

## Her tongue is tied not her eyes

Amado's experiment with non verbal language in Tereza Batista Cansada de Guerra

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SWARNAKAR, S. Her tongue is tied not her eyes: Amado's experiment with non verbal language in Tereza Batista Cansada de Guerra. In: SWARNAKAR, S., FIGUEIREDO, ELL., and GERMANO, PG., orgs. *Nova leitura crítica de Jorge Amado* [online]. Campina Grande: EDUEPB, 2014, pp. 72-84. ISBN 978-85-7879-328-9. Available from SciELO Books <<http://books.scielo.org>>.



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# **Her tongue is tied not her eyes: Amado's experiment with non verbal language in Tereza Batista Cansada de Guerra**

*Sudha Swarnakar*

## **Abstract**

Brazilian critics as well as the academics in general seem to show a sort of dislike for Amado's language. Often the ironical comment or negative tone does not suppress their disapproval of his use of language, ignoring the lyricality, simplicity and stylistic innovation in his novels for instance in *Terras do sem fim*, *Gabriela, cravo e canela* or in *Tereza Batista Cansada de Guerra*. Present paper focuses on female silencing and the use of non verbal language in Tereza Batista to show how this prolific Brazilian writer kills two birds with one stone. On one hand it shows Amado's command on language and on the other hand it shows how Amado offers a verbal meaning through a non verbal mean making, this otherwise "powerless woman" the victim of social and sexual abuse, an "intelligent" woman who learns to speak through her eyes. Her tongue is tied not her eyes, the most powerful tool her creator could offer her to speak.

**Key Words:** non verbal language, Jorge Amado, Tereza Batista's eyes.

## **Resumo**

Críticos brasileiros, bem como os acadêmicos, em geral, parecem apresentar uma espécie de antipatia para a linguagem de Amado. Muitas vezes, o comentário irônico ou tom negativo não suprime a sua desaprovação da sua língua, ignorando a simplicidade e inovação estilística em *Terras do sem fim*, *Gabriela*, *Cravo e Canela* ou em *Tereza Batista Cansada de Guerra*. Este ensaio centra-se em silêncio feminino eo uso de linguagem não verbal em Tereza Batista para mostrar como este escritor brasileiro prolífico mata dois coelhos com uma cajadada só. Por um lado, mostra o comando de Amado sobre a linguagem e, por outro lado, mostra como Amado oferece um significado verbal através de um meio não verbal transformando essa “mulher impotente” vítima de abuso sexual e social, numa mulher “inteligente” que aprende falar através de seus olhos. Sua língua está amarrada não seus olhos, a mais poderosa ferramenta que seu criador poderia lhe oferecer a ela para falar.

**Palavras-chave:** linguagem não verbal, olhos da Tereza Batista, Jorge Amado

Most of Amado's novels are knitted around characters who present a certain class or group stigmatized by social and cultural elites. Hence, he uses the vocabulary normally considered inappropriate or obscene, but which is strongly marked by situational factors. A number of Brazilian critics as well as the academics in general have expressed their concern about Amado's language and there is a huge body of criticism about Amado's language.<sup>1</sup> Often the ironical comment or negative tone does not suppress their disapproval of his language use, ignoring the simplicity and stylistic innovation in *Terras do sem fim*, *Gabriela, cravo e canela* or in *Tereza Batista Cansada de Guerra*. His language that appears with naturalness in the texts, appropriately presents the speech of the lower classes. My concern here, however, is not to discuss Amado's language but the lack of language, the absence of speech as I cast a glance at his central character Tereza Batista.

Comparing woman's situation with the colonized, Gayatri Spivack (1988) sees woman in more underprivileged condition and says "[...] the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow...." The discussion here will show how this subaltern

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1 A wide discussion on Amado's language is offered by Paulo Tavares (1982), Álvaro Cardoso Gomes (1988) ABDALA Jr., Benjamin Abdala Jr. (1999) and others.

woman comes out of shadow and makes herself audible and visible.

Amado depicts her in three different situations. First, through the master-slave relationship between Justiano Duarte da Rosa and Tereza Batista. Secondly, during her life with Emiliano Guedes, she lives as a kept woman of the most powerful patriarch of the region. And finally, in her love relationship with Januário Gereba which offers her recognition and fulfillment. The love episode between two is short but sufficient to explore her situation in this love relationship. The text in this part shows that Tereza does not lack feminine qualities: she fights like a man but she listens like a woman. As the narrator says: “Ele falando, ela ouvindo” (AMADO, p 16). However, now she listens not by force, not because of her admiration, but lovingly “ouvindo as ondas do mar, o vento nas velas pandas, o marulho nos búzios” (AMADO,p. 16).

Contrary to Gabriela, in whom Amado creates an icon of Brazilian beauty and youth, Tereza is presented as a woman who is seen, used and abused as female body. First, she is presented as an adolescent girl and then as a woman but in both depictions she does not fit in the long line of sensual women of Amado’s world. In the part of novel that presents her as a adolescent girl there is no reference to her beauty:

Pela janela da saleta pobre o capitão  
brechava o olho cúpido na menina

[...]. Parecia um moleque, o corpo esguio, os peitos apenas despon-tando na chita da blusa, o saiote no meio das coxas longas. Magra e comprida, ainda tão sem jeito de mulher [...]

(AMADO, p.60)

It is only the body, the female body of a girl or a young woman which remains as a haunting echo of the more subtle reduction of woman, reduced to body parts charted in the proceeding, not as a glorified image of femininity one sees in the later part. Chapter three of Part One “A Estreia de Tereza Batista no cabaré de Aracaju” presents her in a cabaret where Saraiva, the poet, exhibits her to his friends, “—Artista, admire o supremo modelo, digna de Rafael e Ticiano [...] a dama mais leve, de ouvido mais fino” (AMADO, p. 6).

The portrait of Tereza’s extraordinarily lovely body described above does not provide a complete picture of her beauty. The description here is governed tellingly by the repeated use of word “dama” which constructs her as an alluring object of desire. As the story develops, other attributes are allotted; her face, her teeth, the skin color are presented as the mark of physical beauty but most importantly her tongue, which is necessary for speech, is absent.

In her first physical contact with a man it is her female body and not her beauty, her femininity or her speech

that matters. Although Tereza occupies a prominent place in the plot, an acute sense of absence of her speech takes over the reader because her acts are described by multiple narrators more than by her own verbal expression or monologues. In Bakhtin's point of view such characters are made subordinate to the control of the author as the narrative voice leaves them powerless but I argue that in case of Tereza Batista, Amado does not snatch away her power of speech. Though in whole novel he presents her as someone who is silent but I argue she is not muted she speaks through her eyes.

Spivack (1988) observes "the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves" in literary world we see it is plotted more by the authors than by the characters as it is the author who is troubled by their silence. In a number of examples of literary representation of woman the power she gains is through her speech or her action and often it is not she who speaks but the authorial narrator. In Tereza Batista Amado creates an icon of female power in a subaltern woman who does not need speech to express her feelings or to exercise her power. As further discussion will show life teaches her to be silent.

Justiniano Duarte da Rosa so overpowers and dominates her through his brutality that for ever she shuts her mouth. He conquers her body and takes his pleasure from her making her mute for ever. The lengthy descriptive passages, describing the rape of Tereza Batista in the novel, give the glimpse of brutality to which girls like Tereza were submitted.

After going through such an experience can she get her voice, can the subaltern speak? Yes, she will speak, similar to Philomina in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* or the Hindi poetess Meera, Tereza acquires a different medium to speak out.<sup>2</sup> Amado delineates a northeastern woman in Tereza who by social law is forced to keep her mouth shut but he does not present a mute woman as he skillfully gives her those expressive eyes to reveal her feelings. Through most of the novel she keeps quiet but her sentiments are revealed through her eyes. In a number of scenes the narrator calls attention to her eyes, exhibiting her feelings and reactions, transmitting messages more powerfully than the words could do.

The first time one meets her she appears to be a happy child 'suor brilha no rosto de cobre, **a alegria nos olhos**' (AMADO, p. 62).<sup>3</sup> Soon this happiness is transformed into anger as the narrator says: '[e]la se debatia, tentava morder, **os olhos em fogo**' (p. 69). However, this fire is soon cooled down by the violence she goes through in Justiniano's

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2 For a detailed discussion of Philomela and Meera see Swarnakar, Sudha "Female Silencing in Mythology and in Modern Literature: Ovid's Philomela and the Hindi Poetess Meera" em Sudha Swarnakar and Maria Marta dos Santos Silva Nobrega (org.) *Cartografia da Violência: Ensaios Comparativos*. João Pessoa: Idéia, 2008, pp. 29-43.

3 For emphasis, the part of text with specific reference to her eyes has been marked with bold letters.

farm house. Once in Justiniano's house, her eyes assume a fixed expression as if the young and vibrant girl is frozen. The circumstances bring big change in her outlook. From a sweet, innocent girl she is transformed in person full of hatred. As the narrator says: **'[n]os olhos de Tereza apenas ódio, mais nada'** (p. 101). However, the strength to oppose and hatred in Tereza's eyes disappear as she sees Justiniano with an iron and burning coal. I will not repeat the scene (Part Two "A menina que sangrou o capitão com a faca de cortar carne seca", Chapter 18) here, as I have discussed in length in other articles, yet I will say that it is one of the most powerful examples of Amado's language. Similar to Edgar Allan Poe or Lawrence Amado's language flows with such power that the distance between verbal and visual almost disappear. The reader not only read the depiction of brutality but feels, senses and smells the burning of tender body part. This seems to be few occasion where Tereza is given voice to implore. But the speech is taken over again by her powerful eyes and the narrator does not let it pass unobserved as he says **"Arregalaram-se os olhos de Tereza"** (AMADO, p.107).

Viewed from a feminist perspective, her silence during this period is a clear sign of her resistance against patriarchal power. For two months the force of brutality keeps her quiet and she endures his violence without uttering a single word. As Miécio Táci observes: "[...] mulherzinha persistente, sofrida não se discute." The "epistemic violence" she is submitted to in this sexual initiation has profound effect on

young Tereza and she is snatched off of her speech for ever. At a very early stage in her life she learns to obey the social norms. She knows that her class, her race and her sex prohibit her to speak, to speak against the oppressors and the political power, against the injustice and the exploitation. She learns to speak herself out without uttering a single word.

During this period hatred and fear become the synonym for love and sex. It is Daniel with whom she learns the first lessons of love and suddenly ‘dentro de seu peito alguma coisa explodiu e **os olhos [...] umedeceram-se [...]**’ (AMADO, p.144). This pleasure has no verbal expression it has to be shown through her humid eyes. After her affair with Daniel when Justiniano takes her, he is taken by Tereza, the ‘donzela’, and is pleased by her ‘new virginity’. He decides she deserves ‘duas argolas’ but he does not see her face and the ‘**lampejos de ódio nos olhos de medo, negros de carvão**’ (p.169). The hatred reaches its climax as she attacks Justiniano. The text is very well structured here as it shows the shift in power from male aggressor to subaltern woman. He turns to look at her and sees ‘Tereza de pé, a mão erguida, **um clarão nos olhos**, a beleza deslumbrante e o ódio desmedido’ (p.176). The verbal language has no space here as the hatred which makes her kill him could be expressed only through eyes.

During his first meeting with Tereza in police custody on charge of murder Emiliano Guedes, the powerful patriarch of society, does not see her as a beautiful young

woman but as a victim and is taken by sympathy for her. It is her eyes that mark her presence more than her youthful body. He feels pity for her as he does not fail to note the “**fulguração dos olhos negros** [...]” (AMADO, p.123).

The life with Emiliano brings her happiness and makes her relax, as the narratorial comment shows: [...] agora o óleo do prazer banhara-lhe rosto e corpo, o gosto e a alegria do amor acenderam-lhe **nos olhos aquele fogo** do qual o doutor Emiliano Guedes percebera **o fulgor** meses atrás’ (p.172). As the above passage shows that even the pleasure of being happy in love, being treated well and having a comfortable life with Emiliano Guides does not make her open her mouth, she only speaks through her eyes. She is depicted as a silent listener, rarely giving her opinion. However, in contrast to her relationship with Justiniano it is not because of force or brutality but because of her admiration for him. After her brutal possession by Justiniano she finds solace in this master-pupil relationship which develops between them and transforms her into his devotee. From a subjugated slave she is changed into the body of a woman who behaves with the delicacy and comprehension of a lady and as a lady, when she comes to know about the sexual scandals of Aparecida, Emiliano’s daughter, she does not encourage the gossip and keeps the secret.

In an episode, in Chapter 19 in Part Four “A noite em que Tereza Batista dormiu com a morte”, Amado constructs a scene where she ascends from womanhood to motherhood.

After she comes to know that she is pregnant she becomes extremely happy but she does not express herself through words, her joy is expressed through her eyes ‘**os olhos negros de Tereza cismarentos, abortos**’ (p.264)

The second half of Tereza’s portrayal at this point offers an altogether different image of her feelings. The use of verb ‘quite’ gives way to phrases dominated instead by ‘olhar’. She keeps quiet but her sentiments are revealed through her eyes. As Juarez de Gama Batista observes, her whole personality is revealed “sempre através da iluminação dos olhos, do olhar [...]”.<sup>4</sup>

The scene where Amado presents her after Emilianino’s death she becomes the focus of both narrator and the characters. The doctor who comes to attend Emiliano Guedes seems to be more worried about social aspect than Tereza but Nina, the maid servant observes her carefully and expects to see her crying, her eyes full of tears. Tereza however, is perplexed; she cannot cry and leaves the house with ‘**olhos secos**’ (AMADO, p.316). Her pain at such an occasion could not have been expressed through her cry. It had to be expressed internally and silently as it makes the reader see the power

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4 Batista seems to be the only critic who in his brief essay on Tereza Batista touches on a number of important issues which I explore in my thesis and also in my articles as he just mentions these points never goes in depth, makes no effort to analyze or discuss them. Most of his observations, though crucial to understand this novel, are made in a passing way in one or two sentences.

of her dry eyes and how they speak more powerfully.

Tereza's silencing offers an opportunity to show Amado's command and skillful use of a language that is not verbal. As we see the novel is full of examples where he offers a verbal meaning through a non verbal form, the "eye language" that helps him to empower this otherwise "powerless woman" the victim of social and sexual abuse as a "tactful" woman who learns to speak in a way that is more effective. Her eyes are the most powerful tool her creator could offer her to speak. The beauty and skillful use of this non verbal form in Amado make it hard to ignore this silent but strong woman and also to disagree with critics who overlook this stylistic experiment in Amado's language.

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