

**THE SPACE BETWEEN SEWINGS: RELATIONS BETWEEN EXPERIENCE
AND ESSENCE IN THE NOVEL *O FIEL E A PEDRA*, BY OSMAN LINS**

**O ESPAÇO ENTRE COSTURAS: RELAÇÕES ENTRE EXPERIÊNCIA E
ESSÊNCIA NO ROMANCE *O FIEL E A PEDRA*, DE OSMAN LINS**

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Abstract: This paper presents, in Osman Lins' book 'O fiel e a pedra', the external factors of space as constitutive elements of the character Bernardo's conflict, whose condition leads him to the search for an inner essence that overcomes the disintegrating reality he experienced in complexity. The study is based on the assumptions of the problematic hero of Lukács (2000) and takes as a theoretical contribution on space, Borges Filho (2007), Bachelard (1989) among others, showing the multiple spatial faces in relation to the fictional subject, inserted in the complicated social relations, based on the hierarchical structures of power.

Keywords: space; Osman Lins; power relations.

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta, na obra *O fiel e a pedra*, de Osman Lins, os fatores externos do espaço como elementos constitutivos do conflito do personagem Bernardo, cuja condição o leva à busca de uma essência interior que se sobreponha à realidade desagregadora por ele vivenciada em toda sua complexidade. O estudo se baseia nos pressupostos do herói problemático de Lukács (2000) e toma como aporte teórico sobre o espaço, Borges Filho (2007), Bachelard (1989) dentre outros, evidenciando as múltiplas faces espaciais em relação ao sujeito ficcional, inserido nas complicadas relações sociais, alicerçadas nas estruturas hierárquicas de poder.

Palavras-chave: espaço; Osman Lins; relações de poder.

Initial considerations:

The transdisciplinary relationship of space attributes the articulatory character of meanings to the context of the literary work, so this category has the capacity not only to uncover the socio-cultural aspects of the aesthetic product, but also to provide a dynamic panel of interactions between man and world. In this sense, it is observed that in the universe of Osman Lins writing, space is impregnated with images and senses capable of projecting the texture of narrative action, where the inter and intrapersonal relations of the subjects are fixed in their life trajectory. In the novel *O fiel e a pedra*, we dig through the strong dramatic tension of a man divided between two common enemies: the values that make up his identity and the conflicting elements that overlap his world reality. Seeking, therefore, the values lost in an increasingly corrupt social

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environment, the hero of this narrative tries to subjectively find himself and resist the complexity of the relations established with the social universe, so that he can find the meaning of life and be guided by exclusive principles. Lukács (2000) in his considerations about the novel affirms that in modern society, collective heroes have given way to the individual and problematic hero, since the degraded world of values no longer encompasses or satisfies him, functioning as a prisoner of his interiority. In this struggle, the subject of the novel undertakes a solitary action within the social and spatial whole that surrounds him.

But to be is to be situated within specifiable contexts of voice, of social, cultural, political, and economic conditions that determine the individual's uniqueness in relation to an experience of life. In this sense, it can be affirmed that, inserted in the mirrors of coexistence, space therefore carries the sensitivity, the experience and the transformations of the human being who tries to survive unscathed from the struggle in defense of his own dignity. Tied, therefore, to external factors, the subject plunges into the "metaphysical suffering" (LUKÁCS, 2000, p. 37) that characterizes the dimension of his interiority. Thus, the character Bernardo tries to sew his rectitude of character and the ethical posture as a form of resistance to the conflicts that impose him in the form of psychological and social pressure within the spatial meshes of the relations of power and the measured human condition, makes the hero question his own balance in the universe of degraded values. Investigating, therefore, this narrative experience, we try to analyze, in the mentioned work, the space as constitutive element of the conflict of the character, subdued and resilient to the pressures of the system.

2-Good and evil in the hero's *via crucis*

According to Massaud Moisés (2007), the novel *O fiel e a pedra*, written by Osman Lins, is a basic work in the trajectory of the fictionist, since "it reaches the fair and high balance between the two tendencies, the introspective and the experimentalist" (p.376). That is, although this still refers to a traditional structure, it shows a narrator that cannot stand any longer the complexity of the human soul, opening space for the inner voice that punctures the

insurmountable gap between man and the world, this already opaque of values and of meaning. In this way, the plot exposes the tearing of the subject's interiority within spaces of oppression.

The narrator of this story, in the third person, obeys an elementary sequence of events, delivering the voice to the characters. The protagonist Bernardo Vieira Cedro, when he was the tax inspector of the municipality of Vitoria, avoided compromising with the embezzlement of money practiced by the mayor Coutinho and allies, in what concerns the collection of taxes of the loads of the trucks that crossed the tax office and, for this reason, he resigned. This act is not approved by the population that considers him proud and radical, denying him the necessary help to save his son Jose.

After the death of his son, Bernardo is summoned by Miguel Benicio to be a stander in Engenho do Surrão where he also refuses to participate in dishonest articulations, such as putting the boss's goods in his name, so that Creusa, the adulterous wife of this would not have access or, after the suspicious death of the boss, to give the oxen of the widow to Nestor Benício, brother of the victim.

The stander responds negatively to the actions of dishonesty and injustice and this gesture recovers of opposition as much to the structural forces of power as to the human reification, however his voice does not echo within a corrupted universe. Thus, the space of lived experiences ceases to be seen as real and positive, to assume the character of a disintegrating element. Thus far from a favorable relationship with the outer universe, the protagonist sees himself as impotent and solitary in the face of the superiority of the world and of things, and it is precisely in this clash between the exterior and the interior where the "effort to grasp the essence, Which in turn appears as something frightening and doubly strange in the context of everyday estrangement imposed by social conventions "(ADORNO, 2003, p.58). And, without finding answers to the personal chaos in the world, Bernardo sometimes identifies himself as "a cornered man [...] who needed to tame, to direct his strength" (OSMAN, 2007, p.254), and sometimes perceives that the world is "a place of punishment, a desolate vastness, with an invisible and threatening enemy watching him" (Ibidem, p.282). Consequently, in those inhospitable places, a

hard certainty pervades his being: "to be alone in the face of wickedness" (Ibidem, p.285).

In this way, he has rough and deficit relationships, occurring in his space of relations, the protagonist is impelled to measure himself as a human being, seeking a totality that can give meaning to his own actions.

The acts that supported the daily life of the people of Surrão were in conflict with the values of the stander, therefore, the desires became unfeasible and his actions were configured as those of a problematic individual, since he tried to "accomplish, in some way, the core of his interiority in the world" (LUKÁCS, 2000, p. 142). Thus, throughout the plot, it is verified that this tension is transferred to the physical space, that is narrowing itself and suffocating the character, because the unpleasant sensation that prevails in him at the beginning of the narrative, while pondering on the strength of Nestor Benicio's greed, the new boss, is confused with the noise of the beings within the state of need that forces him to remain in the Engenho do Surrão:

The rumors of the night grew, the dog let out a long howl. And everything, the howls, the songs of the little animals, Nestor Benicio, the men in the darkness, the life in that wilderness, the poverty that forced him to endure these things with his woman, everything seemed to merge - elements of a conspiracy that would destroy him, which already threatened him, closing on both a vague, baleful, imponderable circle (OSMAN, 2007, p.98)

The howling of the animals reminds him of the tenebrous sensations provoked by the power relations, pushing him to visualize Nestor Benicio in his irrationality among men torn in the darkness of his interiority, at the same time that the conscience points him the siege of oppression which was firmly established in the reality as a stander. It is inferred by the vision of the circle, geometric figure without demarcated beginning and end, the certainty of the character that no viable alternatives to his problem were pointed out, which leads him to a feeling of individual anguish or "essential aspiration of the soul" (LUKÁCS, 2000, p.88).

In the face of the split between interiority and action in the corrupted world, Bernardo opts for the project of being, according to Sartre (1997), to be the genesis of all other choices of life. However, while this alternative marks both freedom and responsibility for choices, it also corresponds to the state of

existential solitude (SARTRE, 1997), and it is this feeling that dominates the character throughout his trajectory. After being shot, he notes:

In the last hours he had lived them as a man in ecstasy, altering his relations with the world. As if he had lost track of weight and distances, there had been a mismatch, a disagreement between himself and everything around him. From the beginning, suffering had frightened him (OSMAN, 2007, p.275).

In the total mismatch between the character's interiority and the space of his relations, he is crushed by the power structure, represented by Nestor Benicio: "he had suffered through the cemetery, by the ambush on the road, by the kick on the calf, by the plantation. To one suffering there was another, which added to the previous pain and at the same time absorbed it "(OSMAN, 2007, p. 355), because he has to make the negotiations himself between being and to be in favor of his individuation .

Recognizing himself, therefore, superior to the space that oppresses him, Bernardo emphasizes that he was strange to that mechanism of alienation and misunderstandings: "This unhappy world was full of people without constancy, people who made and did not remember, men of bad judgment, but He was not of these "(OSMAN, 2007, p.278). Thus, since "he was not one of these," Bernardo could not act like them, yielding to the oppressive yoke and emptied himself of his individuation, so he decides to face Nestor, not releasing the oxen, belonging to the widow. This decision, conditioned to its essentiality, has a universal and fair character, but it offends Nestor Benicio, whose ambition was "to reap everything that was within reach, to extend. At any price, against all scruples. The height of man is his powers "(OSMAN, 2007, p.134).

Power that is established in the work by the millstone that crushes the cane and from it removes the substrate, but which, linked to the "faithful", works as a tool for chiseling the most intimate values. Crude stone, symbol of perfection and at the same time the double movement of ascension and fall (CHEVALIER and GHEERBRANDT, 2012), is linked to the yoke of oppression imposed on the protagonist. Yet, though forced to dissolve like the cane crushed by the stone, he ventures to the last consequences to resist the crushing of being, as "the most fearsome enemies of man, those who dwell in

his soul, grew in adversity, in peacetime they were silent and did not seem to exist "(OSMAN, 2012, p.305).

Nestor Benicio, marked by the ideologies of classes that define the dominant and dominated, imposes himself on the employee, in an attempt to control him as he used to do to others. Initially, part of his strength as owner of the mill and the reified beings that live in it: "The boss is now Nestor Benicio, I command and I violate, I do as I please, and within my limits, my jurisdiction, there is no man worth more than me! I double anyone, understand? From end to end (OSMAN, 2007, p.238). Then he is motivated to trample him by hatred of his resistance: "You and your race of broke proud will disappear from the world. Either he dies or surrenders to the forces, he has no other choice (Ibidem, p.217). However, the despotic lord of land cannot wither the pride and character of the farmer and stander, who is carried away by the blind utopia of his character, even though his self is broken by the force of the abrupt subjects, he opposes the overflowing evil which suffocates him.

Thus, while Nestor proclaims that "remedy for arrogant, is strength", that "what is form above, on the top, and what is from below, on the ground" (Ibidem, p 346), or yet that "either dies or surrenders to the forces, there is no other way to choose" (Ibidem p.217), the faithful tries to raise up through sewing of the patches of his experience, wondering "how his days would end, whether his soul and his muscles would succumb, whether life would crush him" (Ibidem, p.265) or if his human dimension didn't require deeper and more transcendent acts: "Is it, he asked bitterly, that I only came to be a man to enslave myself? Am I cowering and making myself a slave of misery?" (Ibidem, p.133).

And as the memories of the outside world cause the subject to immerse himself in the particular universe of memories related to the house, where the most intimate values are preserved (BACHELARD, 1989), Bernardo remembers the fragile rabbit that his mother had created and that had been dragged by the aggressive force of the dogs, imposing death to it, when Nestor and his armored henchmen, try to expel him of Surrão. He perceived himself besieged as the animal, therefore: "Fear grew, seized his soul like the shadow of the courtyard" (OSMAN, 2007, p. 347). Space then functions as an active element in the construction of the subjectivity of the character that, challenged within the experiences experienced in it, is forced to seek its essence and resist. Inserted,

then, in a reality emptied of values, the protagonist Bernardo inhabits the prison world and is configured as "an individual trapped by hatred and fear [...] to fight with the indomitable forces that aroused or set in motion - of the human being in the face of Nature, of the similar ones and, above all, of himself, his greater enemy "(MOISÉS, In OSMAN, 2007, p.376). In this way, it is possible to confirm a relation of conflict between the interiority of Bernardo and the degraded space that surrounds him and impels him to the desire of action and freedom in the search of the totality that embraces him.

It is observed, therefore, that the protagonist emerges as a survivor of a reifying world, therefore fragments himself and shows himself unfit to modify it; so that the space embraces him and is internalized by him, modeled and perceived, presenting itself in the narrative "[...] with psychological inquiries, with complexities, with unexpected attitudes and in parallel to all this, there is a greater concern with the spaces of this character "(BORGES FILHO, 2004, p.87). In this sense, the self that springs from the narrative throws on the environment a disenchantment of the world, as we can see in the following fragments:

The shadow of the porch was advancing on the deserted road, the same old rumors were coming from afar: an ox cart, the rattling of a rattle, a cicada, a scream in the cane-field, sounds of an ungrateful world (OSMAN, 2007, p.295)

[...] saw the sky, oxen in the pasture, horses in the meadow, but did not feel life in anything, as if life were not in the trunks, in the earth, in the flesh of the animals, but in the man with the strength to subject them (Ibidem, p.301)

Something was lacking in the animals and plants, not sap or blood, but vital as sap and blood. Weird, weird. A bountiful and distressing landscape, the green grassland desolating it like a field in ashes (Ibidem, p. 301)

It is noted in the above quotations that the synesthetic perception of the environment becomes the conscious verification that "the world is ungrateful" and that the elements of this place do not hold values, since these reside in the men that inhabit it, so all this landscape is transformed into a "field in ashes". The ashes refer to the remains of burning, extinction and at the same time the futility of human life (CHEVALIER and GHEERBRANDT, 2012), demarcating the actions of the subject and the awareness of their results within the relations evidenced in space. This combustion of interests permeates the whole narrative and gains body in the outcome, when, challenged by Nestor and the henchmen

inside a scene of siege and shooting, Bernardo does not bend over even though he is facing death. Until a stranger, named Ubaldo, favors the escape, registering that "a male like this needs to live" (OSMAN, 2007, p.367).

As the act of existing precedes the essence (SARTRE, 1998), it is possible to see that good and evil, within the conflictual relationship that dot the narrative, function as instruments of self-apprehension by the subject who experiences them, that is, the Negative is necessary to prove the essence of the human spirit and affirm its actions on the world, since, according to Hegel, "man depends only on himself, his reason and the forms of sociability that he gives himself: man is a free and self-conscious product" (HEGEL In Rosenfeld, 1988 p.121).

3-The ethical event of resistance - experience versus essence

Massaud Moisés emphasizes that *O fiel e a pedra* "is a novel of dramatic and metaphysical tension" (MOISÉS in: OSMAN, 2007, p.376), since it involves a problematic of social character and another about the state of being of an individual between human needs and conscience. He further emphasizes that although the landscape of the novel is distressing to the hero, what stands out is the human figure placed between the fatality and harshness of the environment and the repression undertaken by others. In this way, we can see that Bernardo is building himself in a double glance that moves from the landscape to himself, getting to attribute to the place of his experiences the same hardening that had occurred to him. While the environment is seen as rough and fiery with the "stony appearance. Black, solid landscape, a severe mineral landscape" (OSMAN, 2007, p. 287), "ungrateful world" (p. 295), "landscape full and distressing," a "field in ashes" (p.301), "black and dirty world!" (p.364), he translates himself as brutish and resistant, a "man of ill-tempered energies. Cracked wall, faltering wall" (p.297) full of "hardness" (p.306), with a thirst for "burning stone" (p.364) or simply a being of desires so demeaned that he looked like a dead man: "What fire scorched him? Where did that hardened, the strange oppression, come from? [...] ? [...] There was a corpse in the body, one dead, one black and dirty dead (OSMAN, 2007, p. 364).

With the perception that his universe no longer has the ontological integrality between the self and the world, Bernardo resists consciously and firmly to the reality that closes about him as a circle, firming his personality. From this emerges the consciousness of the degradation of the social cosmos and the curtailment of the desires that feed him, because "being a man means being solitary" (LUKÁCS, 2000, 34).

In search of meaning for this fragmented and godless world, the hero is solitary and inadequate, so there is a divergence of extension between the soul and the world because this either compresses or promotes its expansion. Thus, when we immerse ourselves in the novel *O fiel e a pedra*, we see Bernardo trying to dominate both the ordeals of physical space, where he tries to live with dignity with his family, and psychological space, in which he undertakes an incessant search for the essence that determines his actions. Therefore, his conflict is inserted in space, and it is from this that the force of his character, of his will, is generated. Therefore, its conflict is inserted in space, and it is from this that the force of its character, of its will, is generated. Thus the "stony" place that crushes the faithful is the same as the hardness in a *via crucis*, which makes him resistant to the pressures of the system. The human subject, therefore, emerges from this clash with the environment and is constituted in the product of lived space, able to associate sensations, customs and psychological dispositions, becoming object and subject in the course of its history.

Within Bernardo's tragic course, the spaces of the city of Vitória and Engenho do Surrão assume subjective features, emerging as places devoid of optimism, since they encompass a conflict that exceeds the physical plane to establish itself in the psychological universe of this subject, whose existence ends up consubstantiating *being* and space. Curiously, the character leaves "Vitória", place of the first disappointment and returns to it, marking the overcoming of a tragic experience in the sugar mill, but not in its totality, which suggests the infinite circle of subsistent battles in human existence, leaving the individual always better, but never perfect or finished.

Surrão, whose name refers to a pouch, an element of provisions of a pilgrim and, at the same time, a sack that limits the actions of an animal, providing it with the necessary feed while performing painful works (AULETE,

2004), leads us to see in the relation between Bernardo and the environment, the critical perception necessary to his resistance and existence.

Feeling the imposition of the yoke of relations in space, he considered that it would not be "leveled at those goats" who inhabited the mill, for he "discerned good from evil" (OSMAN, 2007, p. 136) and knew that it was only through a "indomitable strength, [...] strict and extreme decision that certain men would gain their bread and peace!" (P.270). He was a "man with broad horizons" (p.175). His essence, therefore, is the product of a choice or a position in front of that reality of the world.

For Lukács (2000), it is precisely this adventure in search of the right measure of interiority the heart of the modern novel. The struggle of interiority with the universe that surrounds is today the great adventure of the hero, since it is his "soul that goes out into the field to know itself, that seeks adventures to be proved by them and, putting itself to the test, to find its own essence (Ibidem, p. 91). In this sense, we find within this universe of humiliation, the protagonist Bernardo to question himself as subject of those landscapes: "What, for example, is its true dimension? Wasn't he afraid? He did not fight against those impulses to humiliate himself or to attack, which succeeded each other as vomits and were forms of the same terror? (OSMAN, 2007, p.348).

Bernardo was a simple man who was trapped in a routine of exploration and challenge, since Nestor, drawn by the hatred that consumed him, constantly tried to defy and dominate him completely, objectifying him: "He will die weightless , a poor bastard. Who can sustain pride without ambition? For great pride, greater ambition. This is the rule that you do not learn. But life has punishment. It hurts, breaks, grinds, kneads the hardest" (Ibidem, p.351).

The essence of the protagonist manifests itself in the form of resistance early in his childhood, when, facing his physical exhaustion, he transposes the space from the island to the bank of the Tapacurá; Then this scene of mythical character reappears as confirmation of his nature, when Nestor and henchmen try to submit him to his command, because the character, again, will have to overcome the fear in order to face the situation. Thus he judges himself:

But it had been his first truly virile gesture, the first step forward, of the man who had grown quiet in him, and who had at last asserted himself somewhat prematurely: with coolness, without any commotion,

he measured the strength left in his Body, determined to return if he understood that they were over. If my body can, I can - would have reflected. And if my body cannot, still maybe I can. The will of man, the will of man ... "he repeated to himself as he swam, now slowly. Take fear in the teeth, like a horse biting on the bridle (OSMAN, 2007, p.83).

It is noted in the transcribed fragment that Bernardo's physical and psychological forces were exhausted, but with the mastery of the will, he manages to reach the margin. This scene is repeated at the end of the novel (p.369), when, already shot, he fights to stay alive. As an authentic and constant hero, his actions do not constitute a standard for the residents of the Surrão, yet the strength of character and will makes him overcome the adversities and gain the respect of Ubaldo, who helps him in the escape from the sugar mill. That siege that had closed over him had given him the certainty of the total emptying of the world: "he had blown up with his hatred, devastated everything, [...] he roared over the world, [...] that kingdom of wickedness and cowardice, where he tried to live, ignoring that only the wicked had friends and that others lived alone, condemned to death "(pp. 365-366).

Space, therefore, far from representing the protection and stability of the protagonist Bernardo, promotes closure and fear. However, it is precisely because of this resistance to the universe of altered values that the character constructs his interiority, endeavoring to constitute himself as a subject not conformed to the world and destiny. Consequently, the search for self-knowledge of the problematic hero relates to space insofar as he does not find in social structures the necessary foundation for the soul, initiating a clash with everything that surrounds him, according to a higher need that determines the duty-being of his existence.

Final considerations

When we propose to the study of space as an element that drives the actions of the characters, having a reciprocal influence between them, we do not intend to exhaust the possibilities of the work, since there are still few studies about it and this is one of many readings that the text allows.

The work analyzed here evidences man in the search for his internal structures, built from the social conflict with the environment and with himself. In

this way, the experiences lived in the city and in the countryside lead the character Bernardo to discover the inner potentialities that lead him to a blind action against his oppressors. And in this search for his own inner essence, the subject in becoming is dominated by anguish, loneliness and doubt, which makes him observe more deeply the place where he lives, the subjects with whom he lives, and the mystical sense of his existence.

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