

***Na tua face* by Vergílio Ferreira: “... Towards a New Natural Order of Being”**

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This article uses endnotes instead of footnotes.

Todo o real precisa de outro real para existir. (Vergílio Ferreira 209)

Havia ali uma outra ordem incompreensível a percorrer as linhas de um outro mundo possível e blasfemo e provocatório contra uma ordem ou decisão sem justificação nenhuma. (idem 210)

Deve haver uma razão antes das razões que venha a haver e essa razão é que é. Não sei. (idem 78)¹

An ageing narrator tells us that he practices medicine, draws caricatures, and was once a painter in his spare time; that his name is Daniel, but also Dani; that he is married to Ângela, whom he doesn't love, but does, and that he would have liked to have married Bárbara, also known as Babi; that he has two children – Luz and Luc – also known as Luzia and Lucrecio. Vergílio Ferreira's *Na tua face* (1993) is built upon this tangled web of doubles.

Unlike many of his other novels, this one does not involve the telling of a story. There is hardly any action but a minimal narrative nucleus that can be summarized as an encounter made up of the on-and-off relationship between Daniel and Ângela begun many years before, during their university days in Coimbra.

Their eventual separation is brought about by the ghostly presence of Bárbara, a friend of the couple, who is constantly coming between them due to Daniel's obsessive evocation of her. Daniel's life is filled with interrupted relationships, with Ângela, with his children, with the few friends who crossed his path, with Bárbara, of course, with a job that never motivated him and, finally, with painting – postponed time and again. As usual in Vergílio Ferreira's work, we are dealing with an evocative blend of novel and essay about remembering and philosophical reflection, with a strong lyrical dimension that “põe em cena o exercício de pensar” [foregrounds the exercise of thinking] in the apt words of Silvina Rodrigues Lopes (253).

At first it may seem as though there are no significant changes here from the existentialist novels that the author had been developing in the 1980s where the themes of choice, freedom and lack of communication arose from the dysphoria associated with loss of meaning, alongside the theme of lost love and the anticipation of death as the limit of life. Nevertheless, in the novel under consideration the construction based upon doubles linked to the aforementioned paring down of the narrative herald the changes that subsequent novels will tend to amplify, changes that would lead Maria Alzira Seixo to admit that *Na tua face* is one of the novels written after *Para sempre* (1983) that marked a clear change in the main epistemological perspective of the author's work.

The game of doubles is visible right from the first page through the setting up of an unavoidable reflection between the enunciating *I* and the enunciated *I*. The enunciated *I*, first in time, becomes the second in relation to the enunciating *I* and follows it chronologically: the first *I* becomes a *character* in the narrative constructed by *another I* which is its double; in other words, one *I* turns the *I* into another *I*. This produces a space where alterity, or even an ontological shift, can be created. Lacan makes this very clear when he says: “Je pense où je ne

suis pas, donc je suis où je ne pense pas" (277).

The very first scene in the novel shows the "décalages" of space and time between enunciating *I* and enunciated *I*. The reader notices the discrepancy immediately. It is presented to her/him as ontological opacity:

-Bárbara!

e ela estacou instantânea, a entender. Depois rodou sobre si para donde ouvira o chamamento. Mas ficou ainda o chamamento. Mas ainda imóvel, não te movas. Ficou ainda imóvel, à procura de uma razão de eu estar ali a chamá-la. E foi esse breve instante que se me gravou para a vida inteira. O destino. *Quem foi onde eu não estava?* Alguém pois escolhe por nós o que escolhemos para a eternidade? Alguém. (9)²

Daniel/Dani, the doctor/painter, is both the *I* and the *someone*. He is a narrator who, through constant ontological duplicity, permits himself all sorts of impossible leaps in time and space. The reader will be disorientated by this apparently careless narrator who, without prior warning, speeds forward in time ten or twenty years, straddles spaces far apart in time and, to top it all, expressing himself with a disenchanting and naturally duplicitous irony.

Daniel is engrossed in thoughts of Bárbara when Luc, his son, who has reached the "acne metafísica" [metaphysical acne] stage (141) as he calls it, interrupts him:

- Que é que tu querias dizer há dias com isso de que é fácil hoje ser profeta? – pergunta-me ainda Luc. – Que o futuro para ti é perfeitamente previsível?

- Luc, meu filho, depois te explico. Tenho agora de ir casar com a tua mãe, compreende.

E ele compreendeu. E só daí a muitos anos voltou a pôr-me questões. Entender. Porque é que me vou casar contigo? Deve haver uma razão antes das razões que

venha a haver e essa razão é que é. Não a sei. Ou não sei se a sei, vou ver se encontro alguma que me convenha. Por exemplo, tu podias ir gostando de mim sem saberes e quando deste conta já tudo estava decidido. [...] Ou tu podias vir ao de cima do meu amor infeliz por Bárbara e que era muito grande e dava para te contaminar por aproximação. E eu amava-a ainda a ela quando te amava a ti. (78-9)³

Reality – what reality? – is indecipherable to the disoriented reader. Nor can they identify the identity of the enunciating and enunciated *I* or the *someone* mentioned above, all of which, in their duplicity, move from one different status and dimension of reality to another. An example of this is the moment when the narrator – in the role of Daniel, Ângela's husband – relates the first signs of the illness that will eventually take her life. When he is describing the first time she fell down suddenly, without prior warning or apparent reason, a new paragraph starts abruptly and he says: “Mas enquanto não caís de novo e os teus olhos se te não forem apagando, acho que posso ir pensando no meu quadro” (238).⁴ In other words the narrator/Daniel is erased and another narrator/painter appears. An identical interruption – this time by the narrating *I* – occurs at the point when Daniel describes the argument that he had with his wife concerning a name for their son:

Será Lucrecio se for rapaz – que estupidez, disse eu.
Pois se nem utilizámos o método desse teu poeta – e eu
tenho de contar o método. Mas não tenho tempo agora.
(90)⁵

The novel will develop, then, by exploring a kind of multi-layered fiction constructed between interlocking shifts in time and space and a clever game of permanent alternating between the self and the double. Moreover, the unconventional grammar of certain passages – such as: “Mas já desde criança, como toda

a criança – entender” (72)⁶ – seems to be serving that fictional strategy, as if one level of discourse were suddenly abandoned in favour of another, and always, obviously, to the detriment of any diegetic intention, which becomes merely residual. Luís Mourão makes the astute comment that the Vergilian novel tends to use what he calls “uma dobra específica” [a specific fold] that allows the author to make “a passagem do essencialmente diegético para o essencialmente discursivo” [the passage from the essentially diegetic to the essentially discursive] (291). In this novel that fold would be the expression “qualquer coisa assim” [something like that], which actually appears several times in this form or a similar one at moments leading up to the afore-mentioned section where the narrator observes and describes in detail a photograph of his parents and ends with the following phrase: “O ser olhado por um olhar sem olhos para olhar, qualquer coisa assim.” (120) [Being watched by a gaze without eyes to see, something like that.] It is these different aspects that combine to create the ludic structure of the novel – which demands close scrutiny.

The construction of characters as doubles, doubles of themselves and through similarity or in contrast to each other, gives the novel a dramatic tone that is expressed in the very title of the novel and that is confirmed in the vocative noun that begins and ends the text: “Bárbara!” All the characters are at once themselves and parts of other characters, and their opposites. They are all *personae*, or rather masks from behind which the actor speaks (*per sonare*) as in ancient Greek drama. This was the original definition of *pessoa* (person) before it gained its political-philosophical meaning. Each person is a little or a lot like her/his mask, a mask that brings one closer to others or protects one from others. Therefore the person is always a fiction, is always somewhat forced, or contrived. The *persona*, *imago* or *effigies* is after all the produce of craftsmanship and

also means spectre, ghost or shadow. When a person introduces her/himself, s/he presents a representation: every person is her/his own double. The mask fits the face in such a way that the truth of an individual becomes (con)fused with the appearance, with how they appear to others. *Seeming is being*, the *I* is the *double*. The face is therefore a display, a stage where the drama of the self is played out. This is why Vergílio Ferreira called this novel *Na tua face (In/on your face)*. But at the same time the person/character implicitly carries within it a denial, an emptiness, an absence, a lack, that cannot be apprehended completely and turns it into a *not-there*, or a *there* that is *outside* the visible *there*. Therefore, as well as incorporating the dimensions mentioned beforehand, the play of doubles will allude to the invisibility and reversibility of people and of the world.

Just as Daniel/Dani is not just a doctor/painter, but also an *I* and a *someone*, the other characters are also doubles of themselves and each other, reflecting and mirroring each other in a complicated web of optical illusions that make things clear one minute and confuse them the next. The essence of the novel could be said to be an exercise in the multiplication of these games, and could be summarized by paraphrasing them.

Ângela and Bárbara, the women in Daniel's life, are set up in opposition to one another: they are two sides of the same coin, front and back, visible and invisible. He never loved the former, whom he married, or ended up married to, the way he did Bárbara, the latter, an absent and fleeting presence that he pursued throughout his life.

Ângela is beautiful in a cold, blonde neutral way, she is a calm, collected "estátua de leite frio" (163) [statue of cold milk]. The narrator describes her as "Sóbria impessoal" (17) [Impersonally sober], so says the narrator of her, in a phrase composed of those two single words. Intelligent and obstinate, perfect in her "destino de perfeição a cumprir" (244) [destiny of perfection to be fulfilled], Daniel often asks himself whether

there is blood in her veins or "sangue branco" (140) [white blood] and even wonders whether she is human, after she declares simply that she feels neither heat nor cold (cf. 49-50).

Although she embodies this archetypal female beauty, Ângela will always have a doubled/doubling nature in Daniel's eyes. From the moment they met, as students in Coimbra, he sees her firstly in association with Bárbara, with whom she shared both a house and a room, and afterwards as a substitute for Bárbara who had gone to England. By then, Ângela was already a presence that "ficava bastante ao lado" (235) [was always on the sidelines] for Daniel. She appears doubled to him, blurred across dimensions:

[...] e inesperadamente comecei a amar Ângela. Como se ama a essência de alguém em tudo o que a respirou. Amigos parentes. A casa em que viveu. Os objectos do seu uso e que foram também contaminados – mas não era só isso. *Era Ângela em pessoa, olho-a pela primeira vez. Era a encarnação de um certo milagre que a transfigurava no que ela era, mas em transfiguração, qualquer coisa assim, bela e incompreensível. Todo o imaginário e iluminação dos homens pelos milénios, como o sol pela vidraça, a vidraça é a mesma mas é outra, trespassavam-na e deixavam-na intacta, eu penso-o agora para então, mas devo estar baralhado. (16)*⁷

All Daniel's life he must have wondered, as he does in a final summing up, just why he loved Ângela. "Gostava de saber" [I'd like to know], he says at one point, "porque te amo nesta forma estranha de te não ter amado nunca" (139) [why I love you in this strange way of never having loved you at all]. That love will always have a double aspect to it, it will always imply a game of mutual reflection between two gazes that see each other both in appearance and in the *not-there* mentioned above. After all, is

this not what Daniel or Ângela (the identity of the voice that speaks this part of the narrative is deliberately ambiguous), says in an extremely beautiful formulation of the reversible and enigmatic nature of love: “vê se vês os meus olhos a verem-te” (253) [see if you can see my eyes seeing you]?

One day Daniel is looking at a series of x-rays of Ângela and suddenly realizes that he is seeing Ângela “no seu invisível” [in her invisibleness], in the “ser oculto de si” [hidden being of her], in her “essência corpórea de si” [the bodily essence of her]:

Ela era dupla na frescura do seu corpo, no branco rosa da face, nos olhos marinhos, e no que era tudo isso em armação por dentro. [...] Pela primeira vez eu tinha duas Ângelas e não me era fácil meter uma na outra. Era tão fascinante integrar a de fora na de dentro e tentar achar nesta a individualidade da outra. (97-8)⁸

In other words, Daniel has a sort of revelation that nature itself is double; there are always two sides even to beauty and this question will become crucial to the book. Beyond what the mask displays is the *not-there* that she hides but that is just as important in the constitution of the person and her beauty. This is where the reader senses the introduction of an extremely disturbing ontological oscillation, a (con)fusion of clear spatial coordinates and an axiological opacity that leads to a questioning of values, particularly in relation to the concept of beauty, as we shall see.

To Daniel, Ângela, in spite of being so cold and perfect, was at least a body whereas Bárbara was only an apparition, who would never have a palpable body; she is another archetype of femininity created from a moment of contemplation. She is both Ângela’s double and her opposite. In the following extract a young Daniel and Bárbara are sitting on a park bench in Coimbra:

Então olhei-a em deslumbramento e terror *no intocável do seu ser*. Queria ver-lhe os olhos verdadeiros e a boca e a face, mas não estavam lá. Porque eram só uma aparição difusa incontornável como a luz do ar que não se via e era só iluminação. Mas a certa altura não pude mais e disse – volta, sê toda. *No corpo palpável*, deixa-mo palpar. No rosto, nos seios, deixa. Via-lhe a face mas só no impossível como lha vejo agora. (29)⁹

All Daniel's life, on the street, at home, in his memory, Bárbara (in contrast to the day-to-day living presence of Ângela) is a ubiquitous ghost and a frightening corporal manifestation of plenitude, of perfection and, in sum, of eternity.¹⁰

But even though she is able to "coalhar a eternidade no humano" [curdle eternity in human form] (a beautiful metaphor from the novel), Bárbara herself has a double face vulnerable to the corruption of time.¹¹ Fifty years have left their cruel marks on Bárbara's face, which Daniel describes in great detail, down to the surprising "falta de um dente no sorriso" (282) [tooth missing from her smile].¹² However, this game of front and back, of transparencies (X-rays and other kinds), is also played out on Bárbara's face:

Reparei que pouco a pouco eu *ia passando através* de toda a sua face enrugada e divisava *através* dela como de um *vidro* sujo a sua face antiga inatingível que *estava do lado de lá* e não nela, no *vidro*. [...] Levantámo-nos e de súbito eu vi, eu vi o rosto de Bárbara rejuvenescer, a face lisa de esplendor. (284)¹³

Clearly this double dimension to Bárbara, like that of Ângela, also generates a certain ontological oscillation, a (con)fusion of spatial, and here also temporal, coordinates. In this case, however, Daniel does not seem to be heading towards a revision

of the traditional concept of beauty or a toning down of the beauty/horror opposition, as happened previously. This can be seen in the continuation of the last quotation:

Levantámo-nos e de súbito eu vi, eu vi o rosto de Bárbara rejuvenescer, a face lisa de esplendor. E imprevisamente era aí que eu repousava, na tua face, na imagem final do meu desassossego. (284)¹⁴

This section appears towards the end of the novel, which might indicate that Daniel is fixated on an image of untouchable, splendid and unattainable beauty. However, this is not what will happen, or this is not all that will happen.

This game of masks and doubles is occasionally interrupted by a sort of carnival of horrors, turning the world upside down and back to front, and leaving the wrong side exposed. The text reveals worlds of deformity or mutilation, set up in opposition to a supposedly “well-formed” world, of wholeness and normality. Daniel’s hysterical cries, for example, calling out to the ghostly Bárbara, help to create an expressionist tone in the novel, which includes further scenes of excess:

- 1) the wheelchair race in which ‘Serpa the Toad’ takes part and the swimming contest that follows it (42-47)¹⁵;
- 2) the sight of the beggar with the horrendous pelican chin, which suddenly contaminates everyone on the street who then also appear to have “uma bolsa de papeira suspensa do pescoço” (81) [a sagging sack of skin hanging from their necks];
- 3) a wild scream that suddenly ‘kicked’ Daniel’s cranium, heralding the appearance of “uma multidão de aleijados” [a crowd of cripples] in a grotesque procession that filled the streets, stretching “para lá do horizonte” (83-4) [beyond the horizon]. Later in the text there is another invasion of the streets by disoriented cripples, bumping

into each other, described as real "restos sórdidos da humanidade" (232) [sordid remains of humanity]. Further on in the novel, a string of blind people encircle the town, along with drowned bodies, twisted frames, crowds of starving, skeletal figures and "doentes e criminosos e assassinos e vendilhões e corruptos e perjuros e doidos" (249) [the sick and the criminal and murderers and pedlars and swindlers and perjurers and lunatics];

- 4) the sudden hallucinatory sight of the street "coalhada de esqueletos" [clotted with skeletons], in a "chocalhada de ossaria" [rattling of bones], impressive in its uniform rhythm (99-102);
- 5) the deformity that Daniel sees surfacing suddenly in Ângela's face as she is giving a lecture (145);
- 6) the times when he thinks about painting a portrait of his son Luc (158-9) whom his gaze starts transforming horrifically until the boy becomes a Christ-like figure, "pregado numa cruz e as carnes cheias de grandes bolsas pendentes, a cabeça suspensa de lado e a boca aberta cheia de um sofrimento horrível" (160) [nailed to a cross and his flesh covered with great sagging bags of skin, his head hanging to one side and his open mouth full of terrible suffering];
- 7) the "A Carantonha" [Ugly Mug] photography competition in which his daughter Luzia takes part, whose aim is to push the limits of deformity by putting it side by side with a natural face (208-10);
- 8) the hideous face of Barbara's handicapped child, which looked like the snout of a "pequeno suíno em pé" (281) [a small swine on its hind legs].

These dark scenes inevitably recall images from the works of Raul Brandão, one of the authors recognized by Vergílio

Ferreira as one of his literary ancestor. They are pervaded by an emphatically grotesque atmosphere that, rather than hiding it, accentuates the tragic dimension of the human condition. Daniel's transforming gaze captures this grotesque atmosphere, enabling him to assert a transgressive attitude when confronted by what the human condition has set up as normality and to defend, transgressively and provocatively, the dignifying and sublimation of abnormality or non-normality. This assertion is made in the novel through self-conscious philosophical meditation and parody. Moreover, right at the beginning of the novel, when talking about his taste for caricature, Daniel interweaves the act of transfiguration involved in caricature (and parody too) with his meditations on humans and their masks:

Tenho horror ao natural, a não ser quando ele já o não é, suponho. Distorcido maligno estropiado. E então é só copiar. Mas eu gostava mesmo assim de ajudar a Natureza no seu desaforo. Alguns queixavam-se-me do massacre. *Eu adorava. Pegar num rosto e devastá-lo de horror e ficar igual ao que estava por fora mas se não via por estar por dentro.* Revelar o que se não via e deitar fora o que não deixava ver. Agora penso. Ser a verdade do que se mistificou, às vezes vem-me à ideia. (11)¹⁶

Transfiguration enables one to reveal the other side of the truth, of what is real. In fact, in one meditative passage, Daniel concludes that “O grotesco é isso, ver o contrário dele” (108) [That's what the grotesque is, seeing its opposite], after considering that the crippled exists in relation to the healthy or the mad in relation to the sane. The real does not exist, “Porque todo o real precisa de outro real para existir. [...] Mesmo um qualquer objecto tem um outro atrás dele e é por isso que a gente em miúdo gosta sempre de o tocar para o apanhar – tens a vista nas mãos? Costumam ralar as mãos”(208).¹⁷ This brings us back to the question of doubles that is so important in this novel,

where everything is duplicated. Reality is only perceived partially, from a point of view that shows only one of its sides. But there is always another side to it, submerged, subliminal, and hidden, revealed by the X-rays that Daniel, as a doctor, can consult or exposed by anatomical examination. The photographs Luz takes, and a certain painting evoked in the book, are also capable of capturing that hidden side. Everything in Nature, including human beings, has two sides to it: a front and a back, one side visible, the other invisible.

At one point, when pondering on the newspaper cartoons he draws, Daniel wonders:

Tenho a verdade deles na minha cara ao espelho, *mas havia por baixo dela outra verdade que era a verdade da Terra*. A linha que ela traça a direito e vai atirando *para os lados e para trás* a beleza, o horror, as deformidades, os coxos, os marrecas, os génios, os escaravelhos, os sistemas de pensar, os sistemas morais, os sapos, os hipopótamos, os taralhoucos, os santos, os criminosos, as religiões e as políticas e a pancadaria que ambas vão desenvolvendo para terem a razão que não tem, e o mais e o mais e o mais. (62)¹⁸

This acute awareness of the reversibility of what is real and his experience of all kinds of doubling lead Daniel to what is probably the central motive of this novel: the subversion of the opposition between beauty and ugliness and the conclusion that everything in the human that derives from nature is beautiful or at least is beautiful *in another order of life*. Such an order captures the images resulting from direct perception of the objects and those which leading on from that perception become autonomous ghosts, as happens in art. It certainly happens in the paintings Daniel evokes – one by Picasso, never named but easily identified as *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (94 e 108-10) and his own works, his portrait of Ângela deformed (187) or the

picture of a shapeless Luc that he once imagined (158-9) – or in Luz’s photographs that he describes (220 e 258-60). When referring to the experience of looking at one of those photos Daniel witnesses the growing autonomy of the images:

Voltei a olhá-la e ela começou a ser quase só fotografia e menos o motivo dela. Luzes e sombras. Um jogo. Uma figuração inocente. Um entretenimento leve do imaginário. Sobretudo, acho que é de pensar, sobretudo porque o seu real era agora absolutamente *nada*. Viva por si, a fotografia, não tinha suporte, corpo que se imaginasse para a terra, talvez apenas uma poeira aérea de cinza, uma coisa assim. (259)¹⁹

At the very beginning of the novel Daniel says he has a “filosofia da fealdade” (20) [a philosophy of ugliness] which he decides to think about and which will distance him from Plotinus’s concept of beauty defended by one of his colleagues, for whom ugliness is not part of the divine order.²⁰ From this idea he develops an awareness that ugly and beautiful are cultural concepts created by the “trabalho inventivo do homem” (56) [man’s inventiveness]. They are nothing more than that: human constructions that can only be thought of in historical terms and that unnerve man, preventing him from calmly accepting his double, multiple and prolific nature and from unquestioningly respecting the biblical passage used by Ferreira as an epigraph to this novel: “Viditque Deus cuncta quae fecerat et erant valde bona” (7) [And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good] (Genesis I, 31).

I shall return to this question but not before contrasting it with the philosophy of Lucretius, which pervades this novel explicitly and almost insidiously – doubly. Lucretius is one of Ângela’s favourite authors, translated by her as part of her Classical studies and the subject of her thesis research. She uses his words

to find solutions to all her problems and to understand the world around her, even to the point of naming her son Luc after him. The materialistic epicurism of Lucretius surfaces time and again in Ângela's defence, upheld by Daniel, of a philosophy that allows man to reach a certain ataraxia and imperturbability, free from passions, gods and fear of death, *sine qua non* conditions of happiness. In fact, "nada na Natureza é justo ou injusto. [...] nada tem significado" (146) [nothing in Nature is fair or unfair. [...] nothing has meaning], just as nothing is beautiful nor ugly, positive nor negative. Therefore, whilst Ângela, almost prophetically proclaims in a lecture: "O homem de amanhã será um homem natural, limpo de todas as ilusões e tranquilo" (146) [The man of tomorrow will be a natural man, cleansed of all illusion and tranquil], Daniel proposes the invention of "*Uma filosofia que meta tudo no mesmo saco* desde o mais alto que se chama a beleza virtude perfeição, até o mais baixo que se chama ordinariíssimo e excrementício" (69) [*a philosophy that puts everything in the same bag* from the highest, called beauty, virtue and perfection, to the lowest, called vulgar and excremental] (emphasis mine). In other words, this is another way in which the novel approaches a questioning of values, a clear axiological relativization between the beautiful and the ugly, a differentiation inherent in human nature itself that leads Maria Alzira Seixo to associate the author of this novel with an attitude of negativity closer to post-modernism rather than modernism, when she reminds us that "esta experiência da negatividade da criação e da natureza não é feita à maneira, por exemplo, de Kafka ou de Céline, onde negativo implica a preterição do positivo mas por isso mesmo ainda o afirma, antes postula a indiferenciação absoluta das suas categorias" [this experience of the negativity of creation and of nature is not the same as, for example, Kafka or Céline, where negative means an omission of the positive but asserts it in the process; instead it

demands an absolute lack of differentiation between the categories] (218).

I noted above that a toning down of values takes place throughout the novel through systematic philosophical meditation and through parody. An example of this parodic tone appearing in the most forceful manner in a forgery painted by Daniel. It concerns a race described in the Iliad, to which Ângela had alluded when she was working on the funeral games celebrated in ancient times:

E imediatamente Aquiles dá o sinal de preparar. Correm Ajax, Ulisses, Antíloco e o Serpa sapo com as suas tamancas e o cu de sola. E põem-se todos em linha, atentos ao sinal de partida. Serpa sapo quer meter-se entre Ajax e Ulisses mas eles dizem tira-te daí, sapo, e empurram-no para fora da glória. [...] E assim que deu o sinal, Ajax rompeu numa aceleração endemoinhada, mas Ulisses vinha logo atrás, queimando-lhe a nuca com a respiração. Então Serpa largou também numa multiplicação vertiginosa dos movimentos, atirando o cu a uns metros, indo apanhá-lo com as mãos e largando-o logo atrás. Ou fazendo pernas dos braços e movendo-se rapidíssimo no ar. E na sua rapidez eu já não distingui o que era o tronco e os braços como no trémulo de certos quadros futuristas. Ajax corria em flecha. Ulisses em cima dele, mas o Serpa não os largava e não se deixava distanciar com o Arquíloco já lá para trás. E foi quando Ulisses se pôs a chorar indecentemente pela Atena e ela veio e rasteirou de um modo infame o Ajax que afocinou em cheio na bosta de boi. Serpa, muito esperto, aproveitou a confusão que se fez e acelerou ainda mais o ritmo vertiginoso do andamento. Havia ali muita bosta e ele caiu de cu em peso, esparrinhando a bosta para todo o lado, os braços cheios também dela, e a própria Atena também apanhou com uma chapada na parte baixa do peplos e perguntou quem é este tipo imundo? Mas ele

nem olhou, largado à sua fúria desvairada de escaravelho. E quando Ulisses e Ajax ainda estavam em discussão e Atena a dizer-lhes acabem lá com isso, já o Serpa chegava à meta, coberto de esterco bovino. E Aquiles só deu conta quando Serpa ergueu súbito os braços em triunfo e ele apanhou também na cara com a sua dose. Então vergou-se e perguntou quem és? Quem te mandou, homúnculo de braços sujos, meter-te na corrida sagrada onde não tinhas nada que cheirar?
- Vim correr. Vim do futuro. (53-4)²¹

As well as the anachronisms that dissolve the distance between past and present, or rather, between the remote past of Ancient times, the recent past in Coimbra and the present time of the narrator, Daniel's easily diverted gaze erases the distance between men and gods or, to be more precise, between heroes, gods and homunculi-toads all competing on an equal status; in the mishaps of the race and in the abjection, all the runners become (con)fused with animals – Ajax falls on his snout, Serpa the Toad is described as a scarab and everyone, including Athena, is hit by the ox-dung. This equation of past/present and non-selection frequently appear in post-modern narratives as ways of producing the aforementioned axiological indetermination, or, to use one of Daniel's formulas quoted above – *putting everything into the same bag*.

To a certain extent Lucretius's text, which in a subliminal way permeates the novel, is in itself the object of parody, in the sense described by Linda Hutcheon of approximation through an ironic re-contextualization but simultaneous distancing. Ângela's reverence for Lucretius's thought is counteracted by a certain careless tone that the narrator uses when he refers to that exclusive and obsessive fixation, clear from the expressions he employs such as "o teu poeta" [your poet]. Thus Lucretius also ends up being a target of de-canonization.

I return now to the question of beauty and ugliness. Daniel was working on an eternally postponed project: a large-scale painting, for which he had already made several studies, drawn outlines, planned designs, but never got further than his anxiety and a bare canvas. The starting point was a smile, to go on a face, but the restless painter wonders, “donde vens?” (239) [where do you come from?], and that question leads him to run through a whole range of smiles, of laughter of all kinds until he reaches the “grito unísson” [unisonous scream] and, finally, the “horror inaudível” [inaudible horror] of an image that he will never manage to pin down.²² It is as though he goes through every possible contortion of the face, in a metamorphosis ranging from the ambiguous smile of the *Mona Lisa* to the deformed face of Munch’s *The Scream* – these paintings are inevitably called to mind even without explicit allusions to them. In other words, the reader is led through multiple forms of portraits from the history of painting and consequently to the question of representation in art and to the impossibility to capture all facets of the truth, of reality.

The question of representation in art and the avoidance of any mimetic principle has been a central aspect of Vergílio Ferreira’s self-reflexive narrative, also visible in his interest in painting and art theory. Luís Mourão reminds us how Ferreira wrote novels in which the story is told “por manchas, ou seja, segundo um princípio não mimético que libertaria o romance para outras tarefas” [patchily, in other words, according to a non-mimetic principle that frees up the novel to carry out other tasks].²³ This is why throughout the novel the narrator repeats exercises of the same kind as the wide-ranging process of metamorphosis mentioned above. Another example can be found in the description of Picasso’s *Les demoiselles d’Avignon* where reality spreads beyond the limits of referentiality, so that the “mulheres-cabras” [goat-women] become “*belas numa outra ordem da vida*” (95). [*beautiful in another order of life*]. A similar exercise is rehearsed in the portrait of Ângela disfigured

after a visit to the dentist which has left her swollen face distended "até ao limite da passagem para uma outra espécie humana inexistente" (187) [to the limit of passage into another in-existent human species]. This example echoes the imagined portrait of Luc, where, according to Luís Mourão there is "um trabalho de alargamento de possíveis dentro de um mesmo plano de significação" [a broadening of possibilities inside one plane of meaning]²⁴, in a way that will not lead to any sort of hierarchy. Why beautiful? Why horrible? Daniel's "tender" portraits of his children are so beautiful, like the one he is now making of Luc, with an excess of aesthetic, brutally grotesque concepts approaching the work of Francis Bacon – a painter who Ferreira found particularly interesting during the writing of this novel, according to his friend Vasco, a well-known Portuguese caricaturist. In fact, concepts drawn from Bacon's art seem to colour Daniel's ideas:

A história da pintura fora quase sempre a da complacência agradável, para nos deitarmos nela e dormir uma sesta. A outra, a outra, cheia de ferocidade como a raiva de um cão. Assassina. Bestial. Há que dar notícia da bestialidade das coisas. Não, não é a caricatura. Porque na caricatura há sempre um limite que trava a hemorragia do horror. Na pintura não, há a lei da vida, é preciso desabafar. (187)²⁵

And, in the case of Luc's portrait, his future suicide is glimpsed through a process of increasing monstrousness incredibly similar, in the aesthetics of excess undertaken and in the treatment of light, colour and space, to a painting by Bacon. This process is achieved through a muddling of the different stages of the violent struggle of the body against death by suffocation, made explicit in the dynamism and violence of the verbs used ("distendeu-se" [distended], "retorceu-se" [contorted], "estoiravam" [burst], "cerraram-se-lhe" [locked

shut], “estrangeira-lhe” [strangling], “arreganha” [grits], “enrolado” [twisted]) and in the animal features described, along with stages of putrefaction, revealing pathological themes (“viscosidade leprosa” [leprous viscosity], “papa de carne com verdete” [fleshy pulp turning green], “carnes cheias de grandes bolsas pendentes” [great sagging bags of skin])²⁶.

The artist is a god of creation because he carries out the representation / transfiguration / metamorphosis of reality. He is a “Deus do Génesis e da promoção humana” (137) [God of Genesis and human promotion], Daniel says of himself when he sees the Chiado district full of animals: “E eu estava ao lado, encostado à ombreira da livraria e senti-me secretamente possuído de um poder divino. Estava no início da criação e do homem e hesitava sobre a forma de lhes organizar as feições. Se eu o fizesse do feitio de uma lombriga?” (136) [And I was at one side, leaning in the bookshop doorway and I secretly felt possessed by a divine power. I was at the beginning of creation and of man and was hesitating about how I should organize his features. What if I made him like a worm?]. He hesitates and considers various possibilities: a kangaroo, or a toad, or a scarab, or a snail, or, or, or..., ending up by asking himself: “que homem vou eu criar na extensão infinita dos possíveis?” (137) [what man shall I create when there is an infinite range of possibilities?] Possibilities that exist in contiguity, according to a non-hierarchical horizontal logic of inclusion.

Whose is the image pursued by Daniel that leads him from smile to scream in front of the blank canvas? Is it the former unattainable face of Bárbara? Or is it her elderly wrinkled face? Is it the deformed image of Ângela? Or is it the horrible face of Bárbara’s disabled child whom Daniel says he wants to paint, the last time he sees her? And isn’t it this child, once his mother has let go of his hand, who Daniel will face in the final moments of the novel? He loses Bárbara, who has once again regained her “face lisa de esplendor” (284) [the unwrinkled face of splendour], and takes the hand of the crying

child. Is Bárbara's splendid beauty equivalent to the hideous face of the child? In other words, the indelible and fleeting smile that Daniel had projected onto his painting is replaced by the sobs of the child with the grotesque face. In the end, whose is the face referred to in the novel's title, what is the mask? Daniel, at last the master of a "filosofia da fealdade" [a philosophy of ugliness] had actually set off towards "*uma nova ordem natural do ser*" (45) [*a new natural order of being*]. Will Daniel ever complete his painting? Or will he continue in a sort of eternal exercising of a multiple horizontal juxtaposition of scenes, of paintings (real or imagined), that will stretch him to the limit not only of the possibilities of representation but also the possibilities of human nature, or beyond the beauty-ugliness dichotomy that has been exploded in the meantime?

The coincidence between the beginning and the end of the romance with Bárbara leaving, to England at the beginning and to the coast at the end, and with Daniel calling out "Bárbara!" on both occasions suggests a circular structure. Such a form is frequent in the contemporary novel, but not, as Maria Alzira Seixo reminds us, "no sentido de uma estrutura circular que se completa em plenitude, ou de uma espiral que se prolonga, mas de um retorno ao início de uma viagem que por isso mesmo não existiu" [in the sense of a circular structure that completes itself, or of a never-ending spiral, but of a return to the beginning of a journey that therefore never happened" (219). And it didn't happen because there was no definite Meaning behind the journey, but only a multiplicity of contiguous meanings without a visible synthesis. And here one may also be tempted to share Seixo's view of Ferreira as a writer "na encruzilhada do Modernismo com o Pós-modernismo" [at a crossroads between Modernism and Post-Modernism], fitting within both movements to a certain extent, and on the point of changing the dominant epistemological perspective of his work.

In the few passages of *Conta-Corrente* where Vergílio Ferreira talks about the writing of this “ugly” novel, in his own words, he reminds himself that: “O tema a não perder de vista é a verdade de tudo na vida e na natureza, a integrar numa ordem incognoscível a realizar-se no infinito” [The important theme that I must not lose sight of is the truth of everything in life and nature, to insert into an incognoscible order and fulfil in the infinite].²⁷ After all, on page 25 the novel, Daniel, who jumps from a present situated in the past of the childhood of his children to a future that the reader doubts whether, because it is being enunciated in the present of enunciation, is in fact the future in relation to this present, or in relation to the present situated in the past, says:

Tenho uma tela diante de mim no cavalete e vejo o mar. Ângela foi com os miúdos à praia, fiquei só. Levarei a tela até ao fim da vida, jamais a saberei pintar. Levantarei a tela até ao incompreensível e ficarei à porta. Ou só quando fechar os olhos para sempre eu a saberei. [...] E saberei então que a beleza existe, mas tão incompreensível como a fealdade na sua verdade natural. (25)²⁸

The “specific fold” of this novel (in Luís Mourão’s term) is, after all, as he notes, “um modo de concluir que não conclui” [a way of concluding that doesn’t conclude]. In the incredibly complex games of interlocking, telescoping and mirroring that comprise this novel, where everything is doubled, oscillating, indeterminate, undifferentiated, contiguous, non-hierarchical, it seems clear that from the questions about knowing the world or the possibility of ever knowing it that run through Vergílio Ferreira’s novels, he has moved on to a questioning of the world that is inconclusive:

Porque? Disse eu. Sei lá. Toda a resposta é mortal,
qualquer coisa assim, não sei. (76)
[Why? I said. How should I know. Every reply is mortal,
something like that, I don't know].

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¹ Every reality requires another reality in order to exist.]

There was another incomprehensible order travelling along the lines of another possible, blasphemous and provocative world against an order, a decision without any justification

There must be one reason, before the reasons that are to come and that reason is the one. I don't know what it is (all translations of Ferreira's text are mine). Ferreira, Vergílio. *Na tua face*. Venda Nova: Bertrand, 2nd ed., 1993.

² Bárbara! and she halted instantly, understanding. She then turned around towards the place from where she had heard the call. But the calling remained. But still not moving, don't move. She continued standing still, searching for a reason why I might be calling her. And it was that brief moment that became engraved in my mind for the rest of my life. Destiny. *Who went somewhere where I was not?* So, does someone choose for us what

we choose for eternity? Someone. (emphasis mine).

³ “What did you mean a few days ago when you said it was easy to be a prophet nowadays?” Luc’s questions continued. “That to you the future is perfectly predictable?”

“Luc, son, I’ll explain later. Now I have to go and marry your mother, do understand.”

And he did. Only many years later did he ask me about it again. To understand. Why am I going to marry you? There must be one reason, before the reasons that are to come and that reason is the one. I don’t know what it is. Or I don’t know if I know what it is, I’ll see if I can find one that suits me. For instance, you could have become fond of me without being aware of it and when you realized, everything had already been decided. [...] Or you could overcome my unhappy love for Bárbara, a love deep enough to contaminate you through proximity. And I still loved her when I loved you.

⁴ But as long as you don’t fall over again and your eyes don’t start fading, I think I can carry on thinking about my painting.

⁵ Lucrécio if it’s a boy - what nonsense, I said. We didn’t even use the method of that poet of yours⁵ - and I have to explain the method. But I haven’t got time now. Ângela is a classical scholar absorbed in the translation of Latin authors, especially Lucretius, whose thoughts inform her view of the world and even her convictions in matters as unusual as the efficiency of certain methods of contraception.

⁶ But already, since childhood, like all children - to understand. Or sentences like “E um ar feroz que também, quando havia cara” (115) [And a fierceness that also, when there was a face] or “Como é que” (123) [How is].

⁷ ...and unexpectedly I began to love Ângela. I loved her like one loves the essence of someone in everything that breathed her. Family friends. The house where she lived. The objects that she used and that were also contaminated – but it wasn’t just that. *It was Ângela in person, I see at her for the first time. She was the incarnation of a kind of miracle that transfigured her into what she was but in transfiguration*, something like that, beautiful and incomprehensible. All of the imagined worlds and illumination of men down the millennia, like the sun through the windowpane, *the windowpane is the same but another*, passed through her and left her intact, I think it now for then, but I must be confused. (emphasis mine).

⁸ *She was double* in the freshness of her body, in the pink-white of her face, in her marine eyes, and everything that held her together from inside. [...] For the first time I had *two Ángelas* and it wasn't easy for me to fit one inside the other. It was so fascinating to *place the outer one into the inner one and to try and find the individuality of one in the other* (emphasis mine).

⁹ And so I watched her in awe and terror *into the untouchableness of her being*. I wanted to see her true eyes and mouth and face, but they weren't there. Because they were just a vague uncontrollable apparition like the light of the air that couldn't be seen and was just illumination. But at a certain point I couldn't stand it any longer and said - come back, be whole. *In your palpable body*, let me feel it. Your face, your breasts, let me. I could see her face but only in the impossible as I am seeing it now (emphasis mine).

¹⁰ "Vem do fundo das eras, rarefeita até à essência da sua perfeição que não foi prevista por Deus. É uma perfeição instantânea frágil, não lhe posso tocar. Foi feita pelo ardor violento e vagaroso dos homens desde o sem-fim dos tempos, pelo crime excessivo, pela morte, e agora está ali e só eu a sei e todos a perderam para sempre. [...] um dia hão-de perguntar-me como ousaste respirar sobre a sua face? Como ousaste demorar nela o olhar? É a essência do impossível, não a posso perder. Biliões e biliões de esforços para a conseguirem, fui eu o eleito, não posso. Está nela o infinito da beleza e da morte, que é o impossível maior." (77) [She comes from the depths of the eras, thinned down to the essence of her perfection, unforeseen by God. It is an instantaneous, fragile perfection, I cannot touch it. It was made by the violent, lingering violence of men since the beginning of time, by excessive crime, by death, and now it is here and only I know it and everyone has lost it for good. One day they'll ask me how did you dare breath on her face? How did you dare let your gaze rest on her? It is the essence of the impossible, I can't lose it. Billions and billions of attempts to get her, I was the chosen one, I can't do it. Inside her she holds the infinity of beauty and death, which is the greatest impossibility.]

¹¹ In Coimbra, Bárbara and Daniel look at the river: "Debruçámo-nos sobre ele do paredão ao largo do parque a vê-lo correr, e o tempo debruçou-se connosco e a eternidade coalhou em nós" (228-9) [We leaned out over the wall that surrounded the park, to watch it flow, and time leaned out with us and eternity curdled in us].

¹² "A tua face. Vinham-lhe dos olhos, dos cantos da boca até ao queixo, o pescoço, estriadas gravadas fundo, ao longo da testa rugas de uma velhice de

maldição. Cara gretada requemada de segura aridez. Duas pelangas caídas do queixo até aos nódulos das clavículas. E as mãos ósseas um pouco enegrecidas, pareceu-me, pousadas mortas na mesa. E um certo horrível naquele todo encarquilhado” (282) [Your face. Around your eyes, from the corners of your mouth to your chin, your neck, deeply engraved grooves, across your brow the wrinkles of an accursed old age. Your face cracked, parched with arid dryness. Two dewlaps hanging from from your chin to the nodules of your collar-bone. And your bony, darkened hands, it seemed to me, resting dead on the table. And a something horrible in that whole wrinkled mass].

¹³ I realized that little by little I *was passing through* all of her wrinkled face and could make out *through* her, as if through a dirty *pane of glass*, her former unreachable face that *was on the other side* and not in her, in the *glass*. [...] We got up and suddenly I saw Bárbara’s face rejuvenate, the smooth face of splendour (emphasis mine).

¹⁴ We got up and suddenly I saw Bárbara’s face rejuvenate, the smooth face of splendour. And unexpectedly it was there that I rested, in your face, in the final image of my restlessness.

¹⁵ This first episode serves as an example: “[...] O Serpa sapo era um tronco sem pernas, ou só com dois cotos curtíssimos assente na cadeira de rodas e parecia-me alegre por cima desse tronco. [...] E eu fui olhando os outros, corredores sem pernas, ou de pernas moles bamboleantes, ou de pernas com armações metálicas, ou como uma perna só. [...] A seguir era uma prova de natação. Um dos concorrentes tinha só uma perna e um braço do outro lado. Um outro tinha só duas pernas. [...] Havia ainda um outro, extraordinário, que tinha dois cotos de pernas e braços. [...] Passa à nossa frente o dos dois cotos de pernas, cortadas rente aos joelhos, movendo-se sobre eles a passos rápidos e curtos. Passa a um nível baixo o dos dois troços de perna simétricos, não coxeava, tinha a verdade natural de um animal estranho. E só um braço a dar o balanço ao andar. [...] Agora era no chão. E eram quatro. Sapo desceu-se ele próprio da cadeira e sentou-se logo na linha da partida. Tinham uma espécie de sola no traseiro para o assentarem e uma espécie de tamancos baixos nas mãos para a andadura. [...] Depois não houve tiro mas um apito e imediatamente todos os sapos lançaram os braços o mais possível para a frente e vinham atrás buscar o traseiro para o atirarem o mais possível adiante e irem ultrapassá-lo com os braços outra vez. E de cu no chão, cu no ar, iam avançando. Serpa tinha um balanço terrível. As mãos com as tamancas ficavam-lhe muito atrás quando o cepo do tronco vinha sentar-se cá

mais à frente. Depois as mãos iam o mais possível à frente e vinham buscá-lo atrás com uma rapidez de profissional. [...] Havia um jogo rítmico nesse balancear de troncos e braços era como se se revelasse outra ordem da Natureza e houvesse outras leis estéticas, pensei, num mundo fantástico de seres humanos sem pernas." (43-7). – [Serpa the Toad was a torso without legs, or with only two very short stumps, sat in a wheelchair and he seemed happy to me, above that torso. And I looked round at the others, runners without legs, or with limp bandy legs, or legs with metal frames attached, or with only one leg. Next came the swimming contest. One of the competitors had only one leg and only one arm. Another only had two legs. There was another extraordinary one, who had two stumps instead of legs and one arm. Past us goes the one with two stumpy legs, cut off at the knees, moving along on them with quick, short steps. Lower down, goes the one with two symmetrical stumps, he didn't limp but moved with the natural truth of a strange animal. And only one arm that swung back and forth as he walked. Now they were on the ground. And there were four of them. Sapo got out of his wheelchair by himself and sat straight down on the starting line. He had a kind of sole under his backside, upon which he could be placed, and a kind of low clogs on his hands to help him forward. There was no pistol fired, but a whistle and straight away all the toads thrust their arms as far forward as they could and they lifted and hurled their bodies as far in front at they could and push their arms ahead again. They advanced: arse on the ground, arse in the air. Serpa was terrible at keeping his balance. His hands, with their clogs, got stuck behind him when the stump of his torso can to rest in front. Then his hands would go as far as possible in front and return to pick up the body with the speed of a professional. There was a rhythm to the swaying of the torsos and arms, as if revealing a new order of Nature, as if there were alternative laws of aesthetics, I thought, in a fantastical world of human beings without legs.]

¹⁶ The natural horrifies me, unless it stops being that, I suppose. Distorted malign ruined. And then it is only copying. But still I would really like to help Nature in its impudence. Some complained to me about the massacre. *I loved it. To take a face and devastate it with horror and make it the same as it was on the outside but not seeing what was inside it.* To reveal what could not be seen and discard what would not let itself be seen. *Now I think.* To be the truth of what was mystified, sometimes the idea occurs to me (emphasis mine).

¹⁷ Every reality requires another reality in order to exist. [...] Even a meaningless object has another one behind it and that is why children like to

touch it to pick it up – do you see with your hands? That’s what mothers usually say to tell them off. Luzia asserts this point decisively: “- Não há real nenhum, muito séria intensa, que estranha esta filha. Quando era miúda, ela dizia tu perguntaste-me uma vez porque é que eu gostava de ver no espelho as imagens da rua, eu olhava a rua e olhava-a depois no espelho e havia uma diferença e eu não sabia porquê” (71-2) [There is no real at all, very serious, intense, how strange my daughter is. When she was little she would say you once asked me why I liked to see the images of the street reflected in the mirror, I looked at the street and then I looked at its reflection in the mirror and there was a difference and I didn’t know why].

¹⁸ I have their truth in my face in the mirror, *but underneath it there was another truth that was the truth of the Earth*. The line that she draws straight and throws *to either side and behind her*, the beauty, the horror, the deformities, the lame, the hunchbacks, the geniuses, the scarab, the systems of thought, the moral systems, the toads, the hippopotamuses, the loonies, the saints, the criminals, the religions and the politics and the feuds that both develop in order to be right when they aren’t right, and so on and so on and so on (emphasis mine).

¹⁹ I looked at it again and it started to be almost just a photograph and less the motive for one. Lights and shadows. A game. An innocent figuration. A light entertainment of the imaginary. Above all, I think it needs to be thought about, especially because its reality was now absolutely *nothing*. It lived for itself, the photograph, had no support, a body that could be imagined on the earth, maybe just ash-dust in the air, something like that.

²⁰ Indignant, Daniel reacts thus: “você diz que Deus se abstém de ter parte feita com as coisas feias? [...] Você atreve-se a dizer que Deus não participa na lesma, no sapo e nas lombrigas? E em cada homem e no que é de cada homem desde o sorriso de uma donzela até a caca que você fez hoje?” (129) [you say God refrains from getting involved with ugly things? [...] Dare you say that God had no part in making slugs, toads and worms? Or every man and what he is made of from a maiden’s smile, to the shit you produced today?].

²¹ And immediately Achilles gives the signal to get set. Ajax, Ulysses, Antilochus and Serpa the Toad, with his clogs and a sole under his arse, get ready to run. And they all line up, waiting for the race to be started. Serpa the Toad wants to be between Ajax and Ulysses but they say get out of the way, toad and push him away from glory. [...] As as soon as the signal was given, Ajax bolted ahead in a frenzy of acceleration, but Ulysses was right behind him, breathing hotly down his neck. And Serpa the Toad also set off in a

dizzying whirl of motion, throwing his arse forward a few metres, grabbing it and hurling it forward straight away. Or turning his arms into legs and speeding through the air. He was going so fast that I could no longer distinguish his body from his arms as happens in the tremulous outlines of some futuristic paintings. Ajax shot forth like an arrow. Ulysses was on top of him but Serpa wouldn't leave them alone nor would he let them get ahead with Antilochus already falling behind. And it was when Ulysses started cry indecently to Athena and she came and outrageously tripped up Ajax who fell snout-first into a pile of ox-dung. Cleverly, Serpa took advantage of the confusion and accelerated the rhythm of his movements even more. There was a lot of dung around and he landed full on his arse, splashing dung everywhere, his arms covered in it too and even Athena herself also caught a dollop on the lower part of her peplos and asked who is this disgusting guy? But he didn't even look, possessed by wild scarab-like fury. And when Ulysses and Ajax were still arguing and Athena telling them to stop that right now, Serpa was already at the finishing line, covered in bovine manure. And Achilles only noticed when Serpa suddenly raised his arms in triumph and he too got his share of dung on his face. He then leaned over and asked who are you? Who sent you, homunculus with dirty arms, to take part in the holy race when you weren't invited?

- I came to run. I came from the future.

²² “[...] – donde vens? E quantas camadas infindáveis atravessaste para chegares até mim? E então pensei na verdade infinita desse sorriso até poder hoje sorrir. Ou rir. Sorriso de serenidade, riso da plenitude, da alegria da vida, da alegria selvagem, riso bestial com roncões de estertor, riso de escárnio, de ódio, vingança, insulto, riso carnívoro, riso infantil, de ingénuo, de taralhouco, riso imbecil, sorriso eclesiástico, riso cínico, riso altaneiro de pimponice, sorriso de timidez, de vexame de que se tenta o contrapeso, riso dos dentes, da garganta, do estômago, riso de um urro, de uma dor horrível, sorriso de piedade, desprezo, tolerância, riso oco sem dentadura, riso caquético em cacarejo, riso gordo de bochechas, riso magro de tísico, riso de ameaça insinuada como navalha, riso casquinado em troça entremeada, riso estúpido, riso inteligente, riso cruento. Riso. Donde vens? Que é que te transformou através das eras para seres hoje o só visível do horror? [...] Mas insensivelmente os lábios foram-se separando um pouco. Um dente. Subtil iluminado de pacificação serenidade alegria de ser – se te demorasses um pouco. [...] Fixar-te para sempre, riso da minha pacificação. Mas pouco a pouco houve primeiro um estremecimento aos cantos da boca. Pouco a pouco um encrespado na placidez dos lábios repousados um no outro e depois a

boca alargada, vejo-a alargar-se por dentro do meu pavor. E os dentes já visíveis onde o ódio começa, a boca toda aberta, aberta. Rasgada, escancarada até ao limite do seu possível. Os dentes, a língua. E de súbito, entalada na garganta, de súbito um grito horrísono, ouço-o. Tapo os ouvidos, ouço-o. Horror, ódio, desespero. Vem das cavernas do Mundo. Das trevas de todas as noites. Rebenta-me os ouvidos, o crânio. Urro de massacre, a terra trema. Olho a boca selvagem, os dentes carnívoros. A língua.guardo que o urro se acabe. E com efeito, subitamente cessou. Mas a imagem imobilizou-se no grito enorme que já se não ouve. É o horror inaudível, mas presente assim na imagem fixa. Sem estridor que a estremecesse. Mais plausível no imaginário de o ouvir.” (239-41) [where do you come from? And how many endless layers did you have to go through to get to me? And so I thought of the infinite truth of that smile until I was able to smile today. Or laugh. Smile of serenity, laugh of plenitude, of the joy of life, of savage joy, beastly laugh with growling death-rattles, of scorn, of hate, revenge, insult, carnivorous laugh, childish laugh, of the gullible, of the loony, ecclesiastical laugh, cynical laugh, proud, boasting laugh, timid laugh, laugh with which you try to counteract disgrace, smile with teeth, throat, stomach, a bellow of a laugh, of horrible pain, a pitying smile, contemptuous, tolerant, empty laugh without dentures, cracked cackle of a laugh, fat laugh from the chops, skinny consumptive laugh, threatening smile that slips in like a blade, ironic smirk of mockery, stupid laugh, intelligent laugh, bloody laugh. Laughter. Where do you come from? Who transformed you through the ages to be the only side of horror visible today? [...] But without feeling it the lips started to separate from each other. A tooth. The subtle illumination of pacification serenity joy of being. – if you stay for just a while. [...] To pin you down forever, laugh of my pacification. But little by little, first there was a twitch at the corners of the mouth, Little by little a crinkling in the placidity of the lips rested one on top of the other and then the broadening of the mouth, I see it widening from inside my fear. And the teeth already visible where the hate begins, the mouth open wide, wide open. Torn, wrenched open to its limit. The teeth, the tongue. And, all of a sudden stuck in the throat, suddenly a horrendous scream, I hear it. I cover my ears, I can hear it. Horror, hate, despair. It comes from the caves of the World. From the darkness of all nights. It bursts my ears, my skull. Scream of massacre, the shaking earth. I look at the savage mouth, the carnivorous teeth. The tongue. I wait for the scream to end. And, in fact, all of a sudden, it stops. But the image has become immobilised in the great scream that can no longer be heard. It is the inaudible scream but present in the fixed image. Without the shrillness that could rattle it. More plausible in the imaginary of hearing it.]

²³ Idem 289.

²⁴ Idem 295.

²⁵ The history of painting had been almost always a history of pleasant complacency, that one could curl up in and take a nap. The other, the other, full of ferocity like a dog with rabies. Murderer. Beast. One has to notice the bestiality of things. No, it is not caricature. Because in caricature there is always a limit that staunches the haemorrhage of horror. Not in painting, which follows the law of life, one has to let off steam.

²⁶ "E pouco a pouco a face de Luc distendeu-se retorceu-se e os dentes e os dentes. E todo o corpo deformou em aleijões, as pernas nuas monstruosas, os olhos empolados, e os dentes, os dentes, havia no rosto um riso assassino e eu pensei vai morder-me, a danação da vida entrou nele e havia no colorido de todo o corpo as cores da carne crua, do verde da carne podre e um ódio carniceiro e uma miséria de tripas adivinhadas na coloração do podre e vomitado. Todas as formas estoiravam de uma tensão bruta interior e agora a boca fechou-se, os olhos cerraram-se, a cabeça rebatida de uma dor violenta. Tem as mãos a apanhar o ventre, as pernas dobradas de miséria e aflição, os músculos flácidos e escorrentes de matéria gorda. O rabo de cavalo estrangula-lhe o pescoço, estende-se pelo chão e agora arreganha a boca e de novo os dentes, ouço-lhe um urro imenso de desespero [...] ergue-se sufocado, as duas patas abertas, os pés grossos, as coxas distendidas, poderoso animal, mas a cor sempre, um verde azulado de podridão, os olhos enormes injectados, a luz baça do seu brilho, sentado numa cadeira retorcida, o espaço nu de um quarto talvez, o corpo enrolado sobre si, as mãos de novo apertadas no ventre, o rosto entumescido de bossas [...] o corpo agora enrolado numa massa confusa, pernas braços numa viscosidade leprosa. Ou sentado numa latrina dobrado sobre si de esforço, ou com o queixo descido numa grande bolsa de bocio [...], ou enforcado de cabeça torta e uma grande língua de fora, ou todo o corpo de novo enroscado numa papa de carne com verdete, ou só a cabeça num prato de metal, a boca aberta com as duas filas de dentes à mostra [...] ou o corpo enrolado numa tina de sangue negro, ou só os olhos muito abertos com grandes arcadas a boiarem numa bacia, ou pregado numa cruz e as carnes cheias de grandes bolsas pendentes, a cabeça suspensa de lado e a boca aberta cheia de um sofrimento horrível [...]"(158-60) [And little by little Luc's face distended and contorted and his teeth and his teeth. And all of his body deformed, his monstrous naked legs, his swollen eyes, and his teeth, his teeth, there was a murderous smile on his face and I thought he's going to bite me, the damnation of life entered him and in the colours of his body the colours of raw meat, of green of rotten meat, and a

bloodthirsty hate and a visceral misery suggested in the colour of rot and vomit. All the shapes burst from a brutal inner tension and now his mouth closed, his eyes locked shut, his head pounding with a violent ache. His hands hold his belly, his legs bent in misery and despair, his flaccid muscles and flowing with fatty matter. His pony-tail around his neck strangling him, spreads over the ground and now he grits his teeth, once again the teeth, I can hear the great growl of despair once again [...] he rises choking, with both paws open, large feet, distended thighs, powerful animal, but the colour always, a bluish-green of rottenness, huge blood-shot eyes, their glazed brightness, sitting in a contorted chair, the naked space of a room maybe, the body twisted over on itself, his hands clenched over his belly once again, his face swollen with lumps [...] his body folded over in a twisted mass, legs arms in a leprous viscosity. Or sitting on a latrine folded over itself, straining, or with his chin sunk into a great big goitre [...], or hanged with his head flopping to one side, his great tongue lolling out, or once again the whole body curled over in fleshy pulp turning green, or just the head on a metal plate, mouth open with two rows of teeth showing [...] or the body rolled up in a tub of black blood, or just the eyes wide open with great arches floating in a basin, or nailed to a cross and the flesh covered with great sagging bags of skin, his head hanging to one side and his mouth open, racked with horrible suffering [...].]

²⁷ Ferreira, Vergílio. *Conta Corrente – new series IV*. Venda Nova: Bertrand, 1994. 177.

²⁸ I have a canvas in front of me on the easel and I can see the sea. Ângela has gone to the beach with the kids, I stayed here alone. I'll take the canvas to the end of my life, I will never know how to paint it. I'll take the canvas until the incomprehensible and I'll stay at the door. Or only when I close my eyes for good will I know it. [...] And then I'll know that beauty exists, but as incomprehensible as ugliness in its natural truth.