

Traces of Melancholy in *A Cup of Rage*, by Raduan Nassar: A Dialogical Approach / *Traços da melancolia em Um copo de cólera, de Raduan Nassar: uma abordagem dialógica*

Sérgio Linard*
José Luiz Ferreira**

ABSTRACT

Discussion and analysis of the fictional work *A Cup of Rage* by Brazilian author Raduan Nassar. As an analytical category to deepen the interpretations, this study investigates signs of melancholic constructions present in the characters and other elements of the narrative. The approach chosen here is dialogical, aiming to understand how material, content, and form interact in the construction of melancholy throughout the literary work. From an analytical perspective, the study seeks to outline possible answers to the following question: can the emotional oscillation of the narrator-protagonist in *A Cup of Rage* be understood as a manifestation of his melancholic condition? This question receives a positive answer as a result of the investigation.

KEYWORDS: Melancholy; *A Cup of Rage*; Raduan Nassar; Brazilian Literature; Dialogism

RESUMO

Discussão e análise da obra ficcional Um copo de cólera, do autor brasileiro Raduan Nassar. Como categoria analítica para aprofundamento das interpretações, investigam-se os indícios de construções melancólicas presentes nas personagens e em outros elementos da narrativa. O método de abordagem utilizado é o dialógico, com o objetivo de compreender de que forma material, conteúdo e forma se articulam na construção da melancolia ao longo da obra. Do ponto de vista analítico, busca-se delimitar possíveis respostas à seguinte questão: a oscilação emocional do narrador-protagonista em Um copo de cólera pode ser entendida como uma manifestação de sua condição melancólica? pergunta que encontra resposta positiva como resultado desta investigação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Melancolia; *Um copo de cólera*; *Raduan Nassar*; Literatura brasileira; Dialogismo

* Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte – UFRN – Campus Central – Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil; CAPES; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0187-5402>; linardsergio@gmail.com

** Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte – UFRN – Campus Central – Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4868-6614>; j.luiz@ufrn.br

Introduction

Over time and with the advancement of studies in psychology and psychoanalysis on the subjectivity of human beings, death and its due confrontation have become subjects of research for some of the most renowned professionals in the field, aiming to improve the lives of those who have to cope with their own finitude, as well as with that of others. Focusing on the understanding of the state of sadness experienced by someone who has suffered an emotional loss, one encounters Sigmund Freud's significant study *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (2005).¹ Based on analyses that, according to the author himself, are insufficient to claim scientific truth about the subject, Freud proposes ideas that are, at least, starting points for reflection on the human suffering caused by the loss of an object of affection.

The continuation of the research proposed by this author ensures that today there is a presence of trends and theoretical alignments about melancholia that expand as the understanding of human subjectivity progresses. Many of the understandings initially proposed by Freud continue to resonate in current analyses,² while others have undergone redefinitions and deepening with the aim of getting closer to lived reality. In this sense, we observe that there are many trends in the observation of melancholic manifestations in human life, all focused on points designed for the understanding of man. For example, one can list the treatment of melancholia in times prior to Freud, which continues to be explored today, such as the case of what we will call here *Aristotelian melancholia*.

For Aristotle, the Greek philosopher of great influence in history, the manifestation of melancholia occurred in the realm of human intelligence, afflicting the individual who, by perceiving the flaws of the world around them, would feel the weight of these problems and enter a state of sadness (Klibansky; Panofsky; Saxl, 1989). Therefore, melancholia was often directly related to artists and their production, as it was believed that they were entrusted with the task of *representing* the world, and for that, it was indispensable to know it as it truly was. This melancholic spirit would thus be directly

¹ FREUD, Sigmund. *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*. Translation by Shaun Whiteside. London: Penguin Books, 2005.

² It is known that when referring to Freud, the term “analysis” can evoke the practice of consultations with a psychoanalyst. Here, in this text, the term will be used in a broader sense, akin to research, investigation, interpretation, study, etc. In the potential case where the term refers to the work of the Analyst, we will highlight it with an initial capital letter: “Analysis.”

linked to the potential of an individual to be a poet pursued by the tragic demand of *original* creation. Thus, the melancholic being, within societies, would occupy a place of exceptionality, as if being above the ordinary time of everyday life; the melancholic would be, therefore, a distant being, detached, disconnected (to use a more contemporary term) from all that happens in the real world, but always tasked with understanding that same world.

This tradition, which greatly influenced and underpinned the thinking about melancholia in the Western world, breaks away from Freudian studies, as it is this psychoanalyst who proposes a view of melancholia that deviates from the idea of a spirit of the *sublime* and brings it into a reflection more closely related to human problems concerning what is lost, classifying it as a narcissistic psychoneurosis (Freud, 2005).³ In this context, Freud draws attention to the melancholic as a being imbued with ambiguities between “being what one is” and “being the other,” with this confrontation maintaining the very melancholia, feeding a constant clash between diametrically opposed semantic fields, with a fragile and complex boundary, but one that remains constant in the individual’s life. It is precisely this constancy that helps Freud differentiate Mourning from Melancholia, as the former would involve the passage of time assisting the individual in overcoming the pain of loss, while the latter would require psychoanalytic treatment to break the constant cycle of the psychosis.

Furthermore, and still thinking about the treatment given to melancholy throughout history, one point of emphasis is indispensable: Walter Benjamin’s (1892–1940) view on this subject. This German philosopher, even creating his works after a considerable period of the pre-Freudian era, still demonstrates a different alignment from that of the psychoanalyst. For Benjamin, the melancholic’s distancing from social life is still the defining factor, as he ends up “relating the disenchantment and lack of will of the melancholic directly to the effect of a misalignment or even a rejection of the symbolic conditions of social ties” (Kehl, 2009, pos. 1035).⁴ What we observe, then, is that the

³ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁴ In Portuguese: “relacionando o desencanto e a falta de vontade do melancólico diretamente ao efeito de um desajuste ou mesmo de uma recusa das condições simbólicas do laço social.” The version of *O tempo e o cão: a atualidade das depressões* [Time and Dog: The Depression Today] used during the completion of this reading was consulted in a digital reader file in EPUB format, on a device commercially known as a Kindle. Therefore, instead of page numbers, we list the position number (pos), a mechanism adopted by the book format to which we had access. This citation model, although not appearing in NBR1005:2002, is recommended by ABNT, provided that in the references the book is identified as an e-book, as can be

author agrees with the idea of a subject suffering because they cannot find a place in the world, precisely because they occupy a place of exceptionality.

These views, sometimes agreeing and sometimes conflicting, are used for the analyses proposed in this article, as we consider that there is no requirement for the author to adhere solely to one of the theoretical alignments proposed. Therefore, whenever the literary text demonstrates dimensions beyond what one or another theorist of melancholia may suggest, we will not make a move toward “enformating” it, limiting interpretive horizons. On the contrary, we believe that, even if a contradiction in theory is perceived in the construction of melancholia in the novella under analysis, it is essential that this contradiction itself be presented so that the interpretations have an effective potential for deepening, especially because it is in the field of conflict and boundaries that these melancholic manifestations demonstrate to involve the book in question, and, therefore, limiting it to a single theoretical bias would be to impose limits that the literary production itself does not have.

It is important to emphasize, however, that this need to approach and distance oneself from one or another theoretical foundation regarding melancholia will not serve here as a license for indiscriminate alternation of authors. The scientific rigor proposed by this work guides this alternation, always with the proper justifications and considerations of what is said with what is presented in the literary work, as we value the primacy of the text for the analysis, moving from it to make any assertions about it. Since the analysis of the work of art is based on a dialogical relationship between content, material, and form (Bakhtin, 1986),⁵ the relevant information from the text itself, aligned with the perspectives generated by the analyst—according to the chosen theoretical framework—and the lived experiences, are necessary for the proposed analysis to have a firm basis in the work. It is known that the specificity of the literary text, as an aesthetic and artistic object, demands precisely a view that also sees this object within a specific scope. Therefore, it is not a view that seeks to comprehend the literary work as the result of an alienation of its language from its social context, nor should it be understood as a

observed at the end of this text. All citations with the reference (pos.) in this article refer to a text accessed solely in e-book format and cited as such.

⁵ BAKHTIN, M. Response to a Question from *Novi Mir* Editorial Staff. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp. 1-9.

mere reflection of the contexts in which it is found. In the essay *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry: Questions of a Sociological Poetics* (1983),⁶ Vološinov discusses exactly the importance for literature to clearly define the distinction between the use of the word in everyday life and its use in the construction of a poetics. Without this necessary and reasonable distinction, a literary analysis might result in either a purely sociological or purely formalist reading, overlooking the nuances of the literary creation itself. Vološinov (1983, p. 19)⁷ asserts, “We could say that the poet all the time works in or out of sympathy, in agreement or disagreement, with the listener. Apart from this, evaluation is also active in relationship to the topic of the utterance, the hero. [...] The listener and the hero are the constant participants in the event of creation [...].”

Thus, literary manifestation proves to be capable of addressing pertinent themes to humanity, such as melancholia. From these perspectives, we present this investigation into the constructions of melancholia in Raduan Nassar’s work *A Cup of Rage* (2016).⁸

In *A Cup of Rage*, the narrative follows the story of a heterosexual couple involved in the rage that gives the text its title, and as such, they argue constantly. The repetition of this argument is marked by the circularity of the narrative, as the title of the first chapter, “The Arrival,” is the same as that of the final chapter. Notwithstanding, the construction of the scenes of angry conflict, sometimes leading to sexual acts, as exemplified throughout this text, emphasizes a rage over which we focus our attention, though not with a purist or deterministic intent regarding how such a relationship between a couple should unfold. It is about uncovering the details that may reveal important insights into the two characters in this narrative.

What immediately stands out is the fact that these increasingly frequent bursts of anger, at first glance, seem to distance the narrative from what is *commonly* understood or expected from melancholia. However, in this novella, the male character reveals an irregular transition of feelings, with highs and lows, as one might imagine happening with those suffering from melancholia, as Freud (2005)⁹ proposes. Alternating between the pain caused by the insults he received and sexual excitement, the Man shows himself, in

⁶ VOLOŠINOV, V. Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry: Questions of a Sociological Poetics. Translated by John Richmond. In: SHUKMAN, A. (ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers*. Oxford: RTP Publications, 1983. pp. 5-30.

⁷ See footnote 6.

⁸ NASSAR, Raduan. *A Cup of Rage*. Translated by Stefan Tobler. London: Penguin Classics, 2016.

⁹ For reference, see footnote 2.

his own narration, as a pretender of his natural status, with the intention of thoughtfully presenting his “macho” attributes. After the argument has begun, when many verbal and physical attacks have already been exchanged between the protagonists, the following can be read:

[...] in any case she had really got to me, or was I rather, an actor, *only faking*, to follow an example, the pain that I really felt, I who this time had gone right into myself and in the heat here inside knew what changes I was capable of (I wasn’t a monolithic block, no one is of course, and then there’s the fact that certain traits she attributed to my personality had more to do with the situation), but I wasn’t going to mention this to her, yes, I could take up her *challenge* and launch myself into a battle royal, comfortingly with shared content [...] (Nassar, 2016, p. 22; emphasis added).¹⁰

This subtle alteration reveals the need to understand why there is a constant fluctuation in the moods of this character, who, just like someone identified as melancholic, attempts to cover up his potential signs of fragility: “[...] or was I rather, an actor, *only faking*, to follow an example, the pain that I really felt [...] ,” trying not to show emotion—something a melancholic does to avoid trauma. Regarding this difficult situation of someone in a melancholic state, Santos (2006, p. 14) provides a pertinent thought: “Melancholia directs the subject’s doubt at the crossroads of everything and nothing, of being and non-being, of dream and fall. In this crossroads of disjointed things, the self-inhabits a space reserved for the coexistence of opposites.”¹¹ The doubt of this subject, also defended by Freud (2013),¹² is one of the clearest indications of the constitution of a melancholic subject in Nassar’s fiction. Thus, we question: is it possible to consider that the fluctuating moods of the narrator-protagonist are a revelation of his melancholic state? In the novella briefly outlined above, the contradictory manifests itself in the exalted suffering as a characteristic of human dignity. This materialization seems to signal the probability of finding in Raduan Nassar’s fiction the construction of a subject who internalizes and naturalizes melancholia, disguising it through aggressive rage.

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 8.

¹¹ In Portuguese: “a melancolia direciona a dúvida do sujeito na encruzilhada do tudo e do nada, do ser e do não ser, do sonho e da queda. Nessa encruzilhada de coisas desencontradas, o eu habita um espaço reservado à coexistência dos contrários.”

¹² For reference, see footnote 1.

In order to better understand this reality, we will take melancholy as the topic of reading, more specifically the theme of aggressiveness as a disguise for a melancholic state in the construction of the characters in this contemporary novella. Thus, our objective is to comprehend how the choices made by the author reveal both the technical-creative processes and the dialogues of these processes with the analysis category put forward here. Therefore, this text is divided into four parts: this introductory section, presenting a brief discussion about the object of study and corpus; the section presenting the theoretical discussion of the study, highlighting and debating the theories that underpin it; the analysis section, in which the principles presented in the previous section will be applied, breathing life into the dialogical approach and considering the constituents of the novella in question as indivisible: content, material, and form; and the conclusion section, where reflections on the objectives set and the results achieved during the development of this study will be presented.

1 Theoretical Discussion

When it comes to literature, there are many theoretical and/or methodological schools that propose distinct perspectives on the literary work. However, at times, the excessive focus of a particular school on a specific aspect of a work can cause the analysis to lose its depth, particularly by concentrating on isolated details without considering the uniqueness within the entire aesthetic object under examination. This generates setbacks in literary investigations and leads many studies into a common error space, which is to disregard the indivisibility between form, material, and content inherent to the literary work. This indivisibility is better understood when considering the studies proposed by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975),¹³ whose Marxist ideals greatly influenced his propositions regarding the investigation of the literary object, specifically grounded in the concepts of *base* and *superstructure* in historical materialism. These

¹³ It is widely recognized among literature scholars associated with Bakhtin's theories that the ideas of this author are not limited to the texts authored and published by him. The variety of writers who share the same theoretical-methodological alignments contemporary to the referenced philosopher is commonly referred to as the "Bakhtin Circle." We do not disregard, in any way, the existence and importance of this group; however, due to considerations of space and focus in this text, we will refer to these authors individually whenever pertinent to the development of the ideas presented.

distinctions help us understand what Bakhtin argues, for instance, about the science of literature:

[...] literary scholarship should establish closer links with the history of culture. Literature is an inseparable part of culture and it cannot be understood outside the total context of the entire culture of a given epoch. It must not be severed from the rest of culture, nor, as is frequently done, can't be correlated with socioeconomic factors, as it were, behind culture's back (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 2).¹⁴

This necessary proximity between culture and the science of literature points directly to Bakhtin's perception that literature is part of the superstructure and should thus be analyzed as an object within the realm of cultural representation, not merely as a simple manifestation of sociological content. While such content may fill the literary structure, it is important to understand that it does so through culture, not directly, as if it were just reproduction. Therefore, when undertaking an analytical study of literature, it is essential for the researcher to acknowledge that this manifestation enters society through cultural means, considering that such art is not just a "servant" of the ideologies present but also is, itself, ideology (Bakhtin; Medvedev, 1991).¹⁵

Thus, as is common with any utterance's association with ideology, here it is necessary to make a *rough* distinction between how the literary text can be differentiated from non-literary texts.¹⁶ In the case of the artistic manifestation in focus, the process of linguistic refraction occurs doubly;¹⁷ in other words, it is a refraction of the refraction, which forms and associates with an aesthetic project, distinguishing it from texts circulating in what historical materialism would call the base, as the latter only goes through a refractive movement.

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 6.

¹⁵ BAKHTIN, M.; MEDVEDEV, P. N. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

¹⁶ The detailed distinction between literary and non-literary texts is not within the scope of this work; therefore, it is made here more briefly, with the sole purpose of situating the position taken.

¹⁷ "To refract" means, here, that with our signs we not only describe the world, but we construct – in the dynamics of history and as a consequence of the inherently multiple and heterogeneous nature of the concrete experiences of human groups – various interpretations (refractions) of this world. [...]. In other words, refraction is the way in which the diversity and contradictions of the historical experiences of human groups are inscribed in the signs" (Faraco, 2009, p. 50).

It is from these principles that we can clarify the previously mentioned idea of the indivisibility between form, content, and material that constitute the aesthetic object to be analyzed. Vološinov (1983, p. 20, author's emphasis)¹⁸ asserts, for instance, that "form, of course, is realized with the aid of the material, and is fixed in it; but, in its significance, it exceeds the bounds of the material. *The meaning and the sense of form relate not to material, but to content.*" When considering that form is realized in the material to shape the content, we better perceive the impossibility of division between these constituents of the aesthetic object. Content—seen as the valued theme—is interpenetrated by the form—corresponding to how the author organizes the entire artistic whole—which is, in turn, realized in the material—the technical instrument used by the artist.

Once this indivisibility is perceived, a truly integral analysis of the literary work is constructed, allowing the analyst to move beyond merely recognizing a work (the basic acknowledgment of its elements, themes, contents, etc.) toward an understanding of the finished aesthetic project within it. Thus, we start with the idea that the aesthete requires an analytical activity that comprehends the fact that the object of their analysis is finished and consists of a movement that reflects reality and refracts it in a particular way, as it goes through a dialogue between author, language, and structure. This Herculean activity of the critic is better traced when keeping in mind the pathways outlined by Bakhtin (1990, p. 296, our emphasis)¹⁹ regarding how aesthetic analysis should be conducted:

Aesthetics must determine the immanent composition of the *content* of artistic contemplation in its aesthetic purity, i.e., the aesthetic object, in order to decide what significance the *material* and its organization in the external work have for it. Proceeding in this manner, aesthetics must inevitably establish, with regard to poetry, that language in its linguistic determinateness does not enter into the aesthetic object, it remains outside it while the aesthetic object itself is composed of artistically shaped content (or of content-bearing artistic *form*).

Thus, it becomes evident that we must consider the confluence of these three constituents around a fully finished architecture within the literary text to reach understandings that are firmly grounded in the work under analysis, avoiding solely

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 6.

¹⁹ BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art. Translated by Kenneth Brostrom. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability*: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov; translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp. 257-325.

relying on the impressionisms and/or ideologies of the co-creating reader, which have no backing in the object of analysis. One must know, therefore, that the *content* of a work is articulated in a *material* that receives a *form* that, in turn, feeds back artistically into the content.

Moreover, considering that the analyses presented here also focus on the construction of characters and their respective voices, it is crucial to highlight the theoretical alignment within which these voices are studied. To this end, we regard the utterances of the speakers in the narrative as indispensable constituents of this type of text. Furthermore, we recognize that the potential for language to speak of itself and with itself is what ensures the equal potentiality of the voices present in the work under analysis. Thus, they are seen here as contributors to the construction of the overall narrative while preserving particular characteristics for the construction of each individual involved in the enunciative scene. In this way, our investigation is based on the idea that *A Cup of Rage* is a work, in Bakhtinian terms,²⁰ heterodiscursive, and therefore, formed by the various potentials of internal social stratification that make up a language, which demands attention to the dialogues and conflicts inherent to these discourses, converging toward the interpretation of the aesthetic object as a whole. These natural potentialities of heterodiscourse guide the interpretations of the voices and character constructions presented here, especially since we have observed, during the course of this study, the presence of many of these social voices in the protagonists' speech, with particular emphasis on the languages commonly associated with the so-called masculine and feminine genders.

²⁰ During his studies, Bakhtin focused on the analysis of novels, considering this genre to be the ideal one for achieving his analytical objectives. However, it is known that the Bakhtinian method is not limited to this genre, as the author himself, at times, alternates statements, treating novel, prose, and narrative as synonyms. In BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Introduction by Wayne C. Booth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, for example, the author includes the novella *A Gentle Creature* by Dostoevsky as one of his corpora. Therefore, we do not view the use of the term "novel" as a limitation to this genre, and for this reason, we will apply the Bakhtinian methodological perspective to the novella *A Cup of Rage* in this work.

2 Analysis

When investigating the various meanings of the act of fighting that a dictionary presents, we inevitably encounter the idea that this act is an “aggressive discussion.” From this, we can propose the concept that the narration of a fight is a communicative situation, commonly marked by *animosity*, aggressiveness, lack of control, disharmony, and, in more extreme cases, the absence of human rational capacity. In the literary field, there are numerous examples of scenes and contexts of fights across the most distinct literary movements and regions, as they are often the “points of imbalance” in the stories presented. Normally, the fight does not represent the entirety of the text in question, but it often serves as both the starting and ending point. As an example, consider Tolstoy’s classic *Anna Karenina*, where the significant arguments between the protagonist, her husband, and her lover serve as key motivators for the novel’s main moments of breaking the status quo.

Thus, bringing a discussion as the central point of impact in a narrative would not be a significant innovation on the part of Raduan Nassar, as the literary tradition has done so for a long time. However, in the case of *A Cup of Rage*, the author chooses to concentrate efforts on reproducing the fight as an almost integral formation of the novella, and for this, he resorts to a construction of brief and short discourses to materialize the limited reflective time that human beings possess when in such situations. However, the absence of the filter of harmonious social coexistence has the potential to reveal what the human being tries to hide from themselves and others: deep feelings that are not easily exposed to the light of day. Therefore, the details of this uncontrolled discourse help illuminate these feelings, long repressed and hidden.

In the case of these two characters, henceforth referred to as Man and Woman,²¹ there is a social class struggle and self-deprecation that are only made evident when the situation of the fight is brought to the reader’s attention. The romance between them at

²¹ The novella does not provide proper names for these characters but strongly suggests that they are two individuals commonly referred to as Man and Woman. In this study, we do not dismiss the possibility that these characters could be read from other perspectives of sexuality and/or gender performance, including outside the scope of the dominant binary. We have chosen this nomenclature as it seems to us the one that most closely aligns with the reality of the literary text under analysis. We also emphasize that whenever these terms are used to directly refer to the characters, they will be written with an initial capital letter: Man and Woman.

the beginning of the narrative seems to portray a couple in the early stages of acquaintance, with abundant sexual appetite and a strong desire to live. However, it is in the fight that the melancholic ambiguity of both is revealed:

[...] it's impossible to tidy up the world of values, you can't clean the devil's house; so I refuse to think about what I don't believe in any more, whether that be love, friendship, the family, the church, humanity; I couldn't care less about all that! my existence still terrifies me, but I'm not afraid of being alone, exile was a conscious choice, [...] (Nassar, 2016, p. 29).²²

What stands out initially is the fact that the Man who makes the above statement is the same one who, the previous night, was involved in a long moment of pleasure and affection exchanges with the very woman he now argues with. It becomes even more striking when we consider that this human being, who does not believe in love or family, is the same one who, at the end of the narrative, will see in that woman the figure of his lover and mother. It is, therefore, a contradiction that demonstrates the mental confusion in which this person finds himself, highlighting again his attempt to conceal this very contradiction. It is also important to note that this character makes his disbelief in categories that serve as the foundation of Western societies very explicit, signaling disbelief in the world around him. It is well known, following Freudian thought, that disbelieving in all things external to oneself is one of the main characteristics of the melancholic individual, especially because they begin to see melancholia itself as an object of affection substituting what has been lost. In the case of this Man, what he lost was the love of the maternal figure, something he seems never to have fully received, and thus, he found in total disbelief in the world his source for channeling that love. All of that chosen, as he himself says, consciously ("my existence still terrifies me, but I'm not afraid of being alone, exile was a conscious choice").

Further regarding this feeling of hopelessness and detachment seen in the Man's speech, Maria Rita Kehl (2009, pos. 212) provides insight into this melancholic situation:

The hopelessness in the melancholic, for instance, is related to the fact that the Other, in its first imaginary version (the maternal one), did not provide the newborn a place in their desire. The melancholic becomes

²² For reference, see footnote 8.

trapped in a dead time, a time in which the Other should have appeared but did not.²³

As previously noted, it is known that this protagonist reveals how the absence of an idealized maternal figure makes him reach this extreme level of disbelief in everything that seems to sustain the society in which he lives. This prison in *dead time* is revealed more clearly when this character is seen as follows: “[...] I could barely contain the impulse to open myself completely and prematurely to welcome back that enormous foetus. (Nassar, 2016, p. 44).²⁴ The animalistic Man, who self-describes as a “horse,” nestles in the woman’s lap, falls sleep like a “little boy,” and allows himself to be seen as a “enormous foetus.” Thus, this Man concretizes the mood oscillation of a melancholic figure imbued with absences that made him cling to ambiguity to construct his existence; it is as though his peculiarity is non-being, or even ambiguous being, but not due to the multiplicity of common subjects that define human beings, but through the alternation between acceptance and non-acceptance of having lost something/someone. A mood oscillation based, therefore, on attachment to the situation of loss, making the individual who seeks to move forward perceive themselves as mimicking (Lima, 2016) a new defeat. To avoid this, it seems more suitable to cling to pain. When he engages in a fierce argument with the Woman over a hedge, he repeatedly attempts to conceal his vulnerabilities, reinforce his disbelief, but, ultimately, he gives in to the lap of the one who could serve as both mother and lover.

Although the maternal figure, as he idealizes it, does not manifest—or never manifested—its presence, it is to that time long past, when he was a simple child, that he attempts to return. The argument, then, becomes a way for him to reinforce his need for the *stage* and *attention* for his entire situation of melancholic disbelief. In his case, the fight serves as a subterfuge to hide his melancholia, which, however, ends up revealing it.

Before focusing on the melancholia expressed in the fight scenes, it is worth highlighting the construction chosen for the Man’s speech, previously cited. Observe that

²³ In Portuguese: “A desesperança no melancólico, por exemplo, tem a ver com o fato de o Outro, em sua primeira versão imaginária (materna), não ter conferido ao recém-nascido um lugar em seu desejo. O melancólico ficou preso em um tempo morto, um tempo em que o Outro deveria ter comparecido, mas não compareceu.”

²⁴ For reference, see footnote 8.

there is an alternation of semantic fields that demarcate the doubt he experiences, the conflict and confusion that pursue his mind and ideas concerning the world around him. Furthermore, there is the use of a signal that, according to the prevailing rules of written Portuguese, requires the next word to begin with a capital letter, something that breaks with the entire presentation of the material in the book up until that point. Let us examine these circumstances in more detail.

First, this character claims to not care about a list of elements that hold significant value for the predominant Judaic-Christian culture in the West; afterward, he shouts, “I couldn’t care less about all that!” The popular expression “I couldn’t care less” refers to the idea of attaching little importance to what is being discussed, yet in this case, the effect seems to be the opposite, for the need for affirmation through the elevation of his voice seems more like a failed attempt to hide the absence that this character feels for not having been able to, throughout his life, cling to one of these elements as the majority of the population does. By resorting to the extreme of speech, in this case, a shout, the author has to demarcate this choice with an exclamation mark (!). The Man’s need for affirmation was so great that Nassar had to step outside the chosen aesthetic and demarcate the shout, with a sign that would also mark the premature end of the sentence. This ending does not occur, as we can see, because the author decides to continue the text without using a capital letter, as expected by grammatical norms, with this choice justified by the fact that it is a passage with strong traces of oral language (see the pronominal placement throughout the excerpt). This exaggerated need to shout to affirm something that had already been stated in a habitual tone demonstrates precisely the dissonance the character presents when confronted with the absence of those elements in his life. What we see is that, although he claims not to miss elements like family and church, this absence needs to be reaffirmed through a shout so powerful that it demands its expression to be announced beyond the grammatical boundaries of the text itself.

This insecurity with his own assertions becomes even clearer when we see what follows after the shout: “my existence still *terrifies* me, *but* I’m not *afraid* of being alone” This type of sentence construction, with a prevalence of asyndetic, additive, and/or adversative coordinated clauses, is common throughout the text of *A Cup of Rage*, as this is a way to ensure a reading speed closer to that expected for human breathing during an argument. In this case, however, the reading speed might end up making it difficult to

perceive the confusion of this character, who, on one hand, is *terrified* by his own existence, but on the other hand, is not *afraid* of being alone, even though this is the situation in which human beings are forced to face their own existence. Let us agree, however, that if we made a scale of intensity, feeling terrified by something would be at a higher degree than feeling afraid of something; nothing out of the ordinary. However, in the case of the Man, what he is terrified of is the very fact of existing, of being who he is, but he is not afraid of being alone, even though this is the situation in which human beings must face their own existence. The exile he has consciously chosen is an attempt to remain alone, to cling to this solitude, or even, as Starobinski (2016) proposes, a way of preserving the privileges of a lost childhood. An attitude, at the very least, incoherent, or ambiguous, reaffirming this conflict through which the melancholic figure passes when choosing complete disenchantment as the core of their life. After all, “the sad man dispenses with the world. In the company of his sadness, he lets nothing else affect him” (Kehl, 2009, pos. 3083).²⁵

Still within this context of discourses revealing the true feelings of the characters, it is important to highlight the situation of the fight, which is the central theme of this novella. In this narrative, we observe that the couple in a state of disagreement—generated by the action of ants, it should be noted—lets their own effusive and animalistic discourses reveal, in fact, the fragility both present in the face of the world around them, especially through the significant humoral interchange of both. While simple insects are capable of generating the couple’s anger and fight, simple and small details are enough to demonstrate, in the spiritedness of the fight, their failed attempts to conceal their feelings of disconnection from a world that is slipping away, given their profound disenchantment.

However, one observation is extremely pertinent in the case of these characters. All the chapters of the novella are narrated in the first person, with the first six being conducted by the Man and only the last one by the Woman. This creates an important caveat during the analysis: most of what we know about the Woman comes from the Man’s perspective, so her speech may have been altered due to the narrative focus. In this case, we rely on direct speech quotations, demarcated by quotation marks, for better-

²⁵ In Portuguese: “o homem triste prescinde do mundo. Em companhia de sua tristeza, não se deixa afetar por nada mais.”

grounded assertions; in moments when the narrator uses free indirect discourse, observations will have this textual caveat clearly marked. It is also important to highlight that the final chapter of *A Cup of Rage* revisits the initial scenes of the story, where the Woman arrives at the Man's home, but now from her perspective.

In this last chapter, and here lies the problem, we do not get her perspective on the same fight that took place earlier, as the three pages of this final section cut the story and jump from her arrival to the sexual act, ignoring the entire intermediary. It seems clear that the cut is directly related to the silencing suffered by the feminine figure throughout the narrative and, furthermore, with an attempt to delegitimize this figure as someone who occupies other roles in society beyond that of mother and lover. In the one chapter where a woman has the power to narrate the story, the focus centers on the man who leaves clues for a kind of sexual game and nestles in the lap of this narrator to return to being a “enormous fetus.”

Despite all the abuses and psychological and physical aggression experienced by this woman, now, in the last chapter, one must ask: why, when she can tell the story, is it only shown how much pleasure she feels from being in front of that man? In fact, she expresses a desire that he be her son: “I could barely contain the impulse to open myself completely and prematurely to welcome back that enormous fetus” (Nassar, 2016, p. 44).²⁶

This seems to be the confusion—strongly demarcated by the humoral interchange of the characters—that the story attempts to build: the idea of rage, drunk in a cup, leading both to angry and animalistic attitudes, but whose outcome is found in the lap of maternal affection, each of them claiming the place that suits them best. The Man resorts to a remembered time, before his own melancholia (Starobinski, 2014); the Woman resorts to a form of exile, in which ignoring the silencing suffered, leaving the “images of torment” because “the very source of torment has been reached,” for “From the double mirror will come a ‘éclair unique’ [‘unique glow’] of union in death” (Starobinski, 2014, p. 79, author’s emphasis). In these melancholic figures, there is a mood oscillation that corroborates the understanding of a life trajectory marked by the spread of pleasure in suffering or pleasure with suffering. This is a story about a “simple” couple’s fight that reveals archetypes of human society, as well as prejudices and issues that, unfortunately,

²⁶ For reference, see footnote 8.

form the foundation of this very society, with an emphasis on machismo and social exclusion due to class differences.²⁷

However, contrary to what might be thought about melancholia, the individual whose psyche has been struck by this feeling does not necessarily have to show an aspect of constant sadness and disillusionment. As we have seen, they may end up *disguising* this melancholia through expressions of anger. After all, as Benjamin (2012)²⁸ himself asserts, it is the ambiguity of moments of persistent sadness or abrupt joy that characterizes this exceptional being known as the melancholic. Moreover, although perennial sadness is a constant in more advanced cases of melancholia, stressful situations, such as fights, can serve as a motivator for the person in this condition to allow what their condition causes them to hide to become visible: sadness and the complete absence of hope in any situation of the world. Thus, it is in a situation where the control of sadness is diminished in favor of anger that the melancholic allows their shamelessness in relation to the feelings they experience to be revealed. Humoral alternations, therefore, are a legitimate way to perceive potential indications of this narcissistic psychoneurosis, named by Freud as Melancholia.

Final Considerations

The study of melancholia in *A Cup of Rage*, presented here in its initial form,²⁹ can highlight, based on a dialogical analysis of the literary text, that the discourse of the characters Man and Woman, caught in a situation of conflict and/or fighting, presents signs of a character construction based on aspects of this psychosis that affects humans in various forms. Furthermore, this very melancholia, which was perceived here in its incipient form, shows a closer alignment with the conceptions of melancholia presented by Freud, though not exclusively, as the influences of the capitalist world have distinct

²⁷ Analyzing these themes is not within the scope of this work, but the emphasis is important for understanding the complex construction of characters and, furthermore, for serving as a motivator for future research that aims to address this issue.

²⁸ BENJAMIN, W. Theses on the Philosophy of History. In: BENJAMIN, W. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

²⁹ This text is the initial part of a chapter from our doctoral thesis. The analysis of the melancholia of these characters will be expanded in the final version, as this is a text intended for preliminary peer evaluation, as we consider this phase crucial in the development of scientific research.

impacts on the lives of the characters. These impacts, in turn, generate different reactions that closely resemble the melancholia studied and presented by Benjamin.

Within this tradition of conceptions of the sign in melancholia, it draws our attention how the figure of the *phallus* and potential castration may be crucial for understanding the protagonists of this story — something to be explored in future studies. It seems clear, however, that, ultimately, both are in search of replacing the sadness of absence with something outside themselves, even though solitude appears to please both.

Thus, the text demonstrates an unexpected construction of melancholia because it does so through *rage*, rather than *sadness*, as we commonly associate it, and as highlighted by Starobinski (2016). The characters in *A Cup of Rage* are people who, through their enraged spirit, reveal the true sadness that drives them to an exile from themselves to themselves, from what they are to what they once were, trying to escape the terror of existence that overwhelms them in the here-and-now of the present moment, where ants can generate seemingly insurmountable existential conflicts. He, in the absence of a maternal figure, accepts the woman who evokes rage and disturbances in him. She, in the absence of a child, accepts the man who diminishes her as a woman and awakens in her physical, moral, and psychological traumas. Both are clinging to any circumstances that pull them from their absences, but at the same time, they are surrendered to the desire to fulfill these absences. In the search for what is lacking for both, they seek someone who confirms that lack, to which they are attached. Therefore, they are melancholic, and this unveiling is clarified through their constant mood alternations.

This perception was made possible through efforts to observe the confluence of material, content, and form within the work, as proposed by Bakhtin. In the case of the novella under analysis, it was the study of how the brief and coordinated sentences predominant in the text are articulated in the construction of characters driven by melancholia, within a short text, with few characters, seven chapters, and two narrators, that allowed for the understandings presented here. The constant dialogue between the constituents of literature itself, considering it as a product of cultural order, is what allows us to reach conclusions like those presented here, especially when considering the creation of characters based on knowledge from psychoanalysis, medicine, and psychology—topics that are integrated into the work through language and that must be

accessed through studies aimed at observing this dialogue between literary science and other fields of knowledge. Thus, we see the contribution of this theoretical framework precisely because it supports the possibility that studies bring to literary analysis a dialogue with distinct areas of knowledge, something that serves as both its starting point and endpoint in an inexhaustible process of mutual reinforcement.

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Translated by *Valber Rodrigo Ribeiro de Medeiros* – vrrmedeiros@gmail.com

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