

> *Moo*, by Marília Floôr Kosby

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tradução de Flora Thomson-DeVeaux

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introdução de Thomaz Amancio

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Introduction: A closed throat

por Thomaz Amancio

The relationships between humans and oxen are a recurring presence in Brazilian literature. Sometimes as part of the landscape or setting, sometimes as objects or in secondary roles, sometimes even as protagonists, cows and bulls appear in a sprawling *corpus* of poems, novels, and short stories. Such prominence speaks to the importance of these animals in Brazilian culture at large. Since Antonil described the nomadic cattle raising cultures of Bahia in the 17th century, the social, economic, and environmental implications of this industry are a matter of concern for Brazilian artists, intellectuals, and politicians. Cattle rancher Getúlio Vargas was arguably the most important Brazilian politician of the 20th century and, in the 21st, the populist appeal of Jair Bolsonaro is culturally articulated under the sign of his “gado” (literally cattle), an imputed mass of blind followers. Throughout the country, popular cultures alternatively celebrate, appropriate and sacrifice oxen, from the *aboio* to the *vaquejada*, from the *churrasco* to the *bumba-meu-boi*. These examples should serve as mere milestones in what is actually a vast repertoire of historical and geographical variety. From north to south, the entanglement of economic, political, and cultural representations – and, crucially, of animal life and death – register oxen as constituents of the Brazilian *natural contract*.

In *Mugido*, a book of poems published in 2017, Marília Floôr Kosby adds a new chapter in this long and complicated history. Drawing from her personal and professional experience as an anthropologist and the daughter of a veterinarian that took care of farm animals in Rio Grande do Sul, Kosby reconstructs the existential space of small towns in the south of Brazil, where the food consumed in the big city is produced. Embedded in this reality are the gender and class distinctions familiar elsewhere, but also a diversity of boundaries between species. With the poems of *Mugido*, together with the narrative that is scattered in small sections throughout the book, it is possible to reconstruct the systems of exploitation that can be seen from the perspective of

those small towns: how the practices of manhood are molded by their relation with women, horses and cows; how practices of womanhood constitute themselves in relation with figures of masculinity, femininity and care towards animals; how this bundle of gender and species relations are connected to the food industry, that in its turn links small towns to the big city, in a large territorial distribution of positions and effects.

Against this background, *Mugido* proposes the interspecific alliance between human women and cows as a productive form of resistance or simply as a desirable relation in the context of such capitalist economic (particularly gendered and speciesist) exploitation. The narrative that ties the book together sees the daughter of a veterinarian following her father to a farm, to visit a cow that is having trouble to give birth. There she finds Jaqueline, the wife of the owner, who suffers herself because of the cow, while her son and husband mock her for feeling that for a cow. In the difficult birth, “daughter” and “wife” support each other, as well as the cow. In a similar gesture of solidarity between women, the book integrates an afterword by poet Angélica Freitas, who also interviews the author. The publishing house itself (Garupa, a small, independent one) might be described on those lines, as most of the editors are women. In the fictional, interpersonal, and institutional levels, *Mugido* represents an effort in building networks of solidarity which include both women and cows.

However, as she makes these assertions and takes these stances, Kosby also carefully problematizes the voice of the poet as intermediary between geographical locations (small town and big city) and species (woman and cow). If Freitas affirms in the afterword that the “woman that lives with females of other species” was “a missing voice” in the literature of rural Brazil, she also affirms that one must be careful not to “betray the cow again”¹. After all, the cow “makes a huge effort to moo”. In the opening poem of the volume (translated below), Kosby presents her ethico-poetic program. She exhorts us to “translate the moo”, but first describes how the moo, the actual “voice” of the cow, comes to be: “all

¹ Kosby, Marília Floôr, *Mugido [ou diário de uma doula]*, 2017.

that effort / gullet, eye, crop, tongue, rumen”. It is a bodily function expressing some kind of deep feeling not easily translated into human language. Before we translate, before we even listen, we must “stop to watch”. It is a break in discourse and reasoning, a moment of silence and attention. Kosby brings to the contact with cows an ethnographic sensibility that recommends prudence with the displacing powers of language. She performs an ethics of untranslatability founded on the breaking up of discourse. The moo “disjoints” the “so-called human condition” because it (mmmmmm), the humming low-pitch sound made by cows, is right there, in the middle of the word “human”. In Portuguese, the “joint” is “articulação”, that which allows both body and speech to move.

Throughout the volume, as in many of the poems translated here, Kosby makes us stop and remind that we are reading a book, and that language is full of misunderstanding. At the same time, through this estrangement, she also succeeds in making tangible how it might be to be a cow, how all those organs that we share might feel like under rubbing, squeezing, mounting, massaging, birthing, bleeding... She does not seek to convey an ethical program or rationale, but an experience. Instead of displacing the life of cows into (monetary, cultural, ethical, political) values, she would like to recover it in language, while recognizing that this is a difficult position to maintain. To use the formalist language of Shklovsky, against the “algebrization” of the object, Kosby offers to perception the objectness, or, in this case, the *cowness* of the cow. The defamiliarized, de-automatized presence (in language) of a being. As we stop, watch, listen, read, translate, speak, moo, swallow – that presence remains, stuck in our throat, ruminant.

Moo

por Marília Floôr Kosby
tradução de Flora Thomson-DeVeaux

mmmmmm

mais ou menos que um livro,
isto é um êxodo
de uma tal condição
humana

o mugido foi a ação escolhida para essa
desarticulação

parem pra ver uma vaca mugir
já nem digo ouvir
ouvir é difícil, o mugido de uma vaca
parem para ver e procurem a próxima nota
em que palavra daria
aquela melodia
aquele esforço todo
de guela, olho, bucho, língua, rúmen

que fecunda epifania valeria
aquele esforço todo?

traduzam
o mugido

bodoque

sou eu toda
um tímpano
só
– não sois vós?

o amor nas canções
um assovio pelas costas
fonemas de horror
em frases feitas
pra me amansar

o cão ouve
muitas vezes mais
do que o ser humano

sou eu toda um tímpano só
debaixo da cama
em noite de foguetes

mmmmmm

more or less than a book,
this is an exodus
from the so-called human
condition

the moo: the action chosen for this
disjointing

stop to watch a cow mooing
i won't tell you to listen for it
listening's hard, to a cow's moo
stop watch and look for the next note
what word it would lead to,
that melody
all that effort
gullet, eye, crop, tongue, rumen

what fecund epiphany would be worth
all that effort?

translate
the moo

slingshot

i'm all
just one big
eardrum
– are not thou?

love in songs
a whistle down your back
phonemes of terror
stocked in phrases
to quiet me down

dogs can hear
several times what
human beings can

i'm all just one big eardrum
under the bed
on nights with fireworks

eu toda um tímpano só
me confundo com o mundo
silencia e
poupa as pedras
do teu bodoque

all just one big eardrum
i bleed into the world
hush and
spare the stones
in your slingshot

localidade: passo da esguelada

location: choke gully

O cliente ligou a manhã inteira para o pai, querendo saber o que faria com a vaca trancada, a mesma a qual ele havia dado consulta durante a semana. O pai diz que é melhor tirar o terneirinho morto, já que se pode salvar a vaca. Diz que a cesárea é mais arriscado no caso de o terneiro estar morto, pois a putrefação cria substâncias tóxicas. O cliente nos busca de carro, ele e o filho, de cerca de oito anos, que fala como adulto. O pai cobra apenas cinquenta reais pelo deslocamento e a consulta, para que o homem não desista de buscá-lo, e assim a vaca não sofra mais.

The client called Dad all morning long, wanting to know what he should do with the cow stuck calving, the same one he'd seen earlier that week. Dad says better get the dead calf out, since the cow can be saved. Says that a C-section is riskier if the calf is dead, since the rotting gives off toxic substances. The client picks us up in his car, him and his son, about eight years old, who talks like an adult. Dad charges just fifty reais for the trip out and the appointment so the man won't give up on coming to get him, so the cow won't suffer any more.

Ao chegarmos na propriedade, uma pequena chácara arrendada, notei haver muitos bichos na volta da casa. As vacas ficam soltas e os cavalos também. Dois cães ficam presos, por serem brabos, e dois ficam soltos. Tinha uma cabrita que parecia cachorro, de tão mansa. O galinheiro e o chiqueiro também ficavam próximos à casa.

When we get to their place, a little rented farmhouse, I notice lots of animals round the house. The cows are loose, and the horses too. Two dogs are tied up, since they're biters, and two are loose. There was a little goat, so tame she seemed like a dog. The chicken coop and the pigpen were near the house, too.

angélica,
o parto de uma vaca
não é coisa
simples
envolve um útero
imenso
que rebenta
e frequenta não raro
o lado de fora

angélica,
birthing a cow
is not a simple
thing
it involves an immense
uterus
that springs out
and often sags around
on the outside

um rebento imenso!

an immense offspring!

o parto de uma vaca
requer punhos
firmes
finos porém

birthing a cow
calls for fists
strong
but slender

matar uma vaca
não é

killing a cow
is not

uma coisa simples
requer um tiro
certo
alto calibre
o ponto preciso longe
do meio da testa
dois cavalos três
ou quatro homens
um guri
quem sabe uma mulher

carnear uma vaca
exige sangrá-la
até a última gota
para que a carne
não termine
preta

sangrar uma vaca
é para exímios

comer uma vaca porém

Descemos até um mato onde estava Jaqueline, a mulher do proprietário, com a vaca doente. Jaqueline vestia botas de borracha e uma bombacha cor-de-rosa. Angustuada, afagava o pescoço do animal, que estava deitado de lado. Logo que chegamos, Jaqueline começou a vociferar contra a ideia de um vizinho, que teria sugerido o sacrifício da vaca. Seu Walter ofereceu-se para degolar a vaca, mas Jaqueline foi irredutível e não saiu de perto dela, para evitar que a matassem.

O menino debochava do choro da mãe e o marido não entendia o porquê de tanto esforço para salvar um animal de pouco valor, como é uma vaca leiteira Jersey sem terneiro. “Quê, mãe? Tás chorando de novo? Mas é só uma vaca!” Jaqueline retruca e corre com o guri dali. O marido intervém: “Deixa o guri, Jaqueline! É só uma vaca!” Ela responde: “Pra mim não é! Sou eu que dou comida, ela conhece o meu cheiro! Eu não vou deixar matarem!” O insolente do guri ainda solta um “Então vais comer carne artificial?” Ela não comia carne para não ter que matar as galinhas.

a simple thing
it calls for a sure
shot
high caliber
the precise point far
from mid-forehead
two horses three
or four men
a boy
maybe even a woman

butchering a cow
means bleeding it
to the last drop
so that the meat
does not
blacken

bleeding a cow
is for skilled hands

eating a cow, though

We went down near the woods where Jaqueline, the owner’s wife, was with the sick cow. Jaqueline was wearing rubber boots and pink field pants. She anxiously petted the neck of the cow, which was lying down on its side. As soon as we got there, Jaqueline started raging against the idea from a neighbor, who’d apparently suggested putting the cow down. Walter had offered to cut the cow’s throat, but Jaqueline wouldn’t hear a word and kept by the animal’s side to keep them from killing it.

The boy made fun of his mom’s sniffing, and her husband couldn’t understand all that effort just to save an animal as worthless as a calfless Jersey milker. “What, ma, you cryin’ again? But it’s just a cow!” Jaqueline snaps back, hustling the boy out of there. Her husband intervenes: “Leave him, Jaqueline! It’s just a cow!” She responds: “Not to me it isn’t! I feed her, and she knows my smell! I’m not going to let you kill her!” Then the smart-ass kid gets in another dig: “What, are you gonna eat artificial meat then?” She refused to eat meat so they wouldn’t have to kill the chickens.

era noite de celebrar as guampas que
acabavam
de me romper o osso da cabeça
não doeu mas que coisa braba
não ser mocha é enveredar contra

nos reunimos em volta do nada
para devorar com farinha o coração de boi
de vaca

a mãe abre o coração passando a faca quase
sem tocar
estica fina fininho e um pedaço de carne
bota no forno com alho e sal me lambo

aquela graxa grossa me selando um beíço no
outro: não engoli uma lágrima

como te dizer
não é que nem de galinha, tantos
é tipo rim de ovelha,
só que sem gosto
de mijo
a guampa o coração

O pai começa a tocar a vaca e o terneirinho morto. Vê que este não está na posição certa para nascer. Percebe que já mexeram muito nele. Jaqueline mostra as mãos esfoladas e inchadas. Ela e eu, então, seguramos as patas da vaca para que esta não se desloque ao puxarem o terneiro. O pai tenta enlaçar o filhote por dentro da vaca, mas, ou as cordas são muito grossas, ou rebentam. Quando consegue puxar as mãos do terneiro, ele as decepa e coloca de novo o bichinho para dentro do útero, a fim de acomodá-lo para poder tirá-lo totalmente. Jaqueline chora: “pra quê cortarem o filhotinho!” Meu irmão grita para que eu não olhe, diz que vou desmaiar. Muitas vezes já havia desmaiado em partos de vaca; na cesárea, quando sai aquele cheiro quente de coisa viva de dentro da pança da vaca querendo não morrer, é difícil se segurar. Mas ali não, a barriga estava fechada, o filhote já estava morto. Depois de muito tentar puxar o bichinho e não conseguir, então, o pai consegue achar a cabeça e puxá-lo pela nuca. Consegue enlaçá-lo inteiramente pelo pescoço. Meu irmão e o

it was a night to celebrate the horns
which had just
broken through my head-bone
didn't hurt but it's a hell of a thing
not being hornless means going against

we circled round nothingness
to devour the floured bull's heart
cow's heart

mom opens up the heart running the
knife
almost without touching it
she pulls it real thin and a piece of meat
goes into the oven with garlic and salt i
lick myself

that thick tar almost gluing one lip to
another: i didn't swallow one tear

how can i tell you
it's not like a chicken's,
one in a plateful
it's like sheep's kidneys
just without that taste
of piss
the horn the heart

Dad starts touching the cow and the dead little calf. He sees that the calf's not in the right position to be born. He realizes that they've already tried to move it around plenty. Jaqueline shows us her scraped, swollen hands. She and I hold the cow's legs so she won't move when they pull the calf. Dad tries to get some twine around the calf inside the cow, but either the cord is too thick or it snaps. When he manages to pull the calf's feet out, he chops them off and puts the little critter back into the womb, trying to get it settled so he can pull it all the way out. Jaqueline cries out: “why'd you have to cut up the little baby!” My brother yells for me to not look, says I'm going to faint. I had fainted during plenty of calvings; during C-sections, when that hot smell of a living thing comes out from inside the belly of the cow wanting to not die, it's hard to hold on. But not now. This belly was closed

dono da propriedade puxam, mas sem forçar em demasia, para que o corpo não se despedace. Jaqueline e eu alargamos a vulva com as mãos, enquanto o pai acomoda o terneiro e ensaboa a vaca por dentro. O corpo do terneiro sai. Em coro, nós duas dizemos “graças a deus”. O pai repete. Os outros se retiram.

monta de um lado
cai de outro

aperta bem esse cavalo
entre as pernas

deixa que te assem as canelas por dentro

nao teras relho ou esporas

e quando o cavalo enxergar o rumo de volta
pras casa
te agarra
que ele dispara

e vem sozinho

Entre as tentativas de encontrar o melhor ângulo para retirar o terneiro, meu irmão, o guri e seu pai tentam convencer Jaqueline de que a morte de uma vaca não seria uma grande perda: “não é a mesma coisa que perder um pai, um avô, que a gente lembra para o resto da vida, fica lá no cemitério”, “bicho é bicho”. Jefferson, o guri, repetia tudo o que o pai dizia, mas já afastado, pois havia sido corrido pela mãe.

Jaqueline repete: “pra mim não tem diferença! Os bichos estão tudo em volta. Eles sabem quando eu chego, me conhecem, sabem o meu cheiro. Sou eu que dou comida. Não tem diferença nenhuma!” O pai tenta concordar sem afrontar os caras, dizendo que as pessoas desenvolvem valor de estima pelos animais.

Depois de feito o serviço, Jaqueline diz que, a partir de então, se ver touro perto da vaca, vai correr na hora! O filho debocha, pois a prenhez tinha sido por inseminação. Nos lavamos com iodo e voltamos para perto das casas. Eu, meu irmão e o Jefferson

up, this calf was already dead.
After trying and trying to pull the calf out with no luck, Dad manages to find the head and pulls it by the scruff of its neck. He gets the twine all the way round the neck. My brother and the owner pull, not forcing too hard so the body doesn't come apart. Jaqueline and I widen the vulva with our hands while Dad gets the calf in position and soaps up the cow on the inside.

The body of the calf comes out. In one voice, we two women say: “Thank God.” Dad says it again. The others move away.

mount on one side
fall off the other

squeeze that horse
between your legs

let them rub your shins raw on the inside

you'll have no whip or spurs

and when the horse makes out the way
back home
hang tight
and he'll hightail it

and come all on his own

Between attempts to find the best angle to remove the calf, my brother, the kid, and his dad try to convince Jaqueline that the death of a cow wouldn't be such a terrible loss: “it's not like losing a parent, a grandparent, folks you remember for your whole life, out there in the cemetery.” “Animals are animals.” Jefferson, the kid, repeated everything his dad said, but at a distance, already having been shooed off once. Jaqueline repeats: “there's no difference far as I'm concerned! I've got animals all round me. They know when I get in, they know me, they know my smell. I'm the one who feeds them. No difference at all!” Dad tries to agree without offending the guys, saying that people come to care

esperamos do lado de fora da casa, enquanto o pai faz o receituário e recebe o pagamento. Escuto um pouco da conversa. O dono da vaca diz que foi por insistência da mulher que chamou ajuda médica; conta que ela chorou para sacrificarem uma leitoa que tinha fraturado uma pata.

minha mãe não me viu nascer parecia que tinham carneado uma vaca o frio dos ferros entre as coxas a sangueira pelo chão

escrevo poemas
inseminava

quero crer que as vacas gozavam naquele tempo de massagem na vulva das vacas pipetas, luvas, alguém de fora que levante a cola e torça pra frente

um lábio contra outro para cima e para baixo para dentro e para fora uma massagem na coluna um dedo de cada lado de cada vértebra, aperta-se força!

o couro é duro o lombo é magro espuma saindo quente mugidos disfarçados pelo focinho o silenciar dos cascos a hora certa de enfiar um ferro frio até o útero

for animals.
After the job is done, Jaqueline says that from then on, if she sees a steer near the cow, she's gonna run him out of town! Her son pokes fun, since the cow had been artificially inseminated. We washed up with iodine and went back over near the houses. My brother, Jefferson, and I waited outside while Dad wrote a prescription and got paid. I overhear some of the conversation. The owner of the cow only called for medical help because his wife insisted; he says she cried when they put down a sow with a fractured leg.

my mother didn't see my birth it was like they'd butchered a cow cold iron between thighs a bloody mess on the floor

i write poems
i used to inseminate

i want to believe that the cows came, back then from massaging their cow vulvas pipettes, gloves, someone else lifting the tail and twisting it forward

one lip against another up and down in and out massaging the spine one finger on each side of each vertebra, squeezing hard!

tough hide thin rump foam coming out hot moos stifled by the snout the hoofs falling silent the right moment to plunge the cold iron all the way to the uterus

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