



LITERATURE, SYMBOLISM AND IDENTITY IN VERGÍLIO FERREIRA: SPACE AND IDEOLOGY IN *MANHÃ SUBMERSA* – FROM THE NOVEL TO THE FILM

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Abstract:

In the novel *Manhã Submersa*, Vergílio Ferreira devotes a deep attention to the treatment of space that acquires a strong symbolism and that translates into a vector for the construction of the identity of the main character. Space, physical and psychological, is very important for the inner development of the main character, for its influences and echoes in the personality, which is changing. When the novel is adapted to the cinema, the director also used the space as a fundamental element for the narrative and characterization of the character, noting, however, an oscillation between social space and psychological space, between romance and film.

Keywords: Portuguese literature, Vergílio Ferreira, *Manhã Submersa*, space, adaptation, cinema

1. Introduction

In Vergílio Ferreira's novel *Manhã Submersa*, the writer uses space as a central and symbolic element for the construction of the identity of the main character. When the novel is adapted for film, director Lauro António also felt the potential of space, but read it himself.

The portrait of an era stands out and the protagonist's existentialist itinerary and the psychological space are devalued. This space can show atmospheres and environments of deep psychological density, disturbing clipping, and projecting in the actions of the characters. This is exactly what happens in *Manhã Submersa*, with a space of concentrative nature, which overwhelmingly dominates seminarians, reducing them, by humiliation, to an anguished life (Reis & Lopes, 1997, p. 130). This space, very clear in the novel through the technical-narrative strategy of the inner monologue, is transformed in the film into a social space, with the support of dialogue.

In the film, Lauro António clearly explores all elements of social space that can lead the viewer to a certain time and, in this line, operationalizes a configuration: from a static social space, we move to a dynamic social space, by the presence of types. and extras, the priests, who

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allow an epocal illustration, with the vices of a particular society, which, when shown, enables a critical reading. Thus, we find that in the novel and in the film, the relationship of the main character with space is essential for the ideological understanding of the texts.

2. Space, symbolism and identity

In the novel, the bridge between the author's own physical space and the space portrayed in the book is immediately evident - an interconnection that reinforces the ties between the writer and his alter ego, António -, which arouses readings about symbolism and the halo metaphysics that surrounds it. The two most relevant spaces of the text deserve a different ideological interpretation. The Village allows a closer reading of neorealist values, a symbolic mark of conflicts and social dramas, while the Seminar gives rise to a metaphysical treatment, especially regarding the value of silence (Laso, 1989, p. 150).

The Village symbolizes a space of evasion, as opposed to the Seminary, evoked in solitude by the protagonist who effectively associates him with exile and prison. In D. Estefânia's house, a direct, vertical relationship between two distinct social classes is exemplified, arousing feelings of injustice and human degradation - the essential vector of the film -, also allowing a reflection on the destiny of the individual - the essential vector of the film romance.

The Seminar is highlighted in the book as a space of existential limitation, of overwhelming loneliness, alienation of consciousness, but in the film its dimension of physical terror is deepened (with the plans of the exterior, the cabin, the stairs, the classrooms, the of a clear epocal approach with the social horizon of the Estado Novo.

Indeed, in the understanding of the Vergilian novel, the relationship between subject, space, and time (which reminds us of the value of M. Bakhtine's studies (1978, p. 237) and his concept of chronotope) seems cortical. It is precisely within contemporary literature and existentialist philosophy (Sartre, Malraux, Camus, Proust, Robbe-Grillet...) that the relevance of the interaction between these three elements stands out. Indeed, Vergílio Ferreira configures the Romanesque construction of *Manhã Submersa*, in the wake of these influences, as in other novels, associating space with the identity of the subject. The Village is seen as a source, origin, initiatory and freedom space, and often of return, of destination, as happens with the cases of Mario, in *Final Song*, or Paul, in *Forever*. On *Manhã Submersa*, holidays always arouse these deepest feelings:

"Finally, the vacation day has come. And how long I've been waiting for you! (...) Already the frayed mud of the frosts in the paths of the playground, and the blanket of mist along the valley reminded me, in my throat, the winter of my village, the free mountain of my childhood. ... And a fury of freedom, a bloody demand for escape, burned me all over my chest, my tongue, my stomach. Suddenly I began to believe in the reality of the outside world, in the reality of the cooper, the farewell convoys and the distance. ... As I passed the door of the Seminary, I brutally felt like letting out a shout of triumph to the ends of my fear." (1996, p. 59-60)

Thus, the Vergilian novel is markedly an existential space, following the tradition of Malraux, Sartre, and Camus, and well translated by the constant reflections triggered by the protagonist who lives in limit situations (Gordo, 1995, p. 25).

In conjunction with this facet, we note that space also assumes a particularly identifiable feature with mode. If in the narrative we can define space by its mission of framing the action, with symbolic, psychological and social virtualities, in the lyric it is the stage of inner subjectivity, and in the dramatic it is essentially representative. In the case of Vergílio Ferreira's novel, he is a hybrid, combining the aforementioned modes with the essay, a feature that derives from the singular status of the protagonist-narrator who lives in the interior spaces of memory. In this sense, the Vergilian novel is a lyrical novel, as Rosa Goulart has shown with absolute relevance. In the novel, the drawing of the characters in relation to the protagonist is also evident. It is from this that all others are defined, often with collective features of extras. We highlight the groups that have a spatial and temporal reading, such as the protagonist's colleagues, the priests and the rector who give the essential data for the seminary portrait, which extends to the village, reaching characters such as D. Estefânia.

Between the main character and all those involved, we follow in the novel three threads that intertwine in António: individual destiny, collective destiny and the combination of both. It is found that the book offers a global understanding of the main character and all the others that gravitate around him, in a convergence of an existentialist path, clearer in the path of António, and only in neorealistic shades (Seixo, 1986). p. 84), which make themselves felt in the characterization of the group's destiny.

The film clearly mirrors the collective and social perspective, always in the eyes of the protagonist, raising textual marks of the brotherhood and union of destinies of seminarians, united by the itinerary of unhappiness, inability to choose, the crushing of the individual, of the inexorability of a common destiny.

The writer often defines seminarians as a group, analyzing misfortune and common ailments. Recall one of the first examples of the work:

“Gloomily we crossed the village’s dreary streets, as if fleeing any dark crime, furtively muttering a prayerful conversation, glancing sideways with hostility at the world that was not ours. Submerged in the night, lost in the clutter of black suits that were now running along the bare fields, I was sweating with exhaustion and anxiety. I didn’t know anyone, nobody knew me. The fellow travelers themselves had sought the comfort of their friends. There was an anonymous fervor of conversation around me; but it seemed to me that it was under the words that our common fortune shook hands strongly.” (1996, p. 19-20)

When the writer describes the clearer social pictures of the novel, Lauro António does not hesitate to take them to the screen. We remember the moment of Antonio's visit to his family:

“Afraid of any betrayal that I guessed in the blood, they all ate slowly, curbing their appetites, bouncing from time to time with furtive glances, like gangsters in ambush. But what other poison in my veins, poor people, but what is the fate of our common race and I drank in the milk I suckled?”

So, a great black wall of huge deaf stones began to rise again before me, to the highest star of my affliction. And it was through thick iron bars, like the sacristy bars, that I was looking at my people, who had my flesh and my blood.” (1996, p. 10).

This moment is adapted to film in a dense setting, dark-walled by poverty and misery - which the chosen illumination accurately translates - with shy and strange characters vis-à-vis the young seminarian who looks more like an intruder than a family member. At the same time, the mega-narrator highlights living conditions, the meager meal, the poor and scarce furniture, and the clothing that reveals extreme economic hardship.

In this context, the mother figure is divided between humble simplicity and Antonio's desire to become a priest and improve the family's destiny, which does not offer the young person an image of maternal comfort when he returns home. Her mother establishes a female polygon that also includes D. Estefânia, Mariazinha, Carolina and Gaudêncio's sister, who does not appear in the film, and who are responsible for a vision that sometimes approaches the existentialist universe, sometimes the neorealist. The film highlights the facets of social character - which justifies the predominance of episodes with the same theme, centered on the first four figures - and the disappearance of Gaudencio's sister, belonging to the existentialist matrix thread.

For the understanding of the characters, space emerges as a fundamental category. As already mentioned, the main spaces are associated with the two ideological vectors of the novel. Initially, there is a clear disjunction between Antonio and space, because the character is not in harmony with either the Seminary or D. Estefânia's house. On the other hand, the Village is only seen with a positive side when it is felt from the Seminary. Thus, there is a struggle between character and space, characterized by the impositions of the strongest and the dilution of the individual in the mass, a learning by the threat and oppression that will lead him to a desperate escape. This limiting and dysphoric dimension is translated into the novel by society, the institution, and the family. In the latter, Antonio has no place, because his mother's poverty and expectations determine it. At D. Estefânia's house, her corseted experience seems an extension of the seminar's constraints. In opposition to all these vectors, man emerges, his interiority and his dreams and disappointments (Goulart, 1990, p. 242).

In filmic diegesis, the viewer knows the spaces that mark the social and economic chasms. As already mentioned, the sphere of oppression is associated with the Seminary and the Village, and specifically with the house of D. Estefânia.

At the seminary, the rector does not hesitate to cruelly remind Antony of his humble origins, the limited horizons that his poverty entails, as opposed to the possibility of social ascension that the priesthood could provide, contrary to the will of the young without vocation with promise of a socially and economically stable future. António (re) knows his present, his past and his future, in the Rector's speech:

“But the Rector, having surely perceived my struggle, loosened his stiff attitude, now explaining to me, in curvy phrases, the high benefit of God, who lowered his gaze of mercy upon me, the supreme dignity of God. priesthood, the favor of Dona Estefânia, this most pious lady who had set

me free from the fate of my race. And looking at the presence of God on the ceiling, or closing his eyes in inner compassion, began to tell my sad story, which I listened carefully, because after all, to my great surprise, I did not know it. ... But now the Rector was now discovering the future that awaited me, not only that of hunger and weariness, but of darkness and perdition. And all this came in his neutral, impersonal voice, pure instrument of truth, with an incredible force of accuracy and torment.” (1996, p. 43-44)

In the film, it is Vergílio Ferreira himself who assumes this speech, embodying the Rector, having Lauro António transformed this textual segment, dominated by the inner monologue, into a monologue that the actor / novelist utters with austere voice to the young seminarian.

In the novel, Father Martins, recalling the obligations for the holidays - which in the book are read by a student of philosophy - explicitly states that seminarians should not work in the fields, not even with their parents, which proves the social prejudice of the priest in relation to the less favored classes (this detail is not found in the novel either). Prejudices are confirmed by the episode in which Father Tomás devalues António's textual construction during a Portuguese class - as it illustrates the poor origins of the young man - and compliments, with praise, a very elaborate speech by another student, revealing a higher cultural and socio-economic level. About this episode, writes Luís Mourão:

“It is not just and already important that the ruling class imposes its language on other social groups; In this case, too, it is about how, through language, the ruling class agrees to serve an image of reality that will ultimately turn against it - here is the whole story of the “natural” alliance of clerical culture with Salazarism, of a pastoral lyricist who knows nothing about urban capitalism.” (2001, p. 74)

In the village, António is confronted with the economic hardships experienced by his family and the desire for social ascension that the priesthood could bring. In D. Estefânia's house there are situations of embarrassment and humiliation: António's protector decides that he must continue to eat in the kitchen to deal with all social classes; In conversation with the parish priest of the village, he said that the ideal was that the young man should not even visit his family so as not to acquire the bad examples he observes when he is with his family members; When António confesses that he has no vocation, his protector violently criticizes him and foretells him a future of poverty and hunger that terrifies the young man and causes him to change his mind, under the weight of this social, economic and moral threat.

It should also be remembered that the meals the young man eats with the host family are of atrocious humiliation. During the meal, he is constantly slaughtered by Dr. Alberto's incisive and malevolent questions (systematically denigrating his knowledge of Latin), by Mariazinha's persistent insistence and his terrifying question, and by the embarrassment he feels when trying to cut a leg off chicken, she jumps on the towel, motivating a comment by D. Estefânia who criticizes the Seminary for not teaching how to deal with all social classes. Finally, in the fateful episode, Dona Estefânia is permanently worried about her daughter's proximity to the rockets,

but Antonio's direct contact with them does not give her any care. In the novel, he puts the boys away (which do not appear in the movie), relegating the launch of the rockets to the seminarian:

"Then they gave me a 'light'. I burned the "light", which was blue, so beautiful blue that everyone was sorry it was over. And because she was beautiful, one of the boys also wanted to lay one down. Dona Estefânia then slapped her son to stop the reasons: - I told you you can burn yourself! Antonio must throw everything!" (1996, p. 212-213)

We consider that the devaluation of the psychological space, favoring the social space, is not only due to a greater ease in the "visualization" of the filmic narrative, as Betton (1987, p. 116-117) observes, that the psychological novels turn out to be objects difficult to adapt, but also to the ideological choices of Lauro António, as he himself recognizes:

"I read Manhã Submersa when I was 14 or 15 and it was a novel that struck me a lot, precisely because it is a work that takes a concrete case: a seminarian who is in seminary, who has no vocation and who feels trapped. From this context, in a certain individual way, it goes to a general case, to the description of a country, to an analysis of a concentration society, a society that lives dominated by certain civil, military and religious powers and that have a little to do with it. with Portugal from the Estado Novo. It is this mood that the novel defines and it interested me a lot at that time. It was six years after the revolution, at a time when that revolutionary euphoria was already passing, when we were trying to think again about national identity, what we were as a country, what we went through and let's say such a movie seemed important to me at the time." (2001, p. 9)

3. Conclusion

We can clearly see that the director read Vergílio Ferreira's novel devoting particular attention to everything that could visually work on screen and to all social aspects that could be explored with clear ideological intent. Thus, it intended to build an epocal revisit and a reflection on society. The film had as its reference the thought of Vergílio Ferreira and his "*cinematic temptation*", and translated the specificity of the adaptation that Mário Jorge Torres synthesizes with the following words: "...everything is to find the right ways to operate the necessary transfiguration, having in mind what the novelist's own reflections make with exemplary clarity: every film that adapts a literary work obliges, as a different aesthetic object, to an additional work of the adequacy of the image to the word." (1995, p. 509)

Knowing the adaptation of *Cântico Final*, Lauro António tried to avoid the mistakes made by Manuel Guimarães. He moved away from an excessively faithful and literal adaptation, trying to create a visual reading of the book, as the opening sequences, subordinated to the image and not to the word (travel to the station, arrival of the train, first image of the Seminar, the cloisters). The images functioned as equivalent to the descriptions of the written text, as did the parallel montages in which the priest presents the holiday advice while the mega-narrator shows images of the mountains and the village.

It follows that Lauro António uses a strategy in his adaptation - narrating with images what the written text had spelled with words – “*with an independence from the text, which is the best way to be faithful to him.*” (Torres, 1995, p. 509)

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