

IDENTITY IN CONFLICT: ANALYSIS AND PROPOSAL FOR THE CLASSROOM WITH THE SHORT STORY THE ACADEMIES OF ZION, BY MACHADO DE ASSIS

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ABSTRACT

This article is a theoretical-propositional study on the short story *As Academias de Sião*, by Machado de Assis, which aims to propose literary literacy and the reflection of relevant themes for the understanding of social coexistence and conflicts, such as: the interests between human relations, violent resistance superimposed on critical thinking, religious and gender intolerance, imposed ideological values and the search for identity. Our proposal is aimed at 9th grade classes of Elementary School. Even though this text is considered somewhat complex for young people in training, we realize that it is still very current, and we believe in our analysis to be a production beyond time, as it is a work made in the nineteenth century, but which reflects very current discussions and conflicts. In view of this, we defend the importance of the teacher as a mediator in the classroom and take as a theoretical-methodological contribution, the literary literacy of Cosson, 2018, the directives of the BNCC (2018), and the receptive method of Bordini and Aguiar (1988). In this way, we believe we can contribute to the promotion of critical approaches to human behavior in social media and provide reading mediation with canonical texts in the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

The short story *As Academias de Zion*, by Machado de Assis, written in the nineteenth century, can be considered a futuristic production, in view of the discussions that are currently taking place about gender identity and the nature of some human beings, who seek to resolve their conflicts through violence. In this sense, we believe that its reading and analysis are fundamental for our days. In view of being a reflection on the different types of violence coming from respected institutions, from public representatives as the ruler of a people and also from some private environments such as institutions organized by intellectuals.

In addition, it is a necessary provocation to authoritarianism that is forced to take root in the Brazilian reality. It is a literary work that presents, among so many possible themes and visions, the interests of human relations as power and power, violent resistance superimposed on critical thinking, religious and gender intolerance, imposed ideological values and the search for identity.

This article aims to approach the Machadian tale in a structural way from excerpts from the text and propose an approach to the classroom. Our specific objectives are: a) to analyze the short story *As academias de Sião* (1884) in a structural way; b) to highlight recurring themes and c) to propose a didactic sequence using this tale for a class of the 9th grade of Elementary School.

As a methodological contribution, we will use the didactic sequence of Rildo Cosson (2018) in order to bring a better approach, given the age of the students and the complexity of the literary text, and to exemplify how it would be possible to take a Machadian text to Basic Education. We also used the approach of the receptive method of Bordini and Aguiar (1988), in order for reading to take subjective forms for students.

ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORY

The tale is divided into four parts and set in Sion, we suppose that Machado de Assis wanted to distance this narrative from its place of conviviality and origin. Although it is possible to imagine a veiled criticism of the dogmatic values guided by the Judeo-Christian religions, which condemn any love relationship between two people, other than for the purpose of procreation. Zion in the Holy Bible is considered the holy city. According to the website *Sanctuary Basilica of St. Sebastian*, "this name refers to several places described in the Bible, both terrestrial and heavenly." Thus, it can mean a geographical space,

located in ancient Jerusalem: Mount Zion; the place where Solomon's temple was erected and where David's reign took place, but it also has its spiritual significance.

In the New Testament, in First Peter, chapter 2, verse 6, it says: "For in the Scripture it reads: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a cornerstone, chosen and precious; and whoever leans on it will not fail.'" It is the Messiah Jesus Christ who, after his crucifixion, releases any sacrificial offering in Zion, thus making whoever believes in him the very dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, thus becoming the most general definition of the word "the pure in heart". We believe that, being a good observer of society, Machado de Assis provokes us to look at the past and present of political institutions and reflect on what has or has not changed in human behavior.

We suspect that, in order to exempt himself from any prior judgment, the author begins the short story by interacting with his readers as if he were in a conversation. "Do you know the academies of Zion? I know that in Zion there have never been academies: but suppose there were, and that there were four, and listen to me." After this presentation, the author leads us to the initial situation in a fantastic way, giving an explanation about the formation of the Milky Way, stating that the stars united in space to give freedom to the luminous thoughts of King Kalaphangko.

Then, the conflict that generates the plot appears with a question: "why are there feminine men and masculine women?" The reason for the question is that the king of Zion was an effeminate man, "he was virtually a lady". One of the academies is bothered by this fact and argues that it happens because some souls are born in the wrong bodies. Therefore, he believes that sexuality is defined by the soul. The other academies disagree and argue that the soul is neutral; they therefore decide to meet to reach a consensus in this discussion; however, the sexual academy, led by U-Tong, dissatisfied with losing by the majority, is locked in a bloody dispute against the other academics. The scene is described by the author with an air of horror narrative, in the passage, "It costs me (woe is me!), it costs me to write the singular revenge", he prepares the reader for the scene that describes the summit of the massacre suffered by the other academic intellectuals.

The whole city was shocked by what happened, only one person agreed with everything, "the beautiful Kinnara, the flower of the royal concubines". Of his three hundred concubines, Kinnara was the king's favorite. And just as Kalaphangko was effeminate, she was manly, "a buffalo with swan feathers." But he knew how to use his charms and charms to get what he wanted. The king thought that whole discussion was a total absurdity, he did

not believe that sexuality came from the soul, but between kisses and caresses he is convinced by her to sign a decree that declares the sexual academy as "legitimate and orthodox".

In the third section of the tale, Kinnara exposes her cunning plan to take Kalaphangko's place. After asking about the kingdom's taxes. Knowing that her king is not in favor of the death penalty to debtors, she convinces him to swap bodies with him, arguing that she knows of an ancient spell that makes such a feat possible. We, readers of the text, who understand the fantasy in which the story was built and warned at the beginning of the narrative, do not question the wonderful character. However, given the naivety of some young people, in a classroom appreciation, it is possible that they wonder if this story is true.

In the fourth part, Kinnara shows herself more and more comfortable and confident in occupying the king's body; The king, on the other hand, no longer feels so valued by his former love. The six-month deadline they had agreed to dispose of the bodies was coming to an end. And in fact, the Siamese's coldness was a reflection of her plan to try to kill Kalaphangko and stay permanently in her post. But she stopped at the doubt that if she killed him, she might end her own life. It was then that he decided to consult his respectable and admired sex academy. He called all the members, thirteen of the members attended, the leader U-Tong could not attend because he was ill.

Before immediately going to the subject, which led him to bring the academics together, he dealt with various topics and asked them about the wisdom of the leader of the sexual academy. Noticing the discomfort of the academics when looking for an answer, the king orders them to tell the truth, that's when they unanimously said that U-Tong was a great stupid, worthless and incapable of learning anything; but he has a good heart and good character. The king (Kinnara in Kalaphangko's body), astonished by this revelation, dismisses all those present and receives in private the leader, who at first was ill. This, by the way, reveals the same condition to the other members of the academy; and even compares them to camels.

Faced with such a revelation, Kalaphangko was thoughtful. After having given all possible luxuries to a group of stupid men, and the title of "Clarity of the World," he thought for himself of a way to put his plan into practice. That's when the second astonishment came. Kinnara (Kalaphangko in Kinnara's body) reveals that she is expecting a child. At that moment, Klaphangko was experiencing mixed feelings, she felt at the same time father and

mother, and she was decided. So, he gives up his plan and decides to destroy the bodies, with the same rite initially done on the royal vessel.

During the process of passage, Kinnara, already in possession of his old body, observes a boat in the distance, all adorned with the academics singing in chorus: "Glory to us, who are the rice of science and the clarity of the world!" Amazed, she does not understand how a group of men separately are compared to camels and together claim to be the clarity of the world.

DIDACTIC SEQUENCE

To build the proposal to be executed in the classroom, we will use the Basic Sequence of Rildo Cosson (2018), present in the book *Literary Literacy* and the receptive method of Bordini and Aguiar (1988), from the book *The formation of the reader*.

MOTIVATION OR SEARCH FOR A HORIZON OF EXPECTATION

The proposal to motivate the study of the short story can be with the presentation of the poem "The other" (Mário de Sá Carneiro), musicalized by Adriana Calcanhoto, with a survey of hypotheses about the content that will be studied next.

Guiding questions:

1. What does the lyrical self of the song mean by the verses "I am not me, nor am I the other"?
2. What does he mean when he says that it is "something in between"?
3. What meaning does the lyricist want to give to the expression "pillar of the point of boredom"?

At this point, it is important to listen to the students' answers and questions; make a brief explanation about the reading of the poem; Try not to exceed 10 minutes. The moment of motivation should be brief and provoke the curiosity of the students. It is possible that most students do not know the artists. A brief presentation of who they are is also welcome, to enable the dissemination of their contents among young people later.

READING - MEETING THE HORIZONS OF EXPECTATIONS AND BREAKING THE HORIZONS

The reading can begin with the organization of the room in a circle and the presentation of the title of the story: "The Academies of Zion", with the following guiding questions:

1. What does the title suggest to us? Come up with hypotheses and present the images of the sex symbols.
2. Ask students if they know the symbols, it is possible that they only know the binary symbols. Introduce others and explain about the diversity present today.

Then, hand in the texts and start the shared reading. Arrange the room in a circle to improve reading dynamics. Difficulties can arise with some pronunciations, including the names of the characters. In view of this, episodes of laughter may occur, it is necessary to resume the spirits, after interventions in the readings, and return to the text. Before and during reading, some resistance may arise in relation to the volume of the text; In the face of negative comments, it is necessary to intervene in a positive way, in order to instigate the curiosity of the class and invest in improving reading and comprehension skills.

After the reading course has begun, it is possible that some students refuse to participate orally. It is important to make clear the need to exercise reading to improve competence, however, when resistance is strong, the teacher needs to continue with the activity so as not to delay the course of the plan and those who are ready to participate with reading aloud, may do so to compensate for the lack of participation of those who refused to read. It is necessary, at this point, to take short breaks to certify the understanding of reading. It is necessary to know if the understanding is in flux, if there is doubt, the teacher should help before continuing and ending the contact with the text.

According to Cecilia Bajour 2012,

For those who are mediators between readers and texts, it is enriching to think of this moment of chat about what has been read as reading, the exchange about the meanings that a text triggers in us. It is not a random aggregation, which may or may not occur, and which is usually interpreted as the "true" reading, the one that occurs when the eyes scroll through the lines and images or when the ears are attentive to the oralization of a text by means of a reading aloud. To talk about the texts is to read them again. (Bajour, 2012, p. 23)

In this sense, we realize that it is possible to promote a better use of the contents covered in the text, we can give students the opportunity to externalize their perceptions and doubts, in addition to promoting a more in-depth attention to those who find it difficult to

understand what they read. Cosson 2018, names these interventions "reading breaks", which are brief evaluations that we can make through this activity.

INTERPRETATION AND QUESTIONING OF HORIZONS OF EXPECTATIONS

Propose a second reading, this time individual and silent. This is an opportunity to give students the chance to discover new information about the story. Introduce the sex symbols and ask the students if they know them, these symbols can be presented on a slide, printed poster or drawn on the board. It is possible that students do not know the hermaphrodite symbol that has a new nomenclature called intersex, according to the CNN Brasil website,

Intersex people are born with sex characteristics—including genitals, chromosomal patterns, and glands such as testicles and ovaries—that don't fit into the typical binary notions of male or female bodies. Intersex Human Rights, Australia, adds to the definition that intersexuality creates risks to experiences of stigma, discrimination and harm. The concept is based on definitions shared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

In view of this information, it is important to reinforce the need to respect the differences between people, both in relation to their bodies and in relation to sexuality; report on Bill No. 672/2019, which amends Law No. 7,716 "to include in said legislation the crimes of discrimination or prejudice of sexual orientation and/or gender identity."

It is possible that students will find the story of Kinara and Kalaphangko interesting, open discussions to know if sexuality is directly linked to the soul in the opinion of students. Some may propose to respond seriously and consciously, others may tell jokes with effeminate colleagues, it is necessary to intervene in defense of respect, if this happens. It is necessary to seek and pay attention to discussions that provoke good conclusions and conceptions of human values.

In this moment of construction of meaning, it is important to observe the interferences that involve the author, the reader and the community. Raise discussions about the themes covered in the story. Identity and interpersonal relationships; sexual and gender intolerance; religious intolerance; violence superimposed on critical thinking; Imposed ideological values and the struggle for power are some of the topics that can be addressed. Ask students if the assumptions raised before reading were confirmed; Ask what your perceptions are after reading the story and dedicate time for a good dialogue within the classroom, listening and guidance, in view of the positions presented.

Also present as an intertextuality activity the exhibition of some excerpts from the film *If I Were You*, directed by Daniel Filho in 2006 and starring Glória Pires and Tony Ramos, the film has its criticisms for the humorous appeal in some scenes, but it can be used as a resource to know how the actors interpreted an exchange of bodies after a conflict and how they have to live together appearing natural to the people in social life. In addition to reflecting on their roles inside and outside the family, based on this unusual fact and how the characters understand the difficulties faced by each one in the daily life of their lives.

We can use Helena's scene in the therapy section, before the exchange of bodies, to refer to the poem *Os outros*, by Mário de Sá Carneiro, where the character states that she feels as if she did not exist, as if she had no will of her own or existed only to balance the tensions between family and work and claims to be "tired of balancing everything". The therapist, in turn, says it is necessary to equate the masculine and feminine side of the couple, so that they have greater harmony in the relationship. Then, we can show the character Claudio, a supposedly successful publicist, but who is in crisis with the company's partner. The latter claims to want to sell the agency, Claudio, who has the smallest share in the company, shouts that he does not want to become an employee.

Later, we can use the scene of the exchange of bodies to make a comparison with the short story *As Academias de Zion*, by Machado de Assis. There is a moment in the film when Helena asks Claudio "If I throw myself out of the window, will it be me or you?" This scene can be compared to Kinnara's doubt in planning the death of King Kalaphangko in order to remain administering Sion. Which motivated her to consult the academics and find that they were great ignorant.

A directed study can be proposed at the end of the readings, containing questions about the elements of the narrative and comparison between the texts with the following questions:

1. What is the conflict that generated the plot in the short story *As Academias de Zion*, by Machado de Assis?
2. Were you able to clearly identify the outcome of the narrative? Comment on your answer.
3. Who are the protagonists and supporting characters in this story?
4. Identify the narrative focus and the type of narrator present in the text.
5. In which space do the facts narrated occur?

6. In summary, write down the relationship of meaning between the texts studied.
Be guided by the topics presented and try to follow ethical rigor in your analysis.

3.4 PRODUCTION OR VERIFICATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE READINGS

A production proposal can be made after the discussions promoted in the classroom. The activity can be carried out in a group or individually for later presentation and/or delivery on a date to be arranged, according to the pace of the class. The proposed genres must be known to the students. The suggestion is that it be a form of expression that the student feels safe in elaborating. It can be an opinion article, a review, skit (theater), dance, parody, comic strip, painting or drawing, poem, chronicle or other genre that the teacher deems pertinent.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When analyzing the short story, we realize the significance of the canonical writer, the one who remains current even with the passing of the centuries, as is the case of Machado de Assis in several short stories and novels, but especially in *As academias de Sião*, where we can see the recurring themes of Machado's prose in a more subjective way. The hypocrisy, the social relations, the power game, the tension between a man and a woman, throughout the story we go in a movement of losing ourselves and finding ourselves in the fabric of the complex text, where not everything is what it seems.

However, in the structural analysis, we perceive the possibility of taking this tale to the final years of Elementary School, in view of the important discussions that it can raise. At this point, our text shows the importance of the role of the mediator teacher, the one who must guide the students' reading so that there are no losses or even overinterpretations, that is, wanting to attribute to the text meanings that are not present, or that may be anachronistic to the author. Let us know that it is necessary to face the difficulties of the text and take it to the classroom; The critical development of students can be presented when faced with texts like this.

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