



## THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE NOVEL CRONICA DA CASA ASSASSINADA II



William Valentine REDMOND\*

### ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

This article looks at the critical reception of the novel **Crônica da Casa Assassinada** at the time of its publication and examines later comments and analyses made by later critics, especially those who have studied this novel in post graduation studies and which lead to publications in the academic press.

Keywords: Lucio Cardoso. Crônica da Casa Assassinada. Reception.

Today, it is possible to go beyond the fervent or the critical views of the critics on the works of Lúcio Cardoso, so we can put them into perspective in the contemporary vision of modern literature. Careful reading shows that Lúcio was one of the strongest temperaments and one of the greatest talents of his generation and his masterpiece, **Crônica da casa assassinada**, has an impassioned and a disturbing literary density. He is the creator of dark atmospheres and is able to go deep into the unconsciousness of remarkable characters, of frightening archetypes, and he does not hesitate to project them into paradoxical situation in which incest is symbolised as cancer. But for Lúcio Cardoso, in the last analysis, the unacceptable scandal is the secretive lie which corrodes and lacerates the house of the Meneses.

This complex novel was marginalised by the dominant currents of literary criticism of Brazil of his time. Lúcio confesses that he had a tragic and dilacerated conscience of

---

\* Doutor em Letras (Ciência da Literatura) pela Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Professor do Mestrado em Letras do Centro de Ensino Superior de Juiz de Fora (CES/JF).

<sup>1</sup> The first article is in VERBO DE MINAS, Juiz de Fora, v. 13, n. 22. p. 51-71, ago./dez. 2012.

his existential drama as a creator. He states in the **Confissões de um homem fora do tempo** that the writer is tormented and takes up a position with certain violence. He tells us that he believes in the novel, but the novel written with blood, and not that produced merely by the brain with the help of notebooks, but the novel that comes from the stomach, from the bones, from the whole body, from the despair and sick soul of the author who produces it as a man spits blood, against his will and throws it as a challenge to humanity. His final aim is to destabilise the reader and to reveal the falsities of our human comedy (CARELLI, 1997 p. 762).

Among the writers who noticed from the start the importance of the writings of Lúcio, the regionalist José Lins de Rêgo, apparently so far from the metaphysical preoccupations of his colleague, capture with respect to the novel **O enfeitado** the essence of the contribution of Cardoso to literature. He tells us that Lúcio Cardoso is a great poet and has no fear of words, which he dominates with music which brings to us visions. He is like a deep spring in the depths of earth, crying for the earth. He portrays human beings with that madness that comes from the fury of carnal desire and which trembles despite the terrible peace of impotency. His poetry of disintegration invades of perception and the reader hangs between dreams and reality and overcome by this prose which reveals the soul on fire with sinful desires (CARELLI, 1997. p. 767).

In the literary circles of Rio, the novel of Lúcio Cardoso was awaited since it had been announced in 1953. In 1958 with the complicity of some of his friends, he had given provocative interviews aimed at starting up a scandal. In **Suplemento Literário do Jornal do Brasil** of the 27th of April of that same year, he published fragments of the novel with a clear explanation on the meaning of the title. It was a house in the sense that it was the story of a family, of a tradition. It was assassinated in the sense that its ancient dignity was destroyed by sin. This is the key idea of the novel, the sin of the family. Unsubdued he tells us: “Meu movimento de luta, aquilo que viso destruir e incendiar pela visão de uma paisagem apocalíptica e sem remissão é Minas Gerais” (SUPLEMENTO, 1958).

When **Crônica da casa assassinada** was published, Maria Alice Barroso reminds us in an article of the *Jornal do Brasil* that the sedate position of the publishing houses in Brazil was upset and it provoked an enormous polemic among writers in

favour or against the content of the novel. She insists that the free and freeing concept of the novel reaches universal sentiments through a portrait which is markedly Brazilian. She points out that the writer deals with good and bad with a vision and a geniality which is missing even in angels and that he submits his characters to evil with that nostalgia of the impossible Good.

The polemical reception developed in various phases. Olívio Montenegro was the first to attach what he considered to be an immoral novel and provoked a number of responses. The critic from Pernambuco thought that the novel was written in a prose as artificial as the characters, which were all without moral backbone and he denounced what he called the “bestial colours of the incestuous portraits” (Diário Carioca, 1959). Walmir Ayala published the reactions of other critics to these statements and Octávio de Faria offered a formal answer, which sums up the position of many:

Devemos desistir do direito de construir um mundo melhor, que é a nossa grande responsabilidade e sobre a qual talvez dependa a nossa salvação, apenas por causa de uma meia dúzia de preconceitos [...] A *Crônica da casa assassinada* é uma declaração que lança uma luz imensa sobre a escuridão da nossa desordem e nosso fracasso de amar a Deus (CORREIO, 1959).

Various voices were raised to give support to the proposal of Lúcio Cardoso, Manuel Bandeira, Adonias Filho, Eneida and Armindo Pereira, for whom the simple suggestion of the myth of incest showed the grandiosity of the themes discussed in the masterpiece of the novelist. Lêdo Ivo praised the fullness of the visionary novel, pointing out its symphonic prose, full of weight, colour and meaning and the plot which does not shock because it is validated by the art of the writer and offers to all a meditation on human destiny which is stamped on every page.

In the same way, other intellectuals, such as Assis Brasil, Aníbal Machado, Pascoal Carlos Magno and Dinah Silveira de Queiroz, all defended the liberty of the writer.

In the following year, Lúcio refused the Prize Machado de Assis of the National Institute of the Book, which was offered to him together with the other winner, who wrote

a literary column. He preferred to maintain his stance of an accursed and rebellious writer, and scorned the trappings of glory that often go with great writing.

The confusion continued in the newspapers, with a large number of opinions expressed. Some were enthusiastic in favour some were hesitant. A friend of Lúcio, Paulo Hecker Filho, praised the athleticism of the vast machine of words which Sesimo de Miranda complained of the dark book too full of good qualities and defects. Louzada Filho points out the affinities and the divergences with the works of William Faulkner.

Some insisted on the qualitative improvement in the **Crônica** compared with the previous novels. Manuel Bandeira sums it up pointing out the demiurgic power which culminates in the new novel of Cardoso. For José Carlos Oliveira, the saturnine characteristics of the previous novel continue in the new one, but managed to reach a redeeming and tranquil clarity in the text.

With each new edition of the novel, new passions were aroused and new opinions expressed. On the 1st of December of 1979, in the national newspaper, *Jornal do Brasil*, the novelist from Juiz de Fora, Rachel Jardim wrote that despite the heavy atmosphere of the novel, for no moment did the writer ignore the text and produced one of the most dense, one of the most versatile and one of the most beautiful texts of all published in the Portuguese language.

The academic world too took notice of the novel and in **História concisa da literatura brasileira**, Alfredo Bosi considers that the author is an inventor of existential totalities and states that the work is a masterpiece since it makes prose into poetry and allows the psychological novel to escape from the cul de sac and places it in the context of family and group relationships.

The novel has too become important as a text for study in postgraduate studies. In 1980, Adolfo Bonapace in a thesis entitled “The beautiful questioned: **Crônica da casa assassinada** of Lúcio Cardoso”, shows how the text is a questioning of the nature of the beautiful and raises the text of Cardoso an unreadable signpost in the context of human life.

Academic study continued with the thesis of Tereza de Almeida “Lúcio Cardoso and Julien Green: transgression and guilt” to examine with honesty and with sagacity the text of **Crônica da casa assassinada**. The careful comparison of the two writers

finally confirmed the generalised statement of Agrippino Grieco and Tristão de Athayde made thirty years previously. Both Green and Cardoso were steeped in the Anglo-Saxon writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Brontë, Lord Byron and Nathaniel Hawthorne. But the central reference in both the text of Cardoso and the text of Green is the Romantic novel of Dostoyevski. However, Cardoso transcends the limited concept of influence in his novel in relationship to Green and approaches the point of a convergence of world visions. In the diaries of both writers, it is possible to notice the importance and fascination of the writings of William Faulkner. But there is also the marks of Bernanos and Mauriac in the way Cardoso approaches the problems of life, just as there is in the approach of both Octávio de Faria and Cornélio Penna, but the atmosphere of mystery and the hallucination that goes beyond mere psychology shows close links with the work of Green. The characters of both writers are taken forward to transgression either in the dizziness of somnambulism, or by psychic unbalance or even by suggested invisible evil forces portrayed by animistic images. The thesis ends contrasting the baroque writing of Cardoso with the classicism of Green.

There was another thesis defended in the University of Campinas in which the candidate defends the idea that Lúcio Cardoso was essential a post modernist critic. Ana Maria Cordeiro under the tutoring of Professor Raúl Antelo defended her dissertation in September of 1995. Working with the theories of Harold Bloom on the anxiety of influence, she studies how this impulse to free himself from the father text distanced himself from the limits of the rupturing of the modernist theories. Since Cardoso worked for some many years as the literary critic of newspapers in Rio de Janeiro and produced didactic material for the Ministry of Education, it is timely that some one studies his literary production and tries to seem him in perspective. The use of the word “postmodern” is of course rather loaded and a close reading of the text is obviously called for to see exactly how the study handles the concepts.

Perhaps one of the most important books on recent studies of Cardoso has been **Lúcio Cardoso: a travessia da escrita**, organised by Ruth Silviano Brandão and resulting from a scholarship from CNPq and with the generous use of trainee researchers. It is an uneven book, but this is obviously the price of using a financed research as a way of introducing students to the methods of academic research and

very often the resulting enrichment of the students is more than recompensed for the unevenness of the work produces. There are several very fine articles in the book. It is very touching that the first article is written by Andréa Vilela, one of his nieces who recalls how she used to visit Nonô: “Nonô, era assim que nós o chamávamos. E é engraçado como chamar a um homem feito por um nome tão infantil nunca nos causa estranheza” (BRANDÃO, p. 17). This information about his house name was also very important because in the autobiography of his sister Maria Helena, *Por onde andou meu coração*, she speaks continually about Nonô and at no point in the book, tells us that Nonô was in fact Joaquim Lúcio Cardoso Filho. The book also has a fine study of the *Diário* in the chapter “A voragem da escrita: considerações sobre o Diário de Lúcio Cardoso”. There is a very detailed academic study of the parallel between the book of Maria Helena and the novel **Dias perdidos**, showing how close the autobiographical text of Maria Helena is very similar to the fictional text of Lúcio Cardoso.

But the main contribution to the study of Lúcio Cardoso offered in the book is the use of the Lacanist concepts of psychoanalysis especially on the absence of the father figure. There is besides the article of Professor Brandão, also two other articles by the trainee researchers. The preface points out clearly the importance of these texts and calls attention to the key concepts: “Em ‘Lendo Lúcio’, os três primeiros textos têm como objeto a figura do pai, como uma ausência na vida da família e como presença na memória e na escrita do filho que, nesse espaço de criação, o reencontra na letra mesmo de seu texto” (Ibidem, p. 14).

This study is essential and for a young boy, who was brought up with hardly a glimpse of his father, the influence of this in his imagination creative writing is shown to be central and an important new light is shed on the texts of this important novelist.

Another book published in 1997 by the Professor of the Federal University of Goiânia, Maria Teresinha Martins, entitled **Luz e sombra em Lúcio Cardoso**, is a publication based on the thesis of Doctorate tutored by Professor Gilberto Mendonça Teles. The book is the result of a doctorate thesis of the professor, originally from Minas, but who works and lectures in the Federal University of Goiás. Following the suggestion of Michel de Certeau, she states that the novel does not reflect reality because it is part of this reality: it is its anxious and agitated aspects, its dark side. Using this metaphor of

light and darkness, and playing with the title of one of the novels, **Luz no subsolo**, Professor Martins traces the anxieties and the psychological anguish of the novels from his first neorealist novel **Maleita**, through to the technical and existential brilliance of his final masterpiece **Crônica da casa assassinada**. The final chapter on the restoring aesthetics of art and of mankind is masterly written and shows a great understanding, a keen appreciation and an enormous admiration for the writer Lúcio Cardoso the conclusion affirms:

É possível que a arte leve o homem à plenitude, mas, contraditoriamente, ela o atrai e o mantém como ser desejante. Não esgota o reino da possibilidade, no qual é possível a realização humana. Assim, a narrativa cardosiana devolve ao fragmentado, deformado e massificado homem moderno sua essência imutável, mas cambiante, em que as luzes são sombras e as sombras são luzes em que não se revela o ser e o resgata da precariedade humana (MARTINS, 1997, p. 190).

A dissertation defended in the State University of Campinas came out in the book form in 2001, entitled **Polêmica e controvérsia em Lúcio Cardoso**. It was the work of Cássia dos Santos. The dissertation is based on a close reading of the novels of Lúcio Cardoso and not fast reading (the twin sister of fast) that is so bad for the physical and literary health of the modern man. The study is a good detailed report on the reception of the texts of Cardoso from the first book **Maleita** published in 1934 and imitating the regional neorealist novels of the time through to **O enfeitado** published in 1954 which shows that Lúcio had moved forward to the writing of psychological novels. The essay is carefully researched and her observation about Byron could lead on to further research: “Leitor e admirador de Byron, em cuja obra foi buscar a epígrafe para **O viajante**, Lúcio parece ter se deixado atrair pelo mito romântico do ‘escritor maldito’ que procurou conscientemente cultivar” (SANTOS, 2001, p. 11).

But the most important writer in recent years on the work of Lúcio Cardoso has been Mario Carelli of the University of Paris. This Frenchman with an Italian name worked in the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique – Ecole des Hautes Etudes em Sciences Sociales de Paris. And is undoubtedly the most important scholar in the



history of the criticism of Lúcio Cardoso, a distinction that might with more propriety be proudly held by a Brazilian scholar.

Carelli wrote this doctorate thesis on Cardoso with the title **L'univers romanesque de Lúcio Cardoso**, published in 1986 in three volumes by the Nova Sorbonne with a total of 1152 pages. It was this book which later inspired the organisation of the marvellous collection of texts on Latin America to call on him to organise the book on the novel **Crônica da casa assassinada**. The Associação Arquivos da Literatura Latino-Americana e do Caribe do Século XX was made possible after the donation by Miguel Angel Asturias in 1974 of all his manuscripts to the National Library of France. The edition offers a critical final version of each masterpiece with a complete bibliography and many supporting articles of analysis. The critical edition of this novel of Lúcio Cardoso was number 18 and published in its first edition in 1991 and then a second edition in 1996. There was a second impression of this edition in the following year. By this second edition not only Octávio de Faria and José Geraldo Nogueira Moutinho had died but Mario Carelli himself. The volume was printed in Spain with a painting on the cover by Lúcio Cardoso himself produced when, after his stroke, and unable to write, he began painting.

Mario Carelli also wrote the biography of Lúcio Cardoso translated into Portuguese by Julio Castañon Guimarães in 1988 with the title **Corcel de fogo: vida e obra de Lúcio Cardoso**. The untameable pony used in the title was a quotation from a letter of Clarice Lispector to the novelist that shows the warmth and special quality of the friendship between the two great novelists:

Lúcio, estou com saudade de você, corcel de fogo que você era, sem limite para o seu galope. Saudade eu tenho sempre. Mas, saudade tristíssima, duas vezes.

A primeira quando você repentinamente adoeceu, em plena vida, você que era a vida. Não morreu da doença. Continuou vivendo, porém era homem que não escrevia mais, ele que até então escrevera por uma compulsão eterna gloriosa. E depois da doença, não falava mais, ele que já me dissera das coisas mais inspiradas que ouvidos humanos poderiam ouvir. E ficara com o lado direito todo paralisado. Mais tarde usou a mão esquerda para pintar: o poder criativo nele não cessara (In CARELLI, 1996, p.789).

She continues her letter:



Mudo ou grunhindo, só os olhos se estrelavam, eles que sempre haviam faiscado de um brilho intenso, fascinante e um pouco diabólico. De sua doença restaria também o sorriso: esse homem que sorria para aquilo que o matava. Foi homem de se arriscar e de pagar o alto preço do jogo. Passou a transportar para as telas, com a mão esquerda (que, no entanto, era incapaz de escrever, só de pintar) transparências e luzes e levezas que antes ele não parecia ter conhecido e ter sido iluminado por elas: tenho um quadro, de antes da doença, que é quase totalmente negro. A luz lhe viera depois das trevas da doença (Ibidem).

## AS ORIGENS DA NOVELA CRÔNICA DA CASA ASSASSINADA CONFORME OS DIÁRIOS DE LÚCIO CARDOSO II

### RESUMO

Este artigo examina a recepção crítica do romance **Crônica da Casa Assassinada** na época da sua publicação e estuda comentários e análises posteriores feitas pelos críticos em outras décadas, especialmente, estudiosos que examinam o romance em estudos de Pós-Graduação, que alcançam publicação na imprensa acadêmica.

Palavras-chave: Lucio Cardoso. Crônica da Casa Assassinada. Recepção.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

BONAPACE, Adolfo. **O belo posto em questão**: Crônica da casa assassinada of Lúcio Cardoso. Tese de doutoramento, UFRJ, 1980.

BRANDÃO, Ruth Silviano. **Lúcio Cardoso**: a travessia da escrita. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 1998.

CARDOSO, LUCIO. **Crônica da casa assassinada**. Edição crítica coordenada por Mario Carelli. 2. ed. Madri: ALLCA XX, CSIC, 1996. (Archivos, 18).

CARDOSO, Maria Helena. **Por onde andou meu coração**. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1968.

CARELLI, Mario. **Corcel de fogo**: vida e obra de Lúcio Cardoso (1912-1968). Tradução Júlio Castañon Guimarães. Rio de Janeiro: Guanabara, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. (coord.). **Lúcio Cardoso** - Crônica da casa assassinada. 2. ed. [edição crítica]. Madri: ALLCA XX, 1996. (Archivos, 18)

CORREIO DA MANHÃ. Rio de Janeiro, 20 jun. 1959.

DIARIO CARIOCA. Rio de Janeiro, 17 de maio, 1959.

JORNAL DO BRASIL. **Suplemento Literário do Jornal do Brasil**. 27th of April 1958.

MARTINS, Maria Teresinha. **Luz e sombra em Lúcio Cardoso**. Goiânia: Universidade Católica de Goiás, 1997.

SANTOS, Cássia dos. **Polêmica e controvérsia em Lúcio Cardoso**. Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 2001.