

Renato Amado. *Nonada*. São Paulo: Editora Cajuína, 2025. 86 p.

*“Nonada. Tiros que o senhor ouviu foram de briga de homem não, Deus esteja.”*¹

João Guimarães Rosa

Nonada: almost nothing, or everything at the same time? The word that opens Guimarães Rosa’s acclaimed *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956) and reappears towards the end of the narrator’s monologue returns in the title of Renato Amado’s novel, published in 2025 by Editora Cajuína, imbued with a similar multiplicity of weighty existential meanings. With his *Nonada*, Amado summons this literary tradition and reinscribes it in another fictional dimension: a flat, gigantic, and strange Planet Earth, where intercontinental travel is nearly impossible. Continents become separate universes, and curiosity about what lies “on the other side” becomes a collective obsession.

The narrative follows the daily life of Galeano, a middle-aged divorced rideshare driver in a strained relationship, father of a teenage boy, and a self-described “cultural voyeur,” to use Osei Appiah’s term.² We learn about Galeano’s Earth through the voice of a scientist at the Large Hadron Collider (the world’s largest particle accelerator, located in Switzerland), who inexplicably gains access to this parallel world. From the prologue and throughout the narrative, the narrator’s humor and light touch reverberate in this fantastic premise, a metaphor for incommunicability, distance, and the impossibility of fully accessing the self and the other. It is a metafictional narrative that, from beginning to end,

¹ “Nonought. Shots you heard weren’t a shootout, God be.” (Translated by Alison Entrekin). ROSA, João Guimarães. *Grande Sertão: Veredas*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1994. p. 3.

² See APPIAH, Osei, “Cultural Voyeurism: A New Framework for Understanding Race, Ethnicity, and Mediated Intergroup Interaction,” *Journal of Communication*, v. 68, p. 233-242, 2018.

questions the very act of writing fiction and who is entitled to do so. The narrator provokes the reader to fact-check the science behind the possible existence of a flat Earth and foresees the reader's questions and judgment. As a scientist, the narrator develops a literary performance allegedly inspired by realists, which allows for a cinematographic, frame-by-frame view into Galeano's life.

A protagonist searching for meaning on the other side of the planet, Galeano carries the psychological, moral, and physical marks of a frustrated existence. As a rideshare driver, he is constantly exposed to passengers whose words often reproduce prejudices, clichés, and banalities. In his private life, he moves uneasily between his current partner, Amanda, his ex-wife, Dalila, and his teenage son, Jobson, whose visits feel as much a burden as a painful reminder of failed fatherhood.

Amado paints the portrait of an ordinary man, marked by a masculinity in crisis, disillusionment, and a permanent sense of emptiness. Galeano's difficulty in offering affection, his latent hostility, and his unconscious machismo, along with moments of vulnerability, make him both moving and unsettling. Sharing an atheist and nihilist worldview, mainly in his conversations with passengers, the protagonist rejects the idea of having a purpose in life and reveals a Nietzsche-inspired radical skepticism. Yet his nihilism is not absolute: when Galeano finds Seiryu through his telescope —just an eye staring back at him— he invests time and energy to create a language of their own, setting out in search of meaning in an urge for connection. Their relationship is marked by ambiguity: intimacy and discovery on one side, voyeurism and projection on the other. Thus, Galeano's encounters with Seiryu come across as a kind of escape from reality, clouded with anxiety and obsession.

These tensions permeate the narrative: between domestic life with Amanda and the distant fantasy of Seiryu; between the confrontation of the commonplace Brazilian urban middle-class dialogues with passengers; between the son demanding presence and the imagined woman offering evasion; between everyday rides and the gaze projected across oceans. The novel's force lies in this pendular movement, expressed formally by its fragmented structure. The eleven chapters are short, often ending abruptly, alternating between introspection, meticulous but not exhaustive descriptions, and realistic dialogues.

Some passages are visually powerful, such as Galeano adjusting his telescope to reveal mountains, cities, or a single eye in close-up.

A careful and inventive use of language distinguishes Amado's style, and literary devices appear in moderation but always with purpose. Occasional neologisms, hyphenated-agglutinative expressions, linguistic loans, and onomatopoeia permeate the text, creating moments that capture the reader's attention rather than overwhelm it. His choice to employ non-binary Portuguese in direct dialogue with the reader—even with ironic undertones—demonstrates an engagement with ongoing debates about language, gender, and identity. The shifts in register between narration and dialogue highlight the distinct voices at play, especially the private language Galeano and Seiryu invent for themselves. This self-conscious play between registers and stylistic strategies reinforces the text's awareness of its own construction, while ensuring that even the most subtle deviations become strategic in shaping meaning.

Nonada engages with broad questions: contemporary loneliness, technologically mediated relationships, the fragility of masculinity, the weight of routine, and the search for meaning. The contrast between the extraordinary and the trivial intensifies the sense that modern life swings between emptiness and the yearning for belonging and affection. The novel unsettles precisely because it refuses simplification. Galeano is neither a hero nor a clear antihero, but an ordinary man exposed in his contradictions. Seiryu is not merely the idealized woman but also the mirror of Galeano's lacks. The telescope, far from being just a tool for the protagonist's voyeuristic hobby, becomes a symbol of distance of the longing for contact that never quite arrives.

Renato Amado compels the reader to grapple with absence, discomfort, and the unsaid. The result is a novel that offers no easy solutions but captures the contemporary experience of loneliness, desire, and disconnection with a telescopic precision. Thus, *Nonada* asserts itself as a work that both challenges and provokes, while offering a contemporary reflection on what it means to seek the Other in a world of overwhelming distances.

Joyce Fernandes
Brown University