

Name, Voice and Body as Elements of (Im)mortality in Murilo Rubião's *O Pirotécnico Zacarias* and in Jorge Amado's *A Morte e a Morte de Quincas Berro D'Água*¹

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"The dead are afraid of the living. But the living, not aware about it, fear the dead." (Canetti 2003, 17) – The death of Zacarias, the pyrotechnist

"Raras são as vezes que, nas conversas de amigos meus, ou de pessoas das minhas relações, não surja esta pergunta. Teria morrido o pirotécnico Zacarias?" (PZ, 7). Thus begins the short story *O Pirotécnico Zacarias* (PZ), and already the beginning of the story makes one fact around the death of the protagonist (who, as it happens, is also the narrator of the story) quite clear: We do not know!

Zacharias goes on to name three reactions to his death: 1. distrust regarding the news of his death: "Uns acham que estou vivo — o morto tinha apenas alguma semelhança comigo." (PZ, 7); 2. the conviction that this Zacharias is a stray soul in a bodily vessel: "Outros, acreditam que a minha morte pertence ao rol dos fatos consumados e o indivíduo a quem andam chamando Zacarias não passa de uma alma penada, envolvida por um pobre invólucro humano." (PZ, 7) and 3. distrust regarding the living being who calls himself Zacharias "Ainda há os que afirmam de maneira categórica o meu falecimento e não aceitam o cidadão existente como sendo Zacarias, o artista pirotécnico, mas alguém muito parecido com o finado." (PZ, 7).

The three-part beginning of the story reflects the structure of the present text. Zacharias' not wanting or being able to die is retraced and, in the process, a closer look is taken at the last two of the three framework conditions in particular: his body which continues functioning and the fact that he still possesses a name. What role do

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body and name play in the context of death, as both objects are purely normed by discourse? In order to address this question in more depth, Foucault's *utopian body* and subsequently Byung-Chul Han's thoughts on "Name, Invocation and Mortality" serve as a basis for the text analysis here. The examination also takes up Giorgio Agamben's considerations regarding the deictic element in "Da-sein", such as the capability of speech, to convert the negative in being (*Il linguaggio e la morte*, 1982), where, lastly, the following two theses should be verified: 1. Zacharias' death is above all a social one and 2. The telling of his story can be seen as an attempt to overcome this social death and find an audience that acknowledges and listens to him.

For the sake of cultural text analysis, in my essay I forgo both the interpretation of the genesis of the text and the history of the story's reception, and I do not carry out an in-depth narratological analysis. In the first part, using the process of *wide reading*, the culturality of textual meaning is revealed and placed within a cultural discourse on "death" in a sense that shaped the intellectual history of Western and Central Europe in the 20th century. Methodologically, the process of intertextuality and cultural semiotics will be drawn upon in order to reveal socio-critical and power-critical positions as they are applied in Rubião's text. I therefore approach the text as a *writable text* as understood by Roland Barthes, to whom random meanings can be ascribed through the reading. In the second part, the undertaken considerations are verified using a further text, i.e. *A Morte e a Morte de Quincas Berro Dágua* (QB), by Jorge Amado. This text exhibits astonishing parallels to Rubião's text: besides the question of name – Amado's protagonist even bears two names – this story also begins with the ascertainment that Quincas' death continues to bring about confusion for some: "Até hoje permanece certa confusão em torno da morte de Quincas Berro Dágua" (QB, 13) and there still exist one or the other "quem negue toda e qualquer autenticidade" (QB, 14).

Yet let us first turn to the body of the pyrotechnist Zacharias. In *Le Corps Utopique* Foucault argues that the body possesses placeless locations which are deeply buried, so much so that they appear to be unreachable. At the same time, the body unites within its spatial borders "tout l'espace du religieux et du sacré, tout l'espace de l'autre monde, tout l'espace du contre-monde" (Foucault 2013, 63), which make it a "point zéro du monde" – a place, "où les chemins et les espaces viennent se croiser" (Foucault 2013, 63), especially seeing as it will never be fully recognized in

its completeness. Complete recognition of the body is only possible in the mirror or in the tender touch of another person, or in death:

C'est le miroir et c'est le cadavre qui assignent un espace à l'expérience profondément et originairement utopique du corps; c'est le miroir et c'est le cadavre qui font taire et apaisent et ferment sur une clôture qui est maintenant pour nous scellée cette grande rage utopique qui délabre et volatilise à chaque instant notre corps. C'est grâce au miroir et au cadavre que notre corps n'est pas pure et simple utopie (Foucault 2013, 64-65).

Todorov sees this proximity between physical attraction and the corpse as typical for numerous texts in fantasy literature. He writes of the "proximity between lust and death ... the desired body approximates the cadaver ..." and proceeds to give numerous examples (Todorov 2013, 166). In the case of the pyrotechnist Zacharias, we see that the body which shifts through the city indeed seems to be his corpse because this corpse was never buried. Shortly after the accident, however, he fears the "disposal" of his corpse, which is surprising, considering that he is still in control of his dead body, so that the feared scenarios he describes (being left in a hole or on a cliff) ought to be of no concern. Yet, he may not be completely aware of this control over his body shortly after the accident, even though, according to Foucault, during death one should be more aware of one's own body than ever before. Foucault asserts that our body is in a constant state of decay, he speaks of a great utopian frenzy that can only be brought to rest by death or a mirror. Only death makes us fully aware of our own body, so that it does not surprise us when Zacharias feels even more intensely at the end of the story than ever before: Alcohol quickly goes to his head, he sees varying forms and shapes and feels the arm of the redhead as "metallic," or cold and heavy. This intense feeling nevertheless causes him to worry because he discovers a discrepancy between his feeling and that of the living. "E a minha angústia cresce ao sentir, na sua plenitude, que a minha capacidade de amar, discernir as coisas, é bem superior à dos seres que por mim passam assustados" (PZ, 15). Zacharias is calm since his death, and not "in a state of alarm" like the others around him. At the same time, however, he feels alienated from them. They wander through the world like Heidegger's *thrown* individuals, feeling guilt because of this.

This brings me to Giorgio Agamben, who examines *Da-sein* and at the same time explores the place of negativity using as a springboard Heidegger's guilt in *being thrown*: "Essendo fondamento, cioè esistendo come gettato, il *Dasein* resta costantemente dietro le proprie possibilità. Esso non è mai esistente prima del suo fondamento, ma solo *da* questo e *come* questo. Esser-fondamento significa, quindi, *non esser mai* padrone del proprio essere più proprio fin da fondamento." (Agamben 2008, 8). The uncertainty which a human being feels, according to Agamben, can be justified in the fact that life always means life towards death. The deictic "Da" in "Da-sein" refers to a *here* and a *there* and this *there* is always a final *there*, one's own death, which we have no power over (just as we have no power over our origin in the world).³ This final "Da" has overcome Zacharias by means of a car accident.⁴ His body "as a space of the counter-world" (Foucault) is stilled, he no longer decays and evaporates, which in the end gives him power over his existence (in contrast to powerlessness, which Agamben emphasizes when he speaks of the *foundation* of *Dasein*)

This powerlessness, however, also manifests itself in the name that we *are given* at the beginning of our existence.⁵ Naming is an active exercise of power and thrusts the named into a guilt⁶ which they carry around without being at any fault (for their being guilt-y). "My name is older than my consciousness," writes Byung-Chul Han (1998, 146), "I am a passive recipient of the name" (*ibid.*). Aside from the "Da" in "Dasein" the name also constantly refers to human mortality. Byung-Chul Han asserts: "To call someone is to know that the name will survive its bearer," and as Derrida states: "When we call someone's name or name them during their lifetime, we know that their name can and will survive them and already survives them to the extent that it already begins to relinquish itself from the bearer during their lifetime" (Derrida *apud* Han 1998, 149). In that Zacharias is no longer called by his name, he circumvents the memory of his own mortality, he circumvents guilt. Simultaneously, however, Zacharias experiences a social death because, first of all:

³ „Nel significato abituale, *Da* significa ‚qui‘ o ‚là‘“ (Agamben 2008, 10) „Qualcosa è, nella piccola parola *Da*, che nullifica, che introduce la negazione in quell'essente – l'uomo – che ha da essere il suo *Da*. (Agamben 2008, 11).

⁴ He has stepped beyond the boundary that death represents, so that the border no longer has any effect on him, no longer possesses any relevance (*cf.* Han 1998, 234).

⁵ „Il primo atto mediante il quale Adamo ha costituito la sua signoria sugli animali è che egli diede loro un nome [...]“ (Agamben 2008, 56)

⁶ "In receiving a name, one becomes guilty" (Han 1998, 146).

"Only he who is guilty, only he who receives his Da from with-out, exists outwardly, can call out or call someone by their name. Guilt and calling refer to mortality as being outward or elsewhere" (Han 1998, 146) – which explains why he cannot call out or call anyone by their name and is thus not able to have encounters.⁷ Secondly: "In Lévi-Strauss' thinking, naming expropriates the bearer of the name, takes away their uniqueness by subjugating them to the system of a society. Whoever is given a name is a prisoner of the system or the structure. The moment they are given a name, they have become an element of the system" (Lévi-Strauss apud Han 1998, 143). In Zacharias' name no longer functioning, he is free from the guilt of naming, but for this very reason he is also excluded from the structures familiar to him. Yet he is quite aware of himself and, for this reason, able to say "I" and tell his story.

So let us remain with Agamben in the deictic realm and inquire: "Com'è possibile che qualcosa come il puro essere (la ούσία) possa essere 'indicato'?" (Agamben 2008, 32). He quotes Benveniste in saying, "che la *deixis* è contemporanea dell'istanza di discorso che porta l'indicatore di persona; da questo riferimento il dimostrativo trae il suo carattere ogni volta unico e particolare, che è l'unità dell'istanza di discorso a cui si riferisce." (Agamben 2008, 34), or somewhat terser in Valéry's words "L'io o il me è la parola associata alla voce." (Agamben 2008, 44). It is this very voice, however, that is denied Zacharias: he has no voice among his peers, cannot convince his friends that he is the one with whom they are speaking:

... tornou-se menos intenso o meu sofrimento e menor a minha frustração ante a dificuldade de convencer os amigos de que o Zacarias que anda pelas ruas da cidade é o mesmo artista pirotécnico de outros tempos, com a diferença de que aquele era vivo e este, um defunto (PZ, 14).

This is surprising, especially considering that Zacharias says the following about himself above in the text:

Sempre tive confiança na minha faculdade de convencer os adversários, em meio às discussões. Não sei se pela força da lógica ou se por um dom natural, a verdade é que, em vida, eu vencía qualquer disputa dependente de argumentação segura e irretorquível. A morte não extinguiu essa faculdade [sic!] (PZ, 11-12).

⁷ "The object of an authentic experience, that is, being called upon is not the general, but the singular. This alone allows encounters" (Han 1998, 144).

Agamben writes: “La centralità del rapporto fra essere e presenza nella storia della filosofia occidentale ha il suo fondamento nel fatto che temporalità e essere hanno la loro sorgente comune nel ‘presente incessante’ dell’istanza di discorso.” (Agamben 2008, 50) – in that Zacharias is deprived of his voice, he dies a social death, which carries much more weight than his physical death. His only escape consists in winning back this voice, i.e. in telling his story. Agamben calls articulation the “facoltà del linguaggio attraverso la quale soltanto la coscienza umana può darsi durevole esistenza” (Agamben 2008, 62). By remembering his story, Zacharias *wins* a voice and a *lasting existence*. In remembering “la coscienza acquista per la prima volta una realtà, [...] così che diventa un *nome*. Nel *nome* è tolto il suo *essere* empirico, cioè che esso è un concreto, un molteplice in sé, un vivente e un essente, ed è trasformato in un ideale puramente semplice in sé.” (Agamben 2008, 56).

“Writing is inextricably linked to death; it is the *being-toward-death*” (Han 1998, 211). The impossibility found in the expression “I am already dead” is surmounted by the act of writing (cf. Han 1998, 205), an author only becomes an author when he or she engages with dying and learns to accept death without fear (cf. Han 1998, 83-84). Zacharias is trapped within himself, persists in an impenetrable inner self. “The in and of itself obdurate subject would have no urge to call upon. It is left only hearing itself speak. The auto-auditive, auto-erotic hearing of oneself speak would represent the most perverted form of calling (upon)” (Han 1998, 145). What is more: “This name is not my property which I keep shielded from the other in my inner self. Instead, this *other* fragments it.” Nevertheless, by missing a name and not being called upon, Zacharias’ inner self is not fragmented; thus, the only escape left to him is to write. “The birth of literature can be traced to the death of the medium” (Han 1998, 84).⁸ In *Schreiben zum Tod – Jacques Derridas Thanatographie*, Han states that the breakup of the “auto-erotic cohesion” (Han 1998, 215) of the ego is a prerequisite of writing. In his opinion, the author must become a nobody; in fact, writing is only possible when the writing individual overcomes their own narcissism and writes “toward death.” “It is death that makes Derrida think or write” (Han 1998, 206) and it is also death that makes Zacharias write/tell. Telling his story is a way for him to regain his voice and to “write himself into” the collective consciousness. “Is writing

⁸ Here, one notes references to Roland Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” inasmuch as, in the black and white of text, “all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes” (Barthes 2012, 185).

that secrecy in which one collects himself, a secret survival?" (Han 1998, 220) I would like to attempt to answer this question by examining a second text.

"To rescue exaggeration. Don't die reasonably." (Canetti 2003, 52) – The death of Quincas Berro D'Água

In Jorge Amado's Text, *A Morte e a Morte de Quincas Berro D'Água*, we also see a great deal of doubt regarding the death of the protagonist, as mentioned above: "Até hoje permanece certa confusão em torno da morte de Quincas Berro D'Água" and some individuals even deny the authenticity of the events ("há quem negue toda e qualquer autenticidade"). In fact, Todorov sees the readers' indecision regarding the question of whether "the evoked events require a natural or a supernatural explanation" (Todorov 2013, 43) as a fundamental characteristic of fantastic literature. What is more, this indecision can also spread to the persons acting in the text so that "indecision [becomes] one of the themes of the work" (Todorov 2013, 44). I see this condition fulfilled both in Rubião's and in Amado's text. The two texts analyzed here also satisfy the third condition for fantastic literature: both an allegorical and a poetic interpretation of the text are rejected (ibid.).

Upon a closer look at the issue of name, in the case of Amado's story, it quickly becomes clear that we are dealing with slightly altered initial conditions. The protagonist bears two names: Joaquim Soares da Cunha and Quincas Berro D'Água. Both stand for a close tie to their own social sphere in which the protagonist was or is active. Joaquim Soares da Cunha belonged to a wealthy family beyond moral reproach, and was himself the paragon of a good citizen: "de boa família, exemplar funcionário da mesa de rendas estadual, de passo medido, barba escanhoadada, paletó negro de alpaca, pasta sob o braço, ouvido com respeito pelos vizinhos, opinando sobre o tempo e política, jamais visto num botequim, de cachaça caseiro o comedida." (QB, 18) Of Quincas, on the other hand, it is stated that "não era ele homem de respeito e de conveniência, apesar do respeito dedicado por seus

parceiros de jogo a jogador de tão invejada sorte e a bebedor de cachaça tão longa e conversada" (QB, 15).

"Whoever is given a name is a prisoner of the system or the structure. The moment they are given a name, they have become an element of the system. They are framed, forced into an expropriated structure" (Han 1998, 143). Indeed, Joaquim does not seem to be satisfied with this expropriation; his own inner self rushes to a structure different from the one he was forced into upon his birth and naming. He thus decides "por livre e espontânea vontade" (QB, 14) to leave his family and his name in order to win back a self that will belong to him. "Every naming kills by trimming the self" (Han 1998, 144) – in this sense, the first death portrayed in the book from the perspective of the forsaken family is, to be sure, a moral one ("uma primeira morte, se não física pelo menos moral"; QB, 15), yet from the perspective of the protagonist a resurrection, a sort of liberation from guilt vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie structures in which he found himself when he was still among the living. The (nearly ritual) admission into the diametrically opposed social system into which Quincas switches is described in the story in detail via naming. It is only by receiving a new name that Quincas seems to have become a complete and equal part of the new structure:

O grito de um animal ferido de morte, de um homem traído e desgraçado: Águuuuuua! Imundo, asqueroso espanhol de má fama! Corria gente de todos os lados, alguém estava sendo com certeza assassinado, os fregueses da venda riam às gargalhadas. O "berro dágua" de Quincas logo se espalhou como anedota, do mercado ao Pelourinho, do largo das Sete Portas ao Dique, da Calçada a Itapuã. Quincas Berro Dágua ficou ele sendo desde então [...] (QB, 50-51).

It is also interesting here that, similar to Rubião's text, name marks the belonging to a social group, and this belonging is no longer guaranteed as soon as the group refuses to use the name, "hushing" the person in the act.⁹ His biological family never uses the name Quincas and only seldom speaks of Joaquim in front of the grandchildren. By no longer being permitted to use his name, he is removed from the family. In the case of the pyrotechnist Zacharias, this situation is unwanted and even onerous for the protagonist, but in the case of Quincas, it is actively chosen by

⁹ The German translation of "hushing" is "totschweigen" in this case, with a double meaning of killing somebody by hushing.

his departure, his first death. Regardless of the fact that physical death did not take place (Quincas) or was overcome (Zacharias), social death occurs via the negation of naming.

The question remains as to whether and how this social death can be overcome. While Zacharias seems to feel a strong compulsion to tell his story autodiegetically, in Quincas Berro Dágua's story, we are dealing with a heterodiegetic narrator. Quincas' first, social death was actively chosen, for which reason he wouldn't want to overcome it by means of storytelling. Even after this death, he still belongs to a social group, whereas Zacharias seems to stand alone in the world "porque os meus companheiros fogem de mim, tão logo me avistam pela frente. Quando apanhados de surpresa, ficam estarecidos e não conseguem articular uma palavra." (PZ, 8).¹⁰ Quincas' second death, however, at first seems to thrust him back into the arms of his original family, and thus into the very social structure from whence he knowingly broke out. His resurrection counteracts the empowerment of his story – Quincas is reborn to put his story right, without palliative corrections and omissions. Indeed, that night death turns into a rebirth, Quincas is saved from the constraints of his family and born into the lap of his friends and fellows: "é dia do aniversário dele" (QB, 83); "Aniversário de Quincas, era a primeira vez que o festejaram" (QB, 82).

No one, says Pascal, dies so poor as to leave absolutely nothing behind.' This certainly pertains to memories – only that they do not always find an heir. The novelist accepts this legacy ... (Benjamin 2007, 118).

Quincas continues to live in stories – only that through his resurrection, he himself has decided which stories these are. As little as his body seems to obey him that night – only after a good portion of cachaça is he able to move more than his facial muscles, when walking he must continually be supported by one or two friends and when fighting he falls directly to the ground and seriously injures himself – he is all the more in control of his voice and forms with his last words the legend around Quincas Berro Dágua that from then on will be told about him "Quanto à frase derradeira há versões variadas. Mas, quem poderia ouvir direito no meio daquele temporal? Segundo um trovador do mercado, passou-se assim: ..."

¹⁰ On solitude in death, cf. Han 2012, 104-119.

(QB, 91). The pyrotechnist Zacharias is precluded any possibility of being called upon by his friends and is consequently free from guilt and invocation, the effect of which being that he is no longer reminded of his mortality. Amado's protagonist, on the other hand, is immediately doubly reminded of mortality due to his dual appellation (the family speaks about him using Joaquim while they are preparing the funeral and his friends are in mourning for Quincas) and therefore uses his voice one last time – which he succeeds in doing because he experiences being called upon, the auto-erotic inner self fractures and thus encounters are made possible.¹¹

In *What is an author?*, Foucault addresses the relationship of writing with death on the one hand,¹² and the question of what an author is on the other. A clear proximity to the present text is shown in the assertion that in classical epics, the telling of the death of the hero makes him immortal, thus assuring him a place in the collective consciousness, something that can also be observed in the story around Quincas Berro Dágua. What is even more interesting, however, are the questions that Foucault asks at the end of the text:

One can imagine a culture in which discourses were disseminated and received without the function of the author having ever appeared. ... For this, one would hear [other questions]: What conditions does this discourse require to exist? Where does it come from? How can it spread and who can appropriate it? How are the positions for possible material distributed? (Foucault 2010, 227).

In the case of the story around Quincas Berro Dágua, the core aspect, the protagonist's last words, come from him himself. The legend will continue to be told and at the same time constantly modified, yet an appropriation of the discourse by Quincas' biological family was prevented by his energetic intervention following his death.

Some brief considerations regarding the body of the dead now conclude the comparison of the two texts. The question of to what extent Quincas, as Zacharias, feels more intensely than before is difficult to answer. Indeed, he is "satisfeito da vida" (QB, 80), "num dos seus melhores dias," "divertidíssimo" (QB, 81) and "no melhor de sua forma" (QB, 86). What is more, Quincas experiences a woman's love,

¹¹ "To hear my name is always to hear the other, to hear them call me" (Han 1998, 146).

¹² Benjamin also localizes the storyteller in direct proximity to death: "Death is the sanction of everything which the storyteller can report about. They have borrowed their authority from death itself" (Benjamin 2007, 114).

which makes him aware of his own body, entirely in the sense of Foucault. The proximity between erotic or even sexual desire and corpses and cadavers that Todorov sees in fantasy texts was already illustrated above. With regard to love, this proximity is also valid for the present text: “[Ela] beijava-lhe os olhos de malícia” (QB, 88), “não tirava os olhos apaixonados do velho marinheiro” (QB, 89) “[e pergunta:] Como posso viver sem tu?” (QB, 88). Yet he does not feel alcohol more intensely than when he was alive, in contrast, he even drinks astonishing amounts of cachaça without having anything to eat. While Zacharias also sees the “constant decomposition” of the body come to a halt after his death, this process does not seem to have been overcome in the case of Quincas. The deceased protagonists in the two stories presented here take hold of their bodies in two very different ways – Zacharias’ senses are sharpened, whereas Quincas’ fights against the clothes being put on his motionless body and that masquerades him as a man of honor¹³ – in the urge to retell and pass on their stories, however, they are remarkably similar. For this reason, the metanarrative features that stand out in the choice of death as a motif in the stories will now be summarized.

In the first part of this article, two assertions were made, put briefly, that: 1. A name reminds one of their own mortality and 2. By means of articulation, a human being “può darsi durevole esistenza” (Agamben 2008, 62). The pyrotechnist Zacharias loses his name and is verifiably dead (he even sees himself in the unfortunate position of having to prove his death), but he uses his voice to create a lasting existence. Quincas Berro Dágua, on the other hand, has two names. He sheds the first, and in doing so is freed from guilt and the reminder of his own mortality and can consequently freely exist – with the central difference, however, that he is not socially excluded, but rather joins a social group in which he feels at home and from whom he receives a new name.¹⁴ Thus, when he dies his first physical death, he is still called upon, though by both names, which doubly reminds him of his mortality and his transience. An intense urge emerges from this to set the story straight, to make use of his voice to create a lasting existence and to prevent a bourgeoisie appropriation of his story.

¹³ Here, too, the element of outside influence clearly emerges.

¹⁴ The act of naming as induction into a social group is a deeply Christian motif. Conversely, the refusal of a name as an anti-christening can be understood as a self-precipitated excommunication.

“Normally, a socio-critical dimension lies in death in literature” (Pfeiferová 2010, 129). Based on the two texts analyzed here, this statement is to be approved. Both stories deal with the question of who is allowed to tell stories, and who possesses the right over the biographical legacy of a figure. The dead arise in order to set the story straight (e.g. in the case of Quincas Berro D'água) or they do not come to rest when their death means total exclusion from society (as is mourned by Benjamin in the case of modernity in Europe, for example). At the same time, the socio-critical dimension appears after the issue is transferred into the world of the living: the dead raise their voices for all those who were either excluded from society (via the refusal to give them a name entirely, cf. PZ) or were forced into a societal sphere to which they feel they do not belong (in this case, their *actual* name, their actual identity is denied to them, cf. QB). The present texts negotiate mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion as well as questions of power and the exercise of power by allegorically transferring the sovereignty over individuals to the sovereignty over stories. In this way, the protagonists are given the possibility, even from the throws of death, to raise their own, self-determined voice.

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