



## THE CENTRALITY AND ARCHETYPAL VALUE OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN VERGÍLIO FERREIRA'S NOVEL *MANHÃ SUBMERSA*: THE DOUBLE APPROACH IN THE NOVEL AND THE FILM

Luis Cardoso<sup>i</sup>

Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre,  
Centre for Comparative Studies,  
University of Lisbon,  
Portugal

### Abstract:

The protagonist of Vergílio Ferreira's novel *Manhã Submersa*, and the film lives a set of experiences that lead him to a process of inner transformation. Antonio lives with a progressive awareness of himself and others. The story is presented by the voice of its protagonist, who in the light of twenty years of memory, recalls his adolescence as a seminarian. The protagonist-narrator is transindividual, and is a symbol of several intrinsically human characteristics, such as the dimension of the irreducible, which makes him aware of himself, walking along a path of existential knowledge, eliminating marks of deformation that have been inculcated to him, in search of universal unity, thus becoming a symbol, a character who is an archetype in Vergílio Ferreira's novels.

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

### 1. Introduction

One of the main facets of Vergílio Ferreira's novel *Manhã Submersa* is the centrality of António Lopes and his maturation process. Beyond his personal history, António has a universal dimension that certainly contributed to the interest of Lauro António. The protagonist-narrator is transindividual, and is a symbol of several intrinsically human characteristics, such as the dimension of the irreducible, which makes him aware of himself, walking along a path of existential knowledge, eliminating marks of deformation that have been inculcated to him, in search of universal unity (Gordo, 1995, p. 115).

The protagonist of the novel and the movie lives a set of experiences that lead him to a process of inner transformation. In dispute with the oppression of the Seminary, and the resulting alienation of this permanent asphyxiation, Anthony lives with a progressive awareness of himself and others. The Seminary is a symbol of totalitarianism, and the film, when it

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [lmcardoso@ippportalegre.pt](mailto:lmcardoso@ippportalegre.pt)

introduces us to the story of young Borralho, also tells us the story of an entire people, of a national destiny in conflict with totalitarian power (Coelho, 1983, p 113).

## 2. The central role of the main character

The story is presented by the voice of its protagonist, who in the light of twenty years of memory, recalls his adolescence as a seminarian. He had left on a misty morning, submerged in immense loneliness and a fate that robbed him of his childhood.

Due to her social and economic condition, she had been led in this direction by D. Estefânia, her protector, one of the oppressive voices in her life. The novel begins to delineate the overwhelming force of socio-economic constraints and the inner perception of the subject that is slowly formed by reflection and awareness. Between Neo-Realism and Existentialism, Vergílio Ferreira will leave some marks of the first current to explore with remarkable vigor the existentialist line. As José Rodrigues de Paiva points out, "*Manhã Submersa* is a novel set in a kind of literary crossroads, a work in which one senses the presence of the main guidelines of Portuguese prose fiction of the first half of this century. From Neo-Realism, which had already conditioned the appearance of the first three novels of the writer and whose inflows Change would not entirely escape, *Manhã Submersa* receives the social problematic, which in this book is, as has been said, the resumption of certain aspects of *Vagão* «J» visas in relation to the existence of António Santos Lopes" (1984, p. 139-140).

Another problem in the analysis of the novel is its 'novel-learning' nature, or Bildungsroman, contemplating the path of a young man, with his experiences portrayed in different episodes until they reach maturity (Besse, 1995, p. 111). voice of a protagonist narrator who, through the thread of memory, evokes a path with successive stages of initiation.

This itinerary implies a human and social learning, simultaneously with the emergence of sentimental life and spiritual development, traits that Aguiar e Silva (1988, p. 730-731) identifies in the Bildungsroman, moving away, for example, from Erziehungsroman (education novel) and allowing species such as the Künstlerroman (artist novel). In this line of reflection, we have not failed to read in the novel two central ideological lines, intertwining with this theme: the social and the existential. The uprooting of the subject and the totalitarianism in the Seminary converge to reinforce the existential line, although in this novel a reconciliation with the social side is perceived, which is linked to the former as its metaphysical extension (Carmo, 1988, p. 174).

Alongside these initiatory episodes, we find in the novel a number of socially motivated obstacles that will mostly be brought into the film. António suffers successive humiliations: in the train, in the pension of the Guard, in the house of D. Estefânia (when embarrassed by the deficient behavior at the table, the constant calls of attention by the son of D. Estefânia, the fact of having to eat in the kitchen), the social evidence of his name (Borralho), and the impossibility of having a wife in the future.

When we compel texts that analyze the film, a vector looms large: António Lopes's centrality and his final attitude of rebellion. Miguel Esteves Cardoso writes: "... *The Brumes of aube* is a matinee who is finite for the sake of marriage, with the petit transgression António who has pre-written a milestone and a rite (the refusals of the handicaps of the ecclesiastical ordinances) derout the toutes, fuyant la fausse perfection morale for the bials of a petite imperfection physique..." (Passek, 1982,

p. 144). This attitude of the young seminarian without vocation, forced to enter the Seminary due to the harsh economic conditions and the severity of his protector, is also highlighted in several reference works on *Manhã Submersa*.

Thus, we do not hesitate to identify Antonio Lopes and the social motivations for his revolt as the ideological axis of the film. This will be the central coordinate in these pages of reflection on the film and the novel.

One of the reasons that led Lauro António (1995) to choose this novel was the relevance of its theme. In addition to portraying a society of the past, it also made one think of the society into which Lauro António was inserted when filming *Manhã Submersa*. The social concerns of the director are thus fully perceptible. This dimension, as well as the symbolism of the main character are rightly highlighted by Jorge Leitão Ramos when he writes «*The trajectory of the character António (an appreciable work of Joaquim Manuel Dias) serves above all to reveal a social landscape that, although situated in the 40's, it is the root and sap of our daily lives*» (1989, p. 245). In fact, between Neo-Realism and the Existentialism of the novel, the director opts for the social dimension, creating a narrative centered more on epochal constraints than on building an inner process of subject consciousness.

The filmmaker took a narrative perspective that departed from a traditional cinema of explicit denunciation. Through António Lopes, the narrator shows, between the protagonist's perplexity and indecision, the concentrating universe that oppresses him, without presenting declared negative judgments or absolute condemnations.

At the same time, the director avoided one of the main difficulties of the Vergilian text, the omnipresence of the existentialist inner monologue, placing the spectator centered on the protagonist's face, often shown with eloquent silence, hollow opacity, or revolted expressionlessness. The revolt is not explicit in the protagonist nor is the narrator explicitly explicit. This strategy merited the following comment from Eduardo Prado Coelho: "*Hence the narrative takes place in a kind of tranquil detachment that makes it both subtle and naive, multifaceted and transparent. The pole of revolt is not here the indomitable interiority of a self-aware consciousness, but the natural, earthly, serene affirmation of a desire. Hence also a certain thickness that the film acquires (available for various literatures and interrogations) and the easy communicability with which it presents itself to the public*" (Coelho, 1984, p. 113).

António dos Santos Lopes, in the literary work, is, at the same time, narrator and main character, that is, self-diegetic, with explicit activation of internal focusing. Thus one revisits in detail the past, but experienced again in the present narrative, or in line with Franz Stanzel, we would say that there is an option for the status of experiencing self rather than narrating self ("*self-narrator*") (1981, p. 432). Deepening the nature of this internal focusing, we recall that narrative representation is determined by António Lopes' vision and movement that resembles cinematographic techniques.

As we mentioned earlier, when the protagonist first sees the seminar, the description that is made is similar to seventh art procedures. There is an identification with cinematic narrative techniques, namely what appears to be an initial traveling ('the big house has been turning with the curve of the road') and the contre-plongée ('going up the wide staircase at the top'). 'A quiet priest' (1981, p. 432).

The protagonist, upon reaching this terrifying space, begins his emotional registers, memorizing the building's devouring ferocity dimension, in an exercise of perennial dysphoria, subjective interiorization of time, in a plenitude of the inner monologue, envisioned by an ideological motivation, a "*Valuing the positioning of the subject and his experiences in the search for his own statement (according to fundamental principles of existentialist thought)*" (1981, p. 432).

In the film, the narrative options fell on an external mega-narrator, obviating a traditional adaptation with the melancholy and eternal omnipresence of an off voice - the usual filmic strategy for translating a self-narrative narrator - since if it were set in motion would convert the film in a long monologue.

Thus, the filmic narrator is mostly external, being sometimes replaced by Antonio's off-voice and internal focusing: when he first writes to his mother, demonstrating his discontent; when he writes his second letter to his mother, perfectly antagonistic to his first, after talking with the Rector; in the letter he writes to his friend Gaudencio during the Christmas holidays; during the tribute that is made in the Seminary to Gaudencio, recalling his desire to abandon the life of seminarian; And lastly, before you drop the rocket, you remember your conversation with a Seminary employee and make the decision that will change your entire life.

Lauro António assumes the centrality of António. Right in the opening scenes, we follow a foggy morning that surrounds the small Borrvalho that travels with the Pebble to the train station. Then, in a happy plan, the convoy lurks between the mists of the day and the smoke from its chimney until the title of the film appears. This emblematic image symbolizes all the submersion that will reach the young Antonio. After that trip, he will not be the same eleven-year-old boy who leaves for the Seminary for the sake of D. Estefânia.

From the host family that submerges it, to the socio-economic conditions of its genetic family that atrophy it, to destiny as an inexorably charged seminarian, existence is a long process of inner anguish that will become, in spaces, in rarely vociferous revolt (when she tells her mother that she has no vocation and wants to have a woman; when she confesses to Dona Estefânia that she does not feel about vocation - an observation she will withdraw as soon as her protector invective invokes her and reminds her of the difficult conditions of your family's life). Curiously, it reaches its peak without a word of its own: during the final episode of self-mutilation, in which Antonio makes no sound, Lauro Antonio creates a moment of deafening silence that bursts with the crash of the rocket. In the Vergilian text, this act entails a cut and a metamorphosis. Maria Graciete Besse observes: "*We can thus consider that the self-mutilation with which the novel ends is a subversive initiatory stage, decided by the neophyte himself, who finds in it a strategy of transgression capable of leading him to liberation and openness to the future*" (1995). , p. 112). At this point, self-harm is the deliberate and thoughtful proof of the will of the self, decided after an evaluation of the seminarian's example and its consequences, as a motive for the will, as Mora writes: phenomenon of will there is a prior representation or, rather, a knowledge, purpose, decision, resolution and action. Intertwined with these elements are the so-called motives of the will, which are sometimes conceived as causing the will to set in motion, and at other times as a mere incentive for the moment of resolution or action. p. 326).

In the novel, Antonio lives in deep inner instability, in constant questioning and rebellion, seeking answers, or rather asking successive questions, thus creating a clearly existentialist

profile. In the film, Lauro António replaces the inner monologue with constant plans of the silent character, in which the viewer only has access to the serenity of the face, the dolent and successive castration scattered on the often expressionless, empty, alienated features of his face. subdued. With this option, the director favors a neorealistic interpretation of the character's behaviors, in which alienation becomes the visible face of social oppression.

In the film, Antonio's empty face is the supreme expression of the unspeakable, the combination of the castrating forces that oppress him. Due to the absence of the saying, Lauro António explores, with a very deep cut, the significant dimension of the image, without having to resort to verbal speech to translate the protagonist's expression or to travel within himself. This often-uninhabited face has its utmost eloquence in the final scene. We recall that in the book, little António thickens his inner revolt from episode to episode, creating a project of liberation clearly personal and energized by his conscience.

In the movie, the great stimulus for the protagonist's action comes from the conversation he has with the seminary worker, giving the young man the revolutionary and saving seed. While holding the rocket, Antonio recalls the words of this worker and decides to apply them to himself, in a serene moment of existential disengagement. For the director, contact with the official was essential for Antonio's choice, which shows the influence of the social environment on the subject (neo-realistic mark) and not so much his personal choice, as it happens in the book (existentialist mark).

This choice stems from a scene in which Antonio, already in his second year of seminary, and increasingly overwhelmed by discontent, especially after confessing to D. Estefânia his lack of vocation - and then regressing in this confession - finds an employee with whom he talks a few words, because conversations between seminarians and staff were prohibited. This man had a minor physical disability as a result of his work in a mine. He confesses to Antonio that he had also been a seminarian, but had ceased to be because he was a regulation officer. This brief conversation provides you with a way to break free from the Seminary because priests cannot be physically disabled.

Lauro António introduces a character that does not exist in the novel, giving, as we have already mentioned, a social dimension to António's choice. This secondary character, irrelevant in the economics of the film, is fundamental to the denouement and ideological interpretation of the director's choices. With this motivation, Antonio is able to discover a way of evading the Seminary, freeing itself from the oppression of its protector, and a destiny that was imposed on her.

While the filmmaker creates a new character, he also omits others that Vergílio Ferreira conceived. In the book, D. Estefânia is the mother of six children, including Dr. Alberto and Mariazinha, the only ones brought to the screen. With this option, D. Estefânia's space and family become smaller, concentrating the viewer's attention and increasing the relief of the characters and the intensity of their interventions. The physical experience of his adoptive family's space is dominated by oppression and successive attempts at ridicule (recall Dr. Alberto's insights, stressing António's little knowledge, and Mariazinha asking the young man repetitive and exasperating, whenever they meet, when they "sing Mass").

Another mark of abandoning the novel's existentialist orientations is the reflection on God. Of the centrality of this motif in the Vergilian text, we find in the film only a scene explicitly close to this theme. In a dialogue between Gaudêncio and António Lopes, the former has the courage to ask the question "What if God did not exist?". Your friend replies that he had already thought. But this issue is abandoned and in the following scenes, the director prefers to highlight the flu outbreak that hits the seminarians (plus a given epocal) and that Antonio takes advantage of to have a few days off, stealing "*to classes and prayers*", when you claim to be sick.

In the treatment of priests, Vergílio Ferreira and Lauro António again delineate dissimilar profiles. While the writer presents a detailed portrait of each member of the clergy, with explicit identification and physical and psychological characterization, the filmmaker takes another path. Rarely naming priests and virtually without providing spectators, directly or indirectly, with elements of characterization, the director builds a homogeneous view of all seminary priests, engaging them in their class ties. The film shows them as an oppressive class, which suffocates the body and mind of young people, an antagonist of various faces, but with the same castrating aim. This option reiterates the social portrait of the time, and deepens the space in particular.

### 3. Conclusion

We believe that Lauro António made his reading of the novel and made several changes, for example, transformed the psychological space of the novel into social space, trying to create in the film a technical equivalence, reinforcing the facet of social criticism. In this sense, the director chooses to explore one of the dimensions of the novel that, in the written text, is at the service of the character's journey: the social side, which takes the reader to a certain time and to certain social referents of Portugal, as stated by Besse (1995, p. 107), which reinforces a fundamental aspect in Vergílio Ferreira's novel: the centrality of the character and its universal dimension.

The character inserted in a time 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 cut-out, 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, as Reis and Lopes writes (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 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 and clearly reveals that Vergílio Ferreira has a fundamental characteristic: his main characters are a symbol, have a universal nature and an archetypal dimension that is revealed in numerous writer's books.

## References

- António, L. (1995) Vergílio Ferreira e o Cinema, in Maria Irene Fonseca (org. e coord.) Vergílio Ferreira – Cinquenta anos de vida literária, Actas do Colóquio Interdisciplinar. Porto: Fundação Eng. António de Almeida.
- Besse, M. (1995). Manhã Submersa de Vergílio Ferreira – a epifania da palavra iniciática, in Maria Irene Fonseca (org. e coord.) Vergílio Ferreira – Cinquenta anos de vida literária, Actas do Colóquio Interdisciplinar. Porto: Fundação Eng. António de Almeida.
- Carmo, C. (1998). Adolescer em clausura. Olhares de Aquilino, Régio e Vergílio Ferreira sobre o romance de internato. Faro: Universidade do Algarve e Centro de Estudos Aquilino Ribeiro.
- Coelho, E. (1983). Vinte anos de cinema português – 1962-1982. Lisboa: Biblioteca Breve.
- Coelho, E. (1984). A Mecânica dos Fluidos, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda.
- Ferreira, V. (1996) Manhã Submersa. Lisboa: Bertrand.
- Gordo, A. (1995). A escrita e o espaço no romance de Vergílio Ferreira, Porto: Porto Editora.
- Mora, J. (1989). Dicionário de Filosofia. Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores.
- Paiva, J. (1984). O Espaço-Limite no romance de Vergílio Ferreira. Recife: Edições Encontro.
- Passek, Jean-Loup (1982). (org.), Le Cinéma Portugais. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou.
- Ramos, J. (1989). Dicionário do Cinema Português. Lisboa: Caminho.
- Reis, C. & Lopes, A. (1997). Dicionário de Narratologia. Coimbra: Almedina.
- Reis, C. (1981). Técnicas de Análise Textual. Coimbra: Almedina.
- Silva, V. (1988). Teoria da Literatura, Coimbra, Almedina, (8ª edição).

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). and European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).