


PRECARIOUSNESS AND FEMININE SUBVERSION IN THE AMAZON OF DALCÍDIO JURANDIR

PRECARIEDADE E SUBVERSÃO FEMININA NA AMAZÔNIA DE DALCÍDIO JURANDIR

PRECARIO Y SUBVERSIÓN FEMENINA EN LA AMAZONÍA DE DALCÍDIO JURANDIR

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I intend to conduct a philosophical analysis of two metaphors by Dalcídio Jurandir. The first is found in the novel, "It Rains in the Fields of Cachoeira," which I call "The Metaphor of the Crucifix and the Skyscrapers." It describes the room where the prostitute Felícia lives in precarious conditions. The second metaphor, which I call "The Metaphor of the Heretical Body," is described in the novel "Marajó," when Jurandir narrates, through the character Ramiro, Ormindá's sexual relationship with the sacristan in the church tower. Based on the analysis of these two metaphors, I aim to conduct a philosophical reflection on the issue of gender and patriarchy, using as a theoretical foundation Butler's conception of the performative body, Fraisse's conception of gender as outside the primary gaze, Bourdieu's conception of the symbolic mechanisms of domination, and Kristeva's semiotics of body politics.

Keywords: Metaphor. Gender. Patriarchy. Feminine Subversion.

RESUMO

Pretendo, neste artigo, realizar uma análise filosófica de duas metáforas de Dalcídio Jurandir. A primeira delas está no romance, Chove nos campos de Cachoeira, que denomino "A metáfora do crucifixo e os arranha-céus". Trata-se da descrição do quarto onde vive, em condições precárias, a prostituta Felícia. A segunda metáfora, que denomino "A metáfora do corpo herético", é descrita no romance Marajó, quando Jurandir narra, por meio do personagem Ramiro, a relação sexual de Ormindá com o sacristão, na torre da igreja. A partir da análise dessas duas metáforas, viso realizar uma reflexão filosófica sobre a questão do gênero e do patriarcado, tendo como fundamento teórico a concepção de corpo performativo segundo Butler, de gênero como fora do olhar principal de acordo com Fraisse, dos mecanismos simbólicos de dominação conforme Bourdieu e da semiótica do corpo-política segundo Kristeva.

Palavras-chave: Metáfora. Gênero. Patriarcado. Subversão Feminina.

RESUMEN

Tengo la intención, en este artículo, realizar un análisis filosófico de dos metáforas de Dalcide Jurandir. El primero de ellos es en la novela, llueve en los campos de Cachoeira, que yo llamo "la metáfora y los rascacielos". Es la descripción de la habitación donde vive, en condiciones precarias, la prostituta Felicia. La segunda metáfora, que yo llamo "la metáfora del cuerpo heredado", se describe en la novela Marajó, cuando Jurandir narra, a través del

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personaje Ramiro, la relación sexual de Orminda con el Sexton en la torre de la Iglesia. A partir del análisis de estas dos metáforas, veo una reflexión filosófica sobre el tema del género y el patriarcado, teniendo como base teórica la concepción del cuerpo performativo según Butler, como fuera de la mirada principal según Fraisse, los mecanismos simbólicos de dominación según Bourdieu y la semiótica del cuerpo político según Kristeva.

Palabras clave: Metáfora. Género. Patriarcado. Subversión Femenina.

1 INTRODUCTION

Between 1941 and 1978, Dalcídio Jurandir published ten novels. This set of works was called by the writer from Pará the "Cycle of the Extreme North". An ambitious aesthetic project that has acquired, in recent decades, wide recognition not only in the artistic and literary world, but also among academics. The universality of this set of novels, although clothed in a poetic regionalism, is manifested to the reader when the narration reaches philosophical dimensions. Jurandir builds his literary philosophy either in the form of metaphor or "dissolved" in the various works, in a dense and tangled narrative, with apparently fragmented reflections.

Currently, the number of academic researches on the works of Dalcídio Jurandir is growing. The cause of this growing scientific interest lies in studying the social, political, and human conflicts that constitute the Amazonian culture of the twentieth century. Very similar to a fantastic realism, the conflicts narrated by Jurandir, despite being naturally rooted in a countryside and, therefore, regional reality, never cease, for various reasons, to be universal.

The universality of Jurandir's work can be found in the numerous metaphors described in his novels. This metaphorical universe can be considered a source of various types of knowledge, which not only makes a diagnosis of the modern Amazon, but also proposes alternatives beyond modernity. Thus, two metaphors will be analyzed in this article, namely: "The metaphor of the crucifix and the skyscrapers", described in Jurandir's first novel, *It rains in the fields of Cachoeira*, when the emblematic character Euthanázio wanders the streets of the quiet village of Cachoeira, tormented by an unrequited love and goes to the house of the prostitute Felicia, with whom he has sexual intercourse and contracts syphilis; and "The metaphor of the heretical body", described in the novel *Marajó*, which narrates the sexual relationship of the mulatto Ormindia with the sacristan, in the church tower. According to the patriarchy of the region, there was a terrible sacrilege, committed by a black sorceress, with skills to bewitch and lead men to evil.

The analysis of these two metaphors makes it possible to carry out a philosophical reflection on the issue of gender and patriarchy in the Amazon at the beginning of the twentieth century, a territory controlled by the latifundia and subjugated by colonial culture, where women are completely restricted from any protagonism. However, Felicia and Ormindia represent not only a form of resistance to patriarchy, but also a subversion of male domination, especially when the attitudes of these characters are understood in the light of the philosophical reflections of Butler, Fraisse, Bourdieu and Kristeva.

2 THE INVENTIVE METAPHOR

The Far North Cycle has a free and intense flow of metaphors. But before analyzing the two metaphors under study, it is important to circumscribe which conception of metaphor is used for this analysis. In this way, metaphor is understood not only as a stylistic resource, proper to language, as Aristotle (2003, p.134) states in his *Poetics*: "Metaphor consists in transporting to one thing the name of another, or from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to one species to species of another, or by analogy", but as a poetic construction that dispenses with analogy and is proper to the one who possesses ingenuity (*euphyia*), that is, to the poet, as Aristotle also states at another point in this same work:

Of great importance, therefore, is the discreet use of each of the aforementioned kinds of names, double names, and foreign words; greater, however, is that of the use of metaphors, because this is not learned in the others, and therefore reveals the natural ingenuity of the poet; in fact, knowing how to discover metaphors means being well aware of the similarities (ARISTOTLE, 2003, p. 138).

The Aristotelian understanding of metaphor as a complex production of the poet, who must possess a maximum innate ability to do so, is not consolidated, over the centuries, in a tradition such as that conception of metaphor proper to linguistic studies. It was only from the twentieth century onwards that this conception acquired wide relevance, especially from Blumenberg's *Metaphorology*. In this work, the author understands metaphor as an aesthetic construction resistant to conceptualization. It is the absolute metaphor, which does not allow itself to be dissolved in conceptuality, but remains active and vigorous in language as a substructure to nourish thought, including philosophical thought:

Certain metaphors can also be *basic elements* of philosophical language, "transferences," which cannot be traced back to logic. If it were possible to show such "transferences", transferences that would be called "absolute metaphors", the fixation and analysis of their enunciative function, conceptually unsolvable, would constitute an essential piece of the history of concepts (BLUMENBERG, 2003, p. 44-45).

Another fundamental contribution to this conception of metaphor as a kind of source of concepts is given by Lakoff and Johnson, in their *Metaphor of Everyday Life*. In this work, metaphor is defined not only as a linguistic analogy, thought of by a certain Aristotelian tradition, but as an expression of conceptual structures and cognitive capacities, which serve as a basis for the construction of reality. For these authors, metaphor is an instrument of

cognition, with a fundamental role in conceptual and cognitive processes. According to this conception, metaphor is part not only of language, but of everyday life, of thought and action:

Based on the linguistic evidence, we have found that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. And we find a way to identify in detail what exactly are the metaphors that structure the way we perceive, think and act (LAKOFF and JOHNSON, 2009, p. 40).

The contributions of Blumenberg, with his conception of metaphor as an image from which the concept flourishes, as well as of Lakoff and Johnson, who understand it as a fundamental cognitive operation, promote a paradigmatic change in the theory of knowledge and establish a crisis in the objectivist view, typical of Western culture, initiated by Aristotle and continued by Descartes, Kant and Comte. According to this new conception of knowledge, the concepts produced by Western rationality, from the pre-Socratic to the present day, are only incipient manifestations of deeper operations, the construction of metaphors.

To this contemporary conception of metaphor, which inserts it in the context of the theory of knowledge, another philosophical foundation is attributed, namely, the reflections developed by Nietzsche in his work *On Truth and Lies in the Extramoral Sense*. In this short and succinct writing, the German philosopher states that truth, so sought after by objectivist thinkers, has a metaphorical nature, that is, truth is the result of an erosion of metaphor:

What is truth, then? A mobile battalion of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human ratios, which have been emphasized poetically and rhetorically, transposed, embellished, and which, after long use, seem to a people solid, canonical and obligatory: truths are illusions, which have forgotten that they are, metaphors that have become worn out and without sensible force, coins that have lost their effigy and now only come into consideration as metal, no longer as coins (NIETZSCHE, 1996, p. 57).

In this way, Jurandir's metaphors, analyzed below, are not understood only as a linguistic resource of the writer, but as a source of conceptions that, in their development, encompasses various forms of knowledge, among them, philosophical knowledge. It follows that these metaphors, constructed in the novelistic fictions of the Amazonian writer, can be sources of philosophical analysis of the problem of gender and patriarchy, as well as of female subversion in the Amazon at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The analysis of these two metaphors by Jurandir aims to enable a reflection on the issue of gender, understood not in the way it is conveyed by the Christian/colonial culture, based on the masculine and feminine dualism, which justifies the constitution of patriarchal society. But, from a philosophical perspective, especially the one elaborated by Butler, in which gender comes to be seen as a performative act, as a construction based on culture, and is therefore not something that is finished, but is constantly under construction over time.

3 THE METAPHOR OF THE CRUCIFIX AND THE SKYSCRAPERS

In *It rains in the fields of Cachoeira*, Jurandir describes the moment when Euthanázio contracts syphilis, when he has sexual intercourse with the prostitute Felicia. This metaphor can be interpreted as a diagnosis of the extreme condition of poverty and submission in which women live in the post-colonial Amazon, determined by the patriarchal binary culture. Euthanazio, when he arrives at Felicia's room, sees a woman

[I]t smelled like wet dust. It smelled like earth after the rain. Hunger. It reeked of hunger. She was barefoot, with the flu, blowing her nose, at the back of the room, where there was a New York print on the wall. An uncovered pot of water, a mug thrown on the ground, a piece of mat and a dog peeking through the door. The lamp was like the tongue of the hungry or thirsty dog. Who would have given Felicia that New York print? The skyscrapers grew inside the dark and dirty little room. The tongue of the lamp gave the skyscrapers an apocalyptic color. The print increased over Euthanázio. But on an old table in the corner, and half lowered, a large crucifix showed in the scarce light some vague redeeming ribs. Where were Christ's eyes on that crucifix? (JURANDIR, 2019, p. 35).

The metaphorical description of the skyscraper print when, in contact with the light produced by the lamp, it is projected on the crucifix and on Euthanazius, giving the impression of an increase in size, can be interpreted as the new manifestation of moral values in the modern world. Submission, justified by such values, which no longer has Europe but the United States as its center of propagation, gains universal proportions and manifests itself in every part of the globe as economic submission. Continuous work is one of the main mechanisms for subtracting the forces of the will, which, when transformed, with the accumulation of wealth, into an exercise of submission, keeps God on lower planes, emptied of meaning.

Butler (1990) states that precariousness is naturally and directly linked to gender norms, since we know that those who do not live their genders in an intelligible way are at

greater risk of harassment and violence, thus leading a precarious life. The philosopher uses as examples of precarious life those who do not have access to citizenship, who live within a nation-state, but are not framed by its laws. In reality, it is mainly illegal immigrants in the United States. In ours, understood as a colony of American neocolonialism, it is women in general, especially poor, black and unemployed women, well exemplified by Felicia.

The shadow of New York, capital of the modern world, which swallows the crucifix, the body of Euthanzio and all the miserable objects present in that dark and dirty tomb, represents the subtraction of willpower and the proliferation of economic submission in the Amazon. This process occurs through the formation of large estates, which requires another demarcation of lands, forcing their legitimate inhabitants, Indians, blacks and caboclos to leave those fields in the middle of the forest, where they had once been a space of resistance against slavery, to live in small groups, the villages, with a way of life that tends to become urban, a favorable condition for the exercise of submission.

Felicia, who contracts syphilis from a traveler, possibly contaminated in Belém, in the port of Ver-o-Peso, would be that body transfigured by male submission, with a contracted conscience, incapable of creating values, since these values are created by men, representatives of colonial culture. In this perspective, Bourdieu (2002) states that in order to build an ideal of male superiority, it was necessary, over time, different ways to supply this belief so that it remained alive in the collective imagination, thus transforming *doxa* into social reality. When constructing an ideal of masculine, one must at the same time construct an ideal of feminine, which is a negation of the dominant ideal. In this way, the analysis of the metaphor makes it possible to affirm that the patriarchal culture, in order to maintain itself, needs to stigmatize Felicia as rotten, impure, incapable of living at the same level as virgin or married women.

4 THE METAPHOR OF THE HERETICAL BODY

In the novel *Marajó*, we have the image of another woman, in the same conditions as Felicia, the mulatto Ormindá. She is not officially a prostitute, but due to the precarious conditions in which she lives, she ends up depending on the man to live. However, in Ormindá there is an important element to be highlighted. This caboclo character embodies criticism, irony and subversion of Christian religiosity. The scene in which she has sexual intercourse in the tower of the Catholic church is perhaps the image that best brings together criticism, irony and subversion of Christianity, as Jurandir (2008) narrates: "– In Cachoeira they saw

her climb the church tower one night with the sacristan himself. On another day, Mestre Cândido, who has been doing work in the church, found the mark of her body on the floor of the tower."

The transgression of the limits of the sacred for the Christian religion, carried out by the one who should protect these limits, the sacristan, is propagated through the imagination of the locality as a desecration of the caboclo Ormindá, not only because it represents the seduction of Eve who, in the Christian tradition, gives rise to sin. But, because Ormindá has powers typical of caboclo religiosity, which not only denies Christianity but also takes an attitude of attack against this religion, because it understands that it justifies the submission exercised by its defenders, the white colonizers and their descendants. Thus, Ormindá's profane attitude is felt as an attack on Christianity. And, for this reason, the Marajoara patriarchy, represented by the landowner Coronel Coutinho, the notary and the representative of the judiciary in the city, build the image of an Ormindá stigmatized by desecration, because the mark of her color was written on the floor of the tower. And yet, the patriarchs constructed a discourse that Ormindá was involved in witchcraft.

According to Bourdieu, the mechanisms of male domination are based on beliefs and myths created about masculinity and femininity, that is, the basic dichotomy between male and female, thus creating different social roles to be played by these sexes. Always reinforcing the ideal of male superiority and delegating to women roles seen as inferior in our society. Male domination occurs not through force, but from a symbolic mechanism known and admitted by both dominators and dominated; This mechanism is the language itself full of signs that give strength to domination.

On the other hand, Jurandir transforms this discourse that reinforces the ideal of male superiority into a moment of female subversion. This mixture of witchcraft and Ormindá's enchantment, because they counted on her being the daughter of a dolphin, so she enchanted and collected men, which provokes a reaction of fear among the patriarchy, constituting itself as a counter-discourse in relation to male power.

And yet, the image of the body of the beautiful and seductive Ormindá, written on the floor of the church tower also indicates subversion of the patriarchal order. According to Kristeva (2012), the body used as subversion is a political body, which subverts paternal law. And this subversion would run through the poetic language present in women's discourses. Likewise, for Fraisse (2016), the body occupies a central place in debates about sex/gender and indicates how it promotes a political action that speaks. Nudity expresses an argument,

so it is necessary to debate the issue of female body language, as the value of the image of the female body occurs differently in different parts of the world.

In this context of the body as a political instrument, it is possible to intersect Orminda and Felicia, as the latter also uses her body as the representation of an object, appropriated and exchanged, possessed and replaced, consumed and used. But in various circumstances this same body is used as a policy against patriarchy. Another convergence between Orminda and Felicia consists of life on the margins of society. Fraisse suggested that gender can manifest itself as an out-of-field presence, that is, gender can be perceived as that which is left out of the main gaze, indicating that sex is beyond sexuality, as it emphasizes that the sex-gender debate is taboo for society and also for thought. Invisibility, or being off the "screen" does not mean that gender is nothing. Fraisse understands that the screen would serve to show and hide reality. In this way, he suggests that it is possible to cast a magnifying glass effect on the canvas, which helps to perceive anthropological "cracks".

This "canvas" would be, in Butler's philosophy, the culture in which gender is constructed. Therefore, it is not something that is finished, but in constant construction over time, producing an inconstant and contextual phenomenon. In this way, gender comes to be seen as a performative act, that is, Butler appropriates the term theatrical to show us that gender is an act of improvisation and being a cultural construct depends on the reality that surrounds us and not a static point supported solely by biology.

5 CONCLUSION

Finally, both Orminda and Felicia can be interpreted as "archetypes of danger", capable of destabilizing the rules of patriarchal tradition, which sees female characters as just a separate and unimportant universe. Despite this, it is these female characters who, in the novel, make room for the patriarchal structure to be questioned in its bases. Orminda and Felicia enable a reflection on the patriarchal domination in the Amazon, which it has maintained for several generations, as well as indicating the subversion of this male totem.

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