

Araguaia writes, Araguaia reads. The jungle as archive according to the theory of geocriticism in Guiomar de Grammont's *Palabras cruzadas*.

The Araguaia Writes, the Araguaia is Read: The Jungle as an Archive According to Geocriticism Theory in *Palabras cruzadas* by Guiomar de Grammont.


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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the novel *Crossed Words* (2015) by Guiomar de Grammont, from a geo-critical and metafictional perspective, exploring how the literary archive becomes a space of resistance against the official memory of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985). The aim is to examine how the novel's fragmentary narrative constructs a topography of memory through the use of diaries, testimonies and fictionalized historical documents. It will address the tensions between the state archive and microhistory as forms of contestation over the meaning of memory. The methodology consists of a literary analysis based on Robert Tally Jr.'s geocriticism and Foucault's theory of the archive. In this way it will be seen how the novel configures the Araguaia jungle as a narrative territory where official history is challenged by a polyphony of silenced voices and how documents can create a new memory.

Keywords: Guiomar de Grammont. Archive. Geocriticism. Metafiction.

Resumen:

El presente trabajo analiza la novela *Palabras cruzadas* (2015) de Guiomar de Grammont, desde una perspectiva geocrítica y metaficcional, explorando cómo el archivo literario se convierte en un espacio de resistencia frente a la memoria oficial de la dictadura militar brasileña (1964-1985). El objetivo es examinar cómo la narrativa fragmentaria de la novela construye una topografía de la memoria a través del uso de diarios, testimonios y documentos históricos ficcionalizados. Se abordarán las tensiones entre el archivo estatal y la microhistoria como formas de disputa por el significado de la memoria. La metodología consta de un análisis literario a partir de la geocrítica de Robert Tally Jr., y la teoría del archivo de Foucault. De esta forma se verá cómo la novela configura la selva del Araguaia como un

territorio narrativo donde la historia oficial es desafiada por una polifonía de voces silenciadas y cómo los documentos pueden crear una nueva memoria.

Palabras clave: Giomar de Grammont. Archivo. Geocrítica. Metaficción.

Introduction

From the mid-twentieth century to the present day, the concept of "archive" has undergone a critical transformation from a simple repository of historical documents to something more complex. Following the rise of poststructuralist studies - particularly since the 2010s - the archive has been redrawn as the representation of memory, power and identity. While Michel Foucault already considered the archive as an instrument of control and selection of discourses - a "device" that regulates what can be said and remembered (Foucault, 2015) - contemporary studies have expanded this perspective, revealing how the archive can also operate as a space of resistance, subversion and identity reconstruction (Rodríguez-Remedi, 2020). From this new aspect, archives become textual territories where silenced memories find their form of re-emergence, even for the disappeared.

Based on this, it would be worth reviewing the work of Guiomar de Grammont (2016), writer and academic, who presents herself as one of the new voices of Brazilian literature. With her five books of short stories, six plays, a book of literary criticism and two novels, she tries to confront historical memory through the actions of her characters. Her work *Crossed Words* (2015), translated into Spanish by Fondo de Cultura Económica in 2021, is an example of how literature functions as an act of political resistance and an archive of identity reconstruction.

The novel has a fragmentary structure that combines diaries, letters and testimonial accounts and the very narration of the one who searches for his brother: it is a literary archive that resists the official narratives of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985). This archive not only documents the experiences of the victims, but also reconfigures the narrative space as a territory of symbolic struggle.

The historical and political context in *Palabras cruzadas*

The military dictatorship in Brazil was a period characterized by censorship, state violence, violence and forced disappearances.

Glenda Mezarobba (2010) analyzes in her article, "Between reparations, half-truths and impunity: the difficult rupture with the legacy of the dictatorship in Brazil", the process of settling accounts of the Brazilian State with the victims of the military dictatorship (1964-1985) and society as a whole. Mezarobba (2010) explains how the dictatorship imposed a distorted reality on Brazilian society, where repression was justified under the doctrine of *national security*. The absence of a systematic effort to clarify the truth led many crimes of the regime to remain unpunished (2004, p. 10). And it is precisely this distorted discourse - so often repeated in any dictatorship - that makes it difficult to agree on what is true. This is why microhistory - individual accounts that allow us to understand cultural and historical macro-movements - is a valuable element within the Foucauldian conception of the archive.

According to Alejandra Estevez (2014), the political and religious imaginaries of this period were constructed from institutionalized narratives and discourses recorded in documentary sources. The progressive sectors of the Catholic Church redefined their role in society. This process was documented in state archives, specifically in the records of the Department of Political and Social Order (dops) and in the Public Archive of the State of Rio de Janeiro (aperj). In this sense, the archive becomes a repository of ideological tensions and surveillance-control mechanisms; the official documents of the dictatorship recorded the activity of the Catholic sectors while reflecting the struggle for hegemony in the collective imaginary.

From this framework, *Crossed Words* functions as a literary testimony that seeks to rescue the silenced voices, for in it, a diary becomes the only document of the disappearance of a man, but later testimonies of people, reporters and individuals will be added to this set of fragments of memory. The novel is an explicit tribute as the dedication indicates: "To the families of all the politically disappeared in Brazil, especially to their mothers and sisters" (De Grammont, 2021, p. 5).¹

The use of the archive as a narrative structure is especially significant in this context: the archive as a *system of enunciability* (Foucault, 2015), that is, a set of rules that determine what can be said or remembered. Beatriz Sarlo (2005) analyzes the construction of memory in Latin American dictatorships and post-dictatorships, highlighting the subjective turn, testimony and the tension between history, fiction and

¹ To delve a little deeper, one can confront the text "Ficção e guerrilha do Araguaia" (2016) by Carlos Augusto Carneiro Costa, where he also delves into the Brazilian historical memory.

institutionalized forgetting; such concepts can be applied to testimony, autofiction or the historical novel, where subjectivity reconstructs memory. Sarlo is concerned with comparing the fictionalized story with the past, tensing memory and oblivion.

Grammont subverts these definitions by using the archive as a space of resistance, where the voices of the disappeared and their relatives recover their actanciality to take control of memory in the face of official history. In other words, *Palabras cruzadas* is aligned with a Latin American literary tradition that seeks to enunciate memory and oblivion. Thus, the archive is a counterpoint to unravel historical violence (Sarlo, 2005).

And at this point -already with the category "archive" well delimited- enters a metafictional element used a lot in this novel: the meta-written, "[...] a literary text inserted in another metafictional text deployed within another work of literary art" (Galindo, 2024, p. 75). This will be a crucial narrative resource in the construction of this novel.²

In *Palabras cruzadas* (2023), the fragmentariness of the story is not only used as an aesthetic element, but also manifests an overlapping of the real with the fictitious. The documentary elements blur the boundaries between the historical and the literary. The notebook found by Sofía, one of the main characters, not only functions as a narrative device, but also acts as a link of resistance against the oblivion to which the state has condemned the writer. "While reading, Sofia felt as if she were the interlocutor for whom she was writing" (De Grammont, 2021, p. 10).

The key to this dynamic is found in the way the notebook brings together different perspectives and voices, creating a polyphonic archive that represents the multiplicity of experiences lived during the dictatorship; but also -an important metafictional element- in the book's orthographic selection. The entire notebook -at least in the Fondo de Cultura Económica translation- opens quotation marks at the beginning of each paragraph, except when reference is made to Sofía's reading, as placed in the previous quote. This back and forth in details requires a more attentive reader: one willing to understand this metafictional game.

² This concept, although recent in literary criticism, corresponds to one of the categories developed in my doctoral thesis *Topología de la metaficción: El metaescrito en la narrativa breve de Enrique Anderson Imbert*, published by the University of Guadalajara. In this study, I propose that the term "meta-writing" is applied to the presence of a text within another narrative text, functioning as a structural and thematic resource. This notion can be considered an update of the French idea of the "*manuscrit trouvé*", a recurrent resource in nineteenth-century fantasy literature.

Thus, the official discourse that should be in the general narrative of the novel, where Sofia moves and searches for Leonardo, her missing brother, is contrasted: "Sofia interrupted her reading, tears prevented her from seeing what was written" (p. 26), "Sofia sobbed as she read this sentence" (p. 42), "Sofia closed her notebook for a moment, her heart was beating fast. How difficult it was for her to read that story! Nevertheless, an imperious need prevented her from stopping" (p. 43), among many others.

In this case, which meta-writing will have more weight: a notebook that persists for almost 85 pages of the 256 pages of the book or small official meta-writings? Development: When Sofia goes in search of her brother from what the diary mentions, she also finds several specific mentions and if historical value for the power group.

It was a magazine published in 1978 by a group of journalists and researchers, among them Sergio Buarque from Holland, who wrote a multifaceted story with interviews with guerrillas, farmers, Indians and even soldiers. The organizers wrote an introduction commenting on the heavy silence surrounding the Araguaia guerrillas. Although *O Estado de S. Paulo* had published a report on the matter in September 1972, no other political movement in Brazil had suffered such an annulment in speeches and publications, official or otherwise. At least up to the time when these researchers published this simple magazine on newsprint (p. 68).

It is not even shown as a meta-write. It is mentioned above without even being quoted as the above quotation marks from the diary. Isn't this an indirect validation on the part of the author?

Even the literate city within the novel has this same regard:

Sofia told several friends about her visit to the offices of the *Brazil: Never Again* project and the case attracted the attention of a newspaper that occasionally asked her for freelance articles. The editor suggested that she do a report on the issue that had been bothering her.

-We want a portrait of the Araguaia guerrillas without touch-ups or heroics," said the editor (p. 67).

The meta-writing wins in terms of the time of the story it covers and its development. It is a direct testimony and a way of evidencing that this jungle is real. All other manifestations want a testimony of good and evil; but that is what exists in the meta-written and not in other possible written realities. We will see how the

archive can also be understood in spatial terms, that is, as a symbolic territory that reconfigures historical memory.

The role of the environment: rawness of context and verisimilitude

The geocriticism proposed by Robert Tally Jr. offers another innovative perspective to analyze *Crossed Words*. This theory considers literary spaces as symbolic territories where struggles for representation and control of meaning are waged. In the novel, the jungles of Araguaia play a central role in the narrative as opposed to the urban spaces of Brasilia and its bureaucratic apparatus. There in the wilderness is the truth and the meta-writing is a way of proving it. For its part, the city is the one that lies and keeps the reality in a post-dictatorial context where even the editors want an ambivalent testimony that shows the two poles as good or bad.

The jungle is in a liminal space where nineteenth-century notions of civilization and barbarism are blurred and shown for what they are: a blueprint, a map of what is real.³ The environment is described with such sensory richness that the tensions are felt more deeply: making the reader of the meta-script pause and weep, as read in the previous section. Although in nature the meta-authors confront the military power of the dictatorship, it would seem that Brazil itself has more power: metonymy of the people for its forests, as it is the one that becomes -again in the time of the story- the protagonist of several fragments of the novel. On the other hand, the urban spaces of Brasilia act as metonymies of the state machinery: it is dehumanization and institutional control that have turned the city into the construct it is now.

In geocritical terms, these spaces are used to create a critical counterpoint between official memory and counter-memory: the characters move between these environments to confront their own traumas, reveal the dynamics of power and give a representation to the physical and symbolic landscape of Brazil.

According to Tally (2013), literary spaces are "textual territories" where political and social tensions materialize. Through narrative, literature represents imaginary or real geographies while depicting power, hegemony and ideological disputes within those spaces. In our novel in question, nature is not a mere

³ To deepen the idea of "liminal spaces" one can turn to Gustavo Verdesio who analyzes how natural spaces in Latin American colonial literature have been represented as zones of the unknown and the untamed; but also as spaces of cultural resistance. Thus, one could argue that the jungle is not only the place where guerrillas hide, but also functions as a palimpsest where silenced voices can resurface (2018).

setting; the Araguaia moves from metaphor to allegory and becomes an indispensable actor in the narrative. Robert Tally, in his theory of geocriticism, argues that literary spaces are not mere reproductions of geographies, but symbolic territories where struggles for representation and control of meaning are waged (Tally, 2019, p. 95). In this sense, the jungle represents a refuge and a trap, a place where characters are also resignified, because the life and death of people is linked to the life and death of those who enter the jungle: "The trees weep and die, but their bodies remain" (De Grammont, 2021, p. 9).

The Araguaia jungle - like the novel - is not a homogeneous entity: it is fractured, full of tensions and contradictions; it is a reflection of the guerrillas in search of survival. The jungle is almost mythological, like a living and autonomous force; the commander tells his guerrillas:

The jungle is a power. It gives a sense of mystery, of enchantment. At the beginning it is an enemy, but you can transform it into an ally. You have to speak its language to master it. Little by little they will discover the forest's entrails, its virtues. They will learn to make it offer them everything they need (p. 12).

There is -therefore- a parallelism between nature and the human being, it is a prosopopoeia, it is an entity that the guerrilla also experiences. The jungle -as a *liminal space*- becomes a place of transition where the traditional categories of civilization and barbarism lose their meaning to explore new subjectivities. Grammont's jungle fulfills this function by confronting the characters with their own physical and emotional limits.

If we would even want to link nature to the incitiatic myth, we see that it is nature that gives birth to the protagonist: "When I returned to camp, I went to the hiding place in the hollow of the great fallen tree over the river. It was still there, with its rough trunk. Trees weep and die, but their bodies remain" (p. 9). This happens at the beginning of the narrative-and there is enough support in the novel-to think that it is she who gives or takes away the privilege of living, of leaving a word.

Returning a bit to the paratextual mentions of the text: the Spanish version of the novel required many footnotes -about 40- to explain this atypical environment for those of us who are not Brazilian. While most of these footnotes allude to natural elements typical of this jungle, the book - translated by Julia Calzadilla Núñez - helps us to map a reality that is foreign to many. This is why Robert Tally Jr.'s (2013)

studies on spatiality become so significant. The passage goes from giving to oppression and articulates a narrative that contrasts individual and collective memories.

When Sofía finds the buried notebook - a reiteration of this womb from which the story emerges, from which the protagonist emerges is the jungle itself - she recovers the voices that the State had tried to erase and which are those of this anonymous guerrilla fighter.

Sofia hired a cab and, accompanied by Aruanã and a local guide, decided to go to the place where the Suruís had told her that the bodies of the guerrillas were being taken by helicopter.

-After they threw the corpses there, they filled the place with old tires and set them on fire," said the boy. You won't find anything there anymore, doña. One day the soldiers arrived, put everything in sacks and put it on a plane. Even pieces of tires. I know that because my father was hired to help.

Despite this information, Sofia wanted to check it out. They drove to the entrance of a trail in the forest and then drove a couple of hours to the place. It was difficult for Sofia to walk through the forest, even though the boy was hacking back and forth through the forest to make way. He stumbled over branches, his hands were injured by thorns and plant hedgehogs stuck to his pants. All he could think of on the road was Leonardo. Sometimes she had the impression that he was walking beside her or coming after her. She imagined him passing through the same trails, experiencing the same difficulties she was experiencing for the first time (p. 133).

Memory and territory have become one. The land gives life, but also a shroud and, in that shelter of the corpses, it also becomes a testimony of those who walked on it. Each tree, each crack in the ground, each fragment of jungle is a page written with the steps of those who inhabited it and, in many cases, made it their last refuge. That is to say: the mythical entity of the jungle also becomes an archive. As a visual metaphor, the cover of the novel in its Spanish version -the one we are analyzing- highlights this constant presence of the jungle, manifesting itself from the very first threshold of the book.⁴

The archive or meta-writing: a crossroads of narrative levels

⁴ Likewise, the cover design reinforces these interpretations: the branches of the trees are intertwined with red ink that can evoke both the roots of memory and the blood spilled in the guerrilla struggle.

Palabras cruzadas (2023) shows a poetics where the archive moves from the physical to the spatial: it starts as a notebook, becomes a couple of magazines and then turns into the whole jungle. At the end of the novel we realize that what she was looking for -Leonardo- has been close to her. The notebook turns out to have two authors, yes, one of them a woman who perishes when she goes to have an abortion, and the anonymous guerrilla, who turns out to be Leonardo according to his mother.

-It was... it was your brother's handwriting!

-Are you sure?

Luisa nodded her head. And she emphasized it:

-Yes. In the second part.

[...]

Sofia carefully examined that notebook and, as she had supposed, saw that it had been written first by one person, undoubtedly the woman, and then taken up by another, probably her companion. The first pages of the notebook showed a round and clear handwriting, while on the last pages the handwriting was small and vertical, as if the person had wanted to save paper by narrowing the vowels (p. 200).

The last part of the notebook was really about Leonardo, the brother Sofia had been looking for. Sofia's mother had always known this; but she had decided that she must find the truth for herself. She didn't think she would believe her, because a single testimony cannot be a totalitarian truth. Sofia had to go through the archive that was Araguaia.

From its fragmented structure, the use of documents mixes the fictional and the testimonial in a reflection on the construction of memory. The jungle and the documents are key elements in the reconstruction of memory: Sofia manages to process all these testimonies so that the archive reveals what really happened. The map of her journey is a reinforcement, another witness of what happened to Leonardo.

I reread everything she wrote and the memories hurt deeply; I cling to them like a castaway. After so long alone, lost in the bush, her diary accompanies me, but the tears, which I had not shed until today, prevent me from seeing what is written. What happened to us? Where did we go wrong? Where did our hopes end up? I take up the narrative from the point where she stopped (p. 191).

The last chapter of the novel is precisely a last file - halfway between Brasilia and Araguaia - it is a testimony left by Sofia's mother on the typewriter, left there to be read.

And it was that comforting thought that made her come to her senses and finally be able to read the text that had surprised and intrigued her when she found it rolled up in Luisa's typewriter. The yellowing of the page indicated that it had been written a long time ago and that her mother had placed it in the machine on purpose, so that Sofia would read it (p. 249).

They confess this in an intimate moment that encapsulates the dual dimension of the archive: connection and isolation. The act of reading and writing becomes a bridge that connects the reader with the voices of the past, forcing them to confront their position in the face of history. For Grammont, diaries and letters document personal experiences and leave a more real reality than those captured by totalitarian memory. Microhistory - the story of an individual - is enough to unscrew the machinery of hegemony. With a simple piece of paper it is possible to reveal those words that were crossed: the meta-writings interspersed with each other until they form a topography of the guerrilla.

To close this work, the jungle of *Palabras cruzadas* is both a liminal space where the story unfolds and a living archive that preserves the memory of the disappeared and opposes the official narrative of the state.⁵ The reconstruction of the past through documents, fragmented voices and the persistence of the jungle connects the novel to a Latin American literary tradition that confronts the violence of dictatorships through narrative as resistance: Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir* or Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* have explored how individual and collective memory is constructed through interspersed narratives, through censored voices that find refuge in literature. In this tradition, *Palabras cruzadas* (2023) is inserted as a polyphonic testimony where the truth is not in a single document, but in the superimposition of discourses that challenge official history. Thus, the act of reading and writing becomes an exercise of recovery and resistance: a gesture that, like the jungle itself, prevents oblivion from imposing itself on those who have been silenced.

⁵ In Latin American literature, the jungle has been constantly represented as a territory where memory is indelibly inscribed. Authors such as José Eustasio Rivera in *La vorágine* or Alejo Carpentier in *Los pasos perdidos* have explored the jungle as a space that transforms and protects. The jungle of *Palabras cruzadas* is a scenario of struggle, a repository of testimonies silenced by official history and a character that triggers in them a transition.

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