

PORTO ALEGRE COFFEE SHOPS: TOPOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF *OS RATOS*

OS CAFÉS DE PORTO ALEGRE: UMA TOPOANÁLISE EM *OS RATOS*

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Abstract: The novel *Os Ratos* by Dyonélio Machado consists of various spaces that are essential for the development of the narrative. Coffee shops have great relevance; therefore they are spaces widely visited by the main character, Naziazeno, who spends the day looking for money to pay off a debt. Because they are spaces where meetings between friends and negotiations take place, analyzing is essential for understanding the social relations described in the work. We present, therefore, this study as an extension of the oral communication presented in the IV JOEEL which was carried out at Escola Superior de Educação Viseu / ESEV and is also the chapter of the master dissertation "Identity and Literary Space: A Study of *Os Ratos*, by Dyonélio Machado", developed in the Masters Program of Language Studies in the Federal University of Goiás/UFG - RC and aims to present, analyze and conclude the relevance of social spaces, the coffee shops, and the effect that these spaces cause in the actions of the characters in the work. To do so, we use as basis the studies of Bakhtin (2011), Borges Filho (2007), Saints (2002), among others.

Keywords: *Os Ratos*; coffee shops; Space.

Resumo: O romance *Os Ratos* do escritor Dyonélio Machado é composto por diversos espaços que são fundamentais para o desenvolvimento da narrativa. Os cafés têm grande relevância, pois são espaços bastante visitados pelo protagonista, Naziazeno, que passa o dia à procura de dinheiro para quitar uma dívida. Por serem espaços onde se configuram encontros entre amigos e negociações, a análise dos mesmos faz-se essencial para compreender as relações sociais descritas na obra. Apresentamos, portanto, este estudo como expansão da comunicação oral apresentada no IV JOEEL que foi realizado na Escola Superior de Educação de Viseu / ESEV e é também capítulo da dissertação de mestrado "Identidade e Espaço Literário: Um Estudo da Obra *Os Ratos*, de Dyonélio Machado", desenvolvida no Programa de Mestrado em Estudos da Linguagem na Universidade Federal de Goiás / UFG – RC e tem como objetivo apresentar, analisar e concluir a relevância dos espaços sociais, os cafés, e os efeitos que estes espaços causam nas ações das personagens da obra. Para tanto, utilizamos como base os estudos de Bakhtin (2011), Borges Filho (2007), Santos (2002), entre outros.

Palavras-chave: *Os Ratos*; Cafés; Espaço.

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The novel by Dyonélio Machado, *Os Ratos*, tells of one-day events in the life of a public officer from Porto Alegre whose main concern is to obtain money to pay the milkman.

The book begins with the milkman arriving at the Naziazeno's door and the fuss he caused when realizing that the father of the family would not have the money to pay off the debt, and therefore, he decides to press the man to search for money as soon as possible.

Faced with the hope of finding a solution and avoiding the interruption of the milk supply, Naziazeno Barbosa goes out into the streets of Porto Alegre in search of money, an aid, a loan, an advance payment, any solution that would put an end to the agony that had settled in his house after the visit of the milkman. In his search, the character suffers emotions that make him feel the influences of the spaces in which she lives, in the very dynamics of life

The goal of getting the money for the milkman becomes the main concern of the public servant who resorts to various places and people he knows. This situation is something constant in its life, therefore the certainty of that will obtain a solution is of house.

After leaving his house, Naziazeno catches a tram that will take him to the city center. There is where the solution is. Living in a "suburb", that was the only way to go to the city center. Here is an observation about the social criticism exposed in the novel, the city center is treated in the work as "the city", social development, the economy and public relations all take place in the city center and, given the development of this space, the whole city is reduced to the center.

While he was still at the stop where he was waiting for the tram, Naziazeno relives dramatic episode with the milkman. He feels rebuked by the people who witnessed the argument with the milkman and noticed his negligence regarding the payment and, even if he left the neighborhood in which he lives, he would have to take all the anguish he felt at the conflicting moment.

The tram bell brings about thoughts in Naziazeno and this results in a mental turmoil as he imagines how his day will end: will he be able to have solved the problem

by then? Will he finally have money to pay the milkman? How will he handle the situation? Will there be any solution? All of these issues that we can deduce from the ramblings of Naziazeno are triggered by involuntary memory caused by the sensorial gradient of hearing, the bell.

After facing all the embarrassment at his door, the fear of being seen on the tram as a bad payer, and the fear of walking around the neighbourhood where he lives, Naziazeno finally gets to where he thinks he can get any help, the coffee shop. At that time, coffee shops were places for socialization, where men got together to negotiate, chat with friends, spend some time or even share their anguishes with those who could somehow be able to help.

Coffee shops were also spaces where men would share their weaknesses and mistakes. Naziazeno was looking for a place where he could be understood and not judged. Initially, he was looking for the coffee shop where Duque used to hang. Besides escaping the eyes of the people in his neighborhood, he would be among people who, in one way or another, had made similar mistakes and similar flaws, considering that failing to pay the milkman or gambling as well as moneylending were considered to be despicable by the community.

As for Nazianeno's approach to the city center and, mainly, the coffee shops, which are spaces for illegal negotiations, we quote the words of researcher José Antonio Cavalcanti from URFJ in his article "Na Cidade dos Homens Invisíveis" (2008) in which he investigates Nazianeno and his friends' habit of having coffee shops as a meeting place.

Even though *Os Ratos* cannot be considered a crime novel, it brings on a strong psychological tension which produces some type of suspense - after all, in the eyes of the owners of financial resources, a debt is an unforgiveable crime and the punishment equals to those applied to ordinary criminals: both triggers social marginalization. (CAVALCANTI, 2008, p. 12)

That is what Naziazeno sought. In addition to some rest to think on how to solve the misfortune with the milkman, he expected to find a friend who would empathize with his situation and help him somehow.

As he got off the tram, automatically he headed toward the market coffee shop he sees right ahead. As mentioned before, he expects to soothe his mind and organize his thoughts in order to find a solution to settle the debt. As soon as he arrives at the coffee shop, he realizes:

Few people, unfamiliar faces. And it is still early. He did not expect that. All the customers were serious-looking, have their breakfast with a long face, hats sitting on some chairs, eyes on the street. (MACHADO, 1930, p.19)

The first sentence of this extract reveals that the torment of Naziazeno goes beyond simply paying the milkman. To him, it was important that he does not bump into any acquaintance so he does not feel judged or embarrassed in front of someone who knows his situation and his debt. So a neutral space with "few people and unfamiliar faces " (Machado, 1935, p. 19) would be the ideal space for him to relax and think.

The importance given to the acquaintances is so great that Naziazeno begins to see life from a different perspective. Minutes earlier he was concerned about the people on the tram and felt trapped by the looks he received. In the coffee shop where he is a complete stranger, though, he feels calm and can notice the pleasant aspects outside (Machado, 1935, p. 19). It is noticed that Nazianeno's emotional changes take place from the space he is in and his opinions reflects on the way he realized the environment around him.

Thus, we conclude that such example represents the simultaneity between feeling and space. The character feels distressed when the space has no highlight or beauty and when the space offers comfort, it also leads the character to acknowledge its greatness.

Coffee shops from the 1930s were the most exciting place for the society in Porto Alegre. In the work of Dyonélio, such reference is given through the character who sees such place as a refuge for when one is indecisive and lacking direction.

To fill the time he lacks, there is two options: hang out at the square or go into the coffee shop. Sit on a square bench means cool *down*, relax... Coffee shops are the fuss. For the coffee, though (Machado, 1935, p. 21)

The expression "coffee shops are the fuss" (Machado, 1935, p. 21) confirms the concept of coffee shop as a social space. As soon as Naziazeno acknowledges the movement of this space, he leaves towards it, knowing that in the midst of the crowd he could overcome what tormented him: the time. The space of the busy coffee shop, full of talkative people would help him pass the time until he finally decided to look for the director of the division in which he works.

Thus we have in this passage, as in all the narrative which takes place in twenty-four hours, the intersection of time and space. The two logics intersect in the novel, the search for space now also becomes the search for the passage of time. In this way, we are reminded of what Bakhtin says in his book *Estética da Criação Verbal* in the chapter on which he analyses and calls *O tempo e o espaço nas obras de Goethe*.

The ability to see time, to read time in the spatial whole of the world and, on the other hand, to perceive the filling of space not as a still background and a finished data but as a whole in formation, as an event; is the ability to read the evidence of the course of time in everything, beginning with nature and ending with human rules and ideas (even abstract concepts). (BAKHTIN, 2011, p. 225)

According to Bakhtin's theory, Naziazeno promotes the reading of time when making the decision to go to the coffee shop. Although he knew that in that space he could not concentrate because of the "uproar" of the people's agitation, he also knew that being there, he would be able to "fill up" that time "(Machado, 1935, 21). Thus, space becomes the solution to face the time that he would have to wait until he would be able to speak with the director of the division.

However, despite being sure that going to another coffee shop would eliminate a time that was eroding what hope he had, Naziazeno had a flow of consciousness that sent him to the consequences of going to the space he intended. Being in a coffee shop would mean spending the last two "pennies" he had left.

As he realized, from the market coffee shop to another one a good part of his prudence had gone. The caution of saving two pennies, the possibility of getting out of trouble with two pennies are not from him (this is the truth): *it is Duque's plan*. (Machado, 1935, p. 21)

Once again, we realize the influence of time on space. In the time it took him to go to the second coffee shop, Naziazeno decides to change his course, the coffee shop is now no longer a place that would bring him peace, but where he could spend the last money he had left and that could be missed. He also thinks about his friend Duque who always knows how to solve his problems.

Naziazeno then concludes that the best thing to do is go straight to the division director, as he goes a certainty is given to him, the time has passed, there is no more time for coffee. The space proposed in the narrative, the coffee shop, is then replaced because of time.

Naziazeno goes to the division and looks for the director, but he cannot talk to him for he is in the office and does not return, until Naziazeno loses patience and leaves looking for Duque. In his ramblings, the civil servant reflects on how to approach Duque, and this causes him fears: "It seems more noble to beg, show an honest poverty, without strategies. However when reflecting on the job of Duque, he feels superior, especially as an effort, as a fight"(Machado, 1935, p. 29)

Seeing him as a successful man and in good financial standing, Naziazeno feels ashamed to talk to his friend and expose his debtor status.

Duque is a regular customer in another coffee shop, in the market on the corner, that is where he negotiates his pawns and conducts his business.

He heads towards the market, to this coffee shop on the corner where Duque made into his headquarters. Naziazeno already knows the first question Duque will ask: whether he had anything to pawn. That is where Duque begins. Then, little by little, his plan takes shape, until it reaches a result. He puts a lot of hope in Duque, even too much! (MACHADO, 1935, p. 29)

The aforementioned excerpt reaffirms the idea that the coffee shops at the time were much more than a get-together space, they were, mainly, trading spaces. At that time, men, as well as Duque, used this space as an office and the certainty that Duque would be in the coffee shop for his day's negotiations was so strong that Duque's habit of attending the coffee shop gave a nickname to the place: "Duque's coffee shop".

He had already set foot on the market sidewalk. "Duque's coffee shop" is on the corner. This sidewalk is a fresh and happy shadow, full of footsteps and voices. As he approaches the central gate, he catches a sight of the Asian street, full of bazaars, a few engravings...of a few tapes... (MACHADO, 1935, p. 30)

In "fresh and happy shadow" we can notice Naziazeno's excitement as he approached the coffee shop where Duque was supposed to be. The shadow indicates the end of the rush put in the hope that Naziazeno has in obtaining a loan with Duque and the exhilarated joy in that surroundings indicated how close to the solution Naziazeno would be. These are representations of the sensations of the character before what he was about to do, speaking with Duque would solve the problem that had consumed him earlier.

The decor of the space with Asian figures that refers to bazaars and tapes

resembles a commercial district in which merchants have talent and financial success. At the simple fact of approaching the coffee shop in which he would find Duque, Naziazeno has the sensation that he also could enjoy that financial excellence.

Barely did Naziazeno know at the moment that in the same coffee shop where one could win, one could also lose and, while waiting for the arrival of Duque, who was uncharacteristically late, he was approached by Alcides that pressed him to spend the last pennies he had left, the very same pennies Naziazeno had saved at first. " _ Come buy me coffee. _ and Alcides drags him inside "(Machado, 1935, p. 31).

In this excerpt of Alcides talk, we retake a concept already treated in this study, the spatial coordinates. Alcides drags him into the coffee shop and Naziazeno no longer sees the street now, and experience a certain tension in the coffee shop.

The chat had long gone cold. In front of him, Alcides, looks away, at the street. Naziazeno follows the gestures of Carvalho, who is preparing to leave. He took the *por-monnaie* from the pocket, twisting a little; then put it back where it was, after looking into it, and pulled out a money bill from the side-pocket of his pants, twisting a little more. The food server, at his side, calmly, but with some impatience, gives him the change fast, before even touching the money. He pulls coins from many pockets putting them on the marble table. Carvalho, with his head down checks *them* separating them slowly. He, then, collects the rest. He takes the cane and the newspapers that he had put on a chair beside him and gets up, looking around the coffee shop, which makes Naziazeno tremble, as if a spotlight was suddenly directed at him. He looks away; he looks at Alcides. Carvalho, however, gradually moves the fringe away from his eyes; he is only a tall black figure, walking in cadence. His footsteps sound already Naziazeno maintains the stiff neck. Any relaxation of muscles would put him face to face with the other. He begins to feel a warmth in the face ... The steps sound louder ... Alcides turns slowly back towards him. (MACHADO, 1935, p. 32)

In this excerpt, we can see the disturbance of Naziazeno before the agitation inside the coffee shop, what once was calming and a symbol of rest, has now become tension and chaos from the operation of the place, the waiter running and the preparation of the client to leave the place, Naziazeno saw himself as a strange being in that space. The problem of being there went far beyond a simple discomfort, but reached the concern of leaving that place without even having the money to pay for the coffee that Alcides forced him to pay.

The description of the activities inside the coffee shop emphasizes the change of emotional state of Naziazeno who walked quietly expecting the moment he would finally have the opportunity to meet with Duque and complete his saga for money.

In the coffee shop, Naziazeno has another concern: losing the little money that he had saved in the pocket and being there in that space where much readily the waiter would fulfill his role and offer something to him, would place him in the same situation when he left the house. The same old concern for money now accentuates with full force and with more anxiety, since he will not be able to leave without losing some pennies.

Duque did not show, indeed. Naziazeno once again experiences that bitterness and nausea in the middle of his chest.

I think I will head to the division. Duque will not come anymore.

He puts his hand into the pocket. He gets the coins. He has a four-hundred reis coin and a penny. He puts the four hundred reis on the table. With the penny between his fingers, he hesitates for some time, then drop it on the table, too.

_ Shall we go?

He stands up slowly, following Alcides. At the door, they still look into the coffee shop, looking for something.

_ Would you not like to have a look at the coffeee shops downtown? _ his friend asks him.

_ Why not? _ and they started walking. The morning is almost lost, Naziazeno realizes. (MACHADO, 1935, p. 34 - 35)

Besides the tension of not having money to pay for anything in the coffe shops, Naziazeno resentend the delay of Duque. The certainty that Duque would arrive was lifting like fog, and despair appeared in his warm face and in his awkward posture, for the morning was almost over and Naziazeno had no idea how he would get the money.

All the experience lived in the coffee shop made Naziazeno go through a moment of *topophobia*, the anxiety in dealing with the absence of Duque, the attitude of the waiter and the customers and the anguish of spending the little money he had in his pocket made Naziazeno realize he might as well leave.

When leaving the coffee shop, Naziazeno returns to the streets where he felt emotions which were different from the ones felt in the coffee shop. Now "he starts walking" (Axe, 1935, P. 35) the *flâneur* now feels comfortable, free and once again starts looking for Duque. According to Cavalcanti:

In the work of Dyonélio Machado the taverns are the coffee shops and the dodging people are all the moneylenders and individuals who make a living at the expense of other people's misery. Although it is also an area of shadow and penumbra, it does not produce bohemia or any other social practice that uses the dark only to enhance the brilliance and magnetism of antipodal forms of alienated labor. The world of Naziazeno and his partners is endowed with thick opacity, without visibility, legibility, legitimacy. In the penumbra where they live they

spend all the time creating strategies of survival similar to those small conspiracies of the daily life. (CAVALCANTI, 2008, p. 12)

The excerpt about Cavalcanti defines the need for Duque's search around the city's coffee shops. Naziazeno wants a loan to solve his problem, but he could not find him at his favorite coffee shop. However, Naziazeno and Alcides decide to look for him at other coffee shops.

According to Cavalcanti (2008), the coffee shops were meeting places for moneylenders and that is why Duque could not be anywhere other than a coffee shop. Naziazeno is convinced that Duque earns money illegally, but admires him for his ability to keep up with his obligations, never showing any financial hardships.

Thus, we verify that the coffee shops are of utmost importance in the construction of the novel "Os Ratos" (The Rats). In the coffee shops, we have meetings and bargaining, the social and the economical. In the coffee shops, part of the population, which shows itself in the novel, lives out their desires, their longings, their negotiations and, even, their loves. Coffee shops are a prime get-together place.

FINAL REMARKS

Coffee shops are social spaces that transpose a certain intimacy given to the friendly atmosphere and the purpose of meeting friends. This space was also approached by combining the slopes of the Topoanalysis and Identity, since, in addition to a descriptive and analytical observation of the space, we observe the critical composition of the characters who attend such spaces. In this manner, it was possible to evidence, mainly, the basic principles of character and identity of the characters.

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