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Weaving the unspeakable: memory, trauma and writing in Minha Mãe Se Matou Sem Dizer Adeus, by Evandro Affonso Ferreira /

Tecendo o indizível: memória, trauma e escrita em Minha Mãe Se Matou Sem Dizer Adeus, de Evandro Affonso Ferreira

Quem nos desviou assim, para que tivéssemos
um ar de despedida em tudo que fazemos? Como aquele
que partindo se detém na última colina para contemplar
o vale na distância – e ainda uma vez se volta,
hesitante, e aguarda – assim vivemos nós,
numa incessante despedida.[1]

Rainer Maria Rilke

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[1] Who has turned us around like this, so that,
no matter what we do, we always have
the look of someone who is leaving? Just as a man
on the very last hill, that shows him his whole valley
one last time, will turn and stop and linger—
so we live our lives, forever taking leave.
Rainer Maria Rilke
Translation made from German to English by Stephen Mitchell: The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke)

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ABSTRACT
The contemporary Brazilian writer Evandro Affonso Ferreira has a literary project whose main themes are madness, despair, loneliness, old age, death and the difficulty of communication in human relationships. One of the devices used by the author to develop these themes is a memoir like tone. The novel *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus*, first published in 2010 by Editora Record, is narrated in the first person by an almost eighty-year-old man whose mother took her own life while he was still a child. Given that the narrator's mother committed suicide and left no letter or note of farewell, the memories he recounts revolve around some events from his childhood involving his own family, but focusing primarily on the enigmatic and mad figure of his mother. While writing the novel in a kind of confectioner's shop, the narrator tries to understand both his mother and himself and, to do so, delves into traumatic memories and a painful writing process. Thus, this article aims to investigate how narration allows the narrator-protagonist to work through traumatic memories of his childhood, especially his mother's suicide. As a secondary objective, we also intend to analyze how melancholy becomes a constitutive element of the narrator's subjectivity . This qualitative, analytical research is supported by the reflections of: Luiz Costa Lima (2017) and his studies on melancholy and literature, Sigmund Freud (1914; 1917) and his theories on mourning, melancholy, memory and elaboration, etc.
KEYWORDS: *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus*. Memory. Trauma. Work Through.

RESUMO
O escritor contemporâneo brasileiro Evandro Affonso Ferreira possui um projeto literário cujos temas principais são: loucura, desespero, solidão, velhice, morte, além da questão da incomunicabilidade nas relações humanas. Um dos recursos utilizados pelo autor para desenvolver tais temáticas é o emprego do tom memorialista. O romance Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus, publicado pela primeira vez em 2010 pela Editora Record, é narrado em primeira pessoa por um senhor de quase oitenta anos cuja mãe tirou a própria vida enquanto ele ainda era uma criança. Tendo em vista que a mãe do narrador cometeu suicídio e não deixou carta ou bilhete de despedida, as suas memórias narradas giram em torno de alguns acontecimentos de sua infância envolvendo a própria família, mas com um foco principal sobre a figura enigmática e "louca" de sua mãe. Enquanto escreve o romance em uma espécie de confeitaria, o narrador tenta desvendar tanto a figura materna quanto a si mesmo e, para isso, mergulha em memórias traumáticas e em um doloroso processo de escrita. Assim, este artigo objetiva investigar como a narração permite ao narrador-personagem perlaborar memórias traumáticas de sua infância, principalmente o suicídio de sua mãe. Como desdobramento do objetivo geral, pretende-se, também, analisar de que maneira a melancolia se faz elemento constitutivo do sujeito narrador. Esta pesquisa de metodologia analítica qualitativa ampara-se nas reflexões de: Luiz Costa Lima (2017) e seus estudos sobre melancolia e literatura, Sigmund Freud (1914; 1917) e suas teorizações sobre luto, melancolia, memória e elaboração.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus; Memória; Trauma; Perlaborar.

1 Introduction

The Brazilian contemporary writer Evandro Affonso Ferreira, who was born in 1945 in Minas Gerais, has a highly rich and sophisticated body of work. That can be perceived after the author incorporates elements of the Greek literary tradition in his works that, perhaps through this close dialogue with this tradition, they are surprisingly contemporary. According to Karl Erik

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Schollhammer in Contemporary Brazilian Fiction (2009), contemporary works are disconnected through this time, and after not connecting to today's time, they are able to express it particularly well.

As contemporary literature represents, then, current events through an inadequacy (Schollhammer, 2009), we can say that Affonso Pereira's works – both his characters and the themes he explores – are made this way. From the title of his works, such as *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus* (2010), *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam* (2012), *Os piores dias de minha vida foram todos* (2014), *Não tive nenhum prazer em conhecê-los* (2016), *Nunca houve tanto fim como agora* (2017), which evoke and refer to classical Greek tragedies, we can see the construction of possibly unsettling narratives.

The main themes in Affonso Ferreira's literature are madness, desperation, loneliness, old age, death, as well as the difficulty of communication. One of the resources that was widely used by the writer to develop these themes – and that became a trace of his writing – is the use of a memoir like tone. In a great part of his works, the narrative is told in first person by an elderly character, who recounts his memories and makes reflections or observations from the perspective of his reflexive present, that is shaped by maturity or despondency.

The novel Minha Mãe se Matou sem Dizer Adeus, that was first published in 2010 by Record, had its second edition in 2022 by the same publisher is part of the trilogy that is called "Trilogia do desespero", that is also made by *O mendigo que sabia de cor os adágios de Erasmo de Rotterdam* (2012) and *Os piores dias de minha vida foram todos* (2014). With this work, Affonso Pereira won an award, in 2011, from the Associação Paulista de Críticos de Arte (APCA in Portuguese).

Briefly, the story of *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus* is narrated in first person by an almost 80 years old man whose mother took her own life when he still was a child. As the narrator's mother committed suicide and did not leave a letter or a farewell note, his memories he recounts concern talk about some events of his childhood related to his own family but with a main focus on the maternal figure that is seen as enigmatic and "crazy". While he writes his novel a kind of confectionery or pastry shop, the narrator tries to uncover both his mother's subjectivity and himself and so he delves into traumatic memories and in a painful writing process.

Therefore, this literary work provides insights that allow an investigation of the memory questions. This work has the goal of investigating how narration allows the first-person narrator to

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elaborate traumatic childhood memories, especially his mother's suicide. As an unfolding of the main goal, we also intend to analyze how melancholy makes itself a constitutive element of the narrator as a subject. So, in order to better organize and structure the text, this paper is divided into the following subsections: 1) trauma; 2) narration; and 3) elaboration. Each subsection highlights these aspects in greater detail, while maintaining the close connections among them.

This research of qualitative analytic methodology is based on Luiz Costa Lima's (2017) reflections and on his studies about melancholy and literature; Sigmund Freud (1914; 1917) and his theories on grief, melancholy, memory and elaboration and Karl Erik Schollhammer (2009) and his contributions to the study of contemporary Brazilian literature, among others.

2 The narrative process of the character and therapeutic treatment: an interpretative hypothesis.

The work *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus* (2022) is narrated in the first person by an unnamed elderly character whose name isn't revealed, who considers himself to be frail, melancholic and lonely. These adjectives are confirmed as the narrative unfolds, leading the reader to understand that this is a man who has never overcome his mother's suicide when he was only a boy. Given that the story takes place over a single day, the discourse time is shorter than the narrative time – in the end, it is through memory digressions that we access the traumas and adversities experienced by the narrator, which directly influence the way he sees himself and life, which are marked by deep melancholy and despair.

Although the narrative is driven by a stream of consciousness, it has a discernible rhythm and cadence. This occurs because, as he narrates, the narrator is actively composing the book. Sitting in a confectionery, the narrator's cyclical writing involves inventing imagined dialogues with other customers, thereby generating self-reflection about his own writing, observations about the external space, and remembrances of his own traumas.

Certain textual elements indicate the time in which the narrator is writing:[2]: "he sits now at the table of the confectionery at the other side of the pregnant woman" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 75) ou

[2]he sits now at the table of the confectionery at the other side of the pregnant woman

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"Senhor abdominoso de pé ali no balcão se lambuza comendo sem-cerimônia torta dupla de morango. Garçonete ruiva solidariza-se comigo no deboche velado"" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 59)[3]. The reference to tables, a red-haired waitress and several other desserts besides a double serving of the strawberry, can visualize that the man is in a sort of confectionery or cafe in a mall or commercial building – referred to several times as a "modern temple".

As previously mentioned, the narration takes place over a single day: "Aqui chove. Muito. O domingo se arrasta [...] Solidão é grande (Ferreira, 2022, p. 52[4]). As the reading progresses through the novel, we notice that this rainy Sunday can be read as a metaphorical construction for the narrator's own state of mind: "trovões chegam mais contundentes; chuva também. Ela minha melancolia parece que não encontra mais espaço para ampliar a própria tristeza"[5] Thunderclaps arrive with greater force; rain too. My melancholy seems that it doesn't see more space to intensify its own sadness." (Ferreira, 2022, p. 80). The atmosphere, built in consonance with the psychic state of the narrator, further corroborates the tone of the narrative and the construction of the pervasive melancholy in the novel.

In this sense, we will begin the following analysis, which focuses, respectively, to the traumatic memories of the character, to narration a means of working through these traumas, and to elaboration as a result of this writing process—which is related, in a certain way, to a psychoanalytic perspective. Although the text is structurally separated into parts, these issues are inseparable in the story, and consequently, the analysis will reflect this integration.

2.1 Trauma

Every human being is, in a sense, constituted by memory. If literature is understood as a representation of reality, we can argue that the characters, who are the most human part of the narrative (Candido, 2014), also have their own stories, trajectories and memories. According to the

[3]A pot-bellied man standing at the counter is making a mess of himself, unceremoniously devouring a double-serving of strawberry pie. The redheaded waitress shares a look with me—a moment of unspoken, mocking amusement.

[4]here it rains. A lot. Sunday is passing by […]. It is very lonely.

[5]Thunderclaps arrive with greater force; rain too. It, my melancholy, seems that it doesn't see more space to amplify its own sadness.

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French sociologist and historian Maurice Halbwach (2003), memory can be understood at both the individual and collective level.

Good or bad, events in an individual's life will create impressions and leave scars on their mind. Our brain keeps this information, which reverberates directly on the way that individuals view themselves and the world. Memory is not a purely physiological process investigated by medicine, understanding memory and other aspects of its functioning is also worthwhile to other fields of inquiry, such as psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and literature. Memory is frequently represented in literature either as a theme or a narrative procedure to tell a story—whether through a linear or a fragmented chronology, or narrated from the perspective of multiple first-person accounts or an explicitly unreliable narrator.

There are situations in which people try to forget their memories. In general, this happens with memories that negatively affect the individual's well-being, whether they are recalled, or with properly traumatic memories. The traumatic memories are negative experiences and they talk about extremely painful and harmful events for the integrity of an individual and a social group.

Marcio Seligmann Silva, expert in the studies of the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis, in his paper *Literatura e Trauma* (2002) [in Portuguese, Literature and Trauma), draws on the following Freudian understanding about trauma:

> Afinal, para Freud, "a expressão ['traumático'] não tem outro sentido que não econômico. Nós – afirmou ele – assim denominamos a uma vivência que traz em um período de tempo curto um crescimento de estímulo de tal ordem, que o transporte [*Erledingung*] ou a elaboração [*Arfabeitung*] da mesma não se dá de modo normal, do que resultam distúrbios dourados no funcionamento energético (SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2002, p. 138 apud Freud, 1960, p. 275).[6]

In summary, according to the scholars, trauma would be the result of the experience of negative experiences, that were deeply distressing, that were not processed, understood or assimilated by the individual or by the group that suffered them. Trauma, therefore, affects the subject in several ways in the subject: as it is physiologically unrelated to the naturality of a social reorganization, in the case of traumas that were suffered both individually and collectively

[6]By the way, to Freud, the expression [traumatic] has no meaning other than an economic one. We – he said – call an experience that brings, in a short period of time such an increase in stimulation, that the discharge [Erledingung] or the elaboration [Arfabeitung] of it doesn't happen normally, which results in the functioning of the energetic system (Seligmann-Silva, 2002, p. 138 apud Freud, 1960, p. 275)

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In the work *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus* (2022) the first-person narrator experienced a traumatic event: his mother's suicide. His mother didn't take her life in the boy's presence, and there isn't a specific memory in which the boy has seen the moment itself or found the body, for example. However, there are several childhood memories, from plays with his mother and the days leading up to the event, almost as if they were contaminated by that fateful event and as if, by association, they were traumatic too.

The opening of the work: "A vida é ruim; eu sei. Mas ainda não vou cortar a teia da própria vida feito ela minha mãe: o vocábulo é minha âncora; aqui desta mesa-mirante observo o anoitecer dos outros para esquecer-me do próprio crepúsculo" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 11)[7] summarizes both the content and the tone that drives the narrative. For the reader, it becomes clear that the character's mother committed suicide by 'cutting the thread of her own life'. This imagery, drawn from Greek mythology and the fates—the Fates responsible for the destinies of gods and mortals, who weave and cut the thread of life—is repeated throughout the whole novel.

Besides highlighting the relationship that Ferreira's writing shares with the Greek literary tradition, this textual repetition—along with the fact that this image composes not only the first paragraph but also the title of the work (which is supposed to be the book, the final product that the narrator is writing)—demonstrates its importance in shaping the first-person character and, consequently, the narrative itself. Through narration and the mediation of language, the narrator attempts to overcome his childhood experiences.

This traumatic event built the character as a melancholic, lonely and helpless. Melancholy, that is a conscious characteristic, is also constant in his narration.

> Quase oitenta anos vendo tudo-todos pelas fendas da tibieza. Sou do signo da dubiedade. Vida inútil: vim vi perdi; não sou melancólico por obra do acaso; afeiçoei-me no desconsolo. Vida me trouxe tristeza tempo todo. Dia escuro-tempestuoso feito este se aclimata comigo sob medida para meu desfecho fatal [...] Primeiro natal sem minha mãe; estamos na casa dela avó paterna; alegria desafia qualquer descrição – deve ser porque não verei outra vez no meio da ceia nora embriagada insurgindo-se contra sogra (FERREIRA, 2022, p. 20).[8]

[7]Life is bad. I know. But I won't cut the tail of my own life that was made by my mother: the word is my anchor; here on this table I watch the sunset from others to forget my own twilight"

[8]Almost eighty years seeing everything and everyone through the cracks of tepidity. I am of a dubiety sign. Useless life: I came, saw and lost; I am not melancholic for a stroke of chance. I have made myself out of disconsolation. Life brought me sadness all the time. A dark and stormy day like this comes with me after a fatal end […] first Christmas

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The Latin sentence ""*Veni, Vidi, Vici"* – In English "I came, I saw, I won" – is changed by him to "I came, I saw, I lost", what says a lot about his behavior towards life. This loss can be in a macro sense, of the narrator that doesn't see any sense in the life that he had, or it can mean the loss of his mother. Both the meanings complement themselves, and the feeling of displacement, and the feeling of desolation, the feeling of detachment, and melancholy, what appears quite often in the text.

In his essay, *Luto e melancolia* (1917), Sigmund Freud discusses the differences between what a person feels either during the process of grief or in a melancholic state. To Freud, their characteristics are similar, which allows for a comparison; however, in grief, certain reactions are perfectly expected and natural, in addition to lasting only for a limited period. In melancholy, on the other hand, the reactions last for an indefinite time and affect the individual with greater intensity.

For the Austrian psychoanalyst, grief occurs when one loses a loved one. In melancholy, however, the individual loses something but does not know exactly what.

"O luto, de modo geral, é a reação à perda de um ente querido, à perda de alguma abstração que ocupou o lugar de um ente querido, como o país, a liberdade ou o ideal de alguém, e assim por diante" (Freud, 1917, p. 4).[9] In this sense, we can say that the first person narrator has been through a grief after losing his mother but, after not being able to overcome this trauma, he had, then, developed a melancholy.

> Agora estou de pé na sala de casa. Vejo apenas flores. Sou pequeno demais para ver o rosto de minha mãe dentro do caixão. Choro. Nos dois tempos. Mas na infância as lágrimas corriam em jorro. Ainda chove. Ainda vejo-ouço meu tio puxando meu braço dizendo-me para ir brincar lá fora [...] Antes de sair da sala ouço vizinha cochichando com minha tia: ela se matou sem dizer adeus. Esta frase acompanha-me há mais de meio século. Estribilho tormentoso. Repetição monótona tediosa que sussurro vida toda para mim mesmo (FERREIRA, 2022, p. 41).[10]

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without my mother; we are in her paternal grandmother's house. Joy challenges every direction. That must be because I won't see another time in the middle dinner a drunk mother in law again.

[9]Grief, in general, is in reaction to the loss of a loved one, to the loss of some abstraction that has filled the place of a loved one, such as the country, freedom or someone's ideal and so on" (Freud, 1917, p. 4)

[10]Now I am standing in the living room. I only see flowers. I am too small to see my mother's face in the coffin. I cry. In both times. But in childhood the tears were coming. It still rains. I still see and hear my uncle pulling my arm telling me to go play outside […] Before I left the living room, I hear the neighbor eavesdropping with my aunt. She killer herself

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The memory above, related to the burial of his mother and the eavesdropping of his neighbor, became the *leitmotiv* of the narrator's life. According to Freud, some characteristics of melancholy are "um desânimo profundamente penoso, a cessação de interesse pelo mundo externo, a perda da capacidade de amar, a inibição de toda e qualquer atividade e uma diminuição dos sentimentos de autoestima" (Freud, 1917, p. 5)[11], so that the person lives in constant autorecriminiation, punishing himself all the time. These characteristics are very evident in the behavior of the narrator, who often qualifies himself as decrepit, melancholic, and self-pitying.

To Freud, a melancholic individual can't accept what was lost, transferring, to himself, anger and the bad feelings that he liked to attributed to what he lost.

> Se se ouvir pacientemente as muitas e variadas auto-acusações de um melancólico, não se poderá evitar, no fim, a impressão de que freqüentemente as mais violentas delas dificilmente se aplicam ao próprio paciente, mas que, com ligeiras modificações, se ajustam realmente a outrem, a alguém que o paciente ama, amou ou deveria amar [...] É assim que encontramos a chave do quadro clínico: percebemos que as auto-recriminações são recriminações feitas a um objeto amado, que foram deslocadas desse objeto para o ego do próprio paciente (FREUD, 1917, p. 8).[12]

The relationship that the subject maintains with his object—whether a person or an abstraction—undergoes a disintegration, triggered by either the death of the object or emotional estrangement. Consequently, the subject's libido is withdrawn from this object; however, instead of being directed toward a new object, it is redirected to the subject's own ego. Once the libido is concentrated there, it allows the subject to establish an unconscious relationship between his ego and the lost object. "Dessa forma, uma perda objetal se transformou numa perda do ego, e o conflito entre o ego e a pessoa amada, numa separação entre a atividade crítica do ego e o ego

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without saying goodbye. This sentence has been with me for half a century. Tormenting refrain. A monotonous repetition that I have been whispering to myself for my whole life.

[11]"a profoundly painful dejection, the cessation of interest in the external world, the loss of the capacity to love, the inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of feelings of self-esteem." (Freud, 1917, p. 5)

[12]If one hears patiently the many and different self accusations of a melancholic person, one can't avoid, in the end, the impression that finally the most violent of them will hardly apply to their own patient but with small changes, they adapt really to other people, to someone the patient loves, has loved or should love. […]. This is how we find the key of the clinic board: we notice that the self recriminations are recriminations made to a loved object, that were displaced from this object to the patient's own ego.

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enquanto alterado pela identificação" (Freud, 1917, p. 8). Ultimately, the anger or hatred that the individual feels toward his lost loved object ends up being directed toward his own self.

This manifests in *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus* because, as the narrative progresses, the narrator not only pities himself constantly but also begins making explicit comparisons between himself and his mother.

> Vejo de súbito minha mãe trabalhando numa prancheta. Acaba de pintar outro rosto indefinido. Angustiante. Parece com ela mas também parece com ele meu pai mas também parece comigo hoje setenta anos depois. Sensação estranha ver agora este rosto assustadoramente tridimensional. Não é por obra do acaso que sou um homem atormentado: herdei os destrambelhos dela (FERREIRA, 2022, p. 40).[13]

Furthermore, considering the troubled relationship the narrator had with his parents, he believes that his melancholy was already cultivated long before his mother's suicide. His object-relationship (Freud, 1917) with them was already so strained that it became natural for the aging narrator to succumb to melancholia and recall past grievances and pejorative characterizations. As evident in the novel, his mother's painting represents a distorted face, which bears a striking resemblance to hers, to her husband's, and to her son's in advanced age. Consequently, the narrative builds the character as someone who shares or reproduces certain traits of his parents, such as a melancholic countenance.

His melancholy was born in his childhood, as the loss of his mother made him helpless, and his father didn't become a figure of love, kindness and protection, as it is generally expected. "Sei que meu pai não era bom; que ela bebia e ele batia nela; poderia não ser necessariamente nesta ordem. Hoje acredito na hipótese contrária: não bebia e apanhava mas apanhava e bebia; a vida às vezes parece verso palíndromo" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 44)[14]. The narrator's memories fade away slowly and in the same way the reader is aware of his unhappy and traumatic childhood that the character had.

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[13] I suddenly see my mother working at a drafting table. She has just painted another indistinct face. Distressing. It looks like her but it also looks like him - my father- but also me seventy years later. Weird sensation of seeing this face astonishingly three tridimensional. It is not by accident that I am a tormented man. I have inherited her instability.

[14] I know that my father wasn't good, that he drank and hit her; it may not have happened in that order. Today I believe in the opposite hypothesis. Perhaps he did not drink and then hit her; perhaps he hit and then drank; life sometimes sounds like a palindrome.

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Although his mother was alcoholic, melancholic and mentally unstable, the narrator found her a certain amount of comfort and care. In his memories, it is possible to notice that his mother had cared for him.

> Minha mãe passa mertiolate no meu braço. Assopra. Choro muito. Não me lembro o motivo do acidente. Apenas vejo-ouço ela dizendo-me baixinho que terei vida afora outros cortes mais profundos. Meu nascimento foi um descuido: eles nunca quiseram ter filhos. Entendo: também não quero. Niilistas não deveriam procriar. Meus pais eram descrentes. Não sou. Caso contrário não ficaria driblando com vocábulos o desejo de cortar a teia da própria vida (FERREIRA, 2022, p. 71).[15]

In several other recollections where the narrator shares happy or sweet moments with his maternal figure—much like in the paragraph previously mentioned—the woman always told her son that life was inherently bad. Consequently, all the "good" memories the man preserves of his mother are "bittersweet" because no recollection is purely innocent or happy; every single one is marked by his mother's melancholy, domestic violence perpetrated by an abusive father, and the haunting realization that he was an unwanted child.

This ambiguity that is present in the narrator's memories also relates, directly, to the ambivalent relationship that he has with his maternal figure. "Na melancolia, as ocasiões que dão margem à doença vão, em sua maior parte, além do caso nítido de uma perda por morte, incluindo as situações de desconsideração, desprezo ou desapontamento, que podem trazer para a relação sentimentos opostos de amor e ódio, ou reforçar uma ambivalência já existente"[16] (Freud, 1917, p. 10).

This ambivalent relationship is conflictual, and it becomes evident through the way the narrator characterizes his mother throughout the narrative.

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[15]My mother gives me an antiseptic spray in my arm. She flows. I cry a lot. I don't remember the reason for the accident. I just hear and see her telling me softly that I will have deeper cuts later in life. My birth was an accident. They had never wanted to have children. I understand: I don't want them either. Nihilists shouldn't procreate. My parents were unbelievers. I am not. Otherwise, I would not be dodging the desire with words the desire of cutting the web of my own life.

[16]In melancholy, the events that mention disease go, for the most part, beyond the clear cut case of a loss through death including, situations of disregard, contempt and discontentedness, that might create to that relationship opposed feelings of love and hate, as well as mention an existent ambivalence (Freud, 1917, p. 10)

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There is a progression in the way which his mother is seen and presented by the narrator, and his childish and adult like impressions often mistake themselves. In the first pages, one builds the image of a selfish woman, dominated by madness. However, later on, the maternal figure is more humanized and represent through several nuances. In the end of the work, when the narrator obtains a clearer comprehension of what was going on, who his mother was and who he was himself, in his process of narrating-elaborating, he admits himself: Agora aqui nesta mesa-mirante a poucas horas da morte descubro que minha infância não foi ruim: tive mãe-moleque; louca feia bêbada – mas encantadoramente moleque" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 101)[17] After demystifying his mother, he understands that she was only a woman who suffered domestic violence from her husband, with a history of mental disorders in his family and who used alcohol to cope with her own problems.

Another interesting detail, clearly related to trauma, is the forgetfulness as a defense mechanism. So, they find several parts in which the narrator says he didn't remember anything: "Não me lembro de minha juventude: velho tempo todo" ([18]Ferreira, 2022, p. 16), as if after the loss of his mother, he had lost himself in a badly processed grief that ended up in a deep melancholy. This made him only a spectator of his own life.

Nevertheless, it is through his writing that the narrator gains a sense of agency over his life. Mastering the art of language and the power of narration can generate results akin to a psychoanalytic process.

> Sei que é domingo e que está nublado e que estou triste e que está chovendo muito; aqui contemplo também meu passado. Mas sou decrépito, tenho memória-flash. Minutos atrás vi-ouvi minha mãe num cômodo qualquer de nossa antiga casa discutindo com ele meu pai. Som-imagem ambos confusos mas ouvi nitidamente esta frase: a qualquer momento desapareço de vez da vida de vocês dois sem dizer adeus. Três quatro meses depois se matou. Foi num domingo nublado feito este. Eu era menino oito nove anos se tanto. Ela gostava de pintar. Ainda tenho guardado um de seus quadros: autorretrato. São nítidos seus traços de loucura. Acho que se mataria mais cedo ou mais tarde independente da paralisia irreversível. Nunca deixei tal obra na parede: não gosto. Atormenta-me conviver diariamente com ela; deixo-a numa caixa. Todo domingo pela manhã abro para ver por alguns minutos aquele rosto

[17] Now on this desk, few hours away from death, I find out that my childhood wasn't bad. I had a who was childlike – crazy, ugly, and drunk, yet astonishingly playful

[18] I don't remember my youth; I have been old all my life.

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> desfigurado. Há quase setenta anos; hábito. Morbidez talvez. Ou homenagem póstuma. Não sei (FERREIRA, 2022, p. 28-29).[19]

As we can notice from this part, the narrator, in the moment of his writing, shows that he is self-aware. After "contemplating his past", or reflecting critically about the events and memories that have happened, his memory shows in form of flash. It is not only related to age but also to overcharge and the form of events that their sounds and the images become "confused". These data can be interpreted, through the light of psychoanalysis, as manifestations of repressed content.

The narrator's habit of looking at the self-portrait painted by his mother every Sunday—the very day she committed suicide—is deeply significant, especially given his choice to write his book on that same day of the week. This repetition suggests a constant struggle between the conscious and unconscious parts of the character; through this cyclical recurrence, he attempts to retrieve the trauma to comprehend what happened while, at the same time, trying to erase it due to an inability to cope. Ultimately, narrating this event constitutes a form of acceptance, as demonstrated in the following subsection.

2.2 Narrating

The Brazilian literary critic Luiz Costa Lima, in his book Melancholy and Literature (2017), examines in how melancholy is present in the literary discursive formation, bringing philosophical reflections with socio-historical issues. For the critic, "[...] a melancolia encontra seu *locus*, por excelência, na ficção verbal e plástica (para não falar em toda a arte); explicitamente, no *como se*, em que, na expressão, não se submetendo à alternativa do verdadeiro ou do falso, domina a

[19] I know that it is Sunday and that it is cloudy and that I am sad and it has been raining a lot. But I am decrepit; I have flash memory. Minutes ago, I saw and heard my mother in a random room of our house arguing with my father. Both sound and image were confusing, but I clearly heard this sentence: 'At any moment I will disappear from your life without even saying goodbye.' Three or four months later she killed herself. It was on a cloudy Sunday like this one. I was a boy of eight or nine years old at best. She liked to paint. I still have one of her portraits: a self-portrait. Her traits of madness are clear. I think she would have killed herself sooner or later regardless of her irreversible paralysis. I have never hung this painting on the wall; I don't like it. Every Sunday morning I take it out to look at that distorted face for some minutes. Almost seventy years of this habit. Maybe morbidity. Or a posthumous homage. I don't know.

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diferença [...]"[20] (Lima, 2017, p. 16). This argument, developed his discussion of art, all the art, allows to think in the relationship between creative power and melancholy.

In the case of literature, the author, as a subject marked by lack and at odds with the world, finds in fiction a means of leaving a mark to the world—to say what needs to be said. Extending this perception to the narrator, who is already a fictional product, we can recognize the importance of literary writing not merely the aesthetization of life, but also as a space for self-analysis. This is particularly in *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus* (2022), where the narrator functions as an author who recounts his own story in the first-person narration.

Narration is a productive activity for the melancholic subject. As Freud posits in *O poeta e o fantasiar* (1908), those who are happy do not fantasize—sharing here the same semantics of fictionalizing or fabulating—but, rather, only those who are unsatisfied. Furthermore, as noted in *Luto e Melancolia* (1917), a major characteristic of the melancholic is a "compulsive need to communicate", that finds satisfaction in the unmasking of himself" (Freud, 1917, p. 7). Consequently, we find an individual who yearns to express himself.

> Ainda não sei como concluir este texto. Talvez não queira. Possivelmente protelo. Tenho medo. Possivelmente esteja entusiasmado com esta descoberta súbita do homo novus. Possivelmente concluirão que narrador é auto comiserativo demais; possivelmente vão concluir enfim que texto sufocante e pouco arejado deste naipe afugenta o leitor – resultando numa indiscutível debacle mercantil (FERREIRA, 2022, p. 120).[21]

In this featured excerpt, we notice the narrator's fear of concluding his text—probably because he still wants to say something but does not know what, or due to his desire to keep listening, along with his apprehension regarding the book's reception by critics and readers. The narrator knows he is melancholic, self-pitying, and loquacious. These characteristics, in addition to the previously mentioned need to enunciate in order to comprehend his traumas, lead him toward fiction and narration.

According to Costa Lima (2017), it is interesting to understand melancholy not merely as an illness, but also as a potential source of genius. In this regard, the author states:

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[20] Melancholy finds its locus, by excellence, in the verbal and visual fiction (not to mention in every art); explicitly in how if, in each in expression, not submitting to the alternative to true or false, dominates the difference.

[21] I still do not know how to conclude this text. Maybe I do not want to. Possibly, I am postponing it. Maybe I am excited by the sudden discovery of a new homo novus. Possibly, critics will conclude that the narrator is too self-pitying; maybe they will conclude, then, that a suffocating and poorly written text like this will drive readers away—resulting in an indisputable commercial debacle.

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> [...] da experiência de desacerto com o mundo não decorre sempre a mesma consequência. Sentir o mundo como desconforme tanto pode provocar a perda do interesse do melancólico no mundo ou até o oposto: mesmo a vida não mostra sentido, importa ao melancólico sentir o que, no mundo, o converte em adverso. Em ambos os casos, a melancolia é o móvel, mas é evidente que só no segundo ela move para uma sensibilidade que conduz à arte [...] Se o estado melancólico admite um acréscimo de sensibilidade, que se cumpre pela procura de saber da constituição do que o provoca, ele propensamente favorece a produção artística (LIMA, 2017, p. 60).[22]

In the novel under study, the character consistently makes clear the importance of writing and language to him. For the narrator, writing means the capacity to express and comprehend himself. In the following excerpt, "*Meus pais eram descrentes. Não sou. Caso contrário não ficaria driblando com vocábulos o desejo de cortar a teia da própria vida*" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 71)[23], he understands that he believes in language. This belief can be interpreted not only as faith in the power and strength of the literary text in general, but also in the power of the act of narrating, speaking, and expressing. Indeed, within a psychoanalytic framework, language allows for a form of 'healing'—namely, the comprehension of oneself and, in this particular case, sublimation—akin to someone who gains one more day in life after fictionalizing his own pain.

After explaining the relationships between narration, melancholy and the process of self-analysis, another point deserves attention: the formal question of the work of Affonso Pereira. As for content, the formal structure of the novel is necessary for the reader to fully grasp its meaning. The novel employs a stream of consciousness narration.

> Vou apenas mais tarde para confiar-lhes estes originais e a carta-despedida da mãe dela amiga filósofa. Moça na terceira mesa à esquerda me disse que quando escrevo tenho o aspecto torvo sombrio e que minha fisionomia se torna subitamente rude e que devo lançar linhas dilacerantes neste meu bloco de rascunho. Digo-lhe também telepático que ela é perspicaz e que decidi neste

[22]The experience of discord with the world does not stem solely from the same consequence. E the world as a misalignment can either provoke a loss of interest in the world on the part of the melancholic, or even the opposite: life itself can reveal meaning. It matters to the melancholic to feel that the world has converted into an adversity. In both cases, melancholy is the driving force; however, it is evident that in the second scenario, it c toward a sensibility that leads to art […] if the melancholic state admits an increase in sensibility, achieved through the quest to understand the constitution that afflicts him, his artistic production is properly enhanced.

[23]My parents were unbelievers. I am not. Otherwise, they wouldn't be dribbling with words and trying to cut the thread of their own web of life" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 71)

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> exato momento dar título ao livro que estou escrevendo: MINHA MÃE SE MATOU SEM DIZER ADEUS (FERREIRA, 2022, p. 99).[24]

Sitting in the bakery, the narrator's through move between the present moment—in which he is writing his book and inventing conversations with the customers—and the past, marked by painful childhood memories. Although driven by a stream of consciousness, the narration does not unfold chaotically. Rather, it is ordered, even within its own circular rhythm. The character fictionalizes dialogues with other people in that environment, establishing a silent or pessimistic reflection through which a memory of his childhood is presented. Briefly and incisively narrated, the memory ultimately leads back to the present and to a reflection on writing as a means that prevents the narrator from committing suicide like his mother—and then the cycle begins anew. Therefore, writing not only anchors him, giving him reason and meaning to live as a writer, but also grounds him in the present moment, as it brings him back to reality and allows him to revisit the events with greater clarity and distance.

The text is written in blocks, without paragraph breaks, and at certain points, a pause is signaled by a short blank space on the page before the narration resumes. This structure supports the device of the stream of consciousness because it conveys a sense of fluidity and further reinforces the notion of uninterrupted speech that occurs during the analytical process, including the role of pauses.

Furthermore, the only punctuation marks used in the novel are the semicolon and the period. The narrator' style is terse and dry, ensuring he does not extend his sentences beyond what he considers necessary, thereby avoiding the use of commas and ellipses. The text is constructed in a single block, the absence of common punctuation marks, and the circular narration of the same themes lead to the understanding that the narrator is a man deeply aware of himself, a state he increasingly pursues.

[24]Later, I will only entrust them with these originals and his mother's farewell letter to her philosopher friend. The girl at the third table on the left told me that when I write, I take on a dark, grim appearance—that my physiognomy suddenly turns rude, as if I needed to tear apart lines into this draft block of mine. I also tell her telepathically how insightful she is, and that at that exact moment, I decided on the title for the book I am writing: MINHA MÃE SE MATOU SEM DIZER ADEUS.

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Although he unfolds memories — undoubtedly a complex and slippery field — they inevitably emerge quite foggy, yet without losing the organic nature of how they are represented. In this sense, we notice the effort involved in rendering them in the text.

Recalling the importance of writing for the first-person narrator, we observe the following excerpt:

> Mas ainda tenho as próprias palavras que são meu ponto de apoio; ainda tenho meus vocábulos-couraça que me blindam do desejo de partir ex abrupto [...] O verbo é o filho que não tive; as palavras são hoje a família que perdi já no começo do caminho. A cada página concluída sensação de ter desenhado a própria árvore genealógica (FERREIRA, 2022, p. 47).[25]

Through his writing, he manages to visualize a son. This evokes a true sense of creation, while also reconciling him with his own family: "a cada página concluída sensação de ter desenhado a própria árvore genealógica"[26]. Poetically, Costa Lima explains what leads to be the literary text when derives of a melancholic creation, as with the case of the analyzed work:

> [...] o mecanismo da vida humana costuma supor o desacerto entre a meta e o tempo de sua realização. O tempo é a atmosfera que envolver a melancolia. A lembrança de Proust é inevitável. Que dizem os oito tomos de *À la recherche du temps perdu*, senão que o sabor do tempo despertado pela *madeleine* revela a inevitabilidade do que já foi? Embora o perdido não deixe por isso de ser reencontrado, como se cumpre o paradoxo? Não é que o tempo deixe de estar perdido; seu reencontro, de que trata o último tomo da obra proustiana, opera por transmutação. A transmutação não torna a palavra transparente ao que foi, como se ela fosse a sucedânea de uma sessão espírita, senão que realiza a diferença que Herder tão bem definira: "A *diferença* entre duas coisas deve ser reconhecida uma terceira" (Herder [1772], I, 1983, p. 723-4). No caso, as duas coisas (vetores) são o tempo e a lembrança, ao passo que a diferença concretiza-se na formulação do texto proustiano (LIMA, 2017, p. 16).[27]

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[25] But I still have my own words that are my support point. I still have my warrior words that blind me against the desire of leaving abruptly. The verb is the son I have never had. The words are the family I lost in the middle of the path. Every page concluded the feeling of having drew their own genealogical tree.

[26] At every page that I conclude there is the feeling of having drew my own genealogical tree."

[27] The mechanism of human life tries to assume the disagreement between the goal and the time of realization. The time and the atmosphere involve melancholy. Proust's memory is inevitable. They say that the eight volumes of *à la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, other than the flavor of time raised by Madeleine, reveal the inevitability of what is gone? Although time does not allow itself to be taken, how is the paradox made? Not that time stops being lost; its meeting, which is about the last volume of the Proustian work, operates through transmutation. Transmutation does not make the word transparent to what was, as if it were the event of a spiritualist session; rather, it makes the difference that Herder had defined so well. "The difference between two things must be recognized as a third." In this case, both things (vectors) are time and memory, insofar as the difference concretizes in the formulation of the Proustian text.

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Taking Proustian literature as an example, Luiz Costa Lima says that literary texts emerge as a product of a counterpoint between time – which is inapprehensible to human beings, and it is likely that this characteristic gives this entity a melancholic character – and memory. It is within this mismatch between the present and the memory that is gone, which constitutes Affonso Pereira's literature in *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus*, that what happens exactly in the narration – both form and content – takes place.

2.3 Elaborating

Sigmund Freud's essay *Recordar, Repetir e Elaborar* (1914) provides an account of the psychological process an individual undergoes in analysis. Remembering and revisiting what has been forgotten or repressed is essential to imagining a future. As long as individuals remain unaware of the full significance of their past experiences—typically rooted in early childhood—they will continue to repeat the same mistakes, turning them into behavioral patterns. Freud refers to this phenomenon as the compulsion to repeat. "*Enquanto o paciente se acha em tratamento, não pode fugir a esta compulsão à repetição; e, no final, compreendemos que esta é a sua maneira de recordar*" ([28]Freud, 1914, p. 4). Repetition occurs unconsciously, serving as a mechanism for the individual to avoid forgetting past experiences, even though it ultimately prevents them from living a more autonomous life.

Consequently, a core function of analysis is to bring these past events to light and examine their impact both on the present and on the subject's formation. At the unconscious plane, these memories must be decoded while the analysand continues to reenact the same mistakes. Eventually, after repeated cycles and with the analyst's guidance, the patient will realize that these behavioral patterns are deeply tied to childhood events, gaining insight into how they operate. Freud conceptualizes this dynamic process as elaboration.

> Aprendemos que o paciente repete ao invés de recordar e repete sob as condições da resistência. Podemos agora perguntar o que é que ele de fato repete ou atua (*acts out*). A resposta é que repete tudo o que já avançou a partir das fontes do reprimido para sua personalidade manifesta — suas

[28] While the individual finds himself in treatment, he can't escape this compulsion to repetition; and in the end this is his way of remembering

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> inibições, suas atitudes inúteis e seus traços patológicos de caráter. Repete também todos os seus sintomas, no decurso do tratamento (FREUD, 1914, p. 5).[29]

The analyst's role is to guide the analysand by interpreting recurrent behaviors. Consequently, the forces operating in the analysand's unconscious can then be understood and worked through the process of working through. This process occurs when unconscious content—once elaborated and re-signified—becomes fully integrated into the individual's psyche. The analyzed subject begins to view those memories and events as a formative component of their subjective constitution, accepting them while striving to understand them.

Applying this analytical framework to the work of Evandro Affonso Ferreira, and conceptualizing the narrative act as a therapeutic process, allows us to understand the narrator's writing and development through the text as an effort to work through his core trauma: the loss of his mother. This is evident in certain excerpts, such as "Desta misteriosa mesa-mirante consigo ver o passado o presente o futuro" [30](Ferreira, 2022, p. 23) e "Penoso trabalho este de fazer do verbo escudo; do vocábulo esgrima contra o desejo de cortar a teia da própria vida" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 28), we notice, firstly, the narrator's mastery over his traumatic past, where the present serves as the space for narration and understanding, and the future is framed as an instance contingent upon resolving the past and comprehending the present. Much like the dynamics of a therapeutic treatment, the act of narrating allows him to make sense of his own history, endowing his life with new meaning.

Later, the character cites his philosopher friend, who states the following: [31]"Escolher a repetição para libertar-se dela – ela amiga filósofa me disse numa quase-quinta. Continua chovendo. Continuo triste. Solitário também. Por isso invento amigos telepáticos" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 44).

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[29] We learn that the patient repeats instead of remembering and repeats under conditions of resistance. Sometimes we can now ask what it is actually and how it repeats and acts out. The response is that everything that has advanced and through the sources of repression to his manifestation personality – his inhibitions, his useless attitudes and pathological traits of character. It also repeats all their symptoms and through their treatment (Freud, 1914, p. 5).

[30] Arduous labor to forge a shield from this verb; the word, the term fencing, weaponized against desire.

[31]Choosing repetition to get rid of them – she, a philosopher friend, said in an almost Thursday. It keeps raining. I am still sad. I am also lonely. That's why I invent telepathic friends.

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Following this compelling statement by his friend, the narrator returns to a cyclical discourse that intertwines observations about his external environment with his internal state. This textual repetition—evident not only in the recurring themes but also in the very sequence of their presentation—is integral to the narrator's compulsive reenactment, ultimately leading him toward the elaboration of his traumas. His friend's advice emphasizes the role of repetition in the process of working through trauma: a repetition that may, in analysis, lead toward working through.

As it was said before, through the story, the narrator comes to see the figure his mother in differently: "Minha mãe não me lembro; esta que vejo rapidamente vez em quando desta mesa-mirante é imaginação de filho escritor distante há setenta anos. Agora consegui ver com mais nitidez: era feia. Triste também. Desajustada também; feito eu" (Ferreira, 2022, p. 30)[32]. A

The issue of melancholy is also manifest when the narrator identifies with the very object of his loss. All of these dynamics generated by the individual constitute integral elements of the analytical process.

Working through, according to Freud, entails:

> O paciente tem de criar coragem para dirigir a atenção para os fenômenos de sua moléstia. Sua enfermidade em si não mais deve parecer-lhe desprezível, mas sim tornar-se um inimigo digno de sua têmpera, um fragmento de sua personalidade, que possui sólido fundamento para existir e da qual coisas de valor para sua vida futura têm de ser inferidas (FREUD, 1914, p. 6).[33]

After he understood that his melancholy, for example, has a "solid base to exist and give attention not only to the consequences of his trauma but to his own traumatic memories, the patient will accept that this is part of him. In the excerpt.

In the excerpt "Mas ainda não vou cortar a teia da própria vida: a palavra é meu sustentáculo; o vocábulo entorpece meu desassossego. Escrever para esconjurar as inquietudes – mesmo sabendo da impossibilidade de esquivar-se da melancolia apenas mudando de calçada"

[32] I don't remember my mother, the woman I occasionally see quickly when this desk is the product of the writer's son imagination seventy years ago. Now I see more clearly: I was ugly. Sad too. Ill at ease; like me.

[33] The patient must find the courage to turn his attention to the phenomena of his illness. The ailment itself should not be treated as negligible; instead, it must be recognized as a worthy adversary—a fragment of his own personality that has justified grounds for existence, and from which vital insights for his future life must be inferred.

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(Ferreira, 2022, p. 51)[34], we notice that the narrator's understanding in the sense that he will never be able to escape his painful memories.

In this perspective, while part of the individual, the metaphor of moving away from the sidewalk are just different shores of the same path. However, only through analysis, the individual will be able to narrate his life in order to understand his own path – where he has been and where he is going.

Concluding remarks

The novel *Minha mãe se matou sem dizer adeus* (2022), by Evandro Affonso Ferreira, offers a valuable basis for investigating the complex dynamics of memory and trauma. By drawing upon the Freud's ideas present in *Luto e Melancolia* (1917) and *Recordar, Repetir e Elaborar* (1914), we can analyze how the narrative act enables the first-person narrator to work through traumatic childhood memories—specifically, his mother's suicide.

Furthermore, Luiz Costa Lima's essay Melancolia: Literatura helps clarify how melancholy constitutes a foundational element of the narrator's subjectivity. Beyond serving as a structuring force within the protagonist's subjective constitution, melancholy also operates as a catalyst for artistic creation, becoming deeply embedded in the text and the narrative voice.

Ultimately, we can discern that the first-person narrator's melancholy is rooted both in the trauma as a trait rooted both in the trauma of his mother's tragic death and in an unresolved grief, as well as in his unresolved grief struggle to comprehend his traumatic childhood experiences. These very circumstances led him to reconstruct his life through literature, using narration as means of working through the narrative process as a means to work through his traumatic past.

CRediT

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[34]But I still won't cut the thread of my life Word is my understanding. the word is my mainstay; the term numbs my restlessness. To write is to exorcise one's inquietude—even while knowing it is impossible to escape melancholy simply by crossing to the other side of the street.

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