



## THE LIQUID NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF “TRIANGULO DO PONTO” OF EROS GRAU

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### ABSTRACT

Triângulo no ponto was not well received by the press when it was published but it did sell over the average amount of copies for a literary novel. The book is dense, and at times intense, learned in its references, well written and using language techniques used by famous novelists. This essay studies the novel from the point of view of post modernity, examining other classical postmodern novels to make the comparison and attempts to verify if in fact the book can be classified as postmodern.

Keywords: Triângulo no ponto. Eros Grau. Romance Post Modern.

After watching an interview on television by the retired High court judge, Eros Grau, I became interested in a novel that he mentioned he had published. After trying four different book shops, I arrived in the city of Tiradentes to try there since he lived in this Baroque city. A caring lady after hearing that I was looking for the book of Dr. Eros, said that it would possible to go to his house and there, they would certainly be someone to sell the novel. Off I went and not only did I find the novel, but I was given a detailed tour of the library, containing over 30000 books in air conditioned rooms and comments of the librarian and sister-in-law on the reading habits of the author Eros. The library of Eros Grau shown was indeed enormous and well organized with many books besides the enormous collection of Law books. Of special interest to me were those on the Frankfurt School in German and French. There were many books on painting as well, especially with those with expensive illustrated volumes. I returned to my car with

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my copy of the novel, thinking about writers who had begun their literary career so late in life. I remembered my favorite poet of the nineteenth century, Thomas Hardy, who after a brilliant career as a novelist began publishing poetry at the age of 58. His poetry proved to be excellently structured and the strong poetry about love and about his native Wessex made him into one of the giants of English poetry at the end of that century. I remembered too Milton Hatoum who published his first novel at the age of 37, late but not so exceptional. Other names passed through my head. I remembered too the novel of the partner of Lygia Fagundes Telles, Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes, - **As Três Mulheres dos Três PPPÊS** published in 1977, in the year of his death and also that while he was writing it, he complained that Lygia had hidden from him all those years the enormous pleasure of writing fiction. He was 61 when it was published.

That evening I sat down and read the novel until very late at night, intrigued at the richness of the text, the sophistication of the plot and the erudition of the references in a novel of postmodern structures. I finished at three in the morning, delighted at my discovery.

Lauro Jardim in the **Journal da Poesia** points out that the success of the book, despite the polemic reviews, was above the average for a three year period of sale. While the average number of sales for a novel was around three thousand in the three years after the initial publication, this novel of Eros Grau sold 4000 thousand during this three years after its publication in 2007.

Triângulo no Ponto, aquele seu romance erótico polêmico de 2007, vendeu pouco mais de 4 000 exemplares após três anos de vendas em todo o Brasil. O resultado é superior a tiragem média de um livro no Brasil que fica na casa dos 3 000 exemplares. (MAGALHÃES, 2010.p.1)

The reception of the readers was varied. Some were decidedly hostile. The articles of the code of Ethics states that the judge should not offer any kind of conduct which to the eyes of a reasonable observer seem to offend the values and the sentiments of the community in the interest of whom it is exercised. In the light of this article Joao Batista Damasceno in an article suggests that the publication of the novel was to the eyes of the conservative observer against the values and sentiments of the

community for whom he works. But the writer points out that the interpretation of this article is extremely subjective.

Others in blogs and homepages were ironic and quoted some of the paragraphs of the book to ridicule the minister-author especially some sentences which were considered vulgar and explicitly pornographic. These lines of course might have been written by the polemical minister of the High court with his tongue in his cheek being famous for his polemic stances. This confusion would have been much more effective as a sales gimmick that a review in the weekend edition of the Globo or the Folha. This might have been just good marketing. A close analysis shows that there are indeed four or five half sentences that were attacked as pornographic. The minister himself says that they were erotic, not pornographic.

Elaine Resende starts an article saying that intimacy and eroticism are only tolerated between four walls. Because of Puritanism, Christian principles or mere tradition, the secrets of the bedroom, fantasies and erotic descriptions are not well received especially when they come from the mouth of a public figure, in this case, a representative of the High Court. But she admits that the literary text is of quality and very interesting.

Others were perhaps too positive in their judgment, considering the legal position of the writer more than the quality of the work produced: Henrique Chagas in his blog states.

Com um texto ao mesmo tempo leve e enigmático, envolvente e provocador, Triângulo no ponto é um romance sobre o tempo e a identidade, que lança a cada página um novo desafio ao leitor. Justiça seja feita: se o romance é de estréia, o autor está em plena - ou suprema - maturidade criativa. Cabe a você dar a sentença.

Although it may be a little too enthusiastic, it is cleverly worded with smart puns on legal language and being a blog and not an article, it is understandable.

The book has many descriptions of sensual and at times explicitly sexual scenes. But Eliane Resende points out that the book is not pornographic according to many critics who emphasize the historical element of the book as a very important reflection on the events of the military government in Brazil. It carries ideological reflections where

the left is criticize for a lack of real content and the middle class for trying to cover up the true reality while living on mere appearances. She concludes her observations with the balanced opinion on the book.

A obra vale sim o investimento. É intrigante, instigante, bem localizada no espaço, sem furos históricos. Trabalha com personagens individualistas, preocupados exclusivamente consigo mesmos e com suas necessidades e desejos. A sugestão é que seja lida por duas vezes. O fim, ainda que inesperado é o mais possível, mas encerra a obra sem deixar aquela sensação recorrente de déjà vu. (idem)

This would satisfy the writer who confesses that he wrote the book to reflect on what he personally experience during this period in São Paulo. It was a means as he says: “Foi uma forma de fugir da escrita jurídica e uma maneira de limpar a alma”. He concludes saying that the book is sensual but not erotic.

I would like to look at the book from the point of view of postmodernist literature, a subject which studied while examining the claims of some that Lucio Cardoso was truly postmodernist. Perhaps the best theory of the post modernist society is that of the American writer Fredric Jameson. It gives an excellent explanation of the structure of society, politically, economically and transnationally based on the theory of the third wave of capitalism and the explanation of late capitalism which gives us an understanding of the society installed from this anthropological standpoint. But when the author moves into its implications about the effects in literature and art in general and his theory of pastiche, I find that this theory does not offer us a real understanding and a genuine comprehension of the reality of literary post modernity. Staying in a hotel in New York, I looked around and was surprised how the theories of Jameson explained the architecture of the hotel. The entrance was pure Greek style columns. The bar was filled with high stools with hatchets on the back, just like a bar in the mountainous regions in the interior. The rooms had various styles of decoration following the norms of the different artistic period. Indeed, the hotel was a perfect example of what Jameson meant by pastiche.

The theories of Bauman on liquid Modernity are much more applicable, however, to literature and it brings into the center of discussion the idea of relativism in thought

inside his philosophical thinking on human reality and permits an insight that helps us towards an understanding of the nature of postmodern literature. This view coincides with that McHale which I think is most helpful in explaining the true nature of literature at this period and offers us a good perspective. He says that modernity as a period of literature is one where the writer had an epistemological doubt about the nature of human knowledge and therefore tries to show this reality through techniques which reflected this doubt. The writer as a result retreats into his own mind and shows us what his own mind shows him, though he is unsure if all other people see things the same way. The writer therefore uses the stream of consciousness that shows what the perception provokes inside the head of the viewer, since he knows how he perceives things, but is not sure if that is reality. The writer also uses the gymnastics of offering facts and situations from a number of different points of view. The **Alexandrian Quartet** shows us the same facts of a murder in the Egyptian city from the point of view of the four couples involved and accused in different ways. The modernist author also breaks away from the traditional presentation with a dense and complicated intertextuality to shore up the flux of the narrative. *Ulysses* of James Joyce offers us a dense intertextuality between the 24 hours in Dublin of his characters with the whole epic poem of Homer. McHale states that the postmodern literature breaks away from this modernist view and puts in doubt the ability of mankind to know reality, putting into all the facts and situations a total liquidity. It is a view of total relativity. The person knows what he perceives in his or her mind, but does not know if this has anything to do with what other people see and think and what is objectively out there. I always think that four lines of Eliot's poem states this well:

I hear the key  
 Turn in the door once and turn once only  
 We think of the key, each in his prison  
 Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison  
 Only at nightfall, ethereal rumours  
 Revive for a moment broken Coriolanus  
 (T.S Eliot, 1969, p.74 )

We are locked away inside ourselves and reality is total immersed in relativity. In practical terms, this fact allows total liberty to the writer and in this case, the novelist, to

tell his or her story with total liquidity. All six new criticism elements of the narrative can become totally liquid.

It might be prudent to observe at this moment that those who hold to this definition of post modernity in literature usually speak of multiple movements during the late twentieth century. Besides Post modernity, they see also neo-Modernism, Neo-Realism, Neo-Barroco, Neo-Romanticism among others. In our age of the unification of the world through the computer, the satellite and the world magazines and newspapers, this is of course increasingly possible and it is absurd to think that one literary ideology can dominate and unite the world of literature.

The plot need not be linear but can jump around and have total flexibility. A novel I bought while travelling was entitled **The Unfortunates** by B.S.Johnson. The instructions of the writer to the reader is to pull out of a box the loose leaf pages in any order and tells them that only that the first and last chapter must be read in the correct order. I was rather surprised while reading later about the novel. It is a series of reflections on a Saturday afternoon of a football narrator when went to Nottingham to narrate a football match and it was the city where his great friend Tony had died. This Saturday afternoon was the first time he had returned to the city. This information made the book a little more comprehensible but it remains, nonetheless, totally liquid. It is sold in a box and there are instructions to read the loose pages in any order. The masterpiece of Júlío Cortázar, Hopscotch suggests a chaotic reading of the 155 chapters just as children pick their square in a random form. This novel too has a plot which is totally liquid and oddly, the author recommends two possible ways of reading the novel: one in straight forward page to page reading like any traditional novel and then he suggests the other way of reading and gives detailed instructions on how to jump around from one part to another. Again a fine novel with a totally liquid plot

The characters need not be solid understandable entities like the people we see surround us. In Sukenick`s novel, the author enters the story and he copies into the book a recorded conversation as he prepares supper with his wife. The novel is called

**The death of the author and other stories** and was published in 1969 by Sukenick, a university professor of literary theory. One malicious tongue says that he recorded the conversation of the evening meal of the previous day and then typed it up and put it into his novel, though the conversation had very little to do with the plot and the narrative, because his contract specified the number of papers necessary for the publication. But no proof of this is shown. In another novel of 1973, the author Sukenick enters the plot and kills the main character.

Time need not be chronological and rooted in a tradition reality. Things can happen over centuries like to the character of Virginia Woolf's **Orlando**: it is the biography of a nobleman born in the sixteenth century, who is still alive but has become a woman in the twenties in the twentieth century, constant only in his or her search for love and art and a character totally liquid compared to the solid reality in which we think we live.

The date of the novel makes many critics hesitate in their classification of the book for two reasons: first because the novel was published on the 11th of October 1928 predated the normal chronology offered for post modernity and secondly the liquidity of the time element of the novel is questioned by one critic since Orlando after falling asleep in Turkey one evening wakes up immortal and the novel covers 350 years of his life. If indeed the novel is to be considered postmodern, it will imply back dating exceptionally in this case the start of post modernity in the novel. But the liquidity of the time element is undoubtedly postmodern in its treatment within the narrative.

There is also total liquidity when it comes to space. There is a novel called Venice which is simultaneously Venice in Italy at the time of the Renaissance and Venice in the modern USA where the characters act and react in episodes separated by centuries of years and thousands of miles. When I first read this novel Venice I had no doubts about the post modernity of the narrative and the liquidity of space. But on rereading the novel and looking over the criticisms of the book, I was disappointed when one critic suggested that the writer might believe in reincarnation and the simultaneous actions in two different cities in two different ages might be a way of reaffirming the belief

in the theory of reincarnation. I promised myself that this affirmation needed to be restudied and if true, it can upset the use of the novel as one with a delightful liquidity of space.

The narrator too has total liberty. The Modernist novelist tries to offer a view of the complexity of reality but gives us the idea that reality is there if only he or she can show us the complexity. The novel *Unnameable* of Samuel Beckett is in fact three novels and at the end of the first novel, the plot places all the characters inside a second novel which is being written by a novelist. After the second book, this happens for a second time. We have a plot within a plot in three dimensions in a way which is totally liquid, rather like those collections of Russian dolls one inside the other.

The author must use language in such a way that it can be understood by the reader and therefore there are limits to the liquidity of the text. Total liquidity would mean total nonsense. But there is a novel which I read some years ago by Doris Lessing, the winner of the Nobel Prize in recent years. The book is a utopian novel where the world has finally freed itself from the existence of all males. The author writes a text which eliminates all reference to the male. In English this is relatively easy since nouns are masculine or feminine only when there is a male or female biological form. In Portuguese, where the masculine and feminine has gender for everything and not just what is biologically male and female. Doris Lessing writes a text which is liquid in English but which would be impossible to translate into a foreign language with masculine and feminine nouns. She manages to tell her female utopia excluding all the male references of the English language. Joyce's ***Finnegan's Wake*** is another example of total liquidity in language. Joyce writes a text consisting of a mixture of Standard English lexical items and neologisms, multilingual puns and portmanteau words. At times, this is hard to understand and impossible to translate.

At this point, it is important to point out that the theoretical postmodern novel which brings total liquidity to all the six narrative elements in the same novel would be almost impossible to read. For this reason, the novels we mentioned and the novels we have read normally insert liquidity in one or two of the six elements and since in novels



in the languages with nouns with masculine and feminine forms liquidity of language is impossible, being an option only in the English language. It would be possible for example to have double liquidity as is the case with the novel **Venice** where time and space both are liquid. But in general terms, the post modernity of a novel will be based on the liquidity of one of the elements.

Moving on to the **Triangulo no Ponto**, I would like to defend the book as postmodern. Eros Grau must have at moments found it entertaining the confusion that arose when he gave to the three characters, Rogério, Xavier e Costa, certain characteristics that were his own. The novel of Eris Grau tells the story of three characters, Rogerio, Xavier and Costa during a period of thirty five years from 1968 to 2003. All of them are in their sixties at the time of the narrative, they live in São Paulo and, despite studying Law, and they have a passion for poetry. All three were academic professors by profession and held communist ideologies. During this period, they all went several times to France and all three had plans of writing a novel as a gift to their girlfriends. However, each one made different choices which brought about a multiplicity of destinies and each one suffered uncertainty caused by the excess of possible options. All three courted women called Silvia: in the first narrative, she was the girlfriend, in the second she was an partner engaged to the professor and in the third narrative, she was the wife, but in all three cases, they are understanding, insecure and worthy of all respect.

Examining the text of the novel from the point of view of theory of liquidity of Bauman and of the ontological doubt of McHale, we can see that in terms of the plot, the novel offers three different points of view about a period of Brazilian history centered around the military government in the political sphere while showing also the love life of the three characters. The novel offers a complexity of the points of view, being in this case more understandable from the angle of ontological doubt rather than a postmodern narrative where the narrator has the liberty of total liquidity, without the obligation to base the story on the hard facts of real historical reality portrayed.

Examining the second element of a narrative, the physical, emotional and psychological space, the book is written with a traditional view of these three types of space. The physical space is that of São Paulo and there are also excellent descriptions of places in France which were visited and we can say that there is little liquidity that would make the story into a postmodern narrative. Rogério tells us about his visit to France.

Tudo efetivamente passa em Saint-Germain. Lembro-me de uma tarde ter esperado por Sílvia no Saint Claude, onde hoje est[á] uma loja de roupas esportivas. Só outro lado do bulevar, nas noites de verão ficavam esparramadas as mesas do L'Appolinaire. Os bilhetes do metrô eram amarelos e o quartier, menos concorrido pelos estilistas. Havia mais livrarias e o Drugstore permanecia lá, com a farmácia e a senhora simpática que me vendia cigarros no início das madrugadas ( GRAU, 2007 , p.18)

Later in the narrative, we are told about the experience of Rogério during his first visit to Paris when he went to the art gallery

Na primeira viagem a Paris apaixonou-se pela Olympia de Manet, que continuou a frequentar ao longo de anos, como se exercitassem, em segredo, ele e ela, a doce espera de um sempre novo reencontro. Apenas Rogério cairia apaixonado por uma mulher em uma tela. Sílvia, a quem de imediato confessara essa paixão- mas só a ela, mais ninguém-, Sílvia contudo o compreendeu, consciente que essa paixão não impediria que ela a amasse. (GRAU, 2007, p.126)

In terms of time, we are also dealing with a novel with a traditional view of time in the life of the three characters, although there is a frequent use of flashback and flash-forward. The period of thirty five years is shown to us as it might have been in any novel written from the earliest form up to the modernist version. But the novel is adventurous. The first chapter is entitled “more than 35 years afterwards”. Rogelio tells his own story and then doubles back and narratives the experiences of Xavier and Costa. Chapter Two is then entitled “Before” but this flashback and flash-forward is common in the modernist novel and even found in novels from the start of the literary form.

The narrator tells us that all three characters were arrested by the political police of the Military Government on the accusation of subversion of the regime. Rogerio tells us about his experience in the prison:

Doeu mesmo, no entanto- é melhor que pareça assim- a circunstância de esse minha estadia forçada nos porões da repressão ter impedido que eu partisse para o exílio como os outros. Teria sido romântico e mais glorioso do que sofrer a angustia de não poder, por uns bons anos, ver passar pelo a rua uma Veraneio (ou veraneio). De não poder cruzar a Rua Tutóia, endereço da pequena delegacia de policia em cujos fundos estava instalado o Doi-Codi, sem que um frio de estilete corresse pela espinha (GRAU, 2007, p.16)

The experience of Xavier is related to us more laconically

Antes que isso se desse por completo, vieram os agentes da repressão e o levaram. Esse, contudo, é um episodio que Xavier extirpou de sua memória. Era fundamental ocultar esse episódio para que sua carreira não fosse afetada, nem de leve. Abriu mão de todo o heroísmo social por conta da Faculdade. (GRAU, 2007, p.45)

Costa was also arrested by the repression but due to the intervention of an influential friend, his stay was much shorter.

Detida pela repressão em um dos seus porões, sem saber que um tio de Silvia já estava negociando a sua liberdade, viveu um momento inesquecível. Bateu à porta. Um dos torturadores atendeu pelo lado de fora da cela improvisada, sem latrina em que ele se encontrava. (GRAU, 2007, p.88)

The narrator tells us that the interests of Rogerio were poetry, women and politics: however, in politics he was a communist with fear and a feeling that it would be better to change his political position than to be discovered and arrested. Costa is a successful businessman and earned much money through incorporations, fusions, sales and investments in certain moments of crisis. Although sympathetic towards communism, he kept a safe ideological distance. The third character was Xavier, a true intellectual and academic. So we can see that the narrative shows us a traditional narrative structure of character without elements of modernism or post modernism. . There is though a strange twist to the narration of the novel. The narrator tells us that he is having difficulties in continuing with the story of the three friends.

Enfrento certos cuidados e pudores ao tratar desse tempo, já mais de trinta e tantos, quase quarenta anos. Jovens, os horizontes que nossos olhos alcançavam eram amplos e permitiam que estivéssemos em mais

de um deles concomitantemente. Torna-se-me difícil preseguir nesta narrativa. (GRAU, 2007, p.113)

He tries a number of times to finish the novel but surprisingly tells us that it proved impossible and that he would hand over the manuscripts to another narrator.

Não me resta diversa alternativa senão a de passar adiante meus originais, na expectativa de que alguém relativamente ao largo de tudo pode conduzi-lo a partir deste ponto (GRAU, 2007, p.115)

We are then handed over to the new author

Tomo o texto que me foi entregue exatamente no ponto em que interrompido para prosseguir no relato do que ocorria há quase quarenta anos, um pouco mais. Disponha-me a tanto, embora não tenha nenhuma passagem anterior pela literatura. Curiosamente aparecerei como autor de um romance do qual só escrevi- escreverei, a parte final. Tudo farei para iludir, de modo que o meu texto seja confundido com o texto de Rogério. (GRAU, 2007, p.117)

Here the narrator in the novel shows elements that are unusual and we could say without exaggeration to say that he is a postmodern narrator. He is certainly post modernist in the sense that the narrative is told by a narrator who has certain liquidity about the variation in the progress of the novel. No other novel I have come across has a narrator breaks down in the middle of the story and hands over to a mysterious other who is not even mentioned before in the storyline.

Leaving aside possibility of the element of language being used in a postmodern way, which is technically impossible in a romance language like Portuguese, dominated by masculine and feminine nouns and syntactical structures, let us examine the last element of novel, that of the characters.

However, it would be difficult to explain the element of character in the book without destroying the immense pleasure of the reading experience. The book is dense, with moments in the narrative which are both intense and confusing, but always put forward in an excellent text. The novel is woven together with great skill and the narrative is full of delightful knowledge on the subject matter involved and on the facts of the historical

period. There is an air of sophisticated involvement in the story and there is the intertext of references to other writings including that of the poetry of the poet from Rio de Janeiro, Armando Freitas Filho. However, it is not possible to reveal the true elements of postmodern liquidity of the novel without destroying the true pleasure which is brought to the reader in the final sentences. Suffice it to say that there is a true element of postmodern liquidity in the closing pages of the novel and the characters have a surprising element of liquidity that makes the novel a gem of post modernity. It would be a crime to reveal these elements and it is possible to end with the statement of a critic: "Justiça seja feita: o autor está em plena – ou suprema - maturidade criativa neste romance de estréia. Ao terminar a leitura, cabe a cada um dar a sentença" on the true post modern nature of the novel.

## RESUMO

Triângulo no ponto foi mal recebido pela imprensa no seu lançamento, embora tenha vendido muito mais do que a média para um livro de literatura. É um livro denso, às vezes intenso, erudito nas suas referências, bem escrito e utilizando figuras de linguagem que marcam posição como a reiteração. Por este motivo, este ensaio examina o livro de Eros Grau como um romance pós-moderno, examina outros clássicos do Pós-Modernismo para uma comparação e tenta verificar se de fato o livro pode ser classificado como pós-moderno.

Palavras-chave: Triângulo no ponto. Eros Grau. Romance Pós-moderno.

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