

The Anguish of Living in the City / *A angústia de viver na cidade*

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ABSTRACT

In Graciliano Ramos' novel *Anguish*¹, the gradual psychological dissolution of the main character, Luiz da Silva, has a close relationship to the conditions of modern urban life. The city is sometimes referred to or signified as Babel, the original urban chaos, and other times as Babylon, the *urbs* corrupted by vice. Furthermore, recurring metaphors like those of the rats (meaning degradation of life, corruption of sexuality, or the predatory character of bourgeois materialism) and the emphasis on the feelings of anguish,² reveal connections between Ramos' novel and philosophical/psychological concepts of Angst in Freud, in Kierkegaard and in Heidegger.

KEYWORDS: City; Anguish; Graciliano Ramos; Rats

RESUMO

No romance *Angústia*, de Graciliano Ramos, a gradual dissolução psíquica de Luís da Silva tem uma relação intrínseca com as condições da vida urbana na modernidade, sendo a cidade referida ou semantizada ora como Babel, o caos urbano original, ora como Babilônia, a *urbs* corrompida pelo vício. Além disso, a recorrência de metáforas como a dos ratos (significando a degradação da vida, a corrupção da sexualidade ou o caráter predatório do materialismo burguês) e a ênfase no estado de angústia revelam as interlocuções com conceitos filosóficos/psicológicos da Angst, tais como expressos em Freud, Kierkegaard e Heidegger.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cidade; Angústia; Graciliano Ramos; Ratos

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¹ TN: The novel *Angústia* was first published in Brazil in 1936. For the English version of this article, we used the edition in the English language, whose reference is: RAMOS, G. *Anguish*. Translated by L. C. Kaplan. New York: Alfred A. Knopp, 1946.

² In the English version of this article, the word “angústia” is translated as “anguish,” its more direct equivalent. However, when it refers to Freud’s *Angst*, it is translated as “anxiety.”

1 When Reality Enters one's Eyes

Anguish (1946),³ the third novel by Graciliano Ramos, is the novel most frequently analyzed from the psychological perspective: The introspective feature of the narrative – whose suffocating density expresses the very condition present in the title –, makes the narrator/protagonist a symbol of a Being who is crushed by the tortuous meanderings of madness. After the publication of two novels (*Caetés* and *São Bernardo*) where dialogues and actions prevailed, Graciliano's choice in *Anguish* catches the readers' attention, for its bitter and overabundant internal monologue. This monologue pervades the novel and becomes increasingly acute in the agitated delusion of the last pages, as Luiz da Silva obsessively awaits the discovery and the punishment for the murder he had committed.

However, as critics have already indicated, in *Anguish* the protagonist's madness cannot be understood outside the relation between individual and reality. The great force of the constitution of this character lies in this very internal/external dynamics. Mostly, it is true that the very structure of the novel coincides with a period in the author's life, which was extremely distressing. Being subject to persecutions, threats, anonymous phone calls, intrigues, financial difficulties, he barely had time to prepare the manuscripts and send them to his typist. He was arrested in March of 1936, in the context of the rise of Vargas dictatorship. In the foreword of the commemorative edition of the 75th anniversary of the novel, Elizabeth Ramos states that:⁴

The construction of the novel reflects [...] the author's suffocation and psychological pain. The book was written in a time of “disturbances, changes, troubles of all kinds.” Therefore, the fictional locus – Maceió – could not be any other. The characters needed to be moved from society to fiction. The degradation confirmed the sign of anguish. The novel was constructed, then, both as symbolic and as cathartic. Graciliano needed to express, in writing, the suffocating feeling in which he was involved (RAMOS *apud* RAMOS, 2011, p.9).⁵

³ See footnote 1.

⁴ TN: The translations of the quotes herein have been done by the translator of this article for the purpose of its publication in English. Whenever English translations are available, as for the works by S. Freud and C. E. Schorske, they have been used.

⁵ Text in original: “A construção do livro reflete [...] o abafamento e a dor psicológica do autor. Foi um livro forjado em tempo de “perturbações, mudanças, encrencas de todo o gênero”. Assim, o locus ficcional – Maceió – não poderia ser outro. Os personagens precisavam deslocar-se da sociedade para a ficção, e a degradação confirmava o signo da angústia. A obra construía-se, pois, como simbólica e

Hence, anguish pervades the act of creation from the field of experience itself. This field of experience was determined, not only by the specific historical context and by autobiographical references, evidently, but also, in a broader way, by the fundamental conditions of modern urban life, about which Graciliano, with his deep social consciousness, was particularly sensitive: disorientation, dissolution, loneliness, materialism and anonymity. From this perspective, the novel can be interpreted with the paradigm of an important literary heritage of the modernist period:

Since the time of Dickens and Baudelaire, the city has been seen as social and psychological landscape, both producing and reflecting the modern consciousness. It is a setting that in the modernist period often takes center stage. In the Dublin of Joyce, the London of Elliot, and the New York of Dos Passos, the city becomes one of the most important characters of all, determining and imaging every human action (SHARPE; WALLOCK, 1987, p.6).

In the Maceió of *Anguish*, which was hostile in the eyes of an introverted public servant, “a citizen like anyone else, a Luiz da Silva going to his tedious job”⁶ (RAMOS, 1946, p.18),⁷ there is no possible refuge, not even in the memory from the past, very often evoked: “I enter the room and seek a refuge in the past. But I cannot hide myself completely in it. In the first place, I am no longer what I was then. I lack the tranquillity, the innocence; I have become a rag that the city has worn out and defiled.”⁸ (A, p.17) Luiz da Silva is the underprivileged heir of a rural Brazil in dissolution in the thirties. In vain, he turns to fragments of a country life, semi-feudal past, which no longer bears the present: the memories of his grandfather, a typical country Colonel,⁹ and of his father (whose death the lonely boy cannot grieve for), who was obsessed with chivalric novels. These memories point to this double reference to a world which is pre-industrial and almost medieval, in which the process of the authoritarian modernization in the Vargas

catártica. Graciliano precisava colocar no papel o sufocamento que o envolvia.”

⁶ See footnote 1.

⁷ Hereinafter all references to Graciliano Ramos's novel *Anguish* will be made with the letter A, followed by the page number. For reference, see footnote 1.

⁸ See footnote 1.

⁹ “Coronelismo” (“rule of the colonels”) is a typical system of the Brazilian historical-social formation, which started in the early twentieth century, and still has vestiges today. It occurred mainly in the rural areas, and it was characterized especially by the predominance of private personal local power (“the colonel”) over a more comprehensive impersonal power of the State, which compromised its formation as *res publica*. “Coronelismo” is one of the longest lasting consequences of rural/slavery origin in the Brazilian society. (Note by the author of this article for its English version.)

Era was undermined: “When reality enters my eyes, my small world tumbles down.” (A, p.84).¹⁰ As stated by Silviano Santiago, in the afterword of the 59th edition of *Anguish* (2004):

Brazil, as described in the micro narratives [from Luiz da Silva's childhood], is in the Old Republic Period (1889-1930), when Luiz's sentimental roots are planted. His lifestyle is not urban. He had been moved from the country to the capital city, and was transformed into a typical representative of *Tenentismo* youth¹¹ - “a rag that the city has worn out and defiled.” In the rural communities of Alagoas, the relationships among men are harsh and unkind. They are all dominated by the fierce command of the *colonel*, which is at the top of the politics-family structure. The behaviour of the clan members and of the animals is given without solution of continuity. They are survivors in a world in ruins [...].

Like the copyist Belmiro, in the novel by the same name by Ciro dos Anjos, Luiz has lost the patriarchal foundation and he builds, in the capital, [...] impoverished replicas of the rural family structure of nobility. To comprehend *Anguish* [...] is to comprehend the role played (especially) by neighbors, bohemian professionals and office co-workers in the urban world of a farmer's son, taken from his roots to the big city. The urban fragmentation [...] is, in the *Tenentismo* novels, the allegory of the lost rural community (SANTIAGO *apud* RAMOS, 2011, pp.342-343).¹²

The dynamics of the relation between the Being and the world, in the text's structure, makes the city the space of degradation, of negative interaction for the man who is eradicated from the traditional nobility, and who is reduced, in the urban space, to (financial, affective and identity-related) penury. In the city, the traditional identity, one which defines the Northeastern countryside, is reduced until it almost reaches a state of anonymity: The five noble names of the grandfather, *Trajano Pereira de Aquino*

¹⁰ See footnote 1.

¹¹ TN: *Tenentismo* refers to young officers' rebellions, who claimed social justice and national reforms in Brazil in the 1920s.

¹² Text in original: “O Brasil descrito nas micronarrativas [da infância de Luiz da Silva] é o da República Velha (1889-1930). Ali estão plantadas as raízes sentimentais de Luiz. Ele não é um cidadão. Transplantara-se do campo para a capital, transformando-se em representante típico da juventude tenentista, isto é, “molambo que a cidade puiu demais e sujou”. Nas comunidades rurais alagoanas, o relacionamento entre os homens é rude e áspero. São todos dominados pela vontade férrea do coronel, que toma assento no topo da pirâmide político-familiar. O comportamento dos membros do clã e dos animais é dado sem solução de continuidade. São sobreviventes num mundo que está ruindo. [...] Como o amanuense Belmiro, no romance homônimo de Ciro dos Anjos, Luiz perdeu o alicerce patriarcal e, na capital, constrói [...] réplicas empobrecidas da nobre pirâmide familiar rural. Compreender *Angústia* [...] é compreender o papel desempenhado por (principalmente) vizinhos, profissionais boêmios e colegas de repartição no mundo urbano do filho de fazendeiro, desenraizado na grande cidade. A fragmentação urbana [...] é nos romances tenentistas a alegoria da comunidade rural perdida”.

Cavalcante Silva, are followed by the three names of the father, *Camilo Pereira da Silva*. Finally, in the long lineage of old rural land owners, there is “a Luiz da Silva [...] like any average citizen” (A, p.18),¹³ with no fame, power, or fortune.¹⁴ The exacerbation of the lonely, unhappy experience – which the narrator/protagonist condenses into the failed passion for the frivolous Marina – ultimately makes him lose control. It is the failure of the Enlightenment reason:

[...] in a context of the value crises, such as one that emerges in modernity, one cannot trust the omnipotence of the “Enlightenment subject” [...], on which Luiz da Silva would base and maintain his balance and rationality [...]. He fails to interact with the community, with the city where he lives. He also fails in his desire for social mobility. This situation provokes in him an unfortunate, self-destructive, psychological state, as nothing fills the void in his soul. The world itself imposes this void and makes him fragile, even though it assigns specific values on him [...] (SARMENTO, 2006, p.116-117).¹⁵

From Luiz da Silva's tormented perspective, the city is one more enemy. As a suffocating and oppressive space, it is the glimpse of the prison that awaits Graciliano and of the upcoming dictatorship regime: “Here it is also too hot. And no shrubs or vegetation. Only a few forsaken cocoa trees, rigid and melancholy though awaiting orders. [...] The stiff cocoa trees are left behind. I think of a military dictatorship, of parades, of discipline” (A, pp.4-5).¹⁶ As a decadent substitute for the traditional communities, the city becomes the place par excellence of fake and superficial relationships, with very few friends and many mere acquaintances: “Rua do Comercio. There are the groups who nauseate me. I count my acquaintances – I always meet some twenty people as far as Martyrios” (A, p.5).¹⁷ The value system is weighed on the scale of *commodity*, a fetish-symbol of the capitalist world. In *Anguish*,

¹³ See footnote 1.

¹⁴ This decadence of the agrarian family, expressed in the absence of Luiz da Silva's ancestors' surnames, had already been addressed by Sonia Brayner in an essay originally published in 1973 (BRAYNER, 1978, p.209).

¹⁵ Text in original: “[...] em uma paisagem de crise de valores como a que surge no panorama da modernidade não se pode confiar na onipotência do “sujeito do Iluminismo” [...], em cujo âmbito Luiz da Silva manteria o equilíbrio e a racionalidade [...]. Luiz da Silva fracassa na interação com a comunidade, com a cidade em que vive e também nos desejos de ascensão social. Essa situação lhe provoca um lamentável e autocorrosivo estado psicológico, pois nada preenche esse vazio da alma que o próprio mundo, mesmo dando-lhe valores específicos [...] impõe, fragilizando-o.”

¹⁶ See footnote 1.

¹⁷ See footnote 1.

the bourgeois city is signified, in a more general way, by the metaphor of the *store window*, which also emphasizes the preponderance of appearance, narcissism and superficiality over the deeper experience:

Certain places that formerly gave me pleasure have now become odious. I pass in front of a book shop, look disgustedly in the window, have an impression that the people inside displaying their names and cost on their faces are selling themselves. It is a sort of prostitution. [...] And the resigned centres of this attention continue to exhibit their signs and prices like the whores on the rua da Lama (A, p.1).¹⁸

Displayed in store windows like any other ordinary commodity, not even literature escapes the “prostitution” of capitalism. In order to survive, Luiz da Silva sold his poems, which ended up forgotten in youthful love letters and cheap folios. As pointed out by Sônia Brayner in the essay *Graciliano Ramos e o romance trágico* (*Graciliano Ramos and the Tragic Novel*),

The oppression present in all affective or social relationships always has [in Graciliano's fiction] a motivation of struggling values. The predominance of money and the system of the world managed by the author maintains the character [Luiz da Silva] in a continuous state of tension, which exacerbates his antagonisms. His fears refer to debts, overdue rents [...], the penuries he undergoes are closely related to his impossible connection with a world of quantified values (1978, p.211).¹⁹

Before the store windows that display the wonders money can buy (most of which are inaccessible to a low-ranking bureaucrat), the narrator's discomfort and anger become increasingly violent: “I walked blindly through the streets, pausing in front of store windows, tempted to destroy the articles on display. The women who stood there gaping, admiring that trash, deserved a whipping” (A, p.83).²⁰ This opposition is personified with the appearance of Julião Tavares, the heir of the commercial establishment Tavares & Company, “a fat, red-faced, smirking individual, a chauvinistic

¹⁸ See footnote 1.

¹⁹ Text in original: “A opressão presente em todas as relações afetivas ou sociais possui sempre [na ficção graciliana] uma motivação dos valores em luta. A predominância do dinheiro e do sistema de mundo gerido por ele mantém o personagem [de Luiz da Silva] numa tensão continuada, exacerbando-lhe as antinomias. Os medos referem-se a dívidas, aluguéis não pagos [...], as misérias que passa estão relacionadas estreitamente ao seu impossível entrosamento num mundo de valores quantificados.”

²⁰ See footnote 1.

babbler and scribbler” (A, p.42),²¹ who buys, with expensive gifts and opera tickets, Marina's body and affection. Thus, it becomes more painful to acknowledge the huge abyss that separates the “owners” of the city – for example, Julião Tavares, who gave “the impression that everything around was his” (A, p.203)²² – from those who were destined to be “insignificant screws in the State machinery [...]”, turning “like screws in the same pot” (A, p.125).²³ As expected, the result oscillates between the naive utopia (Luiz da Silva's dream of winning the lottery and buying a house in Alto do Farol and a cotton mattress for nights of love with Marina) and violence (the brutal murder of his rival). However, the reading of *Anguish* from the perspective of class struggle – which is possible to be observed and even amplified in the interpretations and appropriations of Graciliano's work; for instance, Leon Hirszman, in adapting *São Bernardo* into a film – does not exhaust the surplus of meaning (characteristic which is so markedly literary) of the novel *Anguish*. Let us move on, then.

2 Between Babel and Babylon

In a well-known essay on the European idea of the city, historian Carl Schorske pointed out that, in the course between the Enlightenment and the modernity, there was a progressive devaluation of the city as a concept, both in the political-social thought, and in arts and literature, which was specially expressed in biblical metaphors. Accordingly, Nineteenth century European thought started to represent the city and its vices, due to the failure of the expectations of the city as a space of human emancipation and of the realization of the utopian potential of societies, according to the Enlightenment defense of the city as the heavenly New Jerusalem: “The city as symbol was caught in the psychological trammels of disappointed hopes. Without the dazzling picture of the city as virtue, inherited from the Enlightenment, the image of the city as vice could hardly have achieved so firm a grip on the European mind” (SCHORSKE, 1998, p.44).²⁴ The Eighteenth century metropolis started to assume, in several forms of intellectual and artistic expression, the terrible features of Babylon or Sodom, corrupted

²¹ See footnote 1.

²² See footnote 1.

²³ See footnote 1.

²⁴ SCHORSKE, C. E. *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

by lust, of Dante's dark infernal city, or of the disorienting and shattered Babel, the original urban chaos. Archaic Victorians, such as Coleridge, Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelites, wanted to abandon the city, seeking refuge in a rural past. Writers such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy criticized the dehumanization and the moral-psychological degradation of urban men. Utopian socialists aimed to reform society with the return to small communities. Later, from the Marxist socialism to the Modernist vanguard movements, one sought to reform the city by abolishing its anomalies and social dilemmas, with the aim to recover its primary value as the space of *freedom*.

Luiz da Silva's hallucinatory disorientation and increasing irrationalism are associated with the experience of Babel, marked by fragmentation of images, desires, and ideas. The narrator frequently gazes at the city from his backyard. He can watch recurrent scenes, which are fragmented and poor in the full sense, such as one in which a woman washes bottles and a man fills vats. From there, he sees Marina for the first time – a vision of a woman in pieces: feet, legs, mouth, hair (A, pp.58-59).²⁵ Ideas and ideals are shattered and wander, in a tumultuous way, through the corners and cafés in Maceió:

[...] Public opinion does not exist. The newspaper-reader admits a multitude of dissenting opinions, he maintains this, asserts that, becomes perplexed, and does not know where he stands. [...] I recall the time when men did not read papers. I think of Phillipe Benigno, who had a certain number of sufficiently fixed ideas, of old Trajano, whose ideas were limited, of Mestre Domingos, who was deprived of ideas and lived happily. And I lament this tumult, *this tower of Babel into which the frequenters of the café have fallen* (A, p.174, our emphasis).²⁶

In the flaws, disagreements and confrontations of the polyphonic Babel, whose product is a tumultuous, strange and fearsome crowd, – “The crowd is hostile and terrible. I seldom perceive anything that concerns me [...]” (A, p.142)²⁷ –, Luiz da Silva's ideas have to be what they are, “fragmentary, numerous and unstable” (A, p.47).²⁸

²⁵ See footnote 1.

²⁶ See footnote 1.

²⁷ See footnote 1.

²⁸ See footnote 1.

Nevertheless, Maceió, through Luiz da Silva's eyes, is a Babylon which is especially corrupted by vices: “The city was spawning, it was like old Trajano's goat pen” (A, p.178).²⁹ Lascivious and lacking moral, it becomes a personal offense through the eyes of the mandatory celibate: “What disgusts me is to see accidently people caressing one another on the centre benches, which the foliage scarcely conceals [...]. Dogs! To make love shamelessly in public! Dogs! I tremble with indignation” (A, p.22).³⁰ Repressed sexuality is, indeed, one of the main aspects of the narrator/protagonist's psychology in *Anguish*. It permeates the novel, especially in the recurrence of phallic signs. Firstly, the *snake* which, tangled in Old Trajano's neck, reappears later in the narrative, as the *rope* left by Seu Ivo, which is used by Luiz da Silva as a murder weapon against his rival, the dandy Julião Tavares. It also appears as a badly-sealed *pipe* in the protagonist's house, through which the fertilizing and humid fluidity of the water passes. Before the rope, the pipe had already incited homicide impulses in Luiz da Silva: “A piece of that is a terrible weapon. A frightful weapon, yes, senhor, it can break a man's head. I have seen it done” (A, p.100).³¹ According to Antonio Candido, in a pioneer study of Graciliano's work, *Ficção e confissão (Fiction and Confession)*,

The violent phallic fixation is directly related to the repressed sex, to the psychological suffocation in the book. The boy who lived alone, the unhappy, discontented, unloved teenager, expands into a violent phalism. This phalism conflicts with the conscience of the repressed, and interiorizes it, disabling it to have normal relationships. It takes it to the desperate act to murder Julião. Murdering him with the rope is an image that releases, by transference, the unconsummated energy of his virility (2006, pp.53-54).³²

This permanent anguish of the narrator's violent sexual repression reaches its peak at one night when he – lying naked in his iron bed (which evokes a kind of torture

²⁹ See footnote 1.

³⁰ See footnote 1.

³¹ See footnote 1.

³² Candido, in the same essay (1955), presents the original analysis of the *leitmotiv*, of snakes, pipes and ropes in *Anguish*. The theme is later addressed by Roberto Sarmiento Lima (2006), quoted in this article. Text in original: “A violenta fixação fálica está diretamente ligada ao tom de sexo recalcado, ao abafamento psicológico do livro. O menino que viveu sozinho, o adolescente sem amor, insatisfeito, se expande num falismo violento; este, entrando em conflito com a consciência de recalcado, o interioriza, inabilitando-o para relações normais, e o leva, num assomo de desespero, a matar Julião. Matá-lo com a corda, imagem que liberta, por transferência, a energia frustrada da sua virilidade”.

instrument, the medieval “iron maidens”) – witnesses, through the common walls typical of urban two-story houses, the erotic joys of the neighboring couple. He was desperately smoking a cigarette that insisted on putting itself out (a representation of the fear of impotence). Tormented by flea bites, he has to scratch his skin (a reference to the skinned body, open flesh, or to the body in flames, a metaphor for the burning sexual desire, which is also recurrent in other passages of the narrative). He is inserted, in a hallucinatory way, in the sexual act, in a mixture of desire and repulse:

Impossible to sleep. The walls of Dona Rosalia's room adjoined my own. “Her husband's home,” Antonia had told me secretly. He must have been the same swarthy baldheaded fellow who tipped his hat and grumbled a greeting when he passed me in the street. Now the words were plainly audible: – “Cutie, fatty...” I don't know how these creatures could love each other so loudly without paying attention to the curiosity of neighbours. Dona Rosalia panted and had some long spasms terminating in a frightful ui! which must have been audible on the street. Before this prolonged howl the man uttered obscene words. It seemed to me that my room was filling with loose flying sexual organs. The fire of the cigarette lit up the grappling moaning bodies: – “Cutie, fatty...” – “Ui!” In the darkness the narrow wall disappeared. The three of us were in the same room, I tossing on the narrow mattress, itching with fleas, inhaling the smell of dirty clothes and sperm, they grappling, twisting, biting each other, foaming at the mouth. That would be prolonged for hours. Afterwards silence, fatigue, the light of morning, sleep; the wall would separate us (A, p.111).³³

From this perspective, Luiz da Silva's anguish is similar to Freud's *Angst*, which is related to castration anxiety, to defense mechanisms (fight/retreat), and to the repression of the sexual instinct. Actually, anxiety was one of the most analyzed and revised themes by Freud during his intellectual life. It was the focus of at least four of his most famous writings, and it was the sub-theme in several others. In his early texts, especially in the *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* (1916-17), Freud relates anxiety to repressed sex, the “unconsummated excitation – that is, people in whom violent sexual excitations meet with no sufficient discharge, cannot be brought to a satisfying conclusion” (SMITH, 2014, p.3448).³⁴ Luiz da Silva, emasculated by the

³³ See footnote 1.

³⁴ TN. Ivan Smith collected Freud's works and organized them in a single volume. The full reference is: SMITH, Ivan (Org.). *Freud: Complete Works*. Holy Books, 2014. Available at: <<http://holybooks.lichtenbergpress.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/Sigmund-Freud-The-CompleteWorks.pdf?f8954e>>. Access on: 2 feb. 2015.

petty conditions of his existence, is constantly submitted to processes of alternation between excitement and unconsummated desires, which the specific circumstances of urban life take to the limits of tolerable levels: The cat-eyed typist, who he glances at on some occasions, and who he looks for, in vain, in the city; Marina's bath, which was revealed through the narrow walls of the semi-detached houses, moment at which his erotic impulses are aroused by “the glutglut of the foam” in the armpits and groins, and by “the sonorous urine” (A, p.149)³⁵ of the desired woman; the walks in the scrutinizing and scrutinized city, where “Open automobiles exhibited couples, closed automobiles passes swiftly, and I divined in them crumpled skirts, moans, exciting odours” (A, p.178).³⁶ Snakes, pipes and ropes, as we mentioned, permeate the narrative with sexual content. However, a resident of the *obs-scene*³⁷ of the city, an underground creature, is the most recurrent metaphor in *Anguish: the rat*.

3 The Rat Man

One of Freud's first clinical cases, and also one of the most famous, is the story of the “Rat Man,” a patient who developed severe symptoms of obsessional neurosis – superstitions, obsessive impulses – and who also “produced *prohibitions*, sometimes in connection with quite unimportant things” (FREUD, 1925 p.158; emphasis in the original).³⁸ During the treatment, the man reports a revealing fact which occurred years before, while he was in the Army: One day, a fellow officer, who was “*obviously fond of cruelty*” (FREUD, 1925, p.166; emphasis in the original)³⁹ told him about a horrible punishment used in the East in which the criminal was tied up, and a pot filled with rats was turned upside down on his buttocks. The rats eventually gnawed their way into the victim's anus. In the morning that followed this account, which causes deep restlessness in Freud's patient (from this moment on, he is obsessed with the idea that something terrible could happen to someone dear to him), the same officer assigns the man the task

³⁵ See footnote 1.

³⁶ See footnote 1.

³⁷ The combination of *cena* and *obscena* (scene and obscene) – terms we appropriate herein – of the city, as object of literary analysis, was made by Renato Cordeiro Gomes in the book *Todas as cidades, a cidade (All the Cities, the City)* (GOMES, 1994).

³⁸ FREUD, S. *Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*. Translated by Alex and James Strachey, 1925. Available at: <<http://www.mhweb.org/freud/ratman1.pdf>>. Access on: 2 feb. 2015.

³⁹ See footnote 38.

to get a refund of a payment in the post office. Due to several misunderstandings and failed attempts, he does not manage to get the money back. Since then, the phobia of rats is associated simultaneously, in the patient's neurosis, on the one hand to *sexual repression* and to anal eroticism, and on the other hand to obsessive delusions involving *money*. This happens through several psychical mechanisms of displacement by contiguity of facts and by linguistic connections. For Freud, “rats have a special connection with money... – ‘ratten’ (rats) meant to him ‘raten’ (installment)” (RICHARDS, 2010, p.89).⁴⁰ Furthermore, as the “Rat Man” knows rats can transmit several diseases, he starts to experience intense hypochondria, and he sees rats especially as symbols of *syphilis infection*, so frequent in the life in the barracks and related to sexual promiscuity. From this perspective, the *penis* is itself “the conduit of syphilitic infection” (MILLER, 2011, p.21),⁴¹ and the rat becomes a sexual organ.

From Freud's case of the “Rat Man,” therefore, the rat means, at the same time: (a) the hungry eater of waste and entrails, the one that violently penetrates underground and obscure corners – accordingly, there is an evident association between the city, with its pipes, tunnels and undergrounds, and the excretory system (bowels, rectum, anus); (b) a creature with phallic connotations, the prolific, promiscuous animal; (c) a symbol of plague, disease, deterioration and death; (d) a negative image of materialism, riches and money, especially when it refers to illegal activities, clandestine, night activities of a loan shark or of a thief. Moreover, the rat can also be seen as an infernal, demoniac creature, which makes it a chthonic symbol in several cultures. According to the myth of Smintheus in the *Iliad* (Greek *sminthos*, rat), it can also be the agent of revenge (CHEVALIER; GHEERBRANDT, 2005, p.770).

In one way or another, all these metaphors are present in *Anguish*. In a novel marked by redundancies, repetitions and circularities, and by something that Sonia Brayner called “an undermining zoology, which corresponds to a degradation of humanity” (1978, p.215),⁴² the word “rat” is certainly one of the most recurrent. Through Luiz da Silva's moralizing and misogynist eyes, it is often used as an adjective to disqualify women in the city, seen as vulgar, promiscuous and treacherous (many

⁴⁰ RICHARDS, Arnold (Org.). *The Jewish World of Sigmund Freud: Essays on Cultural Roots and the Problem of Religious Identity*. Jefferson: Macfarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 2010.

⁴¹ MILLER, Michael. *Lacanian Psychotherapy: Theory and Practical Applications*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

⁴² Text in original: “uma zoologia inferiorizante correspondente à diminuição da humanidade”.

times as opposed to women from his memory of the country, such as *sinha Germana* and *Quitéria*. “Marina is like a little mouse” (A, p.4),⁴³ says the narrator in the beginning of the novel. Later, tormented by the tempting (demoniac?) view of the next door neighbor with fiery hair, he once more degrades her by animalization, and compares her successively to a chicken and to a rat:

Perhaps the chick had perceived that I was only feigning sleep; anyway, she began to move about, laughing softly, advancing, retreating, displaying her front and rear [...].

She turned her back on me.

“Chi, chi, chi.”

Her laugh was like a hiss. She bent forward: the slender waist vanished, her hips increased. The cloth marked the separation of her buttocks [...].

“Chi, chi, chi.”

The whispered laugh moved away, reached my ears like the whistling of a rat. Exactly, the hissing of a rat [...] (A, p.60).⁴⁴

After the profound degradation caused by her pregnancy with *Julião Tavares's* bastard son, and by *Dona Albertina's* improvised, illegal abortion clinic – “Marina's son was dying, perhaps he was already dead. I thought of the rats [...]” (A, p.196)⁴⁵ –, the Marina who was once extroverted becomes the image of shame, one who “would remain with her gaze lowered, hiding like a rat, wailing” (A, p.205).⁴⁶ Luiz da Silva is himself a scared rat, in the feverish daily life in the city:

Beastly types. They spend the whole day intriguing in the cafés and lounging around indecently. When I spy this rabble, I shrink back, I cling to the walls like a frightened rat. Exactly, like a rat. I flee from these industrialists who chuckle heartily as they discuss politics and whores (A, p.2).⁴⁷

These “industrialists who chuckle heartily as they discuss politics and whores” are the rats who are eager for money. They are thieves. They are stingy. They devour everything or hoard things in their caves. The bourgeois people at *Tavares & Company*, “[...] wholesale grocers, owners of numerous apartment buildings and influential

⁴³ See footnote 1

⁴⁴ See footnote 1.

⁴⁵ See footnote 1.

⁴⁶ See footnote 1.

⁴⁷ See footnote 1.

members of the Chambers of Commerce, were rats” (A, p.43),⁴⁸ they “wore linen suits and hid behind their merchandise like rats” (A, p.93).⁴⁹ The child that Marina carried, an illegitimate son of the prosperous businessmen in town, “a boy that would be born plump, with fat cheeks, a dirty rat like his father, like his grandfather, the Tavares of Tavares & Company” (A, pp.155-156);⁵⁰ the child may even get the “gnawing teeth” (A, p.174)⁵¹ from its father.

The rat is, therefore, the very symbol of the city, which torments and oppresses men. In *Anguish*, there is also a proliferation of rats in Luiz da Silva's house. They destroy and contaminate furniture, clothes and cupboards. But they have a special preference to destroy the character's books and manuscripts, i.e., the most faithful accounts of his unfortunate existence:

What I should have done was move out. This house is inconvenient, noisy, horrible. The rats did not let me fix my attention on my work [...]. They had opened a hole in the cupboard and they lived inside, whistling infernally. Sometimes there was a dank rotten smell [...]. We finally found the bookcases transformed into a cemetery for rodents. The wretches had selected the books that pleased me most for their sepulchre. But first they made an ugly mess on the papers. They pissed on all the literature, devoured my unpublished sonnets. I could not write [...]. Crunch, crunch – it was as though they were gnawing something inside of me (A., p.96).⁵²

The semantic feature at the end of the passage is not there by accident. The rat that gnaws the house goes to a more intimate home, with the terrible, violent punishment of the “Rat Man”: “Sometimes my heart grew taut like the spring of a well-wound watch. A rat was gnawing at my entrails [...]. The streets were full of women. And the rat gnawed inside of me” (A, p.33).⁵³ It is the ultimate representation of the anguish that gnaws Luiz da Silva, opening holes inside.

⁴⁸ See footnote 1.

⁴⁹ See footnote 1.

⁵⁰ See footnote 1.

⁵¹ See footnote 1.

⁵² See footnote 1.

⁵³ See footnote 1.

4 The Beast in the Urban Jungle

With the structure model of the psyche in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud reformulates the theory of anxiety of his early writings, and relates it to the primary defense mechanisms of fight/retreat, which are essential to survival, as a reaction of the Ego to an internal danger, engendered by the Id, and repressed to its limits by “the severity of the super-ego” (SMITH, 2014, p.3990).⁵⁴ It projects itself, neurotically, onto the exterior reality (in the form of phobias, superstitions and/or compulsive/obsessive behaviours): “The ego is the actual seat of anxiety. Threatened by dangers from three directions, it develops the fight-reflex by withdrawing its own cathexis from the menacing perception or from the similarly regarded process of the id, and emitting it as anxiety” (SMITH, 2014, p.3991).⁵⁵

In more strictly philosophical terms, the concept of anxiety was analyzed especially by Søren Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) and by the German existentialist Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927). The Danish philosopher and theologian expressed, before Freud, the psychological internality of anxiety, which distinguishes it from fear – a reaction to a certain object. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is directed to *nothing*, and it results from the unconscious state of the original sin, which, leaving behind innocence, can only be overcome through the reconnection of the spirit with faith. It arises from the *freedom* that characterizes the human spirit, opening up the infinite possibilities of being, as background of its existence in the world: “The *spirit* feels anguish towards itself”.⁵⁶ (KIERKEGAARD *apud* NUNES, 2012, p.112). Similarly, Heidegger resumes the Kierkegaardian sense of a relation of Being to an imprecise or unexisting object, similar to the concept of anxiety that Freud had been formulating at the same time. Anxiety – fear without a determined object – is then related to the restless freedom of Being-in-the-World. As very well synthesized by Benedito Nunes, in his valuable study on the Heideggerian philosophy and its relation to poetics:

⁵⁴ See footnote 34.

⁵⁵ See footnote 34.

⁵⁶ Text in the Portuguese translation: “O espírito tem angústia de si mesmo”.

[...] the Heideggerian characterization of what is feared in anxiety – the threat or danger which makes us anxious – notably coincides with that of Freud. Unlike fear, danger is declared in anxiety, and does not expose us to real harm or to an immediate harmful effect. It does not need an object. Fear always manifests itself through a determined, innerworldly entity, from which the threat arises. What threatens us “is not anywhere. Anxiety does not know what it is the thing to which anxious feelings are directed” [...]

As threat is not anywhere, the not-knowing of anxiety is the relation to something which is not innerworldly. What is feared in it is then displaced to the world. We cannot cling to any object, as the innerworld becomes insignificant, and danger – which spies us everywhere, without approaching us in a determined way – is the world as itself, *originally and directly* [...] open to *Da-sein*. *Da-sein*, reduced to itself, to the singularity of its factual existence, and to its possible being [...], moves from the family involvement of family members to the uncomfortable and homeless condition of Being-in-the-World.

The threatening background of anxiety – the essence of danger – is not, therefore, any possibility, but the power-of-being-oneself of existence (NUNES, 2012, pp.110-111, emphasis in the original).⁵⁷

From such perspective, the fear that Luiz da Silva projects onto the city that surrounds him is the *fear of himself*. It is a fear of violence and bestiality, of the overwhelming force of desires which are so painfully controlled.⁵⁸ Such violence and bestiality are engraved in his country soul that insists on emerging, in spite of its disguise as a petty, subservient public servant, someone who walks on the streets, and who is bent, shriveled as a rat, muttering apologies for the bumps. This idea of the *beast in the jungle* (like the powerful image in the title of the novella by Henry James) or of

⁵⁷ Text in original: “[...] a caracterização heideggeriana daquilo que é temido na angústia – a ameaça ou o perigo ante os quais nos angustiamos – coincide notavelmente com a de Freud. Ao contrário do medo, que se manifesta sempre pela via de um ente determinado, intramundano, de que a ameaça provém, o perigo, que se declara na angústia, e que não nos expõe a prejuízo real ou a efeito nocivo imediato, carece de objeto. O que nos ameaça não “está em parte alguma. A angústia não sabe o que é aquilo ante que se angustia [...] Não estando a ameaça em parte alguma, o não-saber da angústia é a relação com algo que não é intramundano. O que nela é temido se desloca para o mundo. A nenhum objeto podemos apegar-nos, porque o intramundano torna-se insignificante, e o perigo, que nos espreita em toda parte, sem que de nós se aproxime numa paragem determinada, é o mundo como mundo, originária e diretamente [...] aberto para o Dasein, que, reduzido a si mesmo, à singularidade de sua existência fáctica e de seu ser possível [...], resvala da envolvimento familiar dos entes para a incômoda e desabrigada condição de ser-no-mundo. [...] O fundo ameaçador da angústia – a essência do perigo – não é, portanto, uma possibilidade qualquer, mas o poder-ser-si-mesmo da existência” (emphasis in original).

⁵⁸ In the study *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926) Freud argues that such fear of oneself, which triggers the emotional discharge contained in the fight-retreat mechanism, lies in the origin of several symptoms and phobias, including agoraphobia. It signals mainly the powerful impulses of libido, which are threatened by the trauma/fear of castration: “The agoraphobic patient imposes a restriction on his ego so as to escape a certain instinctual danger – namely, the danger of giving way to his erotic desires. For if he did so the danger of being castrated, or some similar danger, would once more be conjured up as it was in his childhood” (SMITH, 2014, p.4283).

the internal monster that is released (signified earlier in Graciliano's novel *São Bernardo*, with the character Paulo Honório) is represented in the physical description of Luiz da Silva at the night when Julião Tavares was murdered – hands contracted like claws, rough beard, eyes that were “ordinarily dull”, and “had a small hard gleam” (A, p.229).⁵⁹ It is also represented in the fear of conscience (SMITH, 2014, p.3991),⁶⁰ which attacks the character at the instant immediately before the crime, when he becomes the pursuer rather than the pursued. The narrator then accepts the fact that the danger lies inside himself:

How long did these memories and weakness last? A minute, or less. *My hands contracted again*, and my legs walked faster over the long road. I wanted Julião Tavares to escape and free me from this torment. If he ran down the deserted road, everything would be over. I would try to overtake him. In vain. *I thought of shouting, of warning him there was danger*, but the shriek died unuttered in my throat. I do not yell: I have become accustomed to speak softly in the presence of my superiors. It was imperative that something should hinder Julião Tavares and drive him away from there. But at the same time I was enraged because he was clinging to the road and defying me. Was I nothing then? Were not the humiliations received in public sufficient? At the corners, in the streets, in the cafés, he turned his back on me. I was a dog, a nobody. “It's advisable that you write an article, Seu Luiz.” I wrote it. Promptly, without even a thanks. A Julião Tavares turned his back on me and ignored me. In the editorial rooms, in the department, on the street car, *I was an unhappy, bound bundle*.⁶¹ But there on the deserted road to turn his back on me like a toothless dog! No. Where did all that greatness come from? Why that assurance? *There was a man*. But I was a man too. “A man, do you see? A man.” Julião Tavares did not hear me and continued to walk tranquilly. “Run, you devil.” Why didn't that miserable wretch run, *free himself from my evil instincts*? Was he recalling perhaps the caresses of the freckled girl? “All this has no value, Julião Tavares. Marina, the freckled girl, the cat-eyed typist, they are all unimportant. The only thing that matters is your life. Flee.” Julião Tavares stopped and lit a cigarette. Why did he pause at that moment? *I wanted him to move away from me* (A, pp.212-213, our emphasis).⁶²

⁵⁹ See footnote 1.

⁶⁰ See footnote 34.

⁶¹ TN: The word *trouxa* in Portuguese, meaning *bundle*, has also the colloquial meaning of a *stupid person*.

⁶² See footnote 1.

However, Julião Tavares does not notice Luiz's presence, nor does he listen to the momentary appeal of his executioner's fear of conscience. The crime that follows, in the "clammy darkness," in the "dense milky air" of the night (A, p.208),⁶³ is a misty, almost unlikely, an act that arises from the delusion of the anguish. Involved in the shadows (of night? Of the unconscious?), murderer and victim are combined (Luiz da Silva puts Julião Tavares's hat on his own head). Life and death are also confused (Tavares's corpse, raised up by hanging, is perceived by passers-by as a lonely night wanderer). At the core of anguish then, there would be the very mystery and uncertainty of death, the Id's destructive instinct. But the discontents of the civilization, according to Freud, refer to the counterpart of the domestication of instincts imposed by the Western culture: "[...] We have admitted, too, that, in spite of all our pride in our cultural attainments, it is not easy for us to fulfil the requirements of this civilization or to feel comfortable in it, because the instinctual restrictions imposed on us constitute a heavy psychological burden" (SMITH, 2014, p.4714).⁶⁴ Julião Tavares is not, after all, Luiz da Silva's rival, but his *double*, instead, the urban/civilized Ego, reduced to architectonic ruin – "a separate marble pillar" (A, pp.218-219)⁶⁵ – due to the outbreak of his own portion of barbarism/nature, the dark side of town, "hidden in the foliage, wrapped in the mist" (A, pp.220-221).⁶⁶

It is also important to observe one more relevant aspect in Graciliano's fiction, which is closely related to Freud's concept of anxiety. Despite the continuous re-elaboration of Freud's characterization, origins and symptoms of anxiety, one aspect (present since the early *Introductory Lectures*) is maintained as one of the most valuable premises to the founder of psychoanalysis: the association between anxiety and the fundamental pain experienced in the act of birth. The symptoms of anxiety are mainly a displaced repetition of this initial anxiety.

Such Freudian considerations about the origin of anxiety in the act of birth, arising from a double trauma – the pain experienced during birth and the separation (physical and psychical) from the mother – point to a question which, despite appearing to be marginal, may be read from the perspective of *repression*, i.e., something that is

⁶³ See footnote 1.

⁶⁴ See footnote 34.

⁶⁵ See footnote 1.

⁶⁶ See footnote 1.

essential, for not being said. Throughout the narrative of *Anguish*, almost in its totality, and even during the remembrances of Luiz da Silva's remote childhood events, there is no reference to the mother. In fact, the only moment she is mentioned, by an involuntary memory, is on the last pages, in a very brief reference during the hallucinatory delusion: "The sound of a victrola filtered through my ears, caressed me, and I became smaller, rocked in the linens that were transformed into a net. My mother rocked me, singing that song without words" (A, p.246).⁶⁷ Maybe, in a less dissipated existence, she could be the refuge dreamt about and sought by "a rag that the city has worn out and defiled."

5 In a "Dense Mist," Fernando Inguítai

After the murder of Julião Tavares, as already mentioned, the city and the spirit of Luiz da Silva are merged into a mist of obscurity and ruin: "Inside that dark hole there was a mist. Marina, Dona Adelia, Seu Ramalho, Julião Tavares, everything was mist" (A, p.230).⁶⁸ The narrative follows such dissolution, plunging into the dark depths of a feverish delusion, populated by characters from the urban tragedy (Marina, Victoria, Moysés, Dona Albertina, Julião Tavares, Seu Ivo, the blind man with lottery tickets) and from the memory of the country (Grandfather Trajano, Father Inácio, José Bahia, Cyrillo de Engracia) of the narrator. Then a strange character appears: Fernando Inguítai.

Fernando Inguítai walked through the rua do Commercio, his arms loaded with strings of stories, a cigarette between his slaving, puckered lips, buck teeth exposed in an evasive smile. [...] Now it was gone. Who had told me that strange name? Fernando Inguítai, the lizard, the beam of light, Amaro the cowherd. The victrola sang softly: "Fernando Inguítai" (A, p.249).⁶⁹

Similar to other fictional works by Graciliano Ramos, *Anguish* is also a book permeated by autobiographical references, which also appear in *Infância* (1945), such as the almost paternal figure of José Bahia, Father Inácio, Quitéria and the ranch Cavallo Morto, whose owner is the sinister Seu Honório (who inspired the character Paulo

⁶⁷ See footnote 1.

⁶⁸ See footnote 1.

⁶⁹ See footnote 1.

Honório in *São Bernardo*). Let us report to *Infância*, in the search for some reference. There is in fact a Fernando (referred to by first name only), who gives the title to one of the chapters in the book. This Fernando was the protégé of a powerful Colonel in Viçosa, “a thin man, hard eyes, sinister aspect” (RAMOS, 1978, p.210).⁷⁰ He was said to be a mean man, whose greatest satisfaction was to rape poor girls, who later ended up as prostitutes.⁷¹ For the narrator, the lonely boy, raised without his parents' affection, treated violently and marked by traumatizing events, Fernando was the image of absolute evil:

I have gotten used to considering him a dangerous animal. And reading the reddish dictionary [...] that Nero had been the worst monster of all, I doubted it. Worse than Fernando? [...] Fernando tormented me and it was terrible. He might not be the worst monster on Earth, but he was such a rascal. His wrinkled face, his impertinent harsh speech, his nagging, his oblique eyes full of bitterness, his impudent and disgusting ways, his asthma snore which ended in a breath, everything made me sure that Fernando distilled a lot of poison [...]. He became a symbol to me – and I hanged on him all the miseries (RAMOS, 1978, pp.213-214).⁷²

Nevertheless, the boy's belief that he had found evil in its essence is shaken one day when Fernando grabs a hammer and starts to bend the nails down – when he sees workers opening wooden boxes and laying wooden boards with nails sticking out on the floor –, so as to prevent children from getting hurt. From this moment on, the narrator concludes that it is no longer possible to believe in absolute evil: “Maybe Nero, the

⁷⁰ Text in original: “sujeito magro, de olho duro, aspecto tenebroso”.

⁷¹ Among these women, the narrator remembers, from his childhood memories, the figure of Ratinha (“Small Mouse”). In consonance with the nickname, she synthesizes the family characteristics and her sad fate – very similar to several passages in *Anguish*: “I remember Ratinha, beautiful creature. On party nights she wore red clothes, she showed two red roses on her cheeks, she smiled a red smile, she was all a triumphant redness – and this got her lost. Old Mother Rat had rat's eyes, a rat's nose, a rat's manners. Brother Rat was a small young man, restless, with a big nose. Ratinha was different from the family, she was no different from the respectable women. She shriveled and aged in a dark alley” (RAMOS, 1978, pp.212-213). Text in original: “Lembro-me de Ratinha, linda criatura. Em noites de festa vestia roupas vermelhas, mostrava duas rosas vermelhas nas bochechas, sorria com um sorriso vermelho, era toda uma vermelhidão triunfante – e isto a perdeu. A Rata velha tinha olhos de rato, dedos finos de rato, focinho de rato, modos de rato. O Rato irmão era um rapaz miúdo, narigudo, inquieto. A Ratinha se diferenciava da família, não se distinguia das moças de consideração. Engelhou e envelheceu num beco escuro”.

⁷² Text in original: “Acostumei-me a julgá-lo um bicho perigoso. E lendo no dicionário encarnado [...] que Nero tinha sido o maior dos monstros, duvidei. Maior que Fernando? [...] Fernando me atormentava e era péssimo. Talvez não fosse o pior monstro da Terra, mas era safadíssimo. O rosto de caneco amassado, a fala dura impertinente, os resmungos, o olho oblíquo e cheio de fel, um jeito impudente e desgostoso, um ronco asmático findo em sopro, tudo me dava a certeza de que Fernando encerrava muito veneno [...]. O sujeito se tornou para mim um símbolo – e pendurei nele todas as misérias”.

worst being of all, bent down the nails that could hurt the children's feet” (RAMOS, 1978, p.214).⁷³ Unlike Fernando of *Infância*, Fernando Inguítai in Luiz da Silva's delusion, in a brief description, is also “a rag that the city has worn out.” He may be the narrator's own personified anguish, if we take into account that his strange last name is almost an anagram of *angústia* (anguish). Fernando Inguítai is Luiz da Silva himself. Had he been able to straighten the nails that carved on his own feet, his tragic fate would have been avoided.

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⁷³ Text in original: “Talvez Nero, o pior dos seres, envergasse os pregos que poderiam furar os pés das crianças”.

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