

## ICTs as a methodological resource in works on critical regionalism.

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### ABSTRACT

*Justino, o retirante (Justino, the retreator)*, Odete de Barros Mott's book, is a work which is close to the characteristics of critical regionalism, a movement which represented the general and specific problems of certain Brazilian regions. The regional picture in this literature was made through the reflection surrounding essential social problems, destined to provoking consciousness by means of denounce and presenting as a target, in this sense, the contribution in the search of a solution for this problem. The scenery which is presented is composed by the road, an environment which assumes fundamental importance. Justino places himself in face of the arid and remote inland, the one of the drought, the privation of resources that geography and meteorology cause to such lands, determining the posture of most of the people who inhabit them. This land imposes the ideas of immigration and road. The same land causes starvation and uneasiness and it is responsible, yet, for the most degrading condition of the characters. It zoomorphizes them and compares them to nature and to animals. What is presented, then, is a dense narrative with complex and reflective content. From this statement, the idea is how to work with such literary piece concerning Brazilian middle-class teenagers, mainly the ones who inhabit large urban centers, living such different realities compared to the one found in *Justino, the retreator*? Facing this reality, this paper present a proposal of an interdisciplinary activity in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of Elementary School, provided with Information and Communication Technologies, making use of media present in the students' daily lives, searching for inter-relations among the several subjects in their timetable.

**Keywords:** Information and Communication Technologies; media; literary piece.

Graciliano Ramos, José Lins do Rego, Jorge Amado, José Américo de Almeida, Raquel de Queirós and Érico Veríssimo are considered the founding fathers of critical regionalism, a movement which represented the general and specific problems of certain Brazilian regions. Odete de Barros Mott's book – *Justino, o retirante (Justino, the retreator)* – is a work which is close to the characteristics of such aesthetic literature.

The regional picture in this literature was not made by means of the pictoric or the folkloric, but through the reflection surrounding essential social problems, destined to provoking consciousness by means of denounce and presenting as a target, in this sense, the contribution in the search of a solution for this problem:

These writers continue to be classified as regionalists. IN reality they redefined the traditional regionalist novel, with an updated artistic language. We did not have, in the 30's, a regionalism in the sense of giving emphasis to the regional picturesque or to particular situations of each place. Even though the stories were placed in a determined region, they could be extended to the whole country. The critical view which is predominant in such productions points to the social character, representing Brazilian problems and not specific problems of a certain region. It is, so, a literature which means to represent reality in a realistic way, but with a very sharp critical sense, aiming to transform it in its social structures. [1]

Mott's book is classified, or at least is largely adopted, as literature for children and youths, already presenting, in its title an immense range of meanings. The character's name is the first piece of information. It is presented without the usage of the article "*the*", what means that in a first look, it does not put the reader in a very close or familiar position to the protagonist. This means that the name is a clue for his personality. *Justino* is a suffix derivation from "*just*", which in its turn, as an adjective, brings in it the quality of integrity, impartiality, exactness, legitimacy, according to justice and reason.

In the condition of an adverb, its meaning could be defined as: exactly, precisely. However, it is the condition implicit in the noun which mainly interests us. In this case, the one of the virtuous man.

Immediately after the comma, we have from the Greek *epithetos* (qualification, nickname, a word which qualifies the noun), the epithet *the retreater* (here, the noun "*retreater*" is used in the sense of referring to one who migrates from the drought region of northeastern Brazil, as in the Portuguese word "*retirante*"). By these means, Justino is qualified, and even more, with the usage of the definite article, a specifying factor, which puts himself in a delimited position which qualifies and emphasizes his position as an immigrant and among immigrants.

Justino's story is narrated from his twelfth year of life, with the death of his father, followed by the death of his mother, and the boy being invited by his boss to abandon the simple house in which He lived, on the arid northeastern soil, once the land would then be destined to cattle breeding. Having to decide between his godfather and the Road, Justino chooses the second, and from the end of the second to the fifth chapters, the boy starts his life as a retreater until he gets to Croibero.

The scenery which is presented between this excerpt and the purpose of this paper is exactly in the idea of space, once it is composed by the road, an environment which assumes fundamental importance. Justino places himself in face of the arid and remote inland, the one of the drought, the privation of resources that geography and meteorology cause to such lands, determining the posture of most of the people who inhabit them.

Still in the first chapter, the third-person narrator, which keeps itself outside the facts, dominates all the external episodes, as well as the inner self of the characters, it reveals all the nuances of the facts and tells us the story without any presentation under its position as a narrator, already making reference to the battle imposed by the land and the weather: "The sun shot its rays, in a violent manner. It was a battle to be won against the land, against the man, against the green" [2].

It is this land, which imposes the ideas of immigration and road, showing it is not affable: "The way gets longer because there is no scenery variation. There's the

impression that they are always going through the same place" [3] and "The walk under intense Sun. The road ends in a narrow street, with simple, poor houses, that to the boy's eyes look beautiful and rich. He had only seen one like those or better, the manor house in the farm" [4].

The same land causes starvation and uneasiness: "One morning, one of the men found an armadillo, [...] But the food, getting to the empty stomachs, gives violent contractions, and they feel worse than before. A weakness that lets their legs loose and feeble" [5].

The land is responsible, yet, for the most degrading condition of the characters. It zoomorphizes them and, in a first view, compares them to nature: "There are four women, six men, two dozen children or more, all of them younger than him, frail, the clothes in rags. To the boy, they seemed to be the continuation of that region covered with brushwood (in Portuguese, "*caatinga*"), the red land [...] The land itself" [6].

The land, then, compares the characters to animals:

Only hunger was known, constant and permanent. It was then, with immense happiness that the small group saw the camp and anchored there. At least for three days they would live like humans, not animals. [...] Justino stretches his glance, accompanying the group which heads to the camp. He remembers the cattle his godfather drove in the afternoon, out the camp, until they headed to the corral. [7]

It is manifest that other characteristics are imposed by the land, three, to be precise – immigration, hunger and zoomorphization – which all together perform a rude track.

The land is adverse to men, it is his enemy in the daily fight, and, the Road, it becomes longer and always the same for the absence of scenery. In it, the Sun strikes the skin and the simple poor residences that are only pretty to the eyes of the innocent boy who has not seen much of anything.

From the brutality of the land grows hunger. The absence of variations progressively brings heat, hunger, thirst and tiredness. The food, so rare, must be appreciated with caution, once, antithetically, its usual absence provokes uneasiness and weakness to the ones that are no longer accustomed to its ingestion.

But the land is imperative, and in such condition, zoomorphizes the human being, that is, it offers him the rough climate, the violently analogous scenery, the malnutrition and, thus, concludes its authority taking from them the human quality, life, transforming them sometimes into inanimate beings, sometimes into irrational, abstract ones.

The land is, with its brutality, responsible for the metamorphosis of the beings who were born under the human condition, but who start losing it along their scarce life, to be equaled to the very drooping land which they inhabit. They are, so, just two facets of the same crude existence: the “very land”.

Odette de Barros Mott, through Justino, the retreater, comes into terms with innumerable social problems seen in Brazil. From the northeastern region, with the drought, she presents to the reader a problematic which gets developed under the aegis of Justino’s will of outmatching, which comes to a totally unequal ending from the one suggested by the title of the book, once he starts as a retreater, but ends as a gymnasium spokesperson. The boy manages to get rid of the drought, the latifundium owner force and the hunger and finds in his path friendship, solidarity and even love.

One of the remarkable factors in the triumph of the virtuous man is in the hope that is entwined to faith, so much rooted in that region, as observed in the following excerpts: “Yes, for nine days, mister guitar player, that the saint deserves our esteem. He’s the devotion saint of the place” [8]; “Each one, there, the blind and the retreater, immersed in their own thoughts, and joining them, the idea of a priest operating miracles. Blinds seeing the sun light, paralyzed not dragging along the roads. And the biggest miracle, stupenduous one, well-fed bellies” [9] and “He opens the oratory, removes the images and gives a place of honor to the Saint. Justino remembers his mother praying at dawn, the farm bell tinkling Hail-Mary... the father driving the cattle” [10].

Amid the misfortune provided by the land, there’s still hope, the one which is taken from religious forms, always superior to their eternal mendicants: Justino wins, becomes strong, assured and represents the voice of a whole people in search for justice.

What is presented, then, is a dense narrative with complex and reflective content. From this statement, the idea is how to work with such literary piece concerning Brazilian middle-class teenagers, mainly the ones who inhabit large urban centers, living such different realities compared to the one found in *Justino, the retreater*?

An interdisciplinary activity in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of Elementary School, for example, provided with Information and communication technologies, could bring good results when making use of media present in the students' daily lives, searching for inter-relations among the several subjects in their timetable.

Even though in the present Brazilian educational context, including the one involving private schools, many teachers are still unprepared to develop activities with ICTs, there are some very easy resources that could bring truly motivating and meaningful proposals for the students.

Considering the book *Justino, the retreater*, the activity proposal to be presented would start with activities which the geography teacher would provide in the school media lab. The first goal presented for the students would be searching the internet for information on retreaters in Brazil. Besides teaching how to lead good research on the web, not clicking on the first example of the first site that shows – a very common attitude among students – they would research about the historical, economic and social context of this part of the population, also mapping the poorest regions in the country.

In a second moment, the Arts teacher would ask the students to take pictures that could document poverty in the city they inhabit, so that they could make a comparison with the difficult life conditions led by retreaters and people who live in the streets, besides informing that such pictures would be used, in the future, in a hypermediatic presentation. The Arts teacher would also ask the students to select internet pictures that portrayed the every day activities in the life of retreaters.

To close the activity proposal, the Portuguese Language teacher, still using the school lab, would ask the students to prepare a hypermediatic presentation on Brazilian citizens who live in precarious conditions, such as Justino, the retreater, and also as the people who live in the streets of their city. BY means of this virtual proposal, the students would exercise their verbal, visual and sound abilities and competences, a fundamental activity in the educational context which receives young people who are more and more connected to the online universe:

The activity of text production in the computer can take into consideration all the interaction possibilities with images and symbols, getting into a new creation universe, structuring the appearance of new genders related to interactiveness. [...] The text is put into motion, involved in in a vectorized, metamorphic flow. [11]

It is really important to point out, however, that the activity proposal in the lab is only effective if there is a pre-determined didactic sequence with concrete objectives. The mere usage of the lab would not guarantee total success for the project, once teaching is not only made by means of technological instruments, even if nowadays it is impossible to deny that they are extremely relevant tools for the teaching-learning process of young people who inhabit a changing world, which is each day more and more computerized, kinteractive, mediatic and virtual.

Freire [12], years ago, viewing the characteristic of education in Brazil, already mentioned: “I don't doubt the enormous potential of the stimuli and challenges to curiosity that technology will put into service of children and teenagers.”

This is not the kind of individual apprenticeship which concentrates exclusively on the free surfing on sites and on the collection of information from the internet – while the texts are being produced there are exchanges between teacher and students and amongst students. Besides that, once the productions are posted on the internet, the proposal acquires even more relevance, considering that the students would abandon the old idea that their texts would only be read by their teacher:

In the school situation there are very rigid and well defined relations. The students are forced to write into previously given standards and, besides that, have their texts judged, evaluated. The teacher, to whom the text is submitted is the main – perhaps the only – reader of such text. Aware of that, the students would write things that they believe the teacher would like (and, consequently, give a good grade). More precisely, they would write their texts based on the image of the teacher's taste and language view. [13]

The texts would, then, cease to be done only meaning to guarantee a grade, starting to take a more public character. Other students would be able to see what they created. The responsibility on the writing act increases, as well as it enhances the teacher's responsibility, once he/she has to tutor all the text production phases.

Thus, it is possible to notice that even though machines bring a freer learning atmosphere, in which the individual learning rhythm is more respected, the role of the teacher as a mediator, as a guide, continues to be fundamental. The teacher must create work guides, containing rules, schedules, explanations and directions for the proposal. Besides, the evaluation criteria of what is to be produced must also be previously created and exposed to the students. Only from a solid and well organized proposal an activity with ICTs in the classroom can be well succeeded.

To sum up, it is fundamental to notice that by means of the ICTs the initial objective that was creating reflections on the essential social problems and provoking consciousness on the denounce of a difficult life reality is achieved and it is impossible to deny that the usage of virtual language makes a great motivational difference in the teaching-learning process of the people involved in the project.

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