

The Unembodied Self in Luís de Sttau Monteiro's *Um*

Homem não Chora

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the personal crisis experienced by the protagonist of Luís de Sttau Monteiro's 1960 novel, Um Homem não Chora [A Man Doesn't Cry]. The unnamed protagonist of the novel struggles to participate in society and develops a secondary persona which allows him to separate his private and public selves. R. D. Laing's descriptions of the technique of unembodiment are used as the starting point for a close examination of the behaviour of Sttau Monteiro's unnamed protagonist and its consequences, and a consideration of how this device is used within the novel to allude to the socio-political context of Portugal under the Estado Novo, particularly during the late 1950s, when personal and political freedoms were often heavily restricted.

The paper forms part of a wider AHRC-funded PhD project focusing on how Lisbon has been used in literature as a site for crisis throughout the twentieth century, and how the nature of crisis alters in accordance with, and perhaps because of, the changing nature of the social and political structure of the country.

In this paper, I will use R. D. Laing's description of the device of dissociating the body from the mind as the starting point for an examination of how the clash between the individual and the fulfilment of his role in society is treated in Luís de Sttau Monteiro's 1960 novel, *Um Homem não Chora* [A Man Doesn't Cry].¹ The novel (which has so far received scant critical attention)² is a biting critique of Lisbon middle-class society in the late 1950s, and it explores the nature of social interaction and emotional reciprocity in a totalitarian state, and how this may affect or compromise individual integrity. It focuses on a problematic relationship between an unnamed protagonist-narrator (referred to hereafter as the *homem*) and his wife,

¹ Luís de Sttau Monteiro, *Um Homem não Chora* (Lisbon: Areal Editores, 2003). All references to this edition will henceforth be placed in parentheses after quotations in the text. Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this paper are the author's own.

² I am not aware of any published articles on this particular novel; indeed, Sttau Monteiro's work has been too little explored, with the majority of published criticism relating to his first, highly allegorical play, *Felizmente Há Luar!* (1961), which is taught in schools in Portugal.

Fernanda. The novel charts the increasing tensions between them over a period of just a few days, and follows the *homem* through his visits to a lawyer, whom he has employed to help him find a way out of his marriage; social events such as cocktail parties and family dinners; and his apparently aimless wanderings through Lisbon as he attempts to find a way out of his marriage and come to terms with his personal situation. The *homem* appears to be going through a period of existential crisis (the problems in his marriage remain unspecified and appear to be fairly one-sided) and he is preoccupied throughout the novel with the question of how far he should observe what he calls 'the rules of the game' (of society). There is a focus throughout on how he interacts with others. He frequently puts on an imaginary stripy tie — adopting an alternative persona for public interaction — to enable him to get through social events and maintain a distance between his physical and mental selves. The nameless *homem* is to some extent a universal figure, although his behaviour often suggests that he thinks his feelings are unique. In my examination of his behaviour, its consequences, and the alternatives that are presented, I will attempt to relate his personal crisis to the more general socio-political situation in Portugal at the time Sttau Monteiro was writing in 1958/59.

Laing suggests that ontologically secure people do not suffer from excessive fear or anxiety regarding their position as individuals in the world, and they feel real, alive and differentiated from the world in a way that does not call into question their identity and autonomy.³ They are embodied in the sense that they associate the flesh and blood of the body with the mind and their own existence.⁴ This is usually regarded as normal and desirable, and although it does not preclude the possibility of being challenged by external events, the ontologically-secure, embodied individual is usually able to deal with them in a rational and responsible way. The unembodied person, on the other hand, feels the body to be partially or wholly divorced from the mind with which he identifies himself most closely.⁵ In most situations, this is regarded as abnormal and undesirable, although in certain cases (such as spiritual searches) it can be a useful device.⁶ Laing's *The Divided Self* is a study in existential psychology and psychiatry, although it does not directly apply established existential philosophies such as those of Sartre or Kierkegaard.

Sttau Monteiro's novel is usually seen (for example in the information on the novel's cover) as a candid representation of (petty) bourgeois Lisbon society in the late 1950s, and although the *homem* is a purely fictional character, Laing's observations and conclusions

³ R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 41-42.

⁴ Laing, p. 67.

⁵ Laing, p. 65.

⁶ Laing, p. 66.

relating to real individuals are useful here as a lens through which we may view this novel and its depictions of some of the problems raised for individuals living within an authoritarian society which, because of the limitations it imposes on individual freedoms, makes it difficult to reach a position of ontological security. The reason for the *homem's* crisis remains unspecified throughout the novel; indeed, he appears not to understand it himself (p. 16). The crisis appears to have been precipitated by a combination of difficulty in dealing with life's obligations and frustration at the barely changing routine of his daily existence (emphasised by the invariability of the time when he gets up in the morning: pp. 9, 72, 100, 113, 120), together with his desperation to get out of his marriage to Fernanda (see p. 14). There is perhaps an implicit suggestion here that the tedium of totalitarian control, under which personal, artistic and economic freedoms were heavily restricted, has made even the institution of marriage unbearable.⁷ Fernanda, on the other hand, appears to be an enthusiastic participant in bourgeois society, and is keen that her husband should attend social events such as the Simões' cocktail party. The *homem* feels entirely uneasy in the company of others and dons an imaginary stripy tie on these social occasions in an attempt to separate his physical from his spiritual self. The *homem da gravata às riscas* [man in the stripy tie] becomes the part of himself that participates in society and which others are able to see. Even the *homem* frequently refers to this persona in the third person, as though he is observing his behaviour from a distance. This persona or other self enables the *homem* to interact socially (despite being obnoxious at times); it is the physical manifestation of the *homem*, used almost exclusively when he is in the company of others within the particular setting of middle-class Lisbon society. At the same time, it allows the *homem* to keep just for himself the part of himself that he views as authentic: the real *homem* is associated with the mind, and is thus kept away from public view, protected by the false, but semi-conformist *homem da gravata às riscas*. Laing describes such a technique as an act of *unembodiment*:

In this position the individual experiences his self as being more or less divorced or detached from his body. *The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual's own being.* Instead of being the core of his true self, the body is felt as the core of a *false self*, which a detached, disembodied,

⁷ Salazar considered routine to be a political and social merit, although it brought with it a certain isolation and increased the sense of uneasiness in political circles. See Franco Nogueira, *Salazar*, 4 vols (Coimbra: Atlântida Editora, 1980), IV: *O Ataque (1945-1958)*, p. 454.

‘inner’, ‘true’ self looks on at with tenderness, amusement, or hatred as the case may be.⁸

Laing observes that this type of split in the personality is not necessarily an indication of psychosis, but that ‘normal’ people often use it in times of great stress.⁹ We should observe that, at least once, the *homem* mentions wanting to cry immediately before assuming this persona (p. 92). By treating his mind and body as separate entities, he avoids direct participation in the world. We first see him do this at the Simões’ cocktail party.

On arriving at the Simões’ house, the *homem* (as himself) remains on the periphery, merely observing the interaction of the other guests. He drinks five or six whiskies before attempting to enter into the conversation, and even then he can only do so by adopting this secondary persona, through which he attempts to be what others take him to be or expect of him. In other words, he creates a persona that corresponds to his Being-for-Others, and which he models on their Beings-for-Him (what he perceives them to be)¹⁰: ‘Resolvo meter-me na conversa. A única forma de o fazer consiste em pensar em mim próprio como se eu fosse um deles. Passo a ser o homem da gravata às riscas’ (p. 28) [*I decide to join in the conversation. The only way of doing it is to think of myself as though I were one of them. I become the man in the stripy tie*]. In this way, the *homem* is able to be seen to observe the rules of the game (something that Robinson explains was key to personal advancement during the *Estado Novo*).¹¹ However, the device of unembodiment allows him to feel as though he has not compromised his integrity, because it is not really him — the *homem* — behaving in this way. The alternative would be potentially devastating, as Laing explains:

The embodied person, fully implicated in his body’s desires, needs, and acts, is subject to the guilt and anxiety attendant on such desires, needs, and actions. He is subject to the body’s frustrations as well as its gratifications. Being in his body is no haven from possibly crushing self-condemnation.¹²

At this stage in the novel, the device of unembodiment is a temporary measure which allows the *homem* to maintain an emotional and mental distance from the world while still keeping

⁸ Laing, p. 69. Emphases are Laing’s.

⁹ Laing, p. 66.

¹⁰ I borrow the terms ‘Being-for-Others’ and ‘Being-for-Itself’ from Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), especially p. 241.

¹¹ Richard Robinson, *Contemporary Portugal* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), p. 23.

¹² Laing, p. 68.

up appearances. He soon tires of it though, and in a gesture symbolic of the desire to give recognition to what he calls his 'true' self (p. 115), he eats a raisin from the packet that he carries in his pocket, despite having promised himself that he would not eat raisins in public:

Meto a mão no bolso e tiro uma passa. Isto é contra o regulamento. Prometi a mim próprio nunca comer passas em público. Todos nós precisamos duma disciplina qualquer. Esta é a minha forma de viver segundo uma regra, ainda que estúpida. Há quem corte no número dos cigarros, há quem se obrigue a ler uma página por dia dum livro massudo. Eu não como passas em público. (p. 31)

[I put my hand in my pocket and take out a raisin. This is against the rules. I promised myself that I would never eat raisins in public. We all need some kind of discipline. This is my way of living according to a rule, even though it's stupid. Some people cut down on cigarettes, some force themselves to read one page a day of a massive book. I don't eat raisins in public.]

He is obviously aware that individuals must adhere to certain rules if the society in which they live is to continue functioning; the problem is that he desires a different set of rules from those currently in place. The references above to trivial, self-imposed rules that society could easily manage without suggest further that in any society, and especially under a strict, authoritarian regime such as Salazar's *Estado Novo*, individuals and groups start to self-regulate, perpetuating the social and political system in place even when they may not be entirely in favour of them.¹³ Yet the *homem's* rule is different from the others that he mentions, which are a way of regulating even the private sphere. The *homem* associates the raisins with his 'Being-For-Itself', or with the 'true' self that he hides from others through the use of the stripy tie persona. For this reason, while he puts no limits on how many he may eat in private (and even when he is walking in the city, because of the lack of interaction with others, this becomes a private sphere), eating raisins in public equates to allowing others to see the self that he wishes to hide from them, and weakens the protective persona that he builds up around himself. Yet paradoxically his instinctive need to feed himself with the

¹³ The PIDE (the secret police force of the *Estado Novo*) did not kill many people and had a discreet mode of operation that enabled them to maintain what Salazar viewed as an optimum level of terror in order to subdue the nation. Rumours of their efficiency and the omnipresence of their informers led to a type of self-policing which meant, for example, that politics was rarely (and only then very carefully) discussed in public. See Robinson, p. 55, and Tom Gallagher, *Portugal: a Twentieth-Century Interpretation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 120.

raisins, a symbol of his 'true' self, demonstrates how draining it is to be in the world and maintain the stripy tie persona that at the same time he feels is necessary in order to preserve his 'true' self: he is trapped between a social need to repress, and an individual desire to express, his Being-for-Itself. The *homem* is unable to endure the superficiality of the party for long, and leaves early — withdrawing from participation in the world. However, he does not go home, as one might expect, but heads for the city instead, moving away from the sheltered bourgeois society that he finds so oppressive (and that continues in the home he shares with Fernanda) and wandering the Avenida da Liberdade [*Liberty Avenue*] in search of a freedom that cannot be found (pp. 41–44). During the course of the novel, he increasingly retreats to the periphery and ultimately loses control altogether of the secondary persona that facilitates his participation in the game.

The loss of control becomes ever more apparent in the hotel bar, on the evening of his and Fernanda's wedding anniversary, when the feelings of entrapment and claustrophobia cause the *homem* to think about exile:

Olho à minha volta e vejo as três francesas velhas e o meu grupo. Sinto que está iminente um ataque de claustrofobia, que não posso mais, que não aguento mais tempo o Engenheiro Rodrigues, a minha sogra, a orquestra adormecida ... Quero ir-me embora, para a rua, para a China, para onde haja quem viva e acredite em qualquer coisa, seja no que for. (p. 91)

[I look around and see the three old French women and my group. I feel an attack of claustrophobia coming on, like I can't cope any more, like I can't bear any more time with Engineer Rodrigues, my mother-in-law, the sleeping orchestra ... I want to run away, to the streets, to China, to where there are people who live and believe in something, whatever it may be.]

At one level, this passage can be read as a purely existential crisis, exacerbated by the excessive quantity of alcohol that the *homem* has consumed (p. 91). It has been cleverly phrased to disguise its allegorical signification: China is apparently the desired destination, as opposed to the Americas, or one of the European countries to which many Portuguese were

fleeing (and thus Sttau Monteiro avoids the attention of the regime).¹⁴ However, if we look at the passage in its wider context within the novel, we can see a more political implication: that the *homem* wants to remove himself from a society in which personal freedoms are restricted.

The tedium of daily existence in Portugal is stated first. ‘Em Portugal as noites são como os dias: tristes e monótonas. As pessoas nem dançam nem se riem’ (p. 90) [*In Portugal the nights are like the days: sad and monotonous. People neither dance nor laugh*]. The *homem* then wonders whether Portugal has entirely lost the ability to share in laughter (an emotion associated with reciprocity, as in the English proverb)¹⁵, being confined instead to sadness (an emotion more often associated with being alone): ‘Serei que eu já me não sei rir? Será que o país inteiro já se não sabe rir?’ (p. 91) [*Could it be that I no longer know how to laugh? Could it be that the whole country no longer knows how to laugh?*]. Here, he explicitly puts his own crisis on a par with that of the country as a whole, going on to question whether Portugal’s lawmakers have caused it: ‘Haverá alguma lei que obrigue os portugueses a serem graves, pomposos, eminentemente respeitáveis?’ (p. 91) [*Could there be some law that obliges the Portuguese to be serious, pompous, eminently respectable?*]. Finally, the attack of claustrophobia is triggered by Engenheiro Rodrigues’ show of support for Salazar’s government and his comment is a statement of apparent contentedness with the status quo: ‘Há trinta anos não havia hotéis assim, meu amigo ... e não foi a dizer mal de tudo que eles se fizeram ...’ (p. 91) [*There were no hotels like this thirty years ago, my friend ... and that’s in spite of people like you moaning all the time ...*]. The *homem*, then, is unable to find anyone who reciprocates his feelings, either amongst his family and friends or later when he wanders Lisbon’s streets in metaphorical exile, closely observing its other inhabitants who are destined to remain just that — Others. He is equally alien at home as he is abroad.

As the novel continues, the *homem* moves ever further away from the city centre, and his journey through Lisbon — when he stays overnight in a hotel in order to escape Fernanda — takes him across the River Tejo to Almada, beyond the physical limits of the city. At this

¹⁴ The phrasing is important here: books were not subject to pre-publication censorship like periodicals; however, they were examined after publication and the *Secretariado Nacional de Informação* [*National Information Agency*] would remove from circulation those deemed ‘detrimental’ to the nation, while the author and publishers faced fines and/or imprisonment. See Diamantino Machado, *The Structure of Portuguese Society: The Failure of Fascism* (New York: Praeger, 1991), p. 81. This particular restriction led to many writers moving abroad where they enjoyed greater freedom. In more general terms too, Portuguese emigration increased continually from 1950. Western Europe became the most popular destination after about 1960, while the Americas attracted around 85% of the migratory population in 1959: See Table II, ‘Portuguese Emigration by Destination’, in Maria Ioannis B. Baganha, ‘From Closed to Open Doors: Portuguese Emigration under the Corporatist Regime’, in *e-Journal of Portuguese History*, 1.1 (Summer 2003), at: <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/> [accessed 13 January 2007], pp. 1–16 (p. 11).

¹⁵ ‘Those who laugh, laugh together; those who cry, cry alone.’

point, the unembodiment reaches its climax, and the *homem* goes from referring to his other persona as essentially another version of himself (p. 28) to describing it in the third person — as he does when he is dancing with Fernanda (p. 92) — to actually holding a conversation with it, in which the *homem da gravata às riscas* attempts to humiliate the *homem* (p. 115). The respite that dissociation from daily existence temporarily provides is inadequate though, because when he returns home, the same problems remain. As Laing explains, while in some cases this split in the personality may be a means of effectively living with or transcending a basic underlying insecurity, ‘it is also liable to perpetuate the anxieties it is in some measure a defence against.’¹⁶ To apply this once more to the wider political context, we could say that Sttau Monteiro is suggesting here that exile is not a long-term solution, because the problems at home will not be resolved by the simple removal of oneself from them.

This physical move to the periphery of society is preceded in the novel by a symbolic one. The *homem* and Fernanda have a conversation during which she forces him to recognise her as not just a confrontational and indistinct Other who imposes society’s values on him, but as a Being-in-Her-Own-Right (to coin a new term) who both views herself and is viewed by others, as an individual with thoughts and feelings equal in value to his own. Their individual positions are highlighted quite literally by a red light that flashes on and off throughout this conversation. The light is advertising mortgages and loans — another form of obligation, and can be seen as a symbol for the (capitalist) society in which they live. The *homem* keeps all of himself out of the light, even pulling the tip of his foot away from it; Fernanda, on the other hand, has no choice but to position herself entirely in the light:

A Fernanda fica alternadamente vermelha e negra como todo o quarto. Estou sentado no canto, no único local onde está sempre escuro. Só a ponta do meu pé apanha a luz do anúncio. Puxo o pé para dentro e vejo a Fernanda, sentada na cama, como se estivesse vendo um filme em ‘technicolor’. (p. 96)

[*Fernanda turns alternately red and black like the rest of the room. I’m sitting in the corner, the only place that’s always dark. Only the tip of my foot catches the light of the advertisement. I pull my foot in and see Fernanda, sitting on the bed, as though I were watching a film in ‘Technicolor’.*]

¹⁶ Laing, p. 65.

Fernanda is forced to accept the rules of this society and live within it, as is symbolised by the light. Keeping up appearances by playing the role of a bourgeois society wife is her only real option for achieving at least an apparent freedom, because socially, she would have nowhere to go if they were to divorce. The *homem*, on the other hand, makes a concerted effort to remain in the shadows. In his pursuit of a self-indulgent integrity, he moves further towards the periphery of society (p. 115) where dynamic relationships of any kind are ultimately unattainable, and alienation (in the sense of estrangement) is inevitable.¹⁷ The alternative for the *homem* is to observe the rules of the game at the expense of his very sense of self (p. 115).

Fernanda's understanding of their situation is dominated by the socio-political constraints of their country and era (p. 99). The *homem* is not prepared to accept any responsibility for the matter, though, or to act to improve their situation: 'Nem eu nem ela temos solução. Nem eu nem ela temos culpa de nada disto. Nem eu nem ela temos futuro e vejo que nem eu nem ela temos presente ...' (p. 98) [*Neither I nor she has a solution. Neither I nor she is guilty in any of this. Neither I nor she has a future and I can see that neither I nor she has a present ...*]. He wants to escape his present obligations that come from the promises that he made in the past, because he believes them now to undermine his integrity, but in doing this, he would be acting in much the same way as Salazar's regime — declaring that he is acting out of compassion but ultimately limiting his wife's freedom.¹⁸ He attempts to view the two of them as equal, repeating 'nem eu nem ela' four times, but under the *Estado Novo*, men and women could never be equal partners as the state and its laws obliged female subordination to the dominant male, especially in marriage.¹⁹

Eventually, the *homem* realises that the abdication of personal responsibility that the *homem da gravata às riscas* permits him is not sufficient, and he finally experiences an epiphany when he concludes that he alone must find a solution (p. 123). The irony of the novel comes when he returns home to discover that Fernanda is dead. She had gone out to buy

¹⁷ Laing, p. 75.

¹⁸ For example, compare and consider the following excerpts from speeches by Salazar: 'O povo português compreende a minha linguagem. Sabe que nada me interessa senão servir o melhor possível o interesse comum' [*The Portuguese people understand what I say. They know that I am not interested in anything except serving the common interests as best as possible.*]. 'Apelo ao Povo' (9 November 1961), in Oliveira Salazar, *Discursos e Notas Políticas*, 6 vols (Coimbra: Coimbra Editora, 1967), VI: 1959–1966, 163–73 (p. 173); 'Das oposições ouviu-se um rebate prudente a dizer que alguma coisa mais era necessária, porque com a liberdade não podia fazer-se tudo. Pois não.' [*We heard from the opposition a prudent warning that something else would be necessary, because with freedom, not everything could be done. No, it couldn't.*]. 'A Obra do Regime na Campanha Eleitoral' (31 May 1958), in Oliveira Salazar, *Discursos e Notas Políticas*, 6 vols (Coimbra: Coimbra Editora 1959), V: 1951–1958, 451–74 (p. 469). What Salazar is implying here — and what he insisted on throughout his career as Portugal's dictator — is that complete freedom is unsuitable to the Portuguese temperament, and that a dictator was needed to maintain an ordered Portuguese society.

¹⁹ See Walter C. Opello, Jr., *Portugal: From Monarchy to Pluralist Democracy* (Boulder, CO and Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), p. 25.

raisins for him (p. 128) in a gesture symbolising that she has finally accepted that this is a small price to pay for her continued participation in society. This is not the solution that he was looking for though, because even though he is now free from marriage, his obligations towards his (and her) remaining family and society are still there, if not intensified because of his new social status as a widower.²⁰

By the end of the novel, then, the *homem* is forced to recognise that not only Fernanda, but also his parents-in-law and all others face similar problems trying to reconcile their 'Being-for-Itself' with their 'Being-in-the-World'. The problem is therefore how to meet the needs of the individual while maintaining responsible social interaction. Exile and isolation are shown to be ineffective during the course of the novel, and the Communist answer is also implicitly rejected when the *homem's* journey to Almada (a hotbed of Communist Party resistance to the regime)²¹ does not produce change. Similarly, delegating responsibility for the problem to another does not produce a solution (for example in his contracting the lawyer to find him a way out of the marriage, but ultimately rejecting the solution that the lawyer comes up with, p. 25, p. 117). Yet we are never privy to what the *homem* really does want, as the text focuses almost exclusively on what he wants to escape. The omission of a clear and effective solution leads us to consider what this might be. The ultimate failure of the *homem's* use of the distancing and separating technique of unembodiment in the attempt to fit his fractured self into a fractured society perhaps suggests that a fully integrated society can only come about when and because the actors within it are integrated: they are secure in themselves and thus able to participate in reciprocal relationships where the being and needs of others are taken into account as well as, but not to the exclusion of, the needs of each individual. Any change within the country, therefore, must take into account the needs of Portugal as a whole, but still allow, in a democratic sense, for individual and personal freedoms.

²⁰ See Miguel Vale de Almeida, *The Hegemonic Male* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), p. 22, p. 23. Vale de Almeida suggests that a widower living alone (not with another member of his family) becomes a marginal figure in Portuguese society.

²¹ See D. L. Raby, *Fascism and Resistance in Portugal: Communists, Liberals and Military Dissidents in the Opposition to Salazar, 1941–1974* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 194, 199.