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SEXUALITY AND POWER RELATIONS IN “O ATENEU”

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Abstract: Presentation and analysis of the work “O Ateneu” (1888), by Raul Pompéia, with a focus on the homoaffective relationships present in the novel. The analysis considered the reading and critical reflection of the work, as well as the bibliographic review of the subject in question. Scenes and modes of homoaffective relationships were verified in O Ateneu in a veiled way and subject to analysis based on Queer Theory.

Keywords: Homosexuality. *O Ateneu*. Raul Pompeia. Queer Theory.

INTRODUCTION

Homoaffectivity in “*O Ateneu*”, by Raul Pompéia, was chosen because it is a relevant theme in a society that suffers prejudiced attacks and does not accept differences. We seek to understand how this type of relationship took place at the end of the 19th century, in a school environment renowned for the order, with which the pedagogical process was aligned. This analysis makes us think about how the literature shows current issues in historical scenarios: describing the previous society, we see the influence it exerts in today’s society - in the homoaffectivity theme, we observe the judgment that exists, the exclusion and also the not the liberation of homosexual people, something that happened in the 19th century and continues to happen.

In the attentive reading of the work, the scenes and moments of homoaffective relationships between characters drew attention, which caused us concerns in order to understand how they happen and why they happen that way, relating to postulates of Queer Theory. It also shows how the author’s life was influenced by this work, and vice versa.

This idea will be presented, first, contextualizing the author and the mutual influences, the historical and social context of the time in which the novel was written,

as well as an overview of the book and a short summary of it, as well as an overview of Queer Theory. From this, an analysis focused on the homoaffectivity present in Sérgio’s relationships with his colleagues at the boarding school, on how they get along, knowing that this reflects the society of the time, and how this can be understood starting from the Theory Queer.

GENERAL INFORMATION

THE AUTHOR

Raul d’Ávila Pompéia was born on April 12, 1863, in Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro. At the age of 10, he began studying at Colégio Interno Abílio, where there was director Dr. Abílio César Borges, who was Baron of Macaúbas. There is a theory that it was in this boarding school, in the experience that Raul had there, that he based himself to write *O Ateneu*, describing what happened there.

Raul finishes his studies at Colégio D. Pedro II; publishes his first novel: “*Uma tragédia no Amazonas*” - in 1880. The following year, he began studying law in São Paulo, being a republican and abolitionist activist. In 1882, his novel “*As Jóias da Coroa*” begins to be published in serials in *Gazeta de Notícias*, and, next year, it begins to publish, in “*Jornal do Commercio*”, poems from the book “*Canções sem Metro*”. It was in 1888 that he published, in serials, the novel “*O Ateneu*”, again in “*Gazeta de Notícias*”. After publishing this novel, he writes a review section for the same newspaper.

From then on, he became involved in controversies, mainly with Olavo Bilac, when he challenged him to a sword duel. He makes a speech at Floriano Peixoto’s funeral that also generates controversy. With all the dishonor he suffered, he became depressed and committed suicide on December 25, 1895.

THE AUTHOR'S DEATH

Raul Pompéia addresses a very controversial issue for the time when dealing with homoaffectivity in his book. After the work was read, more polemics arose when comparing the author's life with Sérgio's life - such as the fact that the two have studied in boarding schools. It then began to be said that Raul Pompéia was also homosexual.

The author began to defend himself in public circles, saying that his book was completely fictional. But the situation got worse when Olavo Bilac entered, expressing the idea that comparisons between author and character were not necessary, as Raul was homosexual.

From then on, the two exchanged public accusations in the Rio de Janeiro newspapers: Olavo accusing Raul of being homosexual, and Raul accusing Olavo of being a necrophiliac. In one of these publications, Raul challenges Olavo to a sword duel in the public square to prove who was a man; Olav accepted. The two attended, but did not duel.

Raul did not accept this dishonor, he wanted to rescue his masculinity and, thus, committed suicide with a shot in the heart, at the age of 36, choosing the date from December 24th to December 25th, as he was methodical. He left a short note: "To the newspaper ``A Notícia e o Brasil``, I declare that I am a man of honor." (POMPEIA, 1994, p. 10).

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Ateneu was written in 1888, and thus forms part of the Realism literary movement, which began in France with the novel *Madame Bovary*, by Gustave Flaubert, in 1857. In Brazil, it began with the book ``Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas``, by the renowned Machado de Assis, in 1881. Realism proposed a more objective view of reality, in opposition to its predecessor movement, romanticism; in

addition, he sought to make social criticism, denouncing the hypocrisies of nineteenth-century society.

Within realism there was a slightly more radical movement, which was Naturalism, in which man is a product of social pressure and psychophysiological heredity; the writer must observe reality and describe it as it was, showing the reactions of the characters.

At the time the book was written, society was undergoing several changes: industries grew, the bourgeoisie began to get stronger; experimental and observation methods appear, such as the positivism of Augusto Comte and also Darwinism, which directly influence the Realist movement; in addition to these, there is Karl Marx, with socialism and the history of social class struggles. In Brazil, the situation was different: there were liberal movements and it was only at the end of the 1880s that there was the Abolition of Slavery and the Proclamation of the Republic.

In this Brazilian situation, there were not many readers, as Machado de Assis says: "The nation does not know how to read. There are only thirty percent of individuals residing in this country who can read; of these, about nine percent do not read handwriting. Seventy percent hundred lie in deep ignorance." (1876, apud Pompéia, 1994, p. 7). Thus, there were not many copies of the books, nor a very large part of the newspapers dedicated to literature - they did not exceed one column.

THE BOOK

"*O Ateneu*", one of the most important Brazilian novels, is divided into 12 chapters, which narrate the passage of the main character, Sérgio, through the boarding school, directed by Aristarco Argolo de Ramos. Many consider it an autobiographical novel.

Sérgio's narration takes place with him as an adult, remembering what he lived there and the impressions he had, for a period of

two years, justifying the subtitle of the book: “*Crônicas de Saudades*”; thus, everything Sérgio thought is highlighted, with a subjective view of reality - it is the only Brazilian book considered impressionist, precisely because its past is narrated through its memories.

The book has a very descriptive language, making the reader have the impression of knowing the narrated environment. In addition, it presents several drawings made by the author himself, revealing characteristics and expressions of the characters and scenes.

The school reflects society, a mini reality - everything that exists in society, in large proportions, also occurs in the Athenaeum, even minimized: there are power relations, the discovery of sexuality, violence, crime, love, corruption, illegality, poverty, wealth, social classes, among others. This mini portrait of society is already revealed with the first sentence of the novel, by Sérgio's father: “You will find the world [...] courage to fight.” (POMPEIA, 1994, p. 17). With the representation of these social problems, Raul Pompéia criticizes society - a social critique, the main characteristic of Realism.

Despite being characterized as a realistic novel, it has expressionist elements (the exaggerated description of people and places, even deforming some of them), impressionist (the narration through memories, which are not always very clear) and naturalist (the behavior determined by the sexuality, social condition).

BOOK SUMMARY

Sérgio is enrolled at the boarding school, where he dreamed of studying, as it was a famous, prestigious school, where director Aristarco was strict and left everything in order for the education of elite students. There, Sérgio would grow up, he even cut his childhood curls to start his adult life.

But the reality was not quite like that: Rebelo

warned him about what it would be like to live there, and that he needed to be careful, that it was preferable not to have ‘protectors’. His first friend was Sanches, a senior at the boarding school who saved him from drowning during bath time (Sérgio suspected that he had caused the incident), which took place in a kind of swimming pool - the bath was feared by the weakest and most vulnerable young people, as it was a time when older people took advantage, abused and violated. Their friendship was advantageous to Sérgio, who received protection and was favored in his studies, as the teachers liked his friend. Sanches wanted a more intimate relationship, so Sérgio moved away. Sanches didn't like that, he took advantage of his ‘power’ and had Sérgio punished, put in Aristarchus' Book of Notes, which was very embarrassing.

Afterwards, he made friends with Franco, but he was a ‘rebel’, his name was mentioned several times in the book. Franco was not a good friend to Sérgio; Franco wanted revenge on some boys, and asked Sérgio for help: they ran out of the dorm during the night, went to the pool and Franco threw shards of glass into it, so that the students could cut themselves. Sérgio had a bad conscience, thinking about what would happen; luckily the janitor saw the shards while cleaning and no one was hurt. Sérgio went to the chapel to seek forgiveness. In one of the sentences they served, Franco also wanted intimate contact, making the protagonist distance himself.

Then, he met Barreto, a very religious boy, who was always describing hell to the protagonist, in addition to talking about God's fury, penance and fasting in an exaggerated way. Thus, Sérgio abandoned his friend and religion.

Upon returning home for the holidays, he was advised to be independent, not to be in anyone's shadow. He decided that he would spend his time studying in the library, join the

literary club. So, he spent a lot of time with Bento Alves, who was both a veteran and a librarian—colleagues began to distrust the relationship.

In the midst of these relationships, a crime occurs at the boarding school: one employee stabs the other to death, out of jealousy for Angela, who was also an employee.

The exams were approaching, in addition to the artistic exhibitions - Aristarchus loved all of this, since he saw the result of his work in the exams and was represented and adored by his students in the exhibition. During their time at boarding school, they went on trips - the most important ones were to Christ the Redeemer, Corcovado and the Botanical Garden.

Sérgio fights with Bento, the librarian, who is expelled; Sérgio receives a worse punishment: the director pretends he doesn't exist. During this period, everyone is frightened by the director's fury when he finds letters with Cândida's name, exchanged by two students. Afterwards, the students also revolted, as Franco was assaulted by an inspector, for no reason; and also, because the food lacked quality. Aristarchus said that he would improve everything and let them go unpunished - he was really worried about the fees, the money.

The narrator's next friend is Egbert, a really true friend, with whom he has the opportunity to have dinner at the director's house. Dona Ema, Aristarco's wife, was a beautiful woman, and the boys had a motherly relationship with her; Sérgio started to fall in love with her at dinner.

Now with Sérgio in the veterans' accommodation, the official exams approach and the environment becomes tense, showing how the boarding school was oppressive, in the same way that Aristarchus was a tyrant. At the same time, Franco falls ill and dies.

At the end of the second year, a party begins

to be prepared. When performed, it was huge, full of extravagances, with the presence of the Princess and a tribute to Aristarchus, who had received a bust of himself. On vacation, Sérgio falls ill and needs to be cared for by Dona Ema, as her family had traveled to Europe and thus creates even stronger bonds with her. While he was in the care room, the school burns down and everything is over, there was almost nothing left of the Atheneus, not even of Aristarchus - because the boarding school was itself.

QUEER THEORY

Queer Theory grew out of feminist theory of gender studies in the mid-1980s, deepening and expanding it while encompassing all kinds of sexual activities and identity that are perceived as "normative" or "deviant". Queer Theory is against the concept of "heterosexual" in dichotomy with the "anomalous", since its principle is that all social identities are equally anomalous. In addition, they postulate that sexual or gender orientation or identity is socially created and, thus, has variable forms - an attempt is made to pay attention to sexual minorities. "Queer studies attack a repronarrativity and a reproideology, bases of a homophobic heteronormativity, by naturalizing the association between heterosexuality and reproduction" (LOPES, 2002, p. 24 apud COLLING, [20--], p. 1).

Queer is all of these things: it's strange, rare, weird. Queer is also the subject of deviant sexuality - homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, drags. It's the eccentric who doesn't want to be integrated, much less tolerated. Queer is a way of thinking and being that does not aspire to the center and does not want it as references; a way of thinking that challenges society's regulatory norms, which assumes the discomfort of ambiguity, of in-between places, of the undecidable. Queer is a strange body that annoys, disturbs, provokes and fascinates. (LOURO, 2004, apud MIRANDA,

GARCIA, 2012, p. 3).

Still, according to Lugarinho (2001)

Queer theory intends to mark the place of the queer (the homosexual) in the cultural concert in which it is part, by observing it under its innumerable social, ethnic, national, etc. facets. without trying to project an essentialist and globalizing image, on the contrary, but investing in difference as the only way to perceive its place and the meanings it generates. (LUGARINHO, 2001, p. 6).

Sergio, main character of “*O Ateneu*”, he is a “queer” subject because, as will be seen below, he does not identify with any socially accepted ideology - he transits between sexual activities, without having a defined identity.

HOMOAFFECTIVITY IN “O ATENEU”

In boarding school, there are different types of relationships between young men, teenagers, and most of them are homoaffective relationships. Sergio lives this kind of relationship, and with more than a boy.

In a deterministic view, the relationship between students is marked by libido, as the environment favors it, since there are only men in it, leading to the discovery of sexuality being homosexual: “If I hadn’t forgotten practices, such as Rebelo’s personal assistance, I would perhaps notice that little by little I was going invading, as he observed, the morbid effeminacy of schools.” (POMPÉIA, 1994, p. 42). It is noted, in this passage, how society sees the female sex - fragile, passive; and it is in the same way that they see the homoaffectivity.

One can analyze each of Sérgio’s relationships, as it happened, and understand the homoaffective language in the book, which appears ‘disguised’, minimized, since the issue involved a lot of prejudice, it was not something said, much less accepted.

[...] homosexuals are made invisible and socially stigmatized. Stigma refers to the

set of attributes inscribed in an individual’s social identity, which, in an interaction, can discredit/belittle him, making him a socially ‘lesser’ individual. (GOFFMAN, 1988, apud MIRANDA, GARCIA, 2012, p. 4).

The sexual component is highly valued in romance, and it divides people into males and females.

When Sérgio entered the school, Rebelo, an exemplary boy at the school, already warned him that he must be ‘strong as a man’, and that he must not have protectors. But the novices, who are naive in the face of the entire reality of the Athenaeum, are dominated, are treated as ‘female’, who have always been “represented as passive beings” (BELLIN, 2011, p. 2), admitting with the protectors, that they were physically stronger and defended them in exchange for sexual favors.

The first time Sérgio goes to the boys’ bathroom to take a shower, he meets Sanches. This is his first homoaffective relationship, but one that is quite characterized by abuse, as Sérgio has no interest in him. Sanches was seductive; he offers protection to Sérgio, who is defenseless and weak, but at the same time causes an incident, a possible drowning in the pool, just to pretend to save him. After Sanches’ second attempt, Sérgio pulls away. Some scenes, as in “Sanches was approaching. He then leaned against me a lot. I would close his book and read in mine, blowing my face with a tired breath.” (POMPÉIA, 1994, p. 45), portray the seduction of Sanches, which approaches little by little. how Sanches wanted to take care of Sérgio and have him all to himself - “That guy definitely wanted to treat me like a baby” (POMPÉIA, 1994, p. 46); “I noticed that he changed his attitude when an inspector showed his head to the entrance to the living room...” (POMPÉIA, 1994, p. 46). Sanches was close to Sérgio all the time, not allowing him to have new relationships and new friends; as well as exceptionally disguising the whole situation in front of his friends that are

superior - teachers and principal. The pressure that Sanches put on Sérgio was too great, and that's why he pulled away, but with difficulty, as Sanches cornered him. As an adult, Sérgio sees this relationship as just the "[...] binding affection of a synapism, intolerable and glued together, a kind of lazy slavery of inexperience and fear [...]" (POMPÉIA, 1994, p. 122).

When he decided to isolate himself in the library and join the literary club, Bento Alves approached him, and Sérgio liked that, he was interested in him: "I esteemed him femininely, because he was big, strong, brave; because he could help me, because he respected me, almost shy, as if he didn't have the heart to be a friend. In order to look at me, he expected me to take my eyes off him." (POMPEIA, 1994, p. 82). When Sérgio says that he 'femininely esteems him', he means that he is attracted to him, but he says it this way because it was not considered normal or correct to feel attracted to a 'male'. Bento Alves also showed interest in Sérgio, explicitly between them, but always hidden from others.

My good friend, exaggerated in showing himself better, always afraid of bothering me with a livelier demonstration, invented new surprises and delights every day. [...] One day, opening the numbered shelf in the study hall in the morning, I found the imprudence of a bouquet. [...] I caressed the flowers, very grateful, and hid them before they saw. (POMPEIA, 1994, p. 92).

Bento chose books that he thought would interest Sérgio, and even had the Grêmio buy them if the school did not have them; they exchanged many glances and caresses. They had a very concrete, albeit hidden, relationship; the book features several scenes in which they relate, but always treating it as a stronger friendship, not dating, not as a homoaffective relationship. Their relationship ends when Bento Alves hits Sérgio and is expelled from school.

[...] Bento Alves's friendship had been true,

but on my side there was only gratitude, devotion to strength, the comfort of voluntary subjection, the feminine vanity of dominating through weakness all the elements of a passive form of affection, in which the expenditure of energy is zero, and the feeling lives on rest and sleep. (POMPEIA, 1994, p. 122)

Her last relationship was with Egbert, they had a mutual relationship, although more veiled than the one she had with Bento Alves. Sérgio thought of him a little more as "the tenderness of an older brother" (POMPÉIA, 1994, p. 122) and a true friendship, but at the same time he was more willing to dedicate himself to him than he dedicated himself to Bento Alves.

I was friends with Egbert. No more reasons than sympathy is not argued. We did the collaboration themes; we exchanged meanings, no one was in debt. However, I experienced the delightful need for dedication. I thought I was strong enough to want well and show it. I was burned by the inexplicable ardor of disinterest. (POMPEIA, 2004, p. 122).

Also related to Egbert, Sérgio says:

[...] I, lying down, waited for him to sleep to see him sleep and woke up earlier to see him wake up. Everything that belonged to us was common. I for one positively adored him and thought him perfect. He was elegant, dexterous, hardworking, generous. I admired him from the heart to the color of his skin and the correctness of his figure. [...] At recess, we were inseparable, complementary like two reciprocal conditions of existence. (POMPEIA, 2004, p. 122).

It is clear that this relationship was of great value to Sérgio, but the author portrays this affection as true friendship, and not love and desire, revealing how homosexual relationships were hidden in society. Another point that reveals Sérgio's passion for Egbert is the way he writes about the walks they took together-he writes in the same way he wrote in the Romantic movement, idealizing nature

and the beloved.

Another relevant fact, but which does not involve the protagonist, is the romance of two boys, discovered by Aristarchus through love letters. With the discovery, the director is furious and the students are terrified, since it wasn't just those who had same-sex relationships. During Aristarchus' reprimand, he exposes the prejudice that existed in relation to homosexuality:

They forget their parents and siblings, the future that awaits them, and the inescapable vigilance of God!... The holy kiss of mothers didn't catch on their tinned faces... Shame fell on them like a fake nail polish... Deformed physiognomy, when dignity is downgraded, they further aggravate nature; they forget the sacred laws of respect for human individuality... And they find quite perverse colleagues, who favor them, silencing reproach, avoiding directing the revenge of morality and the restorative work of justice! (POMPEIA, 2004, apud VALENTIN, 2013).

Aristarchus, like society in general, sees homosexuality as something immoral, as a denial of religion and God.

CONCLUSION

Pompéia makes a very deep psychological description of the characters, characterizing all their feelings and internal conflicts. It is believed that Sérgio, the main character, is not homosexual, but there are homoaffective scenes and relationships in the narrative. Sérgio fits within Queer Theory, as he is neither heterosexual nor homosexual, fleeing this dichotomy, being a “decentralizing or deconstructive strategy that escapes from positive social propositions and programmatic policies [...]” (SEIDMAN, 1995, apud MIRANDA, GARCIA, 2012, p. 5).

It is also noticed that the supposed homoaffectivity is treated as passivity, as it compares the homoaffective relationship to femininity, considered, in the book, as something fragile. This link between homosexuality and femininity suggests the conception that was held, at the time the book was written, about homosexuality, seen as a “sexual inversion and, consequently, as a fundamentally feminine behavior” (VALENTIN, 2013). In addition, it is possible to understand how homoaffective relationships were hidden in society: just as it happened in “*O Ateneu*”, they are always treated as a true friendship.

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