

# *From Tradition to Innovation: The Short Stories of Osman Lins<sup>1</sup>*

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**Abstract:** *Present in the literary and cultural life of Brazil from 1955, the year of publication of his novel *O visitante* [The Visitor] until 1978, when he died prematurely, Osman Lins produced a varied and complex body of work, which, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, has been of growing interest to academic readers, having been languishing in limbo for a number of years. Perhaps the best way to present Osman Lins to a public unfamiliar with his work is to revisit some of his collections of short stories, which reveal the transformation in the poetics of a talented and determined writer following in the tradition of Flaubert, in which the act of writing is the fruit of persistent work with words in order to reach perfection.*

**Keywords:** *Osman Lins; short stories; novels.*

The apprentice Osman Lins took over ten years of constant exercise to arrive at the harmonious configuration of the thirteen stories in *Os gestos* [The Gestures], published in 1957. Almost the same period elapsed before the writer, mature and assured, but no less determined in his search for his own narrative form, offered his readers the collection *Nove, novena* [Nine, Novena], in 1966, a mark in the transformation of his poetics. A similar creative process was also undergone by the author in his novels: *O visitante* [The Visitor] and *O fiel e a pedra* [The Believer and the Stone] (1961), successful achievements in the traditional register, and *Avalovara* [Avalovara] (1973) and *A rainha dos cárceres de Grécia* [The Queen of the Greek Prisons] (1976), novels notable for their innovative language, not always favourably received by the critics, unlike the reception of *Nove, novena* [Nine, Novena].

A man of his place and time, Osman Lins had a solitary literary formation, reading the great classics of literature. It was therefore natural that his first books should have been inscribed in the garments of the traditional narrative and have been immersed in the gloomy, sad melancholy atmosphere of the world in the years after the Second World War. Although he was from the Northeast of Brazil, he did not incorporate the tradition of the regionalist narrative of the 1930s. He is more interested in stories plumbing the inner depths of the character, in a world of elastic frontiers, spotlighting the old, the sick,

children, adolescents and women in prosaic situations, offering us a gallery of characters, most of whom fit into the category that we nowadays understand as the excluded.

Confined, for the most part, to the domestic space, in affective family relationships which are tense, oppressive, stifling, the characters, caught in moments of the quotidian, with greater or lesser dramatic density, are notable for the consistency and complexity of their internal makeup, which is always drawn in firm outlines based on their confrontation with the other and the resultant perception of the impossibility of human communication.

The old man André, in “Os Gestos” [The Gestures], physically gagged by his mute condition, closeted in his bedroom, experiences despair, irritation, frustration and loneliness because of the impossibility of communicating verbally with his wife, his daughters, Lise and Mariana, and the visitor, Rodolfo. His gestures are not always understood, which confines him still further in his uncomfortable loneliness. The reader not only penetrates André’s inner world but is also led by him to perceive the other characters, seen in contrastive pairs. His wife “dressed in darkness”, with a permanent air of boredom, is “cold and vigilant”, while Rodolfo “in his white clothes” is reminiscent of “a sailor”, his presence marked by the amplitude of “voyages”. The daughter Lise, devoted to André, is contrasted to Mariana, a self-centred adolescent.

This marked opposition between the characters governs all the stories in *Os gestos* [The Gestures]. Zilda is shown to have a serene, distanced view of the past, in contrast to her interlocutor, charged with emotion. She does not remember scenes and details recollected by her former neighbour and childhood friend, which results in the impossibility of them sharing a “treasure in common”. The chance re-encounter between the narrator and Zilda, in a train carriage, is confused with their affective mismatch, a variation on the theme of incommunicability, in “Reencontro” [Re-encounter]. In “A Partida” [The Departure], the grandson, in search of a libertarian environment, is opposed to his grandmother, who devotes herself to him with exaggerated and oppressive affection. Julia Mariana, the pregnant character, in “Cadeira de Balanço” [Rocking Chair], sensitive, fearful and oppressed, submits to her husband, methodical, indifferent and authoritarian. “O Vitral” [The Stained Glass Window] presents Matilde, a middle-aged, ingenuous, infantile dreamer, who lives with her adult, realistic husband Antonio.

In these stories, loneliness, the theme shared with others based on human relationships, is experienced in the direct coexistence with partners. “Elegiada” [Elegiad] is different in this sense: the reader is faced with the utmost situation of loneliness, by means of the pungent and lyrical “monologic dialogue” of the character who takes on the narrative voice. The term “monologic dialogue” is used because the old man converses mentally with his dead wife, during her wake, confined in the purest expression of interior discourse, in which valued recollections of the petty detail of the quotidian lived with his partner are fused with complaints and observations of the neglect with which he is and will be treated by his children and grandchildren: not as someone deserving of consideration and affection, but infantilised, incapable and subject to supervision and orders. In this case, the contrast is established between the experience of coexistence

(perhaps idealised due to the painful moment) with the wife he has just lost and with whom he constructed a life and a family and that which is evidently about to start. He will no longer have anyone with whom to share his memories and speak of trivial, loved matters.

Although he focuses on the inner tensions of his characters, Osman Lins does not neglect their insertion in the external space, with the particularity that this is never previously described as a setting, but always arises out of the concrete situation in which the character finds him- or herself. For Lins (1974), rather than organising plots, portraying characters, conceiving of structures, the distinguishing characteristic of the writer of fiction is the “capacity to introduce into his work the feeling world, concrete reality, the backbone of the universe, in such a way that those elements that are incorporated into the work sustain themselves without obstructing it, without us perceiving their voracious dominating presence”. This theoretically formulated conception had already been put into practice years previously.

In the stories of Osman Lins, objects, discretely present, always serve a function: they emphasise the contrast between the interiority of the character and the external environment; they serve to reveal the emotional and affective state of the character, to emphasise their tension, to awaken their consciousness and bring it into contact with reality. In “A Partida” [The Departure], a few sounds caused by the “shuffling of flip-flops”, by the “careful opening and slow closing of windows”, by the “tick-tock of the clock”, by the “clink of cutlery and cups” intensify the “quietness of the house” (imbued with sadness) for the boy, who is lying down and is going to be leaving his grandmother’s house the following day. The story concludes in an emotional atmosphere, focusing on objects charged with affective history.

In “Vital” [Stained Glass Window], Matilde, in her childlike happiness and alone on the morning of her twentieth wedding anniversary, becomes aware of the leaking away of time. Her husband ends up agreeing to his wife’s wish to have a photograph taken of the two of them together on the day of their twentieth wedding anniversary, but brings her down to reality: “It is impossible to show any happiness he said. About anything. No stained glass window retains its brilliance”. Matilde assimilates his lesson, before the vision of the five girls dressed in cambric: “... it was all intangible: it became deceptive or underestimated as soon as you tried to capture it.”

In the story of the same title, the eponymous rocking chair, linked to the lullaby, to affection, to rest, becomes the symbol of Augusto’s authoritarianism, expressing with poetic density the wife’s situation, destined for domestic chores under her husband’s submission, in accordance with the mind-set still reigning in the 1950s. Without the least inner movement of revolt, she accepts the image of her husband’s social function as being a taskmaster to whom the right of rest is only conceded after work. Pregnant, tired, with swollen feet and low self-esteem, caused by the transformation of her body and Augusto’s gradual distancing, having felt ill while she was washing shirts, Júlia Mariana goes back inside the house and sits down in the rocking chair. As she begins to

enjoy the peace and quiet of the afternoon, in a form of examination of her consciousness, she lists the undone tasks and foresees her husband's complaints.

The expected complaints do not materialise, but something worse happens: Júlia Mariana is the victim of contempt, indicated by the gestures of Augusto (a significant name) with which the story closes: he throws a newspaper and his hat onto the sofa, takes off his jacket and tie, hangs them on a hook, opens the window, picks up the newspaper, and touches her shoulder without looking at her for her to get up and give him her place in the rocking chair.

For the cloistered André, in "Os gestos" [The Gestures], his bedroom window looks onto a landscape which brings him "a well-being he had not felt in a long time" and other moments of relief, on a rainy day, giving him motives for escape through an imaginary journey into the past, finding himself "gazing on a lakeside landscape, linked to his youth". The rhythm of the rain, for its part, in addition to marking the flow of the objective time of the story, also determines the movement of the opening and closing of the window in perfect harmony with the intensification and distension of André's anxiety, with the externalisation of his brusque gestures, angry and calm, in his relationship with his wife and daughters and with the content of his interior discourse, now reflexive, now evasive, now lucid, now dreaming.

There is no loose strand in the laborious warp of the fabric of each of the stories in *Os Gestos* [*The Gestures*], whether at the level of the elements of the narrative (relationship between character, space, time and point of view) or at the discursive level, characterised by short phrases, by precise words, by appropriate and beautiful images, in a confident and successful command of the fusion of technique and style, which enables Lins, as critics have never failed to point out, to capture the human condition directly and profoundly.

The rigorous composition of these short fictions, aligned in the tradition "of the neo-modernist story with its poem-like affiliation", as the critic Hélio Pólvora (1976) suggested, does not hide the adjacent reality, although there is no explicit period contextualisation.

An expert in the art of writing exquisite stories registering the illusion of reality, Osman Lins confirmed his literary talent, allied to the conception of workmanlike shaping of words, in the narratives of *Nove, novena* [*Nine, Novena*], under the sign of antimimetic art. Narratives because, in this book, there are very few nuclei of condensed action, irradiating tension and intensity. Narratives with a reduced number of pages, although most of them have the more extended duration of stories, as generally happens with the novel, although it is problematic to establish frontiers between genres, particularly between the story, the novella and the novel. Despite this particular treatment dispensed by Osman Lins to his short narratives in *Nove, novena*, critics generally refer to them as short stories.

By including the term “narratives” on the title page of *Nove, novena*, Osman Lins intended to underline his lack of concern for the frontiers between short story, novella and novel and, above all, to emphasise his commitment to the story, in a book in which he introduced his new literary diction, at a time when the cultural scene was dominated by discussions about the French new novel. Under the baton of a writer jealous of his craft, *Nove, novena* amalgamates the rigorous construction of the narrative structures, in fragmented blocks, in the manner of modules; new processes of character composition; unusual modalities of narrative focus; the constant presence of metalanguage and the resource of ornamentation in a precise, beautiful, poetic style shaped for each case, in a poetic fabric.

Each pause, each word, each phoneme, each situation, each interlinking of stories, each type of character composition, each juxtaposition of fragments has its reason for being and constantly offers itself up to interpretations. The narratives of *Nove, novena* thus offer the reader an intriguing text, far from easy consumption, which require from him or her a reading which is differentiated and engaged, although no less enjoyable.

“Os confundidos” [The Confused] takes the form of the conflicted dialogue of a couple, over a short space of time, as indicated by the wife’s statement which initiates the interlocution and the story – “I’m tired. Almost midnight” –, and that of the husband, at the end: “It’s after midnight”. The man relates the development of the attack of unhealthy jealousy that assailed him, when he was alone at home, while his wife was working. Oscillating between disgust, anger, madness and lucidity, she reacts to her husband’s feelings of jealousy, doubt and distrust. The development of the verbal antagonism also includes reflections about love, loss of identity, the impossibility of knowing the other and the monotony of life. The dialogue is intercut with sections of narrative, which operate as theatrical stage directions, situating the characters and describing their spatial movements.

“Os confundidos” alternates between eight sections of dialogue and seven micro-narratives, exposing the balanced, geometrical organisation of the text, which becomes more evident when one perceives the interplay between the transparency of the discourse of the dialogue and the unusual register of the micro-narratives, which oscillates between the poles of definition and uncertainty, creating an appropriate climate for the theme of “Os confundidos”, as can be seen below:

One of us stood up, or is going to stand up, half open the curtain, look out at the night. The murmur of the vehicles, continuous, will rise – rose? – from the avenues, spinning around the room, over the watercolours in their fine frames, over the leather armchairs with red cushions, around the lighted table-lamp. The vibrating stars, appearing to be shaken by the murmur of the city that does not sleep. We are holding hands, which of these hands is burning. We look at the empty wall. (Lins 1966, 75)

The sequence of actions in mutually exclusive temporalities placed side by side subverts the laws of chronology, establishing the uncertainty in the temporal sphere.

The very subject of the action of “stood up” is undefined, we do not know whether it is the man or the woman. In opposition to this uncertainty is the inventory of the objects in the room, always highlighting some detail. The theme of confusion is also materialised in the sensations of the characters holding hands and in the subversion of the use of pronouns, with the absence of the second person in the dialogue.

This small sample of the warp of all levels into a balanced, geometrical narrative architecture is present in the nine narratives of *Nove, novena*. The quest for a balanced form, in a movement of convergence towards the unification of the various elements making up the fictional universe, lends substance to a vision of a literature which awakens the desire to recover man’s harmony with the world and the cosmos, despite the fragilities of the human condition. Fragilities and dissonances glimpsed in personal relationships, domestic space and social structure.

The central nucleus of “Conto Barroco ou Unidade Tripartita” [Baroque Story or Tripartite Unity] consists of the mission of a man, hired to kill a certain José Gervásio, without knowing the reason. He gets in touch with a black woman, who had a relationship with José Gervásio, father of her son, and asks her to show him the victim. After the black woman has pointed out her ex-lover in three different situations and cities (Congonhas, Ouro Preto and Tiradentes); after the criminal has had an emotional-sexual relationship with the informer and parted from her in three versions; after he has been sought out by the father of the victim, by José Gervásio himself and by the black woman, in three different modules, with the intent of dissuading him from his criminal intent, the murder is executed in three versions: in the first, the black woman dies; in the second, a man (identified generically) and in the third, the father.

This nucleus of the story extends over five segments, each of which focuses on a precise moment, as though it were a module, with the particularity that the second, the third, the fifth and the seventh present three variations in the form of superimposed studies. Exhibiting the various choices of the narrator and proposing a multiple combination of variants for the reader, the device of tripartition, the principal innovation of this narrative, accentuates the anti-illusionist character of the poetics of *Nove, novena* and explicitly invites the reader to make a creative reading. Osman Lins informs us that, according to the calculations of a maths teacher, “Conto Barroco ou Unidade Tripartita” permits four thousand nine hundred and ninety-five possible recreations.

The offer of the possibility of a multiplication of stories based on the central nucleus of the action of the killer, who carries out the order of his boss without knowing the reason, sets the scene for the theme of the absurdity of the human condition, anchored in a stratified order, widespread in modern society. Through this procedure, Osman Lins focuses on this human problem on a collective scale. He removes himself from individualism, inherent in the tradition of the bourgeois novel, which also explains, in part, the fact that his characters are identified by nouns, without names: the killer, the black woman, the father. Only the victim is designated by his Christian name, José Gervásio, in addition to having a surname which is not mentioned.

In an inverse movement to that of “Conto Barroco ou Unidade Tripartita”, but with the same purpose of giving a collective dimension to existential and social problematics, in “Pentágono de Hahn” [Hahn’s Pentagon], five independent stories are fused, narrated by characters who cover the phases of life: a child, a young woman, a bachelor, a married man and an old woman. The narrative opens with a description of Hahn’s show. The subject only of the first paragraph, the presence of the cow elephant extends throughout the text, corresponding to the unifying centripetal force of the five narratives, as pointed out by Benedito Nunes (1967).

An epiphanic symbol, Hahn reveals to the five characters, identified by different signs, the mediocrity of their own existence, filling them with the desire to overcome their limitations, satisfy their needs and reach an ideal life. But the end of the stories brings no solution. The internal conflict and dissatisfactions of the characters remain. With the death of the brothers, all that is left for the old woman is the perspective of an accentuated loneliness; the woman embodies society’s prejudice, which rejects the love between an older woman and an adolescent, and begins to conceive of her relationship with Bartolomeu as being impossible and sends him a farewell letter; in spite of his desire to end his loneliness, the bachelor remains alone; after seeing the act of writing as a solution in his life, the married man returns to Recife, aware that “he is like someone who, mentally assumes undertaking a journey, without knowing that it is necessary to create, in his soul, conditions to overcome his habits, his fears, and leave”. All that is left open is the fate of the relationship between the boy and Adélia, in the final scene in which he declares himself and reveals himself to be a precocious man, in a poetic register:

I enter my girlfriend, I enter a market, she is waiting for me, I take her hand and go on, I go on with her, naked in the market, through her body. Canvas-covered stalls, women on the game, horses with pack saddles, merchants, ox-carts covered with calico, treacle in pots, croché cloths, coloured hammocks, rattan mats, clay animals, fruit, greens, kites... Adélia, in her wet dress, penetrates me and discovers in my pupils, crouched, weeping, stalking, a precocious man. She smiles understandingly and strokes me with her wet hair.

The emotional-sexual encounter between these characters in a “market”, a metaphor for a microcosm where objects, animals, people and natural elements share the same space, is transformed into a symbol of amorous fulfilment and acquires a meaning which transcends the particular sphere of this story, by signalling the possibility of union between loving beings and of harmonious integration between man and the world, in poetic language, with unusual tints. One observes the arrangement of the language underpinned by a syntax of juxtaposition, as if all the words were harmoniously interlocked with each other.

Composed of nine segments, corresponding to nine phases of the life of the character, from childhood to adulthood, arranged in non-chronological order, “O Pássaro Transparente” [The Transparent Bird] is the story of the failure of someone who succumbs

to family pressure and absorbs his father's values. He gets married to Eudóxia, imposed by his father, in order to accumulate material wealth. In adolescence he tried to flee from his father's clutches and from all that the family meant. As his father's double, the adult represents the negation of the adolescent who wrote poetry, dated an artist, dreamed of travelling and disowned his family's narrow-minded values.

Each module focuses on a different space, connected to the characterisation or the description of the character, and is articulated, in a repetitive movement, in two parts: the first, assumed by a third-person narrator, who narrates a slice of the life of the character, and the second, emitted by the character, in direct interior speech, during the event in focus. This repetitive and even, up to a certain point, monotonous structure represents in the composition of the narrative the atmosphere of the life of a methodical man, tied to business, unhappily married for money, devoted only to material wealth, living in the extremely limited city of his birth. An upset in this scheme occurs in the sixth and seventh segments, when the man interacts with the artist, the girlfriend of his adolescence. The significant explosion of the monotonous structure, opening the way for dialogue, is linked to the presence of the "dream source" woman, now a famous artist.

Amongst her pictures, there are some which represent fruits, birds flying. One bird is transparent, both the bird and its heart can be seen. A clear reference to the title of the narrative, it can be interpreted as a kind of metalanguage of Osman Lins's creative process, because the bird has the appearance of bird of prey and a person's gaze. It is a frightening bird, which does not exist. The artist's drawing is anti-illusionist, the result of a process which amalgamates human and animal features, similar to that which Osman Lins makes use of to compose his characters, *flesh transmuted into word*. The parallelism widens and extends to the collection of narratives of *Nove, novena*, as a whole, because the anti-illusionism already begins and is exposed in the very structural composition of each one of them.

Although one should not always take into consideration what an author says about his work, it is pertinent to quote the explanation that Osman Lins gives, in a letter, to Gilberto Mendonça Teles:<sup>2</sup>

The title "transparent bird" has to do with a problem of narrative focus. One sees the bird and the skeleton of the bird. The external and the internal of the protagonist, through the alternation of the he and of the I.

The metalinguistic content attributed by the author to title of the narrative which opens his innovative book is significant, based on a rigorously geometrical and balanced architecture. On the one hand the bird conveys the idea of open space, liberty, flight; on the other, as Osman Lins himself tells us in one of the few poems that he wrote: "the necessary weight! for the rigorous flight, is easy, weight that knows! the mysteries of numbers: point of intersection of the tense and invisible web ...."<sup>3</sup> The transparent



bird is the image of the new poetics inaugurated in *Nove, novena*, which does not exclude other meanings to be attributed to it, depending on the reading perspective adopted.

In “Pastoral” [Pastoral], the reader will encounter another adolescent in a situation of conflict with his family, in a rural environment, as the title announces, which refers back to pastoral poetry, which is generally in the form of dialogue. Ironically, in this environment, dominated by the patriarchal structure, dialogue is non-existent. Baltasar, the adolescent, carries the weight of being the son of a woman who abandoned her husband for another man. Rejected by the father, by the brothers (except one) and by Joaquim, the distant relation, because he looks like his mother, he lives suffocated in the exclusively masculine family environment. Only his stepfather, who had fallen in love with his mother, pays him any attention. One day, he gives him a mare as a present and tells him the story of his fugitive mother. The mare becomes the object of the adolescent’s affection and the indirect cause of his death, when he tries to kill the second horse, provided by the family, to mate with her.

The oppressive environment is projected in the repetitive structure of the twenty paragraphs, corresponding to the scenes of Baltasar’s life, set out almost entirely in chronological order, but always with interruptions, as though they were cinematographic cuts. The two dislocated scenes, those of the seventh and eighth paragraphs, the only ones that are coupled together without rupture, and which in fact antecede all the others, refer to the space of affection and liberty. The break in the expectation of structural rigidity in the narrative coincides with the breach opened by his stepfather for Baltasar: in giving him a mare (baptised as Canária [Canaria]) as a present and in revealing to him the story of his mother, a forbidden memory in that patriarchal, misogynistic space, the stepfather functions as a dispatcher sending him off in search of liberty.

Unlike the character in “O Pássaro Transparente”, Baltasar refuses to be the double of his father. Like his mother in physical appearance and his psychological makeup, he faces his family to the point of death, but he does not succumb morally. “Pastoral” was the first narrative to be conceived and written by Osman Lins in his phase of seeking new routes for his fiction, when he was still in France, at the beginning of the 1960s. This fact tells us much about the author when we remember that, while he was in Paris for the first time, following a rigid cultural plan based on his literary project, he produced a narrative whose content was solidly linked to the Northeast rural environment, from which he had originated. He denounced the violence of the patriarchal structure, in an unusual narrative form, introducing a new technique to embody his anti-illusionist literature: the use of the I in a non-naturalistic perspective.

Baltasar is the first-person narrator of the twenty fragments, thus narrating his own death and describing his own wake. Unlike Machado de Assis’s character, Brás Cubas, the adolescent is not a corpse narrator, because the “I” of Osman Lins corresponds to a false pronoun. Utilised as an instrument purely to lend movement to the phrase, the pronoun “I” is as distanced from the character as a “he”. The adolescent in his bedroom describes everything that happens in the living room. Dead, he is the

first-person narrator from the first to the twentieth fragment of “Pastoral”. He seems to be the narrator, but he is not. Behind this false “I”, there is a narrative instance with a complete view of the time and space of the fictional world, establishing aperspectivism, a feature that Osman Lins himself recognises is not exclusively his own, but dominant in contemporary art, a curious fact in a world characterised by fragmentation and violence.

The beautiful narrative, “Retábulo de Santa Joana Carolina” [The Altarpiece of Saint Joana Carolina], considered by many to be the author’s masterpiece, is a perfect literary transposition of the plastic altarpiece, composed of twelve modules, called mysteries in a clear reference to the religious theatrical genre of the Middle Ages. “Retábulo de Santa Joana Carolina” is assumed by various first-person narrators, who highlight the exemplary profile of this woman from the Northeast (a character inspired by the author’s paternal grandmother), demonstrated in her love, fidelity, loyalty, solidarity, strength of character, determination, courage, resistance against and confrontation of local authorities and in her coexistence with nature, based on specific events in her life. The reader sees that these events are described as though they were paintings being contemplated by the narrator of each mystery. However, this narrator also participates in the internal composition and narrates the events from this position, with a global command of time and space, explicable only by the use of the “I” as a false pronoun.

In addition to this, aperspectivism makes it possible to establish the collective voice, an original contribution to literature by Osman Lins, by means of a rotation of narrative foci, centred on characters who are generally anonymous and identified by graphic symbols, and by means of choric sections, uttered by the people, as in the case of the last mystery in “Retábulo de Santa Joana Carolina”.

Another resource devised by Osman Lins to transmit this vision in his own literary language is the embellishment, which makes it possible to render concrete a more intimate connection between man and the totality of things and the cosmos. “Retábulo de Santa Joana Carolina” achieves this very successfully. Its interconnection with the cosmos begins in the framework of the altarpiece: the twelve mysteries correspond to the signs of the Zodiac, beginning with Libra and concluding with Virgo, as Anatol Rosenfeld points out. This organisational principle of the altarpiece, by means of which the story of a woman who lives in Pernambuco is widened out, inserts the narrative “into the mythical-circular time of the celestial constellations, reconnecting it to cosmic dimensions” (Rosenfeld 1950).

Inlaid into the beginning of each mystery in “Retábulo de Santa Joana Carolina”, the embellishments poetically create links between man and the world splicing the life of Joana Carolina into an evocation of the cosmos and the great cycles of human civilisation. In the twelfth mystery, the embellishment is dissolved into the body in the description of Joana Carolina’s burial, assumed by the choric voice, collective in the full sense of the word, and not indicated by the rotation of the “I narrator”. The bond between the radicalisation of the collective voice and the device of the embellishment

integrated into the material of the narrative of the last mystery is achieved in the poetic language of the full integration of Joana Carolina with the universe through her death.

It should be noted, however, that Osman Lins, committed to his time, does not ingenuously reproduce the ancient idea of a natural harmony, marked by the balance and agreement of all things. Without failing to denounce the fragmentation of modern man and without ignoring the dissonances in the structure of society, this “practitioner of a unifying craft”, proposes to awaken, through his literature, the desire of reconciliation with the world. The lucid gaze around him shows him the injustices, the dissonances, the acts of violence, the incomprehension, the anxiety of which contemporary man is a victim, but his desire is to recover lost unity - hence his poetics of tensions, so well exposed in the final mystery “Retábulo de Santa Joana Carolina”. If, on the one hand, the insertion of Joana Carolina into the cosmos is achieved, as is demonstrated in a literary manner in the formal rupture in which the embellishment is embedded into the text, on the other, the burial scene is described by the people, in an intensely violent, pounding rhythm.

Finally, the innovations in the art of composing and telling stories are not merely sterile technical novelties, empty of content. Fruit of a determined commitment to the art of the word, they are also a formal exposition of the world view held by Osman Lins in his maturity. Amongst those authors of a lasting reputation, it is better that their work receives the recognition it deserves late than never.

## Notes

- 1 Republication of the preface to *Os melhores contos*. Osman Lins, São Paulo: Global, 2003, with an altered title, and some cuts and minor alterations to the text. This presentation was also published under the title “Um singular contador de histórias”, in my own *Transfigurações* (ensaios sobre a obra de Osman Lins), São Paulo: Hucitec/Fapesp, 2010. Translated from the Portuguese by Peter James Harris
- 2 Found in the Fundo Osman Lins, of the Institute of Brazilian Studies, USP.
- 3 “Ode”, *O Estado de São Paulo*. São Paulo, 12 November 1959. I am grateful to Hugo Almeida for having introduced me to this poem by Osman Lins.

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