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Memory storytelling: structural aspects in *O drible*

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Abstract

This work uses the stream of consciousness of narrators Murilo Neto and Murilo Filho, son and father, from *O drible* (2013), a novel written by Sérgio Rodrigues, in order to highlight the importance of storytelling in this text. The context of national soccer after the 1950s is the scenario where particular issues of the characters are addressed, as if they were in the middle of a match of this sport. The use of this collective game shows itself to be an opportunity to bring to light human dilemmas and feelings. There is also the use of a variety of truthful elements concerning the history of soccer allied to free literary creation, alternating aspects of reality and fiction. The narrative mirror in abyss makes explicit the degrees of similitude transposed to the sphere of orality. Faced with the concept of reminiscent memory, telling establishes parallels that provide a comparison with the tradition of African storytellers, more specifically from Angola, for the denomination of characteristic types of telling. Theoretical texts by Walter Benjamin (2012), referring to the figure of the narrator; Lucien Dallenbach (1977), referring to the concept of *mise en abyme*; Jeane Marie Gagnebin (2006), on the study of memory and Harry Garuba (2012), referring to the concept of animist realism, will be used as references. It is noticeable that in the narrative of *O drible* storyteller and text are hybrids, because both are endowed with *makas* and *missossos* that become a narrative voice, leading the reader through reminiscence, since rescue and revenge are the objectives sought by the characters.

Keywords:

O drible,
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 memory,
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 human dilemma.

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Hatıra Anlatıcılığı: *O drible*'de Yapısal Yönler

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Bu makale, hikâye anlatıcılığının önemini vurgulamak üzere Sérgio Rodrigues'in *O drible* (2013) eserinin anlatıcıları baba ve oğul Murilo Neto ile Murilo Filho'nun bilinç akışını ele almaktadır. 1950ler sonrası futbol bağlamı; karakterlerin özel sorunlarının, adeta bir futbol maçının tam ortasındaymışlar gibi ele alındığı senaryoyu oluşturur. Bu kolektif oyunu kullanmak, insanı ikilemleri ve duyguları gün yüzüne çıkarma fırsatı sunmaktadır. Aynı zamanda, hakikat ve kurguyu çarptan özgür edebi üretenkenlikle bağlantılı futbol tarihi ile ilgili hayatın gerçekliğiyle uyuşan çeşitli öğelerin kullanımını da mevcuttur. Olay içinde olay şeklindeki anlatı, söz katmanına aktarılan teşbihleri açıklığa kavuşturur. Hatırlatıcı bellek kavramıyla karşı karşıya kalan anlatıcılık, hikâye anlatıcılığının ana niteliklerinin adlandırılmasında özellikle Angolalı olanlar başta olmak üzere Afrikalı hikâye anlatıcılığı geleneğiyle karşılaşılmalıdır yapmayı sağlayan koşutluklar kurar. Anlatımcının şahsına atıfta bulunan Walter Benjamin'in (2012), olay içinde olay kavramına atıfta bulunan Lucien Dallenbach'in (1977), bellek üzerinde çalışan Jeane Marie Gagnebin'in (2006), animist realizme atıfta bulunan Harry Garuba'nın (2012) kuramsal metinleri referans kaynaklar olarak kullanılacaktır. *O drible*'nın hikâye anlatıcısının anlatısı ile metnin melez olması dikkate değerdir, çünkü her ikisi de *makas* ve missossos'larla bezelidir ki bunlar, okuyucuya anılar vasıtasyyla rehberlik eden anlatısal sese dönüşürler zira kurtuluş ve intikam karakterlerin peşinde koştukları gayelerdir.

Introduction

This study intends to highlight the importance of storytelling in the stream of consciousness of the narrators of *O drible*,¹ by Sérgio Rodrigues. This novel brings as scenario the Brazilian football environment from the 1950s, determining individual issues of the characters as if they were playing a football match. However, the collective advent of the game is an artifice to infer intrinsic human dilemmas such as abandonment, revenge, love, and hate. Thus, true elements from the history of football are mixed with fiction, so that the reader enters a duplicate environment that alternates and collates reality and fiction.

The text *O drible* is the third book by author Sérgio Rodrigues, winner of the 12th edition of the Portugal Telecom Prize for Literature in Portuguese Language in the category “Novel” (Cofina), and has been translated into Spanish and French.

Among the many reviews known in digital media, we highlight three that have been published in Brazilian scientific journals, such as an untitled one (Abreu), Sérgio Rodrigues: *O Drible* (Valente) and *Futebol e identidade nacional: resenha da obra de “O drible”*² (Lis and Capraro). This book, besides greatly contributing to contemporary Brazilian literature, has also been the object of research in scientific papers such as *Memórias a passos e passes em O Drible*³ (Effting) and *Racismo, futebol e sociedade em O Drible, de Sérgio Rodrigues*⁴ (Chagas), a paper published in conference proceedings entitled *Em tempos de ditadura brasileira: analisando O Drible sob uma perspectiva de gênero*⁵ (Rosalen), a monograph whose title is *O futebol a serviço da tradição literária*⁶ (Cantilo) and an undergraduate thesis called *A potência poética do drible: reflexões sobre futebol-literatura*⁷ (Brochado), as well as being mentioned in many others, among which we highlight *A ‘tabelinha’ entre o futebol e a poesia*⁸ (Guimarães), *O enigma da literatura brasileira contemporânea na França: recepção, visibilidade e legitimização*⁹ (Rissardo), *Masculinidades em foco: A (des)construção da paternidade a partir de crônicas de Rogério Pereira*¹⁰ (Munsberg and Rocha), *O romance brasileiro contemporâneo conforme os prêmios literários (2010-2014)*¹¹ (Zilberman), *Relações literárias México-Brasil: notas de trabalho*¹² (Carvalho), “*Toda Rígidez é Condenável*”: os dois Brasils das crônicas sobre futebol de Carlos Alberto “Nego” Pessôa¹³ (Mattar and Schwartz) and *O modo de organização enunciativo no gênero artigo de opinião*¹⁴ (Pauliukonis and Bastos).

¹ “O Drible” translated as The Dribble (all foreign words translated by authors).

² Football and national identity: review of the work of “O drible” (all foreign words translated by authors).

³ Memories to steps and passes in O Drible.

⁴ Racism, football and society in O Drible, by Sérgio Rodrigues.

⁵ In times of Brazilian dictatorship: Analysing O Drible from a gender perspective.

⁶ Football at the service of literary tradition.

⁷ The poetic power of dribbling: reflections on football-literature.

⁸ The ‘one-two’ between football and poetry.

⁹ The enigma of contemporary Brazilian literature in France: reception, visibility and legitimization.

¹⁰ Masculinities in focus: The (un)construction of fatherhood from chronicles by Rogério Pereira

¹¹ The contemporary Brazilian novel according to literary awards (2010-2014).

¹² Mexico-Brazil literary relations: working notes.

¹³ “All Rigidity is Condemnable”: the two Brazils of Carlos Alberto “Nego” Pessôa's football chronicles.

¹⁴ The mode of enunciative organization in the opinion article genre.

In *O drible*, Murilo Neto is the son of the sports chronicler Murilo Filho, who is already eighty years old and has been disillusioned by doctors. Father and son have not spoken with each other for twenty-six years and, with the chronicler's imminent death, Murilo Neto is invited by his father to spend Sundays together. This is a troubled relationship, with a history of events of dispute, cruelty and suffering between both. Faced with the father's invitation and, consequently, acceptance, a reflective soliloquy is established in Murilo Neto, setting up a stream of consciousness in which stories are told.

The orality has strands, beyond the traditional ones, which are not made in a usual structure. Walter Benjamin, an important German philosopher, and literary critic, proposes in his text *O narrador* that the art of narrating is in extinction: “É como se estivéssemos privados de uma faculdade que nos parecia segura e inalienável: a faculdade de intercambiar experiências”¹⁵ (Benjamin 213). In the chosen corpus, the experience of narrating subverts this assumption and finds in the contemporary novelesque structure insurgencies that analogously are of oral substance, like telling a story to oneself while this self unfolds into a listening reader. Sérgio Rodrigues' narrative crosses the threshold of individual reflection, moulding it with stories told through recollection. The storyteller has the primordial function of oral transmission – which is to appropriate the circumstances and transmit them. Now when Murilo Neto narrates in third person the events of his life with his father, an atmosphere of storytelling is established in the story and he becomes a narrator in abyss, transmitting small stories that contribute to the construction of the whole novel, that is, a storyteller that fits the structural model named *mise en abyme*.¹⁶

A complex dribble: storytelling in Sérgio Rodrigues' text

The theorist Lucien Dallenbach studied and conceptualized *mise en abyme*, specifying its nuances and classifying them. For *mise en abyme* to occur, the secondary story must work as a reflection within a game of mirrors with different degrees of analogy, as long as it maintains at least some link of connection with the first one, that is, to be a “narrativa dentro de outra que apresente alguma relação de similitude com aquela que a contém”¹⁷ (Dallenbach 18). The narrative mirror in abyss has three forms of reflection : the simple one, which can be defined only as a story within the other; the reflection to infinity, “que toma como base o efeito produzido quando dois espelhos são colocados um na frente do outro”¹⁸ (Pino 161), and which in literature is characterized by a corresponding story within another corresponding story, and so on; and the paradoxical reflection, in which the narrated stories, one

¹⁵ “It is as if we were deprived of a faculty that seemed secure and inalienable to us: the faculty of exchanging experiences”.

¹⁶ “Mise en abyme” translated as Narrative in abyss (all foreign words translated by authors). It means a narrative within another narrative.

¹⁷ “Narrative within another one that presents some relation of similitude with the one that contains it” (all foreign words translated by authors).

¹⁸ “Which takes as its basis the effect produced when two mirrors are placed one in front of the other” (all foreign words translated by authors).

within the other, get confused.

In the novel *O drible*, the degrees of similarity between the great story and the digressions of the character Murilo Neto are subtle in what concerns the reflection to infinity, but it is in the paradoxical reflection, where the father's, the son's and the football's story get mixed that the narrative in abyss is configured. There is an interweaving between the three, even though each one is unique and individual, overlapping one another to compose the main one. Inside the abyss narrative, in which Murilo Neto is the narrator, the reader becomes a kind of listener of the resigned memories of the character, that is, of the reminiscences listed by Murilo Neto. He invokes the question of memory as reminiscence, as mnemonic image – image that comes without a kind of a permission or consent of the individual who is remembering and starts from an external stimulus, i.e., from an external component with some similar feature to the original complex of stimuli, to an original memory:

Estava distraído, observando a boca da menina se mexer sem som, quando se deu conta com um violento baque interno – alguma coisa se espalhando, acordes maiores fazendo eco – de que havia muito na lourinha de farmácia, da cor do cabelo ao corpo mignon, que lembrava certa moça do passado longinquido, uma das vinte mil namoradas do pai. A primeira mulher da sua vida.

Aquilo o atordou. O túnel do tempo tinha se instalado na boca bicudinha de Gleyce¹⁹. (Rodrigues 38)

Awakening or not an image, in this case, does not depend on conscious activity, but on an uncontrollable reverie that radiates and finds strength in a memory or affection already experienced. In the excerpt above, when Murilo Neto became aware of it, the memory of the past was already coated in memory related to the present, re-signified from the reunion with his father, a latent event of the now.

According to the philosopher Jeane Marie Gagnebin, memory is studied in three aspects: the faculty of memory, which is a more comprehensive and psychic concept, because it encompasses a memory competence; the ability to remember, which is a more intellectual concept, because it is an intellectual activity, the activity of remembering; the images that return to memory, for example the reminiscences, also called remembrance, the mnemonic images (Gagnebin). In the perspective that understands the narrator Murilo Neto, it can be said that his memories are the mnemonic memories of his relationship with his father, once the reunion recreates such memories according to his current perception. It is noticed that Murilo Neto appropriates these memories *en abyme*, and that, although the three narrative perspectives – Murilo Filho, Murilo Neto and football

¹⁹ He was distracted, watching the girl's mouth move soundlessly, when he realised with a violent internal thud – something shattering, larger chords echoing – that there was much about the pharmacy blonde, from the colour of her hair to her mignon body, that reminded him of a certain girl from the distant past, one of his father's twenty thousand girlfriends. The first woman of his life.

That stunned him. The time tunnel had installed itself in Gleyce's peckish mouth (all foreign words translated by authors).

stories – run parallel, they are intertwined, since the remembrance of the chronicler's son is not only a memory of the past, but also a rescue of identity understanding. In this rescue of understanding, memory works as a road – it takes the walker to the awakening of an individual archive of affections.

Resorting to characteristics conceived in the African oral tradition, two categories of storytellers stand out: the *Doma* and the *Griot*. The *Doma* comes from a traditionalist tradition, where commitment to truth is paramount. It is called the *Knower* and appears as a scholar and intellectual. Its transmission is faithful to the knowledge it has acquired, and it is not free to expand or reinvent any transfer of knowledge. Its life is guided by journeys for improvement and it generally takes part in meetings and gatherings wherever it goes, listening to stories and reports and acquiring as much knowledge as possible. *Knowers* are great bearers of news and are characterized as a spokesperson within the local culture. The *Griot*, more popular, already has great freedom to speak and in this way can manifest himself at will, since it has no commitment to the truth. It can tell a story according to what suits it at a moment, it is performative, sings and dances while narrating. It is usually connected to a single family, becoming aware of all its genealogy.

Both are intrinsic voices of general African culture and figure differently as storytellers and knowers. In *O drible*, *Doma* and *Griot* merge into a hybrid storyteller. *Doma* could not conduct the storytelling, as it could not use the transforming power of the story according to the context. It needs to be faithful to the truth he narrates. However, the various insertions of true occurrences during the narrative, mainly concerning events related to the history of football, place the figure of the *Doma* as a conductor, even if to alienate truth to fiction the *Griot* is the main bearer.

At the very beginning of the book:

O que você vê primeiro é uma imagem parada que logo identifica como da Copa de 1970 pelo short da seleção brasileira, que é de um azul mais claro que o habitual, além de escandalosamente curto para os padrões de hoje. Tostão, cabeçudo inconfundível, número 9 às costas, conduz a bola observado a certa distância por um sujeito de camisa azul-clara e calção preto²⁰. (Rodrigues 9)

The storyteller here is committed to the truth, since it makes available a real fact, – the detailed physical description of the uniforms worn by the players of the Brazilian national football team, highlighting the measurements of the shorts and the color in comparison with uniforms of previous participations, as well as the figure of the centre-forward Tostão (1947-), owner of shirt number 9 –, it configures itself as *Doma*. However, the construction of the novel starts from truths leading them performative to something that relativizes according to the narrator's intention. The

²⁰ What you see first is a still image that soon identifies as from the 1970 World Cup by the shorts of the Brazilian team, which are of a lighter blue than usual, besides being outrageously short by today's standards. Tostão, unmistakable big-headed, number 9 on his back, handles the ball watched from a distance by a guy wearing a light blue shirt and black shorts (all foreign words translated by authors).

transformative power of the intention is allied to the context and to what it aims at for the future, and the figure of the narrator ends up being substantiated of intonation in the art of telling. At the end of the novel, the commitment to truth loses its meaning while bringing the revelation that only a meticulous performance could create. Murilo Filho is the *Griot* of Murilo Neto, and Murilo Neto is the *Doma* of himself.

O velho detém o vídeo. Pousa o controle remoto no braço do sofá, olha nos olhos outra vez e diz, o que houve aqui, Neto, foi simples: Pelé desafiou Deus e perdeu. Imagine se não perdesse. Se não perdesse, nunca mais que a humanidade dormia tranquila. Pelé desafiou Deus e perdeu, mas que desafio soberbo²¹. (Rodrigues 13)

The *Griot* is universally allowed to conduct the story according to what he wishes to awaken, as occurs in the passage above when Murilo Filho makes use of his personal observations to induce understanding, referring to a supposed affront to the Catholic version of God by the famous football player Edson Arantes do Nascimento (1940-), globally known as Pelé.

Continuing the analyses that converge with the advent of storytelling, a more specific parallel can be drawn with definitions coined in Angola, a country on the west coast of Africa. The terms *maka* and *missosso* belong to Angola and stand out as pertinent designations for the remembrances told. In African culture, *maka* is configured as a true narrative or as such. It is based on something that really happened, as for example when Murilo Filho or Murilo Neto talks about sports, politics, or entertainment:

Tinha se tornado fã de um garoto chamado Michael Jackson, cabelo afro, calça boca de sino e voz de anjo, que emplacava no rádio ao lado dos irmãos mais espigados uma balada linda de morrer atrás de outra:²² “Ben”, “Music and me”, “One day in your life”. (Rodrigues 25-26)

The singer mentioned, Michael Jackson (1958-2009), was an icon of entertainment and really hit the spot with such songs. Moreover, the king of pop had, in fact, the characteristics that the excerpt mentions. *Makas* are recurrently told in the novel, for as much as one experiences a reminiscence, a more logical thought narration is established there, which was born true. *Maka* works in this way and is therefore characterized as a fictionalization of the ways of life of an original true story.

Missosso, on the other hand, represents a fiction or fable, because it is something that did

²¹ The old man stops the video. He puts the remote control down on the arm of the sofa, looks into his eyes again and says, what happened here, Neto, was simple: Pelé defied God and lost. Imagine if he didn't lose. If he didn't lose, never again would humanity sleep peacefully. Pelé challenged God and lost, but what a proud challenge (all foreign words translated by authors).

²² He had become a fan of a boy called Michael Jackson, with afro hair, bell-bottoms and voice of an angel, who, together with his more spindly brothers, used to play one gorgeous ballad after another on the radio (all foreign words translated by authors).

not happen in the empirical reality, but rather an imaginary product that is part of the order of fantasy. The system of the *missoso* “[...] tem dois pilares de sustentação: o animismo e a certeza de que tudo se liga à força vital”²³ (Padilha 44). When a *missoso* is told there is a fusion of individual aspirations with the primordial needs of a group, for this reason the universe is always portrayed by ordinary beings, of the earth, who play everyday roles, even though they are integrated into the magical-animistic thought where everything has life and is connected in a cyclical way. Faced with the concept of *missoso*, it can be deduced that the character Peralvo is a fable told in the empirical real. His connection with the animist cycle of conception of the world portrays fundamentals coming from cultural traditions, such as his religious background of African matrix and his sensitive and anticipated perception of current events. When the story of Peralvo is introduced into the narrative, it is a *missoso* that arises with the intention of awakening feelings that concern the motivation of the *Griot* who tells it. In the book *O drible*, a narrative that is urban and contemporary, when a *missoso* is told, magical realism is consummated. However, relating the specificity of magical realism with African cultural aspects, attributes characteristics of an animist realism as literary structure, constitutes a fusion where animism becomes of more relevant importance in the classification. The fable-like atmosphere in Peralvo *missoso* abstains from the urban format and transmutes itself to the animist conception. Some examples of this sub-genre can be found in works by African authors who produce texts in Portuguese language, such as Boaventura Cardoso (1944-), Luandino Vieira (1935-), Mia Couto (1955-), Paulina Chiziane (1955-), Odete Semedo (1959-) and Pepetela (1941-), just to name a few.

Animist realism draws a parallel with the magic or marvelous realism studied in Latin America, however, it is more appropriate to relate it to African culture, because it corresponds in a very particular way with the close, harmonious bonds established between individuals and the elements of nature, the universe as creation. It comes from a strand in which cultural precepts of African tradition are enshrined. Inscribed in the fictional matter of this culture, it shapes the reality that structures the narrative, giving a concrete aspect to abstract ideas and a spiritual dimension to material objects. As it is an aesthetic-ideological manifestation, and because it is committed to cultural values, it ends up encompassing a very comprehensive concept. Magic realism, on the other hand, carries an intrinsic irony and has a more urban and cosmopolitan slant, a kind of provocation, while the representational technique of animist realism figures as an explanation of an axiological framework of African culture. Harry Garuba argues that animist culture enables a constant re-enchantment of the world and that the name magical realism is not sufficient to encompass such a conception when used to structure a narrative: “[...] ‘realismo’ mágico é um conceito demasiado estreito para descrever a multiplicidade das práticas de representação que o animismo autoriza”²⁴

²³ Has two pillars of support: animism and the certainty that everything is connected to the vital force (all foreign words translated by authors).

²⁴ Magical ‘realism’ is too narrow a concept to describe the multiplicity of representational practices that animism authorizes (all foreign words translated by authors).

(Garuba 244). Garuba also argues that magical realism can be considered a sub-genre of animist realism and that the governing range of this relationship would be animist materialism.

In animist realism, the real and the imaginary condense since the imaginary is conceived as real by a breath of life that animates objects and ideas. It unveils a hierarchy of value inscribed in a cultural community. When it is reported to literature it is dialogued with the universe of the narrative, favouring a fusion of the past (primordial animist time) with the fictional present. Peralvo can see everything that will happen seconds before it happens, besides being able (without much awareness of it) to describe a person by the color he sees of his aura – the energy field that surrounds human beings. His connection with the nature of movement and with the anticipation of the next moment makes him part of a chain of life, in which he pulsates by intuition. Murilo Filho introduces the story of Peralvo and, in doing so, according to the extraordinary facts which he describes as being part of the player's essence, extends that existence to the impalpable instance of animism.

Concluding remarks

Having established the characteristics of the two types of storytelling, in *O drible* not only the storyteller is hybrid, but also the text, as it has both *makas* and *missossos*, and both are inscribed as narrative voice through their due aspect. In the context of football, the *maka* is tied to a physical world, of the events of a historical and linear time and the *missoso* to a spiritual and cyclical world. Therefore, in the weaving of the novel, *maka* and *missoso* have the function of leading the reader through reminiscence, since in the journey of the main characters is the rescue, at first, and the revenge, *a posteriori*, that is sought. This mix of facts that occurred in the last century – like some elements of pop culture from the 70s and 80s – with others that are purely fictional brings to the reader a fictional reality of the time. Rodrigues thus intends to move his creation away from historical fiction to create a kind of alternative historical fiction, a strategy widely used by authors of autofiction or contemporary historical novelists.

In relation to other storytelling elements, Sérgio Rodrigues' novel gives us a tree, in Peralvo's conversation with his mother, and the radio, a primordial device of a so-called golden age in football. The radio is the fire in which the listeners stay around for the pleasure of the storytelling; the narrator of the match, in a time when television was not a constituent artifact of a home, is the storyteller himself, is the *Griot* who excels in performance to narrate a throw, is the one who gives life to something common, making it full of meaning. Murilo Filho appropriates these meanings that he has stored up during his life and transforms them into the leading thread of his final dribble: a revenge, a dribble on the son that life imposed on him. In the construction of

the characters, the author establishes from the beginning the route traced, a logic according to what was previously programmed, but the path is fluid, since the reception of the work is what determines whether the structure is matter or reverie:

*A nossa interpretação dos seres vivos é mais fluida, variando com o tempo ou as condições da conduta. No romance, podemos variar relativamente a nossa interpretação da personagem; mas o escritor lhe deu, desde logo, uma linha de coerência fixada para sempre, delimitando a curva da sua existência e a natureza do seu modo-de-ser.*²⁵ (Candido 58-59)

The novel *O drible* carries already formed and constituted characters, but each one of them unfolds in accountant, *Doma* and *Griot* telling *makas* and *missossos*. The end is set, so is the path, but the path is intrinsic to each listener/reader, whether the storyteller is imbricated in a colloquy or in a soliloquy.

The reasons presented do not exhaust the analysis of a work of great complexity as *O drible*, and perhaps that is why it has received so many positive reviews from the mainstream Brazilian media – as, for example, the text published by the Moreira Salles Institute, an important non-profit cultural organization, which considers this book as a novel about football of the highest quality (Máximo) –, reflected in its awards, translations into other languages and ability to be the object of academic studies by various strands. It is not possible, however, to confirm whether a trend in contemporary Brazilian literature will be to address part of its culture that has sometimes been left aside by writers, but the word known as diversity seems to be increasingly one of the keys to what is to come in the literary production of the 21st century. With this, it is necessary disclosure and analysis of the new literary production of Brazil as much as its production considered classic, so that past and contemporary tread an innovative path in this part of the history of literature that is being built.

²⁵ Our interpretation of living beings is more fluid, varying with time or the conditions of conduct. In the novel, we may vary relatively our interpretation of the character; but the writer has given him, from the outset, a line of coherence fixed forever, delimiting the curve of his existence and the nature of his mode-of-being (all foreign words translated by authors).

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