



**ESTHETIC AND DIDACTIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR LITERATURE TEACHING:  
AN HISTORICAL-DIALECTIC MATERIALISTIC APROPRIATION OF JOÃO  
CABRAL DE MELO NETO**

**CONSIDERAÇÕES ESTÉTICAS E DIDÁTICAS PARA O ENSINO DE LITERATURA:  
UMA APROPRIAÇÃO MATERIALISTA HISTÓRICO-DIALÉTICA DE JOÃO CABRAL  
DE MELO NETO**

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LITERATURA: UNA APROPIACIÓN MATERIALISTA HISTÓRICO-DIALÉCTICA DE  
JOÃO CABRAL DE MELO NETO**

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**ABSTRACT:** Is the poetry of João Cabral de Melo Neto with its place assured in the current educational programs about literature teaching? Departing since a radical criticism about the state of art in pedagogics, it is considered that no. The current tendency today tends to discard it along with other precious literary productions, within a larger process of emptying of scholar contents. Why the valorization of poetry requires a substantive, historical and critical pedagogy theory? And why is João Cabral's poetry relevant for an emancipating and critical education perspective? In other words, this paper underlines the importance of Historical-critical Pedagogy for educators and scholars of João Cabral, by one way; and the importance of João Cabral for educators that assume such the PHC as other critical perspectives in education, by another way. To solve this problem, the paper analyses the poem "The River", and discuss the "esthetic reflection theory", by György Lukács, as well the Activity Theory, by A. Leontiev, considered opportune for the problem of the directive or non-directive way of the educational work and its needs. These are existing questions in the pith of the current pedagogic problematics.

**KEYWORDS:** literature teaching. João Cabral. Historical-critical pedagogy. Activity theory. Esthetic reflection. Learning to learn.

**RESUMO:** *A poesia de João Cabral de Melo Neto está com seu lugar garantido nos atuais programas educacionais sobre ensino de literatura? Partindo de uma crítica radical do estado da arte pedagógica, considera-se que não. A tendência vigente hoje tende a descartá-lo juntamente com outras produções literárias preciosas, dentro de um processo maior de esvaziamento dos conteúdos escolares. Por que a valorização da poesia necessita de uma teoria pedagógica substantiva, histórica e crítica; e por que a poesia de Cabral é relevante para uma perspectiva educativa emancipadora e crítica? Em outras palavras, o trabalho resalta a importância da Pedagogia Histórico-crítica para os educadores e estudiosos de*

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*João Cabral, por um lado; e a importância de João Cabral para os educadores que assumem tanto a PHC quanto outras perspectivas críticas em educação, por outro. Para resolver esse problema, analisa-se o poema “O Rio”, e discute-se a “teoria do reflexo estético”, de György Lukács, bem como a contribuição de A. Leontiev para a Teoria da Atividade, considerada oportuna para o problema do direcionamento ou não direcionamento do processo educativo e de suas necessidades, questões existentes no cerne da atual problematização pedagógica.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Ensino de literatura. João Cabral. Pedagogia histórico-crítica. Teoria da Atividade. Reflexo estético. Aprender a aprender.*

**RESUMEN:** *¿La poesía de João Cabral de Melo Neto esta con su lugar garantizado en los programas educativos sobre enseñanza de literatura? Partiendo desde una crítica radical del estado de arte pedagógica, se considera que no. La tendencia vigente hoy tende a deshacerse de ella juntamente a otras producciones literarias preciosas, bajo un proceso más grande de vaciamiento de contenidos escolares. ¿Por qué lá valorización de la poesía necesita una teoría pedagógica sustantiva, histórica y crítica?; ¿y por qué la poesía de Cabral es cara a una perspectiva educativa emancipadora y crítica? En otras palabras, el trabajo resalta la importancia de la Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica para los educadores y estudiosos de João Cabral, por um lado; y la importancia de João Cabral para los educadores que asumen tanto la PHC quanto otras perspectivas críticas em educació. Para resolver ese problema, se analiza el poem a “El Río”, y se discute la “teoría del reflejo estetico”, de György Lukács, así como la contribución de A. Leontiev para la Teoría de la Actividad, considerada oportuna para el problema del direccionamiento o del no-direccionamiento del proceso educativo y de sus necesidades, questiones existentes en el cerne de la atual problematización pedagógica.*

**PALABRAS-CLAVE:** *Enseñanza de literatura. João Cabral. Pedagogía Histórico-crítica. Teoría de la Actividad. Reflejo estético. Aprender a aprender.*

### **Introducing the problem**

In the period of elaboration and implementation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, crowning a slow, gradual and safe transition from an open dictatorship to a citizen regime, Antonio Candido (2011) posed a problem: would art and literature be essential goods to life, that is, a Right? The philosopher and educator Saviani (2008) launched his work *School and Democracy*, with a convergent purpose. Like Candido and Saviani, here, we start from the premise that literature is an emancipatory necessity, and if it is not given by itself, it needs to be produced intentionally. This issue is effectively a problem (in the radical sense of the term), considering that, in the school environment, there is still controversy about the direction or spontaneity of the needs of students.



The motto “learning to learn” (DUARTE, 2001) is one of the main mottos – if not the main one – of the documents that establish the school contents (or “anti-contents), and not only the transmission of knowledge ceases to be a central task of the act of teaching, as the act of learning itself must be prioritized to the detriment of teaching, so that the student is “active”. It is not by chance that the pedagogies of “learning to learn” call for the so-called “active methodologies”: to get up and walk around the school instead of sitting down and reading; to let the student, with his maturity, choose what he is going to read, instead of introducing him to the world of great works.

These precepts already presented themselves as fundamental questions in what historically constituted a movement of the so-called “Educação Nova” (SAVIANI, 2008), and are umbilically intertwined with the “active methodologies”; they are notoriously equipped and embellished with new and recent elements of informational innovation, but retain the content of their essence. That is, the primacy of systematized and methodical content is questioned, whose organization is centrally in charge of the teacher, starting to refuse it, with the pretext of making teaching inclusive, democratic, non-elitist. Literature marked by marked technical and formal development would not be a necessity, and it does not embitter this relativized position alone. The transmission of scientific content from the humanities and natural sciences has also been questioned, among many arguments, for not providing skills for the immediate adaptation of young people to the instability of a more competitive and, naturally, more excluding labor market, since competition implies winners and losers.

Therefore, the discussion of this work is justified: literature is a generic human need, that is, belonging to the range of human needs and capacities not related to being as an empirical individual, but to being as a human species. Not being an individual and immediate need naturally, nothing needs to be produced. But is it relevant that it is produced? Is this importance effectively justified to the point of bothering young people and school-age children with compositions so different from what they consume on television, on the internet, or on speakers that mostly reproduce what is a market trend? These examples point out of written literature per se, but appear as a suggestion of literary content, alongside, of course, "comics" type comics and “novels”. Should we reinforce that teaching focuses on works and authors considered classics rather than the everyday examples cited above? It is considered so.

This leads us to believe that education is understood as a sphere of human activity of enormous relevance to the process of emancipation and overcoming a human condition that is





not harmonious, free, solidary and fair. It is considered that the reality of the concrete student is a reality involved in violence, alienation, exploitation, deprivation and various injustices. The option for the classics is not an arbitrary ideological position, but the result of a choice that takes sides within the advent of class struggles, from a rationalization of the empirical and theoretical database that can only be pointed out here. It is not intended, with this, that the school can act directly and freely on the social reality, changing it by the “illumination of the ignorant”, as the traditional pedagogy of Enlightenment or Jesuit bias wants; nor by the naive inclusion of the marginalized, who become part of society because they were accepted by the school, believing that through education they would resolve issues related to the division of labor and the historical heritage of determinations marked by exploitation.

Scientifically, the defense made of literature as an emancipatory power is the ability of a given production to unveil reality, making clear the determinations that make up the non-apparent real, expanding the possibilities of choice and rationalization of socio-practical decisions<sup>3</sup>, since it is moving towards the expansion of the database on reality. In a peculiar way, in particular, literature, according to György Lukács (2018), has a defetishizing function of reality, that is, of removing from human perception those appearances that act as concealers of the essence of a phenomenon, without, of course, that this it means giving up a particular field of mediations, fixing the reflection of reality in the universal. This does not happen in a pedagogical way, subordinating art to the functions of science or politics. Lukács (1965a, 2018) stressed autonomy<sup>4</sup> of art in the face of these spheres by defending its own character, that is, the peculiarity of the aesthetic reflection of reality before the scientific reflection. Through realism in literature, it would be possible to overcome the naturalist description, the pure phenomenal descriptivism, immersed in the phenomenon without mediating it by the concrete analysis of totality<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, it rejects the arbitrary transcendence of historical determinations in an artificial way and submitted to the pure will of the writer. This double overcoming, however, implies maintaining the work as a reality and a totality created by the artist. For the author, this does not differ from what the great exponents of different times did, from Homer to Balzac.

<sup>3</sup> As a reflection on historical determinism and freedom in Marx's philosophy summarized by Márkus (2015), throughout the entire volume.

<sup>4</sup> Autonomy, in this case, is always relative, because for him, from a historical and scientific argumentation, there would be no pure human phenomenon, but its peculiarity and difference would be protected.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding this discussion, Lukács (1965b) recalls Flaubert's frustration in not being able to escape a certain monotony in his work, with a lack of culminating points. Despite this, the Frenchman is justified by his commitment to what he understands by realism: if in reality there are no culminating points, in realist art there should not be. Lukács counters by remembering that history is not harmonious and linear, and that revolutions and social and historical conflicts are precisely the culmination of life.





Articulating this network of problems to the theme of the series in which this work is published, the question is: is the poetry of João Cabral de Melo Neto guaranteed to have its place in current educational programs? Starting from a radical critique of the pedagogical state of the art, it is considered not, in view of the controversies surrounding the presence of classic works in the curriculum of school education. The current trend today tends to discard it along with other precious productions. It is therefore necessary to methodically point out why this poetry and this author are justified and necessary within an educational concept that excels in methodical and systematized knowledge. The theory of reflection (LUKÁCS, 2018) points out its ability to encompass reality in a poetic way, as seen in the process of converting form into content, together with ideas, in which the objective elements of language (sound and logical dimension -syntactic) exist intentionally, that is, in a necessary and not casual way for the expression of their historical-cultural content: the snaking of *O Rio* (title of the analyzed poem) through the words, with dry and sharp breath, narrating the harshness of the retreat from the hinterland to the sea. The fate of man and river fighting for life, against the determinations that flank them.

Next, we present a critical analysis approach to the currently hegemonic theories and practices in education, as well as their critical counterpoints, to then discuss the importance and richness of a Cabralino classic for the school context, aiming to develop two questions: why the appreciation of poetry needs a substantive, historical and critical pedagogical theory; and because Cabral's poetry is relevant to an emancipatory and critical educational perspective. In other words, the work emphasizes the importance of Historical-Critical Pedagogy for the educators and scholars of João Cabral, on the one hand; and the importance of João Cabral for educators who assume both Historical-Critical Pedagogy and other critical perspectives in education.

### **Saviani's critique of the *escola nova* and the identification of the continuity of this current in current proposals**

A summary of this criticism can be done by extracting three theses that the educator formulates about the Educação Nova movement, the first two theses being a kind of premises, and the third, a conclusion.

*First thesis (philosophical-historical):* On the revolutionary character of the pedagogy of essence (traditional pedagogy) and on the reactionary character of the pedagogy of existence (new pedagogy). [...] *Second thesis (pedagogical-methodological):* Of the scientific character of the traditional method and of the



pseudoscientific character of the new methods. [...] *Third thesis (specifically political):* Of how, when less was said about democracy inside the school, the more it was articulated with the construction of a democratic order, and the more democracy was said within the school, the less it was democratic (SAVIANI, 2008 p. 48, author's emphasis).

The transition from the rising class bourgeoisie, revolutionary, to dominant, conservative of the new social order, imprinted this relativization in education. For the consolidation of the democratic order, which fought against the old regimes, the universalization of knowledge was necessary, since the bourgeoisie demanded equality among all humans, through the philosophy of essence, against the privileges of the nobility and the clergy. Furthermore, the conversion of the serf into a citizen depended on the education of the masses. The school's need for the consolidation of the democratic order was clear.

It so happens that, as Saviani (2008) reminds us, historical development is faced with this ideal of equality: in the capitalist order, inequality is necessary. The bourgeoisie, however, will need to legitimize difference rather than advocating equality. If the pedagogy of essence aimed to make everyone have the means to master knowledge equally – even if naively believing that the problem of marginality would be solved by converting the ignorant into the enlightened – now more opportune would be a pedagogical theory that chose difference as the norm. At the beginning of the 20th century, educators for the Educação Nova and the pedagogy of existence emerged, operating several inversions of what had been the traditional school. In summary, his motto was to take the premises of democracy into the school, as a world in itself, even if this was not included in a project to build a concrete democratic order, beyond the school, as Saviani argues.

The inclusion of the excluded through the acceptance of difference is the motto of Educação Nova. The centrality over teaching ceases and learning begins. From teacher to student, from content to forms. Claiming a scientific education status against a medieval model, it defends experimentalism and empiricism. Systematized knowledge is not hierarchically superior to spontaneous knowledge. Saviani himself (2008) summarizes in one expression what would become the motto of pedagogy in neoliberalism: “learning to learn”. Educator Newton Duarte (2001) in one of his several robust criticisms of this motto, classifies it as an umbrella concept, realizing how several contemporary pedagogical trends are intertwined in what is central and essential to them. In all of them, there is an echo of training aimed at adaptation: training individuals who can deal with a world of rapid technological changes, in an uncertain job market, at the same time adapting the school to the immediately





given daily life. All substantive scientific and cultural knowledge, that is, rich in form and content, becomes an obstacle.

This movement would seem inclusive if everyday life were not extremely unequal, violent and alienating. The more complex knowledge, however, allows a glimpse of reality beyond what is given, that is, for what it can become. In the context of teaching literature in school education, the imperative of everyday life on classical knowledge is very representative of how it is a case of an advance of the market on the territory of pedagogy, of culture. Relegating the teaching of literature to the pressure of everyday life means leaving an uncertain place for classic works, representative of different moments of humanity and its complexity, while opening up to the products of the publishing market. The rules for acquiring literary books for public schools in 2020<sup>6</sup> followed exactly this precept. A publication in the context of the centenary of the poet João Cabral de Melo Neto must ask: does bringing to school this daily life that “Learning to learn” proposes guarantee the reading of the author of *Morte e Vida Severina*?

### **Reflection of reality and the production of needs in the educational process**

The pressure of educational policies for the adoption of Learning to Learn and its “active methodologies” deserve a questioning: when a student is expending an enormous mental effort to interpret a hermetic poem, is he passive? Is he not in full swing, that is, actively directing his attention, actively mobilizing mental effort? **Activity theory** (LEONTIEV, 1984, 2017), within the scope of Cultural-Historical Psychology, certainly has relevant contributions to this.

Returning to Vygotsky, we have the taking of human consciousness as a specific object of Psychology in the process of understanding the psyche. But what is consciousness? For the Russian current, consciousness is conscious activity, as well as a picture or portrait of the world, including the activity and the subject that operate the “impression” of this image, which, as will be discussed, does not occur in a mechanical way in the subject by the object, but conversely, in an active posture of the subject. In short, consciousness is a subjective image of the objective world. A representation of the world that exists objectively, that is, externally and in spite of a given subject. For Leontiev, there is a primacy of materiality in the subjective generation of objective reality, which is configured as a brain function to guide

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<sup>6</sup> The reader can reach this conclusion by checking the list of books available for the composition of school collections in the PNLD 2020 Literary Digital Guide (BRASIL, 2020).



organisms in the world. The human being, in particular, develops a conscious image of reality by submitting objective reality to *détours* that move the subjective image away from immediacy. Kosik (1969, p. 30) elucidates the understanding of this process:

The whole is not immediately knowable to man, although it is immediately given to him in sensuous form, that is, in representation, opinion and experience. Therefore, the whole is immediately accessible to man, but it is a chaotic and obscure whole. In order to know and understand this whole, to make it clear and explain it, man has to make a detour: the concrete becomes comprehensible through the mediation of the abstract, the whole through the mediation of the part. (KOSIK, 1969, p. 30).

In line with this postulate, Leontiev (1984) makes considerations that contradict what he called *the postulate of immediacy*, the standard scheme of traditional psychology. In this elaboration, there is precisely the direct determination of the consciousness of a passive subject (S) by a certain phenomenon (R). Here is the *object* → *subject* (R → S) model.

In Activity Theory, between subject and object, there is precisely *mediation*. It is not just a matter of recognizing that the influence of external determinations depends on specific internal conditions in organisms, but of seeking the processes that are active in the subject to mediate this influence. It is about recognizing that there is a mediating link in the previous chain. We have the *subject* → *activity* → *object* schema. This schema deepens the understanding of consciousness as a mental image of objective reality. For Leontiev (1984), the external world is not projected onto the brain and is configured as a psychic reflex; rather, the subject extracts that subjective image from this objective world. Therefore, the reflection is consciously *assimilated*.

The Activity Theory considerations point out that the process of assimilation of systematized knowledge is precisely an *active posture* of the subject towards his activity of study, from which he extracts knowledge, instead of having it projected in his psyche by the object itself. This does not deny – rather confirms – that it is activity that establishes consciousness and not the opposite (“real being determines consciousness” etc.). The notion that human subjectivity is established through the objectifications bequeathed by history supports the understanding that the internal movement of individual consciousness responds to the movement of a person's objective activity.

All activity is driven by the satisfaction of a certain *need* – which is understood as a needy state that tends to put a certain organism into activity. The objectual character of the need (need for something) can be due to three types of needs, according to Leontiev (2017): of a material object (material need) of an ideational object (spiritual need), or of the result of a





certain activity (functional need). For all three types, there is an important element about the historical development of needs in correlation with the production of material cultural objects: the satisfaction of needs produces more needs and new ways of satisfying them.

It should be noted that although an object of need is a stimulus, a reason for the activity, its needy state alone is not enough to set the being in motion. The object must be detectable for the subject. The concrete content of a need is acquired according to the conditions and ways in which it is satisfied. The needs of schooling, therefore, require even more precision in the valuation process that qualifies the mediations towards the need attributed to the object.

The category *catharsis* – in its meaning corresponding to the historical-critical pedagogical theory – indicates some paths. It is the production of needs that expand the universe of social relationships in which an individual is inserted, providing new ways of relating to reality (DUARTE, 2019). According to the same author (DUARTE, 2004), the concept of a universal subject not only in the sense of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, but of the dialectical materialist method is precisely a subject rich in needs; it is, therefore, a subject freed from the particular dynamics of the alienated division of labor that make his needs immediate, natural, and generally poorly satisfied or not at all. The association of these categories - activity and catharsis -, in this work, concerns the defense of systematized knowledge, of the most elaborate forms of scientific, artistic and linguistic work as school contents.

If there are needs whose object is not easily identifiable, their investigation, therefore, seems to require overcoming the limits of what is immediately knowable, that is, of the phenomenal factuality to which *empirical thinking* is reduced. Marx successively distinguished the empirical real from the concrete real. The maxim is known: if essence and appearance coincide, science would be unnecessary (MARX, 2017, p. 880). Since they do not coincide, theoretical thinking is fundamental to advance towards the concrete thought.

In order to have a brief outline of *theoretical thought*, it can be categorized as *theory*, which is, for Marx, *the ideal reproduction of the real movement of the object by the research subject*: through theory, the subject reproduces in his thought the structure and dynamics of the object being researched (PAULO NETTO, 2011, p. 23). The concrete dimension of reality apprehended as a synthesis of multiple determinations is the *content* of theoretical thinking, which takes the *form* of substantial generalizations and all the *particular* mediation systems that make up a given *totality* (LAVOURA; MARTINS, 2018).



The importance of theoretical thinking as a mediation that allows the concrete apprehension of reality allows us to seek some approximations between the reflection of reality and the production of needs in the educational process, discussion on screen in this topic. It is opportune, in this sense, to resort to the contributions of the literary critic György Lukács who approached the theory of reflection in the field of Aesthetics, among several contributions he bequeathed to the critical world.

Lukács (2018) credits Goethe with the statement about the role of the *particularity* category in aesthetics: it is in the particular that the artist culminates, receives form and establishes the movement of reflecting objective reality. A different process occurs in *scientific* knowledge, which, depending on its purposes, is fixed in the singular or in the universal. Also different from knowledge linked to everyday practice, whose knowledge is fixed at any point, according to the concrete and practical tasks to which it is linked (LUKÁCS, 2018, p. 151).

In the three types of knowledge mentioned – artistic, scientific and everyday – despite their different historical accumulations, *the same objective reality is reflected*. Still according to Lukács, this reality is the same not only in its content, but in its forms and categories. If this reality is not perceptible by the immediate praxis of everyday life, this is due to specialization - not only of technique, in the development of economic production, of the natural sciences, but of the natural receptive organs that receive increasingly diversified stimuli and demands from work, science and art. That is, historical-social development does not isolate singular attitudes from each other, but that these can be increasingly rich and fruitful the greater the specialization – unless the social structure introduces a “disturbing factor”, as is the case with case of the capitalist division of labor.

The materialist dialectic understands the existence of a content and formal unity of the reflected world, on the one hand, while it highlights the “non-mechanical and non-photographic character of the reflection” (LUKÁCS, 2018, p. 152), that is, according to this same author, activity imposes itself on the subject “when he *concretely builds the world of reflection*” (LUKÁCS, 2018, p. 152, emphasis added), through questions and problems that arise during the development of productive forces. This reflex, which is not mechanically projected as a “photograph”, is *subjectively* obtained by the being, who can only perform this task with the resources available by the stage of development of the productive forces in which he is inserted, with the mediations that his social context -history provides.



The aesthetic reflection is taken within the context of unity between form and content, a situation of unity in which the categories singularity, particularity and universality also occur. It is noteworthy that these categories do not follow one another in a series (linearly), but that one constantly converts into the other. The aesthetic reflection manifests itself precisely within the uninterrupted movement that makes, from one extreme to the other, the reflection of reality. It is therefore different from theoretical knowledge, which completes its movement when it travels from one extreme (singularity) to another (universality), with the intermediate term (particularity) having only the function of mediator. In the case of the aesthetic reflection, the intermediate point is precisely its specificity: in it, the movements coming from both extremes converge, being it (the particular) the conclusive point. Nevertheless, as in the case of scientific knowledge, “the aesthetic reflex wants to understand, discover and reproduce, with its specific means, the totality of the same reality in its explicit wealth of contents and forms.” (LUKÁCS, 2018, p. 153). For Lukács, however, this modification of the subjective process entails qualitative changes in the reflex image of the world. Particularity can no longer be overcome and it is on this that the formal world of works of art is founded. Now, singularity and universality appear to be overcome in particularity.

The discussion carried out so far allows us to argue that the pedagogical intentionality of the interactions that arise from the relationship between the theory of activity and the aesthetic reflection of reality, can provide the construction of mediations that lead to the concrete understanding of the reflected world, leading to *détours* that distance the subject of immediacy. Behold, since the educational work is an intentional activity directed towards ends, it is possible to glimpse in the literary contents, as is the case of the poem, the possibility of, in the educational process, providing mediations that lead to the concrete construction of reality that is reflected in subjectivity that takes place in the consciousness of individuals. It is in this sense that we move on to the discussion of the production of needs through the reading of great literary works.

### **What does the river count? The poem aesthetically reflecting reality and producing needs**

“I had always thought of going / the way to the sea / For animals and rivers / being born is already walking. / I was born going down.” The “narrator river” presents itself to its readers, anticipating its destination, the journey it will take and report. In fact, it is a river that tells its story, as we can see: “(because also as people,/ I cannot remember/ these first leagues/





of my journey)”. He goes on to tell his first memories: “lands of thirst”. And a fear: “that great thirst for straw, / great thirst without bottom / that girls coveted water” (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 18-19) (Our translation). That's why he didn't go through the sand: he looked for stone paths, until he found the woods.

Once the first memory of physical space is told, the first social fact is told and others that follow. The land was "desert, / empty, not empty". Unnaturalized issue, by the way. A place “from where everything fled, / where only stones remained, / stones and few men” (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 20) (Our translation). The rural exodus told by a witness, who is also a road. He goes on to describe the harshness of the place, hitherto natural, geophysically so, but whose harsh, hostile perception is only of social importance. The path that follows the river is the path that everyone who leaves the hinterland and goes towards the sea follows. It finds one or another river, its tributary, intermittent, that is, they dry up in the summer. Capibaribe embraces them, while leaving farms with empty houses, villages with few residents, only church and no school, many without a fair. They have Catholic devotions: Saint Anthony, Jesus, Conceição and other patron saints.

Here, the relationship between “roads-tributaries” and places traveled is abbreviated, where “the same silent pain,/ the same dry sob,/ the same death of a thing/ that does not rot but dries up, persists.” More than the colonels who command, we can see the “manier men” who force the ground to give “plants that eat stone”. They plant and harvest in someone else's land what will also be someone else's. The work and the product do not belong to the producer (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 25) (Our translation).

Leaving the wild, Capibaribe finds the monoculture of sugarcane, which from a colonial mill passes to a modernized mill. The new tributaries arrive, working for sugarcane. Some for mills, others for mills; but in the end, everyone tells the “story of the mills/ with their dying fires”. Although modernization progressively supplanted archaic production, these stories tell that mill and banguê coexist: “the mill with its mouth,/ with its floodplains, the banguê”. The mill, however, “always has an English name / the mill, only the land.” The poem grappling with the theme of *dependent capitalism* (MARINI 1990). The international division of labor: tool, manufacture, technique, industry, on the one hand; land, slavery, routine, plantation, of another. Contradictions between death represented by the difficulty of human survival in the severity of archaic nature that sacrifices the human being and the river path that emerges with modernity to achieve life through social and economic accumulation. Contradictory sides of the same coin that bears marks of the advance of the human race





through capitalist accumulation: complexification, exploitation and super-exploitation, advance and setback. Subscribing to this theme is also “the big house of Poço do Aleixo”, gnawed not only by the time spent in this context of overcoming the archaic by the modern capitalist, but by the armies of bats and nettles that help the plant in this violent task (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 31).

Sugarcane is violent with the Northeastern people. If before the swidden was a prisoner of the land, today it is free to be expelled by monoculture. Capibaribe tells us that wherever he goes, “Everything plants sugarcane / and so on to infinity”. Houses are few, villages have been expelled and exploration is on its way. Until then, the river had seen the old mills taken over by sugarcane, but of the mills it had only heard of other rivers. And behold, it approaches. What the crystalline waters say is directly quoted, revealing what the sorceress-fetishist fumes of progress so much cover:

Turn mills to eat  
the lands they were finding;  
with big cane fields  
all the floodplains occupying.  
The cane field is the mouth  
with which first they devour  
forests and capoeiras,  
pastures and fences;  
how they devour the earth  
where a man planted his field;  
then the few meters  
where he planted his house;  
then the little space  
what does a seated man need;  
after six feet under  
where he will be buried (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 33) (Our translation).

The river, observer and critical accountant, continues to expose its subjective image excavated from objective reality. He sees the larger mouth that is the mill devouring the mill and the extensive plantation lands, which a little while ago devoured swiddens and houses. But it is a wise observation that the teeth of this mouth are the people expelled themselves, descendants of people ground by the old mills. People and work. People who suck cane and eat rapadura operate the machine. The landowner or the planter does not escape the old way, now a tenant: foreign mills also grind them. The minority partners of dependency. Retame sugar is better than head rum.

The journey must go on and the population of that plant is left behind. Further on, you can see that you leave a plant to enter the seas of other plants (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 37).



Before conquering the path, critical reflection persists. There is talk of the deaths that soak people in bagasse who live off the harvest. And that helps in the figure of speech that closes the previous paragraph in this article. The damage is greater at the end of the production chain: the worker is driven to exhaustion to compensate for the transfer of capital to developed countries to which the local capitalist, a minority partner, is obliged. Exhaustion means premature exhaustion of the workforce.<sup>7</sup> And Capibaribe tells the circumstances of this exhaustion, directly linked to the way of producing life implied by the sugar chain:

And I saw all the deaths  
Where did these people live?  
I saw death by crime,  
dripping the hour on the porthole;  
and death by disaster,  
with its sharp edges,  
how an arm is cut,  
cut very close a lot of life;  
I saw death from fever,  
preceded by its whistle,  
consume all the meat  
with a fire that is cold inside.  
There is no death  
of a plant that dries up, or of a river:  
it is death that rots,  
natural there, apparently (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 36) (Our translation).

Perhaps the River would say “naturalized, not natural”, as I said earlier about the sertão: “empty, not empty”. Through São Lourenço da Mata, the Capibaribe will enter the current metropolitan region of Recife, where it will fulfill its destiny of emptying into the sea. The migrants, those expelled from the land by the sugarcane and the other tributary rivers arrive with him. Even the old banguzeiro “reduced to a supplier”. Entering the capital from the periphery reports the existence of old mills, but the landscape changes. In Recife, the landscape is different: the wind blows thin leaves, different from the thick, rough leaves of the cane. They are tree leaves from the two-story houses of a liberal and urban bourgeoisie with fine hair, but weeded by people with “hard and coarse” hair, like the mangroves, the urban periphery from which they leave to work in the picturesque, historic Recife. The river doesn't take long to talk about the beautiful Recife; on the other hand, there is much to be said about the beggar capital.

There are reports of precarious housing in the outskirts. Houses and mansions by the river, in the mud of the mangrove. Houses that, in the rising tide, sail like islands.

<sup>7</sup> One of the pillars of the “overexploitation of work” category, described in Marini (2015, p. 157-161).





Contradictions “From that amphibious city/ that exists underneath/ Recife told in Guias.” (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 43) (Our translation) And the river continues along the outskirts until it reaches the “Dutch foundation reef”

In it the bridges pass  
of Portuguese robustness  
luminous ads,  
with many English words;  
still pass the chain,  
passes the Government Palace,  
both robust, solid,  
planted on the driest ground (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 44) (Our translation).

The river, which now walks more slowly, remembers that it has color: “of islands of black earth / image of the man here close / and the man I found / on my long journey”. The slow step is due to the illness of this man who accompanies him on his long journey. Arriving at the Santa Rita pier, the sea appears. The flow reveals a disappointment both for rivers and for people: “because they do not find / in the city they imagined sea / but another desert / of swamps close to the sea”. In the beggar capital, which “of any city/ has only police”, people live at the level of swamp and mud.

In the “offering” stanza, finally, the river ends its journey. The river is realistic and insists that the only relationship that remains, not as an exception but as a rule, is “only the relationship / of our common withdraw; only this relationship woven in a thick loom” (MELO NETO, 2007, p. 49) (Our translation).

The process of aesthetic reflection of reality could be perceived throughout the exhibition above. The poet travels the surface-essence, singularity-universality path – the particular being the path from one to the other – providing a true aesthetic experience of a content. Through the mediations of scientific reflection, the truth of the comparisons can be ascertained – and they were mentioned, albeit without delay, in the exposition. What interests us, however, is the richness and specificity, the peculiarity of the aesthetic reflex and its formative importance in the process of humanization through school education. In the teaching of literature, school contents that reveal reality come to life and movement. And this has to do with the other issue that we propose to think about: the production of school needs through the poem. In no way is it a matter of subordinating art to the pedagogical – as if the pedagogical element were something small in a species that is humanized through education, through the transmission of accumulated knowledge – but since it is considered that literature must be in this main formative space, its formative role as a quality should be explored.





In summary, the teaching of literature in the light of the theoretical-methodological assumptions of historical-critical pedagogy offers theoretical support that seeks to anchor itself in the importance of theoretical thinking as a mediation that favors *détours* towards the concrete apprehension of the contradictions of reality. Based on this principle, the antithetical character that the poem carries was explored in the light of the reflection theory of reality, in order to demonstrate the possibilities of producing needs in students, mediated by the development of the educational work that can be developed with the poem: the river, the sea, the mangroves; murders and spoliation, floods, revolutions, slave escapes, outlaws; the bed, the path, the thread, the intermittence that connects nature and naturalizes the way society is produced: in the antithesis of the severe disillusionment is the hope that brings the life that appears, there is the force that moves life. Reflections that, rooted in the theory of activity as a possibility to act in the production of student needs, pointed out the possibilities that the Cabralino poem offers for the teacher to explore, deepen and act in the development of psychic activities involved in the interposition that it is possible to make available. to the subjective construction of objective reality, as a form and content to bring the student closer to the reflection of reality. Thus, there is the possibility of providing mediations that put the student in a fully active position.

Here, then, is the importance of the Cabral poem for the development of historical-critical pedagogical work, as well as the contributions of this pedagogical theory to the educational work in the teaching of literature. With this, the place and importance of João Cabral de Melo Neto's poetry is qualified as a guarantee that, mediated by pedagogical work as a direct and intentional activity directed at ends, it is possible to develop activities that allow the formation of a conception of the world resulting from the subjectivity that the poem allows to build in the *psyche* towards humanization.

## Conclusion

João Cabral's poetry is a humanizing power. Throughout the exhibition, reasons were presented to consider it as such. Not only the poem "O Rio", but "Morte e vida severina" and many others by the author have a huge role to play in the process of humanization and schooling. It is not, however, a matter of making a prescription for this author and these works and institutionalizing him in a list of mandatory reading works. But, by exposing the criteria,





considering these qualities as essential for the teaching of literature. In this way, it is likely that the author will be read, and not only him, but also several great authors.

We tried to demonstrate how several novelties that fill the advertised educational reforms are older than one thinks. Taking up Saviani's struggle at the time of the worsening of the relationship between education and democracy is an urgent exercise in collective memory, since little is celebrated in terms of school or democracy, despite all the prescriptions of the management bodies of world power having become hegemonic. On the other hand, with the powerful support of cultural-historical psychology and activity theory, we examined what it actually means to be active in the mental process of consciousness, questioning whether every day, empirical or theoretical experience develops it, carefully crafted.

Still on the Activity Theory, it should be concluded that the production of needs in the educational process takes place intentionally. It is necessary that the educational work formulates the human being who wants to reproduce in the new generations, on the one hand, and remember that the production of new needs (such as the reading of great literary works) is not a natural process, but intentionally produced. Constant reading will produce a need for more reading, and greater constancy. Furthermore, if the criticism reveals the educational value of certain works, there is a criterion to help in the selection of contents for school education; content that will not be spontaneous needs for the students, but may be intentionally produced by the educators. It is convenient to resume the definition of rich subject according to Duarte (2004): of the subject rich in needs - an alternative to the subject rich in goods (especially the money commodity), something so rare in this particularity of dependent capitalism that lives on national soils, so limited from its deepest structures, as shown in João Cabral's poem.

Several issues raised throughout the text deserve deepening, generalizations and singularizations. Despite this, the publication considers that a concrete problem for the teaching of literature is in fact addressed here, and not a mere academic or rhetorical question, chosen as a subject by subjectivist predilection, without considering the reality and actuality of everything that has been asked to put forward. approves.

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