commonly associated with this poetic production, but not necessarily defining), photos or illustrations that synthesize the narrated story. Presented on stages, theatricalized, publicized on social networks, sold on e-commerce, presented on television, going viral on YouTube or sung in circles of pranksters. Such practices comprise a range of manifestations that point precisely to the impossibility of closing the *cordel* in a defining categorization. Though they offer us a wide range of phenomena in constant transformation

to be studied and recognized in their narrative, political and cultural importance. Because they tell stories, they bear time marks, they configure traditions.

From the past to the promise of future: memory and traditions

Memory and tradition are elements of the narrative that trigger the relations of time and the production of meanings, crossing the three modes of mimetic experience. They are part of the prefigured world, which precedes the intrigue, build meanings in the composition of the intrigue, and return to the world from the perspective of audiences.

We deal with collective memories - with all the recognized and conceptually pointed out epistemological difficulties - in dialogue with individual memories, as approached by Ricoeur (1999), which are unique, have a connection with the awareness of the past and provide a sense of orientation in relation to time. So, they are treated here as “those shared memories that outline the ethnic, cultural or religious identity of a given community” [free translation] (RICOEUR, 1999, p. 17), integrating meanings and interpretations.

Orality, according to Zumthor (1993), is a very important element for collective memories, which find an articulation of presence in the voice.

The everyday voices disperse the words in the bed of time, there they crumble the real; the poetic voice brings them together in a single instant - that of performance -, so soon faded because it is silent; at least it takes places this marvel of a fleeting but total presence (ZUMTHOR, 1993, p. 139).

The poetic voice, for Zumthor (1993), is prophecy - which projects events - and memory, which offers him permanence in time. It also considers collective memory as a source of knowledge, while individual memory would be within the scope of the ability to exhaust and enrich it. That also points to the double flow that Ricoeur (1999) deals with, which places collective and individual memories in relationship, instituting each other.

Based on these reflections, Zumthor (1993) points out that the memory involves the whole existence and keeps the present in the continuity of time. Even in the form of poetry, because it carries knowledge and continually reconstructs it, manifesting itself in acts of enunciation by the interpreters, who refer to the collections of collective memories that “without ceasing, adjust, transform, recreate” (ZUMTHOR, 1993, p. 142). Therefore, the arts are composed by memories and compose them - individual in artists and audiences and collective, that feed themselves back.

The *cordel* is a place where the dispute of meanings can be identified in the negotiation between the memory and forgetfulness manifestations, considering that both establish a dialectical relationship. According to Ricoeur (2007, p. 455), we have thus an ideologization of memory, that is, “a cunning form of forgetfulness, resulting from the social actors’ dispossession of their original power to narrate themselves”, which configures the idea of

forged memory. The *cordel* triggers the movements of traditions through the memory of poets in relation to the collective memory of the audience.

This memory is not only related to the past, but is projected in continuity, with the idea that traditions are maintained. It is not a question of creating a “new” tradition, but of its permanence based on projections of the future. We understand this from Koselleck’s concepts of “horizon of expectation” and “space of experience”, pointed out by Ricoeur (1999) as “the set of legacies from the past whose sedimented footprints constitute in a way the soil on which desires rest, fears, forecasts, projects and, in short, all the anticipations that project us into the future”⁴ (RICOEUR, 1999, p. 22). The appreciation and recognition of young poets, singers, *cordelistas*, *repentistas* nowadays present them as this horizon of expectation, that disrupts the idea of a dying *cordel* poetry.

The memory is “kept” and maintained to construct an idea of tradition. It is commonly treated as a stagnation of cultural movements, as something to be preserved for reference to identities - also fixed. This idea of plastered traditions is defended by poets who understand that these traditions are the representation of history and that they need to be maintained - even if supported by enactments. But it is also treated with contempt by others who understand tradition as a dead past. Both maintain the conceptual and historical bonds that unify experience, livingness and memories as defining identities of the past. Whether to remain in the past or to deny it.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) carried out a study on “invented traditions”, that is, habits and custom that were reinforced in narratives conducted by institutions of power so that they remained and were recognized as traditions/identities of specific communities. What we perceive from the authors’ studies is that it seems that there are types of traditions that may have arisen “naturally” and others that are built by the interests of some groups of power. It is possible to think of traditions invented by a voluntary choice and by demarcating the characteristics that must be maintained.

Those invented traditions include both marked in their “origins” and those more difficult to define and locate in time.

Invented tradition means a set of practices normally regulated by tacit or openly accepted rules; such practices, of a ritual or symbolic nature, aim to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior through repetition, which automatically implies a continuity in relation to the past. In fact, whenever possible, attempts are made to establish continuity with an appropriate historical past (HOBBSAWM; RANGER, 2012, p. 12).

⁴ “El conjunto de herencias del pasado cuyas huellas sedimentadas constituyen en cierto modo el suelo en el que descansan los deseos, los miedos, las previsiones, los proyectos u, en resumen, todas las anticipaciones que nos proyectan hacia el futuro” (RICOEUR, 1999, p. 22).

According to the authors, the invention of traditions responds to processes of ritualization and formalization as a way of referring to the past, with impositions of repetition. That is what happens, for example, when cultural practices are theatricalized for commercial purposes which causes their ritual senses to be lost, as they are removed from their reference elements. Those traditions that are “created” without referents in collective memory would be used for unifying ideals of identification. In that matter, a performance of the tradition based on behaviors repeated by poets is part of the closed definition of *cordel*. As much as the metric is required, it is observed how a poet or a poetess relates to such a performance. Once that constructed image is destabilized or questioned, the poets are questioned.

Traditions stem from memories, and as such, they are fluid, mobile, constructed and ideologically organized. “In the long run, the work of memory is tradition. No sentence is the first. Every sentence, perhaps every word, is virtually, and often effectively, a quote” (ZUMTHOR, 1993, p. 143). The idea of preservation needs to be evaluated regarding the idea that the existence of a cultural practice as a tradition only lasts if it makes sense for the community that practices it. Therefore, traditions and traditional processes as a set of social practices are crossed by other elements that produce meaning, such as culture, economics, arts, collective experiences in general.

Carvalho (2005) points out that this discussion in studies on *cordel* seeking origins, roots, explanations for the formation of “spirits of the nation” would be an elitist practice, of a romanticist culture and currents of folkloric studies. The resumption of studies seeking to understand the traditions would relate to reactions of local cultures to the “exaggerations of globalization”. He is interested in the dialectical clashes between tradition and contemporaneity. For Carvalho (2005), the idea of tradition is taken as

Practices that are part of a long duration. It is what remains of what one generation transmits to another, evidently, with losses, substitutions, and gaps. Tradition is this common ballast of experiences (and livings) of certain men in a certain time and place (CARVALHO, 2005, p. 8).

Zumthor (2010) speaks of traditions perceived as the movement idea of works, in other words, their potential for transit, existence, and repercussion turning audiences into new narrators. That applies to artistic performance, but also those ones that focus on representation of everyday roles and forms of knowledge. “It succeeds itself dialectically, in a constant reorientation of existential choices, changing each time the totality of our being-in-the-world resonates” (ZUMTHOR, 2010, p. 282).

According to Zumthor (1993), Tradition is an open series in constant transformation, in which it occurs as performances. In the sense of movement, it opens the idea of intervocality that, like intertextuality, refers to exchange and dialogue that take place within the scope of orality. The idea of traditionality and traditions in flux of movement are continuous creations

in dialogue, updating according to the media, cultural, political, social transformations that interfere in people's daily lives and practices, which resignify the senses all the time.

Therefore, we return to Ricoeur (2010b), to whom the idea of tradition contains tensions between the perspectives of the past and the present, creating and transposing notions of temporal distances. "We are affected by history and we affect ourselves by the stories we make" (RICOEUR, 2010b, p. 363). Our insertion in the world builds the history that constitutes memory and creates new traditions. Traditions are not static nor are they trapped in museums that constantly try to rescue pure origins and forms of cultural practices. They are alive and emerge from the symbolic dialogues that memory produces. Ricoeur (2010b) conceptualizes traditionality as a dialectic between innovation and sedimentation, which points to a living history, whose references are constructed in the narratives by the memories that are articulated. Ricoeur (2010b, p. 387) *thus* differentiates three concepts: traditionality; traditions and tradition.

1. Traditionality is the chain of continuity that implies our "being-affected-by-the-past", in the dialectic between interpreted past and interpretive present based on a "transmission that generates meaning" (RICOEUR, 2010b, p. 377);
2. Traditions are the content that carries meaning that are transmitted, "the things said in the past that came to us through a chain of interpretations and reinterpretations" (RICOEUR, 2010b, p. 379);
3. Tradition is related to a presumption of truth about the past, based on propositions of meanings, which triggers collective memory.

Traditions as elements that convey meaning are fundamental to communicative processes, whether they are media or not. And we think of *cordel* as a process: from the dimension of traditionality, the performance of traditions and transmission, negotiation and power relations that are established based on the idea of maintaining a "true" tradition.

That idea of transformation that we follow here is part of the daily discussion of poets who try to define the *cordel* in search of recognition and legitimacy. Whether by structure, shape, support, there is something that needs to be maintained and sustained so that, in common sense, tradition is maintained. "Adaptation like the translation of the codes, a Brazilian way of making and reading the leaflet, which implied the passage through new themes and for that chronicle character, of a History document from the unofficial point of view, of the subordinate layers" (CARVALHO, 2002, p. 290).

Many contemporary phenomena that define themselves as *cordel* are denied by groups of conservative poets. There are levels of conservatism among poets and scholars of the phenomenon. Folklorists, for example, have a rigidity in the idea of tradition and consider that the transformations mischaracterize the phenomena, removing their purity and originality. The *Cordel* Brazilian Literature Academy itself maintains this folklore and plastering tone in its publications. Since *cordel* is often a marginalized poetry, this position only contributes to maintaining a segregation and hierarchy of knowledge forms.

There are also poets and scholars who deny the folklorist perspective, but who still maintain levels of conservatism and exclusion - for example, with regard to women poets, who do not appear in the catalogs, such as the one by Casa de Rui Barbosa Foundation, in 1974⁵. For these poets, for example, it is no problem to use the Internet to circulate verses, illustrate booklet covers with images made by computer, or to disassociate the poetry from the woodcut. But they remain defending that the *cordel* should be written and should obey formal rules, classifying as “broken foot” those whose rhymes deviate from these norms.

There are also those who question those definitions and any type of fixation: poets who publish leaflets with verses in free forms, women who use poetry as an instrument of feminist struggle, movements of poets who clash with the structures pre-defined by conservatives, scholars who treat *cordel* poetry as a form of knowledge and consider the multiple uses of *cordel* by poets and audiences. Those are not usually recognized institutionally and are excluded within a poetry that is already excluded from academic and literary canons.

Those groups are not entirely segregated, although they often contradict each other. Nor are they temporally delimited, as noted in Fonseca (2019, p. 202). In that research, three senses of tradition were found in *cordel* poetry: the most conservative, associated with the idea of tradition with claims of truth (RICOEUR, 2010b); a second generation that is not entirely in agreement with the first and is composed by men who propose some innovations, as long as the limits of their privileges on the *cordel* narrative are maintained; and the third generation, which would be poets who do not exempt themselves from discussing issues of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and other normativities in the *cordel*. “Based on an exhaustive proposal for the preservation of the *cordel*, there is precisely the risk of bringing it to an end. If the *cordel* becomes anachronistic and loses its social use value, then it will have no reason to exist” (FONSECA, 2019, p. 203).

This last generation is, according to Fonseca (2019), more motivated to push the transformations into the *cordel* universe. It is possible to identify people linked to every way of understanding *cordel* poetry, or who at certain time, according to the conveniences, pick different remarks of each category.

Rafael Brito: callings from cordel’s present and future

When I met Maestro Rafael Brito on Facebook, I saw the announcement of a declamation he would make at the Dragão do Mar Center, in Fortaleza, during the “Cordel com Corda Toda” festival. I contacted the organizer, Klevison Viana, to find out information about that new name, which I had not seen in any other event that I followed. Klevison then told me that that boy was “the great promise of Ceará poetry”. I was curious, added him as a friend and started a conversation, wanting to know more about his production. A while later, we found ourselves in a recitation, but we did not have time to talk. But that presentation

⁵ The first major study on the *cordel* production by women poets is the “Livro Delas”, which is being edited and is written by Francisca Pereira dos Santos.

caught my attention. For the young poet, probably the youngest person in the auditorium where we were, but also for the way the public, mostly composed of other poets - men - responded to the presentation. He wore a dark green suit, a cowboy hat and sunglasses.

Rafael Brito's artistic and intellectual production transits at the intersection between past and present, country and urban, and is thus reaffirmed daily. His speech - identified in formal interviews and in unstructured conversations, in addition to the observations of his work carried out at events in Fortaleza and São Paulo - shows traces of attachment to a tradition that summons past experiences that are not his own, but stem from memories that when shared are reframed. Tradition for the poet is related to ways of performing that resemble a traditional work, for example, the work of Leandro Gomes de Barros⁶. Rafael also claims a precise definition of the *cordel* structure because that was how he was taught as "correct". Therefore, it is related to the notion of what Ricoeur (2010b) calls "tradition" in the singular, that is, a claim of truth imposed by authoritarian relations of memory production.

Nevertheless, he does not fit only in this definition as well as the *cordel* he presents us. The process and poetic learning that impose fixed forms are on the field of tradition as elements already elaborated and legitimized, transmitted between people of different generations. As an artist with multiple skills, Rafael Brito's poetic performance also includes music, interpretation and the link that brings us here, poetry. In other words, this formal learning by the poet is just one of the elements that incorporate traditions and processes of traditionality constituents of possible meanings for the *cordel*.

Rafael is an urban young man who in his poetry talks about other realities, often experienced in the *Sertão*, in the hinterland. *Sertão*, which is the most frequent scenario for *cordel* poetry and is another element of tradition that he carries and reinforces, even if that is not his experience. It is as if a *cordel* poet could not do without talking about the *Sertão* or rural life to understand himself as traditional.

I feel within my soul that I have a great responsibility to those people. As a popular poet, I write and speak of their life as if it were my own. I am an ambassador for this people, and I am proud of that. All the stories, all the sayings, all the custom, the differences, all of that becomes fuel for my verses and I am happy to know that they, approve (BRITO, 2017).

His *cordel* poetry demands the approval of those who defend the time taken up in their verses, whether in themes or structures. The present lived by Rafael and his experiences of poetic consumption are not enough for him to propose structural changes in the *cordel* or to move away from established models. It reinforces the past and is legitimized by it. Only then can he bring this poetry by activating traditions as symbolic contents. So, it is, for example,

⁶ Considered the pioneer of the Brazilian *cordel* leaflet.

when he records DVDs in the studio and takes the rebec, performs with the costume, takes the *cordel* rhythm in unpublished poetry or from other authors. Therefore, he performs a *cordel* tradition.

I am overjoyed to know that even though I did not live half of what they [the verses] said, they [the audience] approved of my performance and proudly received my work, but what moved me most after I finished declaiming poetry, one of them looking at me and say: *That is really a poet!* (BRITO, 2017).

The poet publishes on social networks - Facebook and Instagram - and publicizes his work by tagging his friends in the posts. He sends his work via WhatsApp. He has a blog in which he presents both *cordel* poetry and other forms that follow different structures. He writes about his impressions of the world, his friendships, his inspirations. He is not out of mediatized environments and does not intend to stay out of them. Rafael praises the past today. Based on the interest that arises from the influence of his grandfather, Rafael began to exercise his poetry by reciting verses from other poets. He watched the declamations, memorized the poetry until he managed to stage it - because Rafael is also an actor. Nonetheless, his fundamental interest is music. Therefore, for notorious knowledge, he was admitted at the Music school at the Federal University of Ceará, where he studies violin. Though, because of traditionality marks identified in his cultural interests on what is so called “popular”, in addition to the violin, Rafael learned to play rebec.

This dialogue between the poetry of the past and the uses of contemporary equipment marks a transit of innovations that configure *cordel* poetry today, with all the clashes that it entails. Certainly, there may have been a movement of singers, oral poets, who denied printed poetry when it first appeared - as some still deny the validity of verses on the Internet. But the printing was accepted and recognized for its marketing character: it is easier to attribute the price to a brochure than to the voice. In this case, it would remain “the same poetry” orally, now in print. But then it gets another name: leaflet (or *cordel*, later). Digitalization and online circulation also maintain “the same poetry”, oral and printed, but now with a different scope, visibility and technical potential arising from its materialities and consequent affectation.

The Maestro does not have many published leaflets, the most “traditional” form of *cordel*. His work is based on declamations that are recorded or verses that circulate on the Internet, as mentioned before. But it is still written and follows the structure standards required by the peers that validate it. In this case, there is no requirement for the brochure. It may even appear in a book, but it cannot be called as *repente* because it is not oral. It cannot innovate or dispense with rhymes or established metrics.

What appears in the speeches of several poets - in lectures, interviews or even in bar table conversations - is a rejection of supports that may, by any chance, stifle this valuable tradition. The present is almost always marked by them as the negation of the past, as if

what is being done today is not also the product of relations with the past, that is, the product of what Ricoeur calls traditionality. Until, after many clashes, there is an acceptance and appropriation of technical supports, which do not modify poetry. It may change and remain traditional if we think of traditions from this procedural and dialogical perspective between past and present, aiming the future.

As for the element that defines the tradition, there is no consensus. We still do not know what it is that makes a *cordel* poetry receive this denomination, which has historically remained within a defining classification. So, although the proximity between the poetic forms is accepted, it seems necessary to give different names to the uses of other supports. The great question about the materiality of poetry is that it does carry a great diversity of meanings, which can only be analyzed individually. We do not consider oral poetry to be the same as printed poetry, even though the text is the same. Nor do they have the same implication and possibilities of the verses that circulate on the Internet. But instead of thinking of this diversity as a becoming, the poets guide their discussions trying to decide if a certain poetry is *cordel* or not. That is precisely why we do not wrap up a definition, but we propose a different view that considers all forms that present themselves or that are daily called “*cordel*”.

We think of Rafael Brito’s poetry as contemporary poetry - without going into definitions of “contemporary” as a concept, but considering a broad reference of the present, whose interval started before the writing of this text and is not over yet. We identify elements of traditionality on his work, as proposed by Ricoeur (2010), that is, we recognize elements of affectation of the past that do not limit the possible technique, form, supports transformation and serve as a self-affirmative basis.

In the historiography of *cordel* poetry, whose death has been announced since Romero (1888) - and when it is denied it happens in a passionate way, made by poets who deny future death based on their own activities - Rafael represents a promise to his predecessors. He is the young man who “bought” the legacy and all its challenges. But for this continuity to exist, he cannot completely deny the present in which he lives, the technical means to which he has access and easily uses, nor could he stop dialoguing tradition with his other artistic interests. In order to be accepted and treated as “the great promise” as aforementioned, he could not transgress too much, as do young women poets of *cordel*, for example. Living traditions in the present is only possible when we consider the dialogues.

As a narrative phenomenon, the *cordel* history finds important elements in tradition, traditions and traditionality concepts of Ricoeur’s mimetic circle (2010). In a more didactic understanding - because these elements are not very distinguished by definitions, but are confused in everyday narrative practices - we have that traditionality is in the field of mimesis I, alongside with the individuals affectation, the everyday life, the construction of understandings in the context of the prefigured world, what will be organized into narratives. It is the *cordel* symbolic content, that is memory which, in turn, brings the image references

of woodcut, for example, it is the regional aura, the identity of the *cordel* as popular poetry that remains configuring the ways of understanding this poetry.

Traditions as content that conveys meaning are the very fabric of the narrative. The *cordel* leaflet object, for example, or the poetry text that is written and recited. There are many elements that are triggered in the performances that, though contemporary, are legitimized summoning elements from the past. Tradition, in singular, appears in the field of mimesis 3, in the movement of reading/listening/consuming the booklet/poetry. It turns into tradition - with its presumption of truth, of closed content - the content taken as definitive. But it is so fluid that it returns to being an element of traditionality and, therefore, mimesis 1. And the mimetic circle moves on in a spiral.

The Maestro's poetry has a traditionality recognized in the dialogue between the past and the contemporary. He starts from spaces of well-defined experiences, in which he inserts himself as a new character in history. That poetry that he learns from his grandfather, he observes in the poet Chico Pedrosa and is inspired by Jessier Quirino, represents the elements that will shape his figure in performance: the classical musician who appears with a mature costume playing rebec and recording DVD in the studio.

Rafael Brito's *cordel* is a triggering of past experiences acting in the present, responding to an authoritarian tradition, as those defined by ABLC and FCRB, according to Ricoeur's (2010b) conceptual proposal. There is a way of performance to defend this fixed tradition with elements that could not be changed (the metric, the rhyme, the support), that catches up with a present whose transformations are fundamental to traditionality as a symbolic and dialogical process and consequent transmission of traditions. Those are alive when experienced in the present with projections of the future, which depends on their ability to adapt and malleability to relate to other media, social, cultural phenomena.

Therefore, Rafael Brito is a possibility of present that sets a horizon of expectations on the *cordel*, which is no longer that of death. It is the transition between the past of tradition and the promise of continuity of significant elements, so that they impose a constant affectation on the present content, so they can remain. They are elements like the narrative structure of *cordel* novels, the poetic form with very rigid characteristics of rhyme, rhythm and metric and, mainly, the distinction between what can be called *cordel* and what is *repente*, a dispute of senses that among contemporary poets seem appeased, but that continue to be full of conflicts.

Rafael's story is important to observe the spaces in which traditions manifest in *cordel* poetry, not just in what we already know when treating *cordel* as a tradition in the Brazilian Northeast. Rafael's work points to traditionality notions as effects of significance from the past, which one seeks to understand and reinforce. In a context that claims the *cordel* as a tradition - with its defining features and characteristics, often closed within - there is a fear that those contents will be lost. For the passing of time or for the anachronism of practices and media consumption that were proposed in the attempt of reaching a definitive conception of *cordel* poetry.

Final considerations or the questions that remain

For other male poets, Maestro Rafael Brito is a hope. It is a counterpoint to the fear that poetry will end. Rafael represents continuity. Which, in a very convenient way, invokes traditions, but does not deny the contemporary media possibilities which he has access to. He uses those techniques to an extent that seems to be acceptable in a process where innovations must arrive slowly and in dialogue with repetitions and, fundamentally, recognizing and revering tradition.

It is as a gift that Rafael is a horizon of expectation. It is their cultural heritages that promise to remain disseminated, experienced. And for this tradition to exist, it must exist in the present and be projected into a becoming. Rafael and other young poets represent that. But that does not happen without contradictions. The valuation of new poets follows the same excluding standards. In addition to maintaining the poetic form, the young women poets of *cordel* do not have the same visibility, but they have to recur to alternative means on an outlet that is already alternative to a hegemonic media and editorial logic.

Conceptually, our understanding of traditions clashes with the preference of some poets who insist on fixating the *cordel* definition and sustain those characteristics as essential. However, the passing of time comes with technical transformations and distinct cultural uses that make certain practices obsolete if they are not reinvented or if they do not contribute to the reinvention of everyday life. We disagree precisely because we understand that it will be suffocated by maintaining a fixed manifestation. Therefore, it tends to disappear.

The past does not need to be plastered, much less denied. The past as a memory affects the actions of the present, as we discussed from the idea of traditionality. The past is the field of experiences, where traditions are formed and offer meanings to the contents of the present, but transformations cannot be rejected either. Cultural practices are based on the dialogue between repetitions and innovations. From repetition, it takes reference, memory. From innovations, it comes proposals for continuity. Rafael makes this dialogue, but still very much in tune with the idea of fixed tradition that he would have the role to maintain.

In our understanding, the contemporary *cordel* needs to make room for other ways of making poetry, of publishing, of consuming. The *cordel*'s official historiography is told in a patriarchal perspective. Even in the current *cordel*, which already accepts technical support to a certain extent, there are still organized events that “forget” women poets or LGBTQIA + themes. The themes focus on what men say about women or ventilate references of “tolerance”, instead of discussing “respect”. The women in *cordel* are still treated as a separate chapter, as an exceptionality. And that also represents the *cordel* poetic traditions, which we need to break up with. Because women have always been in the poetic circles of the *cordel*, even against the resistance of men, who deny, erase other stories and turn their own narrative into “tradition” with pretensions of absolute truth.

That is just one of the aspects that needs to change and to be discussed in the writing of *cordel* historiography. Rafael's youth in this movement of maintained and rewritten

traditions is still under construction. So far, there is an appreciation of the past, but it is impossible to deny the present and its demands. Therefore, Maestro Rafael Brito is an expectation of the *cordel*'s future. He seeks traditionality on his work, but without shutting himself down to the necessary transformation and innovation proposing what appears to be the continuation of *cordel* poetry.

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Received on: 08.07.2019

Accepted on: 09.01.2020

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