

ETHOS AND PERSUASION IN DE RUSTICIS BRASILIAE REBUS

Roberto Gonoring D'Assumpção Silva

Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2780-7444>

roberto866d.as@gmail.com

Leni Ribeiro Leite

University of Kentucky

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6600-7692>

leni.ribeiro@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we propose a reconstruction of the poetical and technical conditions under which the *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus*, a didactic poem by the jesuit José Rodrigues de Melo, was composed. Taking into consideration its historical particularities, we propose to read the text as an artifact from a specific discursive universe in which it is rooted and with which it dialogues, based on the Rhetorical persuasive principles, and in conformation to a poetic genre, in this case, the didactic. We observe how reading it according to the rhetorical precepts that regulated what we now call literary production may shine a light upon the mechanisms through which the text positions itself in the genre of didactic poetry, and through which the author participates in the fierce quarrel between the newly-established national states and the international and universalizing Society of Jesus.

Keywords: didactic poetry; Neo-Latin; rhetoric; José Rodrigues de Melo; *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus*.

RESUMO

Neste artigo, propomos uma reconstrução das condições poéticas e técnicas sob as quais o *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus*, um poema didático escrito pelo jesuíta José Rodrigues de Melo, foi composto. Levando em consideração suas particularidades históricas, propomos ler o texto como um artefato de um universo discursivo específico no qual está enraizado e com o qual dialoga, baseado nos princípios retóricos persuasivos, e conforme um gênero poético, neste caso, o didático. Observamos como que o ler de acordo com os preceitos retóricos que regularam o que nós hoje chamamos de produção literária podem iluminar os mecanismos através dos quais o texto se posiciona no gênero de poesia didática, e pelos quais o autor participa na intensa querela entre os estados nacionais recém-formados e a internacional e universalizante Companhia de Jesus

Palavras-chave: poesia didática; neo-latim; retórica; José Rodrigues de Melo; De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus

1. INTRODUCTION

Up until the 18th century, before the irresistible Romantic wave that completely changed the production and reading of poetry and created what we now call Literature, any form of literary production was bound by a rhetorical precept and a literary genre, to which it conformed and belonged. Far from the outcries for originality or rupture, the writing styles answered to different calls, proposed, discussed and established under the umbrella of Rhetorics and Poetics. In such an environment, an author who desired to be read and praised did well in meticulously studying the genre's predecessors, being updated in the recent discussions regarding *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio*, and developing a personal style within the frame of what was known. Undoubtedly, although this process might sound short of freedom and even probably unartistic to our 21st century ears, high levels of artistic expression and production happened under these constraints. The artistry was to show belonging but also surpassing - being like the model, but better than the model; using old words with new unpredictable meanings and contexts; establishing a personal style within a known style. Moreover, if the patterns were well determined, the subjects and the events were new, as times passed, and the authors strove to discuss their world's issues and their own aspirations by creating ever new variations on the models. That was just as true in the New World as it was in the Old one, and people who were born, lived and died in the Americas were part of a transatlantic dialogue that connected the European metropolises and the colonies on the other shore through webs of written text, produced in many genres and in many languages.

As 21st century readers, it is an imperative exercise to read those texts with the aid of the lenses they probably used themselves, or as close as we can get from them; that means using the tools of the Rhetorical and Poetic devices known to them, and not the ones that, having sprung up much later, have been superimposed on those productions, giving them tints of nationalism, Romanticism, nativism and other lines of thought that were alien to that reality. As an exercise in this form of criticism, we propose, in this paper, to look at a Latin didactic poem produced in the 18th century about the Portuguese colony in the Americas, by a subject of the Portuguese crown and a member of the Society of Jesus. By doing so, we hope to show how his poem is, at the same time, extremely conventional, if by that we understand a follower of models, and also extremely innovative, by adding to an Ancient form an incandescent political discussion of his own time.

1.1 The didactic poem *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus* as a Jesuitic book

José Rodrigues de Melo was born in Porto, Portugal, in 1723, and joined the Society of Jesus while still young. He lived in Brazil since, at least, 1739, and left the country against his will in 1760, together with the whole Society, when they were expelled from the lands under Portuguese dominion in 1759 (SOZIM e ZAN, 1997, p.15-16). In Rome, he published the didactic poem *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus* (henceforth *DRBR*) in 1781. The second edition, published in 1798, came accompanied by an older Jesuitic didactic poem, the *De Sacchari Opificio*, begun by Prudêncio do Amaral (1675-1715) and finished by Jerônimo Moniz, and had the addition of an opening poem dedicated to the poet's patron (FONDA, 1975, p. 110). The *DRBR* would still receive three further editions: one in 1830, published in Bahia, Brazil, with a translation into Portuguese by João Gualberto Ferreira dos Santos Reis, called *Brazilian Georgics*; another in 1941, in Rio de Janeiro by the Brazilian Academy of Letters, entitled *Brazilian Georgics: songs on the rustic matters of Brazil*; and, finally, in 1997, one published by Raul José Sozim and Sérgio Monteiro Zan, published by the State University of Ponta Grossa, called *Rural Themes of Brazil*. The latter, the only critical edition, is therefore the one followed in this paper.

Because of his Jesuitic career in the 18th century, Melo's religious, academic and literary education was grounded upon the *Ratio Studiorum*, a document published in 1599 that determined the curriculum of Jesuit education. The *Ratio* specified which disciplines should be studied (such as theology, philosophy and humanities), which texts would be read in those disciplines, the methods that the teachers should apply in their classes, and so forth. In the *Ratio*, orality has a prominent position in teaching, with the prescription of activities such as speeches, orations and debates between the students, therefore the knowledge of rhetoric was well esteemed (SANTOS SOBRINHO, 2013, p.70). The use of Latin was, save for exceptional circumstances, mandatory (Rat. Stud., 14.18), and the imitation of classical models both in oral and in written activities was one of the main exercises - mainly Cicero, but also Seneca, Caesar, Vergil, Ovid and others, some of them Christianized and purged of inconvenient passages (SANTOS SOBRINHO, 2013, p.78-79). Classical rhetoric, grounded primarily on the imitation of canonical authors, thus exerted a strong influence upon those educated under the Jesuit curriculum. Cicero was by far the most important source of rhetorical knowledge - including *Ad Herennium*, then held to be part of the ciceronian corpus -, for "In Cicero [...] rhetoric is not merely one of the arts embraced in a liberal education but the central art to which all others are ancillary" (SCHULER & FITCH, 1983, p.14). Cicero's authority is part of a

tradition that remained largely unshaken from Late Antiquity until the High Middle Ages (COX & WARD, 2006, p. 69).

The *Ratio* prescribes the minimum of two years of study of rhetoric, before which a student was not allowed to take higher studies such as philosophy (Rat. Stud., 1.18). In the inferior classes, rhetoric was at the beginning of every study session, and occasionally the students were encouraged to give speeches in Greek or Latin during dinner, following Ciceronian models (Rat. Stud., 2.11-12). Monthly, the students made declamations for the whole school, and no student could be absent from this event without previous authorization (Rat. Stud., 15.32). The role rhetoric played as a multi use tool is clearly expressed in the Rules for the Teacher of Rhetoric's *incipit*:

*Gradus huius scholae non facile certis quibusdam terminis definiri potest: ad perfectam enim eloquentiam informat, quae duas facultates maximas, oratoriam et poeticam comprehendit; (ex his autem duabus primae semper partes oratoriae tribuantur) nec utilitati solum servit, sed etiam ornatui indulget. Illud tamen in universum dici potest, tribus maxime rebus, praecipis dicendi, stylo, et eruditione contineri.*¹ (Rat. Stud. 16.1)

Insofar as rhetoric and imitation guide the entire process of public language inside the Jesuitic communities, such precepts also form a framework upon which the Jesuits could write texts beyond those dealt with by the curriculum, such as poetry. In a way, one could say that rhetoric took the role of practical literary theory in western high culture from Late Antiquity to the Enlightenment; *inventio*, *dispositio*, and above all else *elocutio* were held as integral parts not only of poetic and public uses of language, but of all other kinds of texts which we might or not today call literature - a distinction that, at the time, was simply not relevant (HANSEN, 2013, p. 31; LACHAT, 2019, p. 58). At the time, writing was not understood through the categorizing dichotomies of fiction/non-fiction and literature/non-literature. Writing practices, as a whole, included much that went beyond the modern concept of literariness, such as epistles, historiography, instructional texts, essays, philosophical dissertations, among others, unified by a web of rhetorical, cultural, theological and political theoretical contributions (HANSEN, 2006, p. 28). Texts governed by this system of representation were written with certain precepts in mind, and expected proper reading.

¹ "The scope of this discipline can't be easily defined in limited terms: it aims to develop perfect eloquence, which comprehends two main faculties: oratory and poetics (of these, the former has a prominent position). Not only does it have practical goals, but it also allows one to improve the ornament of speech. It can be said that this discipline concerns mainly three things: the art of rhetoric, style and erudition." All translations, unless otherwise noted, are our own.

In view of the indissolubility between rhetorical technique and public language production (HANSEN, 2013, p. 16), it is difficult to understand the mechanisms to which the Jesuitic didactic instructor resorts if we do not observe them as necessarily rhetoric, prescribed within the rules of the *ars bene dicendi* and having persuasion as its final objective. In particular, the poetical works from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance showed a tendency to approximate epideictic rhetoric and poetics, which culminated in the various theories found in the latter period that see poetry mainly as a means of praising or condemning men, ideas or subjects. This writing depends on a reader educated not only in technical matters, but also morally edified (TREVIZAM, 2014, p.16-17; VICKERS, 1983, p.509). Neo-Latin Jesuit writing also attributed great importance to the moral and, particularly, spiritual edification of the reader, which therefore meant that the didactic genre was ideal for these ends, and as a kind of “house special” (HASKELL, 2021, p. 240), very popular among Jesuit writers in the 18th century, such as Melo.

1.2 The didactic genre and rhetoric

Didactic poetry approaches rhetoric particularly through a characteristic often pointed to as being specific of the genre, i.e., the instructional voice. Ever since Servius, in his commentaries to the *Georgics*, raised the point that “*hi libri didascalici sunt, unde necesse est, ut ad aliquem scribantur; nam praeceptum et doctoris et discipuli personam requirit*”² (WONDRICH, 1997, p.22), the existence of a relationship between teacher and student is held to be one of the main characteristics of the genre. Katharina Volk (2002, p. 42-43) and Alexander Dalzell (1996, p. 7) point to the textual manifestation of these two functions as the first causes for a poem to be configured as didactic, given that such instruction from one who has more knowledge to one who has less will make it so that the poem follows certain organizational patterns, also common to non-poetic educational texts (DALZELL, 1996, p. 8-25). Other scholars, such as Peter Toohey (1996, p. 4), add to the genre’s definition its form, canonically the dactylic hexameter. Indeed, the most canonical works of didactic poetry, namely Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*, and Vergil’s *Georgics*, have both the correct meter, as well as the marked presence of an instructional voice and a stated addressee that plays the role of student. Vergil cites Maecenas as the poem’s recipient, Lucretius cites Memmius, and Hesiod, Perses. It is of little importance whether the historical

² These books are didascalical, whence it is necessary that they be written to someone; for a lesson requires the roles both of a master and of a student.

Maecenas would use Vergil's counsel regarding beekeeping, or whether Perses did indeed exist and did indeed have a lazy behavior, condemned by his wise brother; textually, these are constituted as the objects of the *caveat*, the imperatives and the advices given by the authors' voices which, similarly, are textually constituted as masters in the fields they teach. Maecenas and Perses fulfill the category of student, while the instructional voice fulfills the category of teacher.

Rhetorically, the instructional voice has a closeness to the concept of *ethos*, the conventionalized name of one of Aristotle's three modes of persuasion, defined by him as the act of seeking to present oneself as good and therefore reliable through one's own words (WISSE, 1986, p. 32). This particular framing reached Cicero through one of the numerous rhetorical manuals popular in Antiquity, and he expanded upon it:

To win a case, it's effective that approval be given to the character, habits, deeds and life, both of those who plead a case and of those in whose name the case is being pleaded, and that these characteristics be equally disapproved in the opponents; and that the minds of the public be won, as much as possible, towards feeling sympathy for the orator and for the person on whose behalf the orator speaks.³ (Cic. De or., 2.182)

Ethos, according to Cicero, is not concerned only with the orator's reliability, but also the public's sympathy (*benevolentia*) towards him and the one he defends. Thus, a skillful orator, by intelligently exposing his qualities and hiding his defects, creates an image of himself that causes the listener to trust him and to feel certain intended emotions. It should be noted that, in this passage and in the remainder of *De Oratore*, the word "*ethos*" does not appear, and in Aristotle's *Poetics*, ἦθος has nuances of meaning that differentiate it from the notion we designate here by *ethos* (WISSE, 1986, p. 30-31). As rhetorical tradition conceptualizes *ethos* from Cicero, and as we use the term in this paper, the concept refers to the proofs based on the character of the defendant, the accuser, the witnesses and the orator, whether explicit or implicit (HABINEK, 2005, p. 103). Likewise, Cicero regards soft emotions as having the potential of being associated not only to the orator himself, but also to his client and to the case (WISSE, 1986, p. 233): the orator should seek to present the case and the one he defends so as to arouse sympathy for them. This aspect of the concept is particularly useful for understanding why *ethos* was held to be a valuable tool in writing in the Early Modern period.

³ *Valet igitur multum ad vincendum probari mores et instituta et facta et vitam eorum, qui agent causas, et eorum, pro quibus, et item improbari adversariorum, animosque eorum, apud quos agetur, conciliari quam maxime ad benevolentiam, cum erga oratorem tum erga illum pro quo dicet orator*

Taking into account the above mentioned dominance of the epideictic, it is not hard to see how, for a rhetorical genre that deals with the praise or condemnation of individuals, objects and ideas, the manner in which such subject is presented with aims to arouse in the public a certain predisposition provides a strong basis upon which the poet can build his other arguments.

It should also be noted that, when taking Cicero's definition of *character* (De or., 2.182), a problem can be identified when one remembers that arousing emotions in the public, according to the aristotelian division, is the domain of *pathos*. Cicero, however, attributes to his concept part of that which Aristotle calls *pathos*, in this case, more subtle emotions such as the public's sympathy towards the orator or their disdain for his opponent. *Pathos*, for Cicero, denote only stronger and more vehement emotions, such as love, hate, fear, hope, joy, envy and pity (Cic. De or., 2.205-211). This persuasive mode is "*accomodatam ad eorum animos, apud quos dicimus, ad id quod volumus commovendos*"⁴ (Cic. De or., 2.114). The choice of words in this passage, with *commovendos* implying intensity in the change towards the intended emotions (TLL, 3, 1940, 76), creates a contrast with the *conciliari* found in 2.182, more subtle and with a less abrupt connotation. Moreover, it is important that the public "*sic moveatur, ut impetu quodam animi et perturbatione magis quam iudicio aut consilio regatur*"⁵ (Cic. De or., 2.128). Therefore, even though there is a link between *ethos* and *pathos*, there is no confusion between their spheres of influence, according to Cicero (WISSE, 1986, p. 237).

Finally, just as the category of instructor in didactic poetry is rhetorically constructed, being, therefore, a role of discursive nature and discursively represented, *ethos* altogether implies the performativity of verbal production, not necessarily matching the author's physical person (BARTHES, 1975, p.77). There may be similarities and even correspondences between the poem's performative *ethos* and the author as a historical individual, such as is the case in the *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus*, in which the instructional voice presents itself as a Jesuit, expelled from Brazil and living now in Italy, and such correspondences may yield productive studies. However, according to this particular analysis' perspective, directed at the rhetorical effects caused by the choices made in the writing process, we seek to observe how these and other specific representations of the instructional voice and of the poem's subject matter may contribute towards its textual/rhetoric, *i.e.*, persuasive purposes.

Placing himself in the tradition of didactic poetry, equipped with a hefty Jesuitic rhetorical toolbox, and not in disagreement with other authors in

⁴ "Appropriate to move the spirits of those to whom we speak towards that which we desire."

⁵ "Be moved in such a way that [they] be controlled by a certain impulse and perturbation of the spirit more than by ruled judgment."

the genre, José Rodrigues de Melo is very attentive to the perceptions that the public has of the rhetorical parts involved in the text, namely, he who speaks, he who listens, and that which is talked about. As we shall see from examples, the instructor is often characterized with persuasive aims in mind; the category of student, although not specified, is filled and qualified; and the subject choice links both functions to the poem's historical context.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1 Book openings

Traditionally, openings are one of the main moments in a text where the orator portrays himself in a favorable manner before his audience, that is, builds his *ethos* (Cic. De or., 2.184). According to Cicero, this is done with two purposes in mind: to demonstrate reliability, and to induce a favorable impression in the audience as to himself (*captatio benevolentiae*). Moreover, rhetorical practice accustomed authors to present the subject matter that would be dealt with in the text in the *proemium*, as in Vergil's *Georgics*:

*Quid faciat laetas segetes; quo sidere terram
Vertere, Maecenas, ulmisque adjungere vites
Conveniat; quae cura bovum, qui cultus habendo
Sit pecori, atque apibus quanta experientia parcis;
Hinc canere incipiam. [...]*⁶ (Verg. G. 1.1-5)

The first verse and its *enjambement* with the second one state the subject matter of the first book, agriculture; likewise, the second verse and its continuation in the first foot of the third one point to vines and arboriculture, subject matter of the second book; the third verse refer to the cattle, subject of the third book; and in the fourth verse the bees of the fourth book are alluded to, and the list is closed with the first direct presence of the instructional voice: *hinc canere incipiam*, "this I will begin to sing." The one who fulfills the role of student is invoked in the second verse with the vocative, establishing a relationship between the two characters already in the *proemium*. In *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus' proemium*, Melo also anticipates the subject matter of his first book, resorting to the vergilian formula:

*Brasiliae populis concessam munere Divom
radicem, unde suis victum providit alumnis*

⁶ "What makes the crops productive; under which stars / it is fitting to plough the earth, Maecenas, and to gather the vines to the elms; / what care should be given to oxen, what care to cattle, / and how much experience to the little bees; / this I will begin to sing."

*terra parens, canere incipiam; ignarosque misertus
agricolas, plantae primum qui cultus habendae
conveniat, tum quos radix adolescat in usus
dicam; [...]* (Melo De Rus., 1.1-6)

Vergilian echoes abound. Beyond the expositive structure, noticeable reappropriations are *qui cultus habendo* (Verg. G. 1.3) in *qui cultus habendae* (Melo De Rus., 1.4), as well as *terram* (Verg. G. 1.1) in *terra* (Melo De Rus., 1.1) and the semantic antonym of *experientia* (Verg. G. 1.4) in *ignarosque* (Melo De Rus., 1.3). The third verse's *canere incipiam* also inserts the instructional voice into the poem's opening through the use of the first person, but this teacher, differently from Vergil and because of him, presents himself as the Mantuan's heir, in every possible way pointing towards the one who served him as his primary model. Quickly the teacher adds to his association with Vergil a discordant mark in the second expositive verb, *dicam*. Instead of naming his Maecenas with a vocative (Verg. G., 1.2), Melo shows the poem's addressee, or, in this case, addressees, by describing them as *ignarosque misertus / agricolas*.

The beginning of *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus*' third book is also significant: "*Rursus, nescio qua ruris dulcedine captus / arva peto, agrestesue iterum tractare labores / accingor. Cererem tenui deduximus ante / carmine Brasilicam; nunc informare bubulcos / fert animus [...]*"⁸ (Melo De Rus., 3.1-5). Once again, the poem's instructional voice presents itself as someone who pities those who are more ignorant, driven to continue his work. His objective, therefore, is to *informare bubulcos*, being necessary to say: "*[...] quoniam optima bobus / pascua; bucolicis quae cura gerenda ministris, / et quae pascendi ratio; quae denique pestes / armentum infestent, et qua ratione domandae*"⁹ (Melo De Rus., 3.5-8). Here, it is not the peasants who are addressed, but the cowboys. However, the two are similar both in the category of general agents of rural practice and in the textual function of students seeking the wisdom of the poet.

These choices have effects that configure the character that the instructor will present throughout the work. First of all, he defines himself as a learned

⁷ "The root given to the peoples of Brazil by divine / grace, from which Mother Earth provides sustenance / to her nurslings, I will begin to sing. And pitying the miserable farmers, / I will tell you first what care should be taken / with the plant, and then for what uses the root / should be grown."

⁸ Once again, taken by an unknown rural pleasure, / I seek the fields, and am led once anew to describe / the rural labors. In a modest poem we previously described / the Brazilian Ceres; now, my spirit leads me to instruct / the cowboys.

⁹ Which fields are the best / for the oxen; which cares should be taken by the herd keepers, / and in what way to let the cattle graze; and also what pests afflict them, / and in what way they should be subdued.

man, possessing knowledge that farmers not only lack, but whose lack causes them suffering, since it is because of the pain of others that he suffers. These teachings, therefore, aim to remove the Brazilian peasant from this state of ignorance; they are the tool that will allow the ascension to a better way of life, but without which, not properly obeyed, the peasant shall remain in his unfortunate situation. Furthermore, Melo textually expands the poem's addressee from one individual to a class of individuals, which is unusual in didactic poetry. Using the third person, however, to refer to this addressee implies a separation. Maecenas, referred to in the second person, is the one to whom Vergil sings not only in the *proemium*, but in the whole poem. To be invoked by his own name places him in a relationship of respect with the voice that declaims. Melo's *ignaros agricolas* and *bubulcos*, on the other hand, are not the target of the poem's opening verses, even though they are the target of the advice, orders and words of caution the poet sings. The instructor speaks not so much to the students, but at them. All of this makes it so that the instructor's main characteristic is not that he teaches, but that he knows more, and teaches only because of this.

Vergil is not the only didactic authority alluded to in this *proemium*. Lucretius is hinted at momentarily in the first verse, in which "*divomque voluptas*" (Lucr. 1.1) is truncated in "*munere Divom*" (Melo De Rus., 1.1), that approaches not the abstract, as in the Lucretian concept of desire, but the concrete, just as the Brazilian root about which he will sing, equally a divine gift. In the following verses, Melo alludes to Hesiod:

[...] *atque Aonio peregrinas vertice Musas
mecum in Brasiliae saltus, atque horrida lustra
deducam. Faveas, sacri pars magna senatus,
Didyme; [...]*¹⁰ (Melo De Rus., 1.6-9)

Melo follows here Vergil's model in the opening of the *Georgics* third book: "*Primus ego in patriam mecum (modo vita supersit) / Aonio rediens deducam vertice Musas*" (Verg. G., 3.10-11). To the Greek Aonia, the Brazilian *horrida lustra* and *saltus* are considered an exotic other, just as the *Musae* are *peregrinae* for Brazil. Here, however, they are not the poet's source of knowledge, as they are in Hesiod (Hes. Op. 1.1-2). Who fulfills this role in Melo's work is Thomas the Apostle, to whom Melo attributes not only the feat of having traveled to India in his catechization efforts, but having gone far beyond Asia and circumnavigated the globe, arriving in Brazil (Melo De Rus., 1.9-16). He then taught the natives how to cultivate and use manioc, a root that, until

¹⁰ "And the foreign Muses I shall bring /with me from the Aonian peak to the jungles and wild caves/ of Brazil. Favor me, O Thomas, great member /of the sacred assembly."

then, had been ignored by the American cultures. From there, the Saint gave them agriculture and law, *annonam legesque* (Melo De Rus., 1.16), relics that should be praised by all those who cultivate the Brazilian countryside (Melo De Rus., 1.17). Just like Lucretius' Venus, although less emphatically, Thomas is indicated as the first source of the knowledge Melo seeks to transmit, and also as the divine figure to whom the book is dedicated.

The mix of Christian and Pagan elements is also significant, and in particular the predilection given to Thomas over the Muses. In the *proemium's* twenty verses, the poet clearly showed himself to be indebted to Vergil, Lucretius and Hesiod, both defining the textual lineage whose style he seeks to imitate and giving him the technical credentials of one who knows not only the technical matters he shall teach, but also the art displayed by the genre's *auctores*. The three dedicate their poems to pagan divinities, Hesiod to the Muses (Hes. Op. 1.1-10), Lucretius to Venus (Lucr. 1.1), and Vergil to a myriad of divine figures associated with the themes of each book (VASCONCELLOS, 2019, p.194, note 1): Liber and Ceres with agriculture (Verg. G., 1.7), fauns and dryads with the woods (Verg. G. 1.10-11), Pan and Neptune with pastoral work and horses (Verg. G. 1.14, Verg. G. 1.17), and Aristaeus, with bees (Verg. G. 1.14). Melo, thus, recognizes the pagan tradition of the canonical authors through the foreign Muses, especially in the second book's *proemium*, in which he invokes the Muses without mentioning Thomas: "[...] *Non molle neque ante / tritum, iter aggredimur; sed vestro, Heliconides, imus / numine: vos mollire viam atque aequare potestis.*"¹¹ (Melo De Rus., 2.3-5). Nonetheless, by dedicating the poem to Thomas the Apostle and praising him as the source of his knowledge, the instructional voice characterizes itself as fundamentally Christian, and conscious of the context in which it is.

Such are the effects of *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus' proemia* in the instructor's enunciative *ethos*: he is learned, well versed in Vergil, Hesiod and Lucretius, and catholic. All these facts build up from the Aristotelian and Ciceronian conceptions of *ethos*, whose main goals are the impression of reliability and the audience's sympathy (WISSE, 1989, p. 7). The importance of demarcating a level of knowledge of agriculture when one puts himself into the position of teacher is evident; to be familiar with the canon of the genre followed and to be capable of taking possession of its words and *topoi* in a meaningful way show that, on one hand, the instructor is well read, and, on the other, that the subject matter he deals with is time honored, reputable and trustworthy.

¹¹ The path we shall traverse is neither pleasant /nor already trodden; but still we travel, Heliconians,/ by your power: you can smooth and flatten the way"

2.2 Warnings

The interaction between the instructor or *magister* who holds knowledge and the student or *discipulus* who must give ear to them, in most of the work, happens through the insistence on the farmer's need to listen to the teachings and apply them correctly. In passages such as “*et tuta time*”¹² (Melo De Rus., 1.153), “*ne sero erroris, si forte incommoda prata / nactus eris, te paeniteat*”¹³ (Melo De Rus., 3.31-32) or “[...] *neque tum, quasi sunt tuta omnia, cessa. / Sed magis invigila, segetemque invise frequenter*”¹⁴ (Melo De Rus., 1.324-325), the care and even the fear that the farmer must have with rural matters are directly highlighted so that he does not suffer from bad results, whose best prevention is, invariably, to listen to the instructor to discover the correct course of action.

In the *Georgics* and in the *Works and Days*, work (commonly *labor* and ἔργον), is something that pervades the poems' matter, and, in both, it is characterized ambivalently. In *Works and Days*, Hesiod deals with work as something mostly negative, a divine punishment upon the men who, in the Golden Age, used to live in idleness without any struggle (Hes. Op. 90-93; 106-126; 175-178). Despite this, work is the main tool for having a fair and just life, as Hesiod counsels his brother, Perses, several times throughout the poem (Hes. Op. 293-319; 390-405; 825-828). The *Georgics*, in the same vein, show *labor*, at times, as something edifying, positive, and, at times, as something harsh and unpleasant, two descriptions that by no means are mutually exclusive. The Latin word itself, *labor*, admits this ambivalence, being used both negatively and positively in other Latin language authors (GALE, 2004, p.146). The word is held to be synonymous with *ardor*, *assiduitas*, *industria*, *continuatio* and *perseverantia*¹⁵ (TLL, 7,2,789), and Cicero associates it to *dolor*, pain (Cic. *Tusc.*, 2.35). The *Georgics* explore this double aspect of work to simultaneously deal with the farmer's endeavor and manual work as dignified and just, but also as harsh and with unpredictable results (Verg. G., 1.118-124; 1.145-146; 2.136-176).

Melo, in accordance with these traditions, characterizes work both positively and negatively, depending particularly on the argumentative purpose of the passages in which he resorts to the expression. Two main purposes can be ascertained: firstly, by valuing *labor* as something fundamentally good, he highlights the worthiness of the poem's subject matter, rural work, as

¹² Fear even what is safe

¹³ So that later you don't regret your error, if by chance /you come across inappropriate fields.

¹⁴ And then do not stop, as if everything were already safe. /But be ever more watchful, and visit the fields frequently.

¹⁵ Ardour, assiduity, industry, continuity, perseverance.

productive and edifying; then, by bringing up the negative aspects of work, such as its strainfulness and the unpredictability of results, he stresses the importance of his teachings, and how much the farmer should indeed pay heed to them. These functions often take place concurrently.

A first example of this occurs in the first stage of manioc cultivation, planting, with the farmer being alerted that: “*Scilicet umiferis quaecumque in vallibus orta est / (grandia ni iubeas in puluinaria terram / surgere) stagnantis lymphae confecta veneno / languescit seges [...]*”¹⁶ (Melo De Rus., 1.74-77). The lack of care in ignoring the step of planting manioc in small mounds of earth, expressed by the conditional in parentheses, causes the weakening and languid death of the plants by the poisonous stagnant water. Another clear case of these two functions occurs in: “*Unde stupet, gemmas neque trudit surculus; omnisque / in cassum it labor agricolae, spesque irrita cecidit*”¹⁷ (Melo De Rus., 1.253-254). In this passage, after the farmer prepares suitable land and plants the manioc, Melo advises that he should beware the dangers of torrential rain. Nature, passionless, will destroy the farmer’s hard work, all his efforts dying in vain, and his hope of a fruitful harvest fading away. When work is gone, hope is gone, one inextricably linked to the other.

And if the poet is dealing precisely with rural work, which has good results, as the subject of his poem, it is understood that the poem itself is consequently good because of its goals. An example of this happens in the third book, in which Melo describes the usage of a series of aqueducts, channels and dams to drain the waters of swamplands that cause suffering and even death both to oxen and to men because of the frequent floods. The instructor emphasizes the power of arduous *labor* in making human life less arduous:

*Talibus auxiliis, humili tellure sedentes,
exactae penitus lymphae, penitusque paludes
siccatae: visique novi se ostendere campi
pascuaque armentis; en ut se mollibus herbis
vestit humus, quae nuper aqua cessabat inert!*
*Quam felix! quam pingue solum! quam graminis uber!*¹⁸ (Melo De Rus., 3.160-167)

The verses that begin this section on field drainage stand out, anticipating how important such work is and how good the results of the undertaking will

¹⁶ It is known that whatever crops have been born /in moist vales perish if you do not order that the earth/ be raised in large mounds, destroyed by the poison /of stagnant water.

¹⁷ Whence the small twig stops and does not grow buds; and the farmer’s /work becomes vain, and hope, frustrated, dies off.

¹⁸ With such aids, the waters settled on the low land /were completely driven out, and the swamps completely/ dried up: new open fields and pastures were revealed/ to the herds. Look at it covering itself with herbs, /the earth which, a little while ago, was sluggish in inert water!/ How happy, how fertile the soil, how rich with grass!

be, however arduous: “*Res ea difficilis quamvis sit et ardua factu, / tu tamen hanc Spartam tenta; labor omnia vincit.*”¹⁹ (Melo De Rus., 3.114-115). Vergil’s famous quotation is repurposed by Melo in a similar context, but with the omission of an important term, *improbis*: [...] *omnia labor vincit / improbus, et duris urgens in rebus egestas*”²⁰ (Verg. G., 1. 145-146). This word, with a predominantly negative meaning, causes strangeness in the Vergilian passage, which seems to positively value human effort, emphasizing its importance in overcoming the adversities of the Iron Age, and this was already noted by commentators of antiquity, such as Servius (VASCONCELLOS, 2019, p.77). This passage’s ambivalence underlines the ambivalence found in *labor* itself both in the *Georgics* and in *De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus*, characterized as dangerous and toilsome, but still a source of hope.

How to be successful, then, if only the effort of the work is not enough to guarantee the desired results? Once again, listening to the instructor’s advice: “*Omnia consilio molire, nec inserte ramos / quoslibet, ac sine delectu; in primisque monendus / es mihi, quicumque Australis rura excolis orae*”²¹ (Melo De Rus., 1.255-257). The farmer is warned to plant manioc only at the right time, to weed the fields and to dig furrows around the earth mounds so that the rainwater runs off unobstructed.

The relationship established in the first and third books’ *proemia* are restated and developed in other cautionary passages. The poet is as learned as the farmer is inexperienced, as expressed, for example, in the passage on the correct way of felling trees:

*Arbor inexpertum saepe insidiosa fefellit
agricolam, atque alio, quam quo gemebunda tremensque
vertice concusso promiserat ante, repente
corrui, incautumque immani pondere pressit.
Cessat opus; subito turbantur gaudia luctu;
nec laetis iam silva fremit clamoribus, alto
sed percussa gemit fletu, miseroque ululato.
Quare age, [...],*²² (Melo De Rus., 1.103-109)

¹⁹ Although the task is difficult and arduous to perform, /yet strive against this Sparta; labor conquers all.

²⁰ Wicked labor conquers all, even cruel necessity.

²¹ Undertake everything with a plan, and don’t plant the branches / in whatever manner, and with no discretion; before anything else, you have to be counseled / by me, whoever you are, who cultivates the fields of the Austral beaches.

²² Often has the insidious falling tree tricked the inexperienced / farmer, moaning and quivering, with its shaking treetop, /towards a place different from where it before forebode, / suddenly smashing the incautious farmer with its enormous weight. /The work stops; suddenly the joys are disturbed by grief; /and the forest doesn’t murmur anymore with happy clamor, / but moans, hurt by a loud wailing, and by a wretched howling. /Therefore act! [...]

As constitutive elements of this warning passage, the farmer is called *inexpertum* and *incautum*, that is, without previous experience or knowledge of felling trees and, therefore, he does not take due care; the following verse begins with a sudden “*Quare age*”, followed by instructions on the correct way to strike logs with an axe. This expression is common in DRBR, being also found in 4.109-113 and 4.30-33, for example, always being inserted after a mention of how dangerous, difficult or useless the work can be, and always immediately before technical instructions on how to act correctly. In this particular case, the shocking value of the figure of the crushed worker also acts as a variation on the more technical teachings addressed in the preceding verses, in addition to showing a clear example of *pathos* by appealing to the fear of the student who, taken by it, would be more susceptible to believe in the importance of what is taught.

Fear is one of the main vehement emotions that Cicero considers useful to arouse in an audience for specific purposes of persuasion, along with others such as love, hate and envy. Fear, he says, is caused by the danger faced either by an individual or by a group of people, the former being more profound and effective than the latter (Cic. *De or.*, 2.209). The emotion felt by an individual is more potent because, as Cicero also points out when dealing with compassion, it is desirable to make the audience able to put itself in the place of the one being talked about, of the one whose tragedy is brought by the speaker as an exemplum (Cic. *De or.*, 2.211). The proximity between fear and compassion is noted by Cicero, as both emotions can be easily aroused from the same example. For instance, in the case of the inexperienced woodcutter, the emotional effect on the student is both that of feeling sorry for and seeing himself in the place of the victim, who is easily perceived as similar to himself because of the repetition of the designation *agricola*, and that of fearing the idea of becoming that crushed woodsman in whose situation he is led to imagine himself.

2.3 The instructor on himself

In the last seventy verses of the second book, Melo narrates an episode in which, affected by a strong fever from an unknown disease, he experienced a firsthand discovery of the medicinal power of manioc. He highlights the personal character of this evidence at the beginning of the passage, right after informing about these uses of manioc in his usual didactic language: “*Sensi egomet, gummi quid praesentissima posset. / Quidque opis afferret vitiatis optima*

*fibris*²³ (Melo De Rus., 2.443-444). This strong mark of the instructor in the poem is intended to support his knowledge in his own experience, which is not uncommon in the didactic tradition. In the *Georgics*, for example, the use of verbs with a connotation of direct experience, such as *vidi*, arouses in the audience the impression that the speaker first saw what he was talking about, not because he had read or studied it, but through real contact, even if it was in the past (TREVIZAM, 2014, p.69). Nor is this rhetorical mechanism strange to Melo, since, in the first book of *DRBR*, he uses it in: “*Unde videns nemus annosum, mihi cernere magni / navigii speciem videor; funesque rudentesque / hinc atque hinc tensos [...]*”²⁴ (Melo, De Rus., 1.135-136). Here, there is a repetition of terms related to vision (*videns, cernere, videor*) that imply, on the one hand, the factual presence of the instructor in the forest, and, on the other hand, the visual/empirical impression he had at the time, as if doubly proving the fact.

Placing the illustrative panel in the city of Rio de Janeiro, describing its peculiar landscape, with its bay surrounded by mountains and the Sugarloaf Mountain (Melo De Rus., 2451), Melo indicates the position of an *aedes* (temple) on top of the hills. He refers to the Jesuit college founded in Morro do Castelo during the administration of Mem de Sá, which was destroyed in 1922 with urban reforms in the city. In Morro do Castelo, Melo dedicated himself to the studies of philosophy when he fell ill, with no known medicine helping him (Melo De Rus., 2. 457-465). He was taken to a place by the sea, where an *expertus* prepared manioc porridge with eggs and sugar cane flowers, the consumption of which quickly improved his condition. The adjective by which the doctor is described reaffirms the importance of the lived experience that the instructor now also acquired, counterbalancing the previous mention of his studies as a young man with the wisdom that he accumulated step by step while living in Brazil.

This place, as Melo says, was often visited by his colleagues, whom he calls “*Ignatiadae iuvenes*” (Melo De Rus., 2.468), the Ignatian youth. This is the second incidence of a direct mention to the members of the Society of Jesus and to Melo’s status as one such member in the second book. The first occurs when, after describing the first cares one should take with the manioc which is to be refined into other products, the instructor extolls the root’s various uses, mentioning how fortunate his companions and the other Italians would be if they knew it: “*Vos autem, o socii, communi turbine mecum / abrepti, ac dominam tam longa per aequora in urbem / advecti, peregrina premunt quos*

²³ I myself felt how effective this most useful porridge was, /and how much help it brought to the sick fibers.

²⁴ Whence I, seeing an ancient forest, seemed to discern /an image of a large ship, /and here and there the ropes and tense moorings.

sidera [...]”²⁵ (Melo De Rus., 2.163-165). The mention of exile is striking, but it is also the theme of the fourth’s book closing verses (Melo De Rus., 4.490-536). Contrasting the majesty of Rome with the Brazilian country and fauna, the poet affirms that, despite Italy’s beauties and the privilege of living in the same city as the *pontifex maximus*, then the pope Clemens XIII (who defended the Company of Jesus in the bull *Apostolicum pascendi*), he is still fond of his memories of Brazil, and still misses it.

The instructor’s characterization as an exiled Jesuit who misses Brazil and Portugal could be seen as merely tangential to his presentation as wise and experienced, but these two aspects are intrinsically linked. By highlighting his experience living in Brazil, both having observed and studied how rural work and having had direct contact with the products created from manioc and tobacco, Melo provides the second basis for the legitimacy of his instructional voice, supported, on one hand, on the theoretical/poetic knowledge of Vergil and Hesiod, and, on the other hand, on his own memories and testimony.

Inversely, the poem’s exilic character evokes other considerations on its nature. Frequently, classical exilic texts, such as Ovid’s *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and Seneca’s *De Consolatione ad Marciam*, *De Consolatione ad Polybium* and *De Consolatione ad Helviam*, are pervaded by the author’s wish to return to his homeland; that, however, comes into conflict with the fact that, in Imperial Rome, they had to argue in favor of their return without implying that the *princeps* had committed a mistake in judgment by punishing them (GAERTNER, 2007, p. 16-17). Ovid, for instance, creates a highly ambivalent discourse between imperial *ira* and *clementia*, while Seneca hides his complaints in his mother’s lamentations, and frequently uses apostrophe, saying through the speech of others that which it is not lawful for him to say (GAERTNER, 2007, p.17). In Rome, surrounded by Jesuits and being read by Jesuits, it would be hard to argue that Melo feared censorship for complaining about his exile; however, the facet of argumentation present in exilic poetry is very relevant. Ovid and Seneca argued for their return more or less covertly, often through lamentations highly efficient in moving the reader’s mind so as to pity and feel mercy for the exiled, a well-established domain within *pathos*.

In the abovementioned passage, in which Melo presents himself for the first time as an exile (*abreptus*), how Brazil may provide good things for the Old World, in this case, manioc’s numerous nutritive and medicinal properties is the highlighted element, and, especially, how the Jesuits are related to this knowledge. The poem’s longest illustrative panel occurs in the second book,

²⁵ You, o partners, taken with me in mutual turmoil,/ and brought by so large seas to the sovereign city,/ you whom the foreign stars oppress [...]

in which Melo narrates a demonic orgy held by the natives (Melo De Rus., 2. 248-382), in which he underlines the destructive power of the alcoholic drinks that can be distilled from manioc root. In the end, he indicates the miserable state in which the natives live because of their supposed tendency to alcoholism: “*Stramineas habitant casulas: hic pensilis exstat, / vili ex gossipio textum miserabile, lectus*”²⁶ (Melo De Rus., 2. 376-377). They own no ornate furniture or complex tools, and make use of nothing more than a rudimentary gourd to eat and drink. Beyond the many mythical references and grotesque figures found in the orgiastic description, Melo deals with the etiquette of eating manioc meal in detail (Melo De Rus., 2. 213-247), and immediately after finishing the tale of the orgy, he begins the passage on the medicinal properties of manioc. It all culminates in the episode about his experience with the root in the Jesuit college found in the book’s closure. The *dispositio* of the passages is noteworthy, as they happen in the work’s midpoint, in the second book, and at the very end: Melo argues against the expulsion of the Jesuits and their consequent exile through lamentations of suffering and longing for the land that welcomed him as a young man, and through subtle displays of Brazilian savagery and disorder as alien to the Jesuit civilizing project, and, in fact, as exactly that which they sought to modify.

3. CLOSING REMARKS

De Rusticis Brasiliae Rebus, in accordance with all productions from the Neo-Latin period, was written with poetical, rhetorical and political principles in mind, which should guide the poem’s reading. The category of instructor, held by some scholars as essential to the inclusion of a poem in the didactic genre, can be adequately understood when we pay attention to its characterization as properly rhetoric, therefore aiming to persuade. This persuasion, as we argued, consists in the participation of Melo’s work in the most relevant political quarrel for the Jesuit authors in the latter half of the 18th century: the conflicts between the centralizing national powers and the Society of Jesus, which culminated in the expulsion of its members from most of the lands on which they operated.

We have observed that the composition of the instructional voice occurs primarily through the establishment of the instructor as participating in a bigger lineage of didactic poets; the definition of the origin of his knowledge; the characterisation of the student as less learned; the insistence upon the dangers that may befall the student in case he does not give heed to the

²⁶ They live in straw huts; here, hanging from the ceiling /there is a bed, a miserable textile made of vile cotton

poet's advice; and the exposition of the poet's direct experience as a Jesuit in Brazil. These elements do not go farther than the limits of the genre, finding precedent in the canonical works, and contribute as arguments that at once defend the Jesuit civilizing project in Brazil and consolidate the instructors' reliability.

CITED WORKS

- BARTHES, Roland. A retórica antiga. In: COHEN, Jean et al. *Pesquisas de retórica*. Transl. Leda Pinto Mafra Iruzun. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1975. p. 147-232.
- COX, Virginia; WARD, John O. *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval And Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*. Leiden: Brill, 2006
- DALZELL, Alexander. *The Criticism of Didactic Poetry: Essays on Lucretius, Virgil, and Ovid*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996.
- FOWLER, Alastair. *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.
- GALE, Monica R. *Virgil on the Nature of Things: The Georgics, Lucretius and the Didactic Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004.
- GAERTNER, Jan Felix. *Writing Exile: The Discourse of Displacement in Greco-Roman Antiquity and Beyond*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007.
- HABINEK, Thomas. *Ancient rhetoric and oratory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.
- HANSEN, João Adolfo. Barroco, Neobarroco e Outras Ruínas. *Teresa*, n. 2, 2006, p. 10-67
- HANSEN, João Adolfo. Instituição retórica, técnica retórica, discurso. *Matraga*, v. 20, n. 33, 2013. Available in: <https://www.e-publicacoes.uerj.br/index.php/matraga/article/view/19759/14255>.
- HASKELL, Yasmin. Latin didactic poetry under the shadow of jesuit suppression In: MARKEVICIUTE, Ramuné; ROLING, Bernd. *Die Poesie der Dinge: Ziele und Strategien der Wissensvermittlung im lateinischen Lehrgedicht der Frühen Neuzeit*. De Gruyter: 2021.
- LACHAT, Marcelo. Letras e literatura: continuidades e descontinuidades. *Revista USP*, São Paulo, n. 121, p. 45-60, abril/maio/junho 2019.
- MELO, José Rodrigues de; AMARAL, Prudêncio do. *Temas Rurais do Brasil*. Transl. by Raul José Sozim and Sérgio Monteiro Zan. Ponta Grossa: UEPG, 1997.
- RATIO ATQUE INSTITUTIO SOCIETATIS IESU. Neapoli: Typ. Tarquinii Longi, MDXCVIII
- SANTOS SOBRINHO, José Amarante. *Dois tempos da cultura escrita em Latim no Brasil: tempo da conservação e tempo da produção*. Discursos, práticas, representações, propostas metodológicas. Tese (Doutorado) – Universidade Federal da Bahia, Salvador, 2013. p.62-89
- SCHULER, Robert M.; FITCH, John G. Theory and Context of the Didactic Poem: Some Classical, Mediaeval and Later Continuities. *Florilegium*, Toronto, v. 5, p. 1-43, 1983.
- SZILÁGYI, Laura Menta. Some Notes on the Literature on Ancient Didactic Poetry. *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis*, Debrecen, v. 55, p. 261-280, 2019.
- TREVIZAM, Matheus. *Poesia didática*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2014.
- THESAURUS LINGVAE LATINAE. 1900-. Berlim: De Gruyter. Available in: <https://publikationen.badw.de/en/thesaurus/lemmata#54197>.
- TOOHEY, Peter. *Epic Lessons: An Introduction to Ancient Didactic Poetry*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

- VASCONCELLOS, Paulo Sérgio de. *Épica 1: Ênio e Virgílio*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2014.
- VERGÍLIO. *Geórgicas*. Cotia: Ateliê Editorial, 2019. Org.: Paulo Sérgio de Vasconcellos. Translation by: Manuel Odorico Mendes.
- VICKERS, Brian. Epideictic and Epic in the Renaissance. *Renaissance Literature and Contemporary Theory*, vol. 13, n. 3, 1983, p. 497-537
- VOLK, Katharina. *The Poetics of Latin Didactic: Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2002.
- WARD, John O. The Development of Medieval Rhetoric. In: MACDONALD, Michael J. (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook to Rhetorical Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2017. p.315-328.
- WISSE, Jakob. *Ethos and Pathos from Aristotle to Cicero*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1989.
- WONDRICH, F. David. *On the Borders of Poetry: Genre and the European Didactic Poem From Antiquity to the Renaissance*. 1997. Dissertação (Doctorate in Comparative Literature) - Department of Comparative Literature - University of New York, New York, 1997.

Recebido: 4/7/2023

Aceito: 18/1/2023

Publicado: 26/1/2024