

## **João de Deus's musical perversions: A case study on the music and sexuality in two films by João César Monteiro**

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In loving memory of Margarida Medeiros, an esteemed researcher in the field of photography, whose invaluable contributions to science will forever be remembered. Margarida sadly passed away before the publication of this work, but her passion and expertise continue to inspire us. She will be deeply missed.

**Abstract:** This article addresses the music and its interactions in two films directed by João César Monteiro – *Recordações da Casa Amarela* [*Recollections of the Yellow House*] and *A Comédia de Deus* [*God's Comedy*]. These are the first two films in *God's Trilogy*, a trilogy released between 1989 and 1999. Together, they tell the story of a character called João de Deus, who lives and behaves in ways that deviate from social and moral norms, establishing obsessive and perverse relationships with several women. In this article, we approach the music and sounds we hear in certain scenes and the way these work in representing the character's 'self'. Thus, by analysing the music that accompanies the voyeuristic behaviour of the character João de Deus towards Julieta, his sexual overvaluation of Rosarinho, and the fetishism evidenced in his relationship with Joaquina's underwear, we can both better define the main character's personality and understand the role music plays in developing the plots of Monteiro's cinema.

**Keywords:** *God's Trilogy*; João César Monteiro; Sexual Fantasies; Film Music; Music and Sexuality.

*God's Trilogy* is a trilogy of films directed by João César Monteiro: *Recordações da Casa Amarela* [*Recollections of the Yellow House*] (1989), *A Comédia de Deus* [*God's Comedy*] (1995) and *As Bodas de Deus* [*God's Spousal*] (1999). They focus on the stories of the protagonist, João de Deus, a character created and played by the director. He is

characterized by his constant sexual fantasies, which materialize in perverted behaviour, particularly in the first and second films of the set. While these two films focus on his sexual inhibition, the third, *God's Spousal*, opens the possibility of liberation. This study analyses three examples from the first two films of the trilogy in which music actively contributes to depicting the perverted behaviours of the main character, João de Deus.

The films *Recollections of the Yellow House* and *God's Comedy* resonate strongly with musical elements constructed from pre-existing works and their usage prior to the trilogy thus becomes part of the diegesis. This crucial condition – the pre-existence – transforms music into ‘music with history’ that is ‘reeled in’ to the cinema”, as Godsall (2019, 1) so cleverly puts it. This history interacts with other types of film components (visual, textual, and narrative, for example) in conjunction with the musical and textual characteristics of these musical elements (some of which include sung lyrics). Therefore, understanding the effects of these musical components in the films involves studying both the context around the musical work and their extramusical associations and meanings, ‘an inescapable factor in every case’ (Godsall 2019, 8).

A film’s narrative is often overviewed and analysed through images and written dialogue, with sound and music being easily disregarded. Adopting a different approach, the theorist Michel Chion (1994), in his work *Audio-Vision*, points out that dialogic and textual elements, as well as the empathetic and anempathetic musical dimensions, modify the meaning of the image while they are themselves simultaneously altered by them, thus determining what the film is supposed to tell through interaction with the other elements. In keeping with Chion, Gorbman (1987, 12) references the ‘mutual implications’ between image and music in cinema with Cook (2000, 24) extending this idea to all multimedia considering the indispensable nature of some kind of ‘perceptual interaction’ between these components for such contents to exist. Also, in a more recent article by Evans and Harper (2022, 95), arguing against the idea that high-quality film soundtracks should be recorded autonomously, the authors conclude that ‘plenty of evidence exists for the ways in which film and music can be entwined so intricately that they create something utterly magical together, irrespective of whether the constituent parts can succeed independently.’

In accordance with this premise, interactions between components become the primary factor in constructing meaning in cinema. Therefore, just as the visual components of the films cannot be disregarded, neither can the sound and musical components. The approach to music and sound in this article is grounded in audiovisual analysis examining the intricate interactions among the audio, visual and narrative components of the films. Thus, this approach is informed

by the methods developed by Chion (1994) and Buhler, Neumeier and Deemer (see ‘checklists’ in 2010, 32–33). Additionally, drawing on Godsall’s argument and Altman’s definition of cinema as an ‘event’ (see Altman 1992, 1–4), we not only explore the interactions among the film components but also consider their relationships with extra-film and extra-musical contexts.

The central conclusion of this article aligns with the ideas presented above. The pre-existing music heard in the analysed scenes not only interacts with the other components of the film but also with their previous ‘history’. Meaning is thereby constructed through this interaction, particularly in shaping the personality of the main character, João de Deus.

This study delves into the underexplored role of music in Monteiro’s films, aiming to demonstrate its undeniable significance in representing certain facets both of the diegesis and of the protagonist’s character. Furthermore, this emphasizes the need to perceive the audiovisual medium as a multimedia platform on which various components establish intricate relationships. Lastly, this contributes to the understanding of how recourse to pre-existing music, a common practice in the European ‘new cinemas’ of the latter half of the twentieth century, extends beyond being a mere result of laziness or budget constraints. Instead, such music serves as the means to establish intricate connections between the work and culture in a broader sense, reaching beyond the realm of filmmaking into other arts, history, and their respective contexts.

### **João de Deus in Monteiro’s cinema**

Monteiro stands out as one of the key figures of Portuguese cinema during the latter half of the twentieth century. He started out as a critic in the 1960s but soon began directing films that would in many ways echo the ideas he expressed in his writings, akin to Godard and other European filmmakers. Despite facing challenges in securing funding due to the political context in Portugal during the 1960s and afterwards decades, Monteiro nonetheless directed twenty-one films throughout his career.<sup>1</sup>

Before *God’s trilogy*, Monteiro explored diverse themes in his films, ranging from a type of documentary about Sophia de Mello Breyner, a Portuguese poet and a film about the Carnation Revolution in Portugal to other works about the forgotten Portugal of remote villages, to name but a few examples. Recognized as a cinephile and a melomaniac, his films stand out for their irreverent and experimental nature, putting forward a critical perspective on culture, particularly within the realm of filmmaking. Even as he directed films, Monteiro

continued writing with some of his texts published in renowned magazines, such as *Cahiers du Cinéma* or *Trafic*.

João de Deus stands out as the most iconic character in Monteiro's filmography, gaining recognition both from the critics and audiences both nationally and internationally. The inaugural film in the trilogy even secured a prestigious Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival. The similarities between the protagonist and the director – it is Monteiro who plays the role – raised questions as regards whether the films were autobiographical in nature, a theory that received particular attention due to the perverted nature of the narrative. Monteiro directed various films throughout his career and with *God's Trilogy* corresponding to a mature phase in his work. Before these films, he had already appeared on screen various times but never as the main character. He dubbed the main character in one of his first films – *Quem espera por sapatos de defunto more descalço* [*He Who Waits for dead man's Shoes Dies Barefoot*] (1969) – a character who appears in *Recollections of the Yellow House*, almost as a reconnection between João de Deus and his past self, Lívio.

In 1997, Monteiro directed *Le Bassin de J.W.* [*The Hips of J.W.*] two years prior to *God's Spousal*. In this film, Monteiro also takes on an acting role, appearing as João de Deus in the final scenes and thereby establishing a connection between this film and *God's Trilogy*. However, the film stylistically diverges from the trilogy, primarily due to its experimental nature, wherein Monteiro assumes several characters – God, Henrique, Max Monteiro and João de Deus – therefore also deviating from João de Deus as the central figure. Martins classifies João de Deus in *Le Bassin de J.W.* as a 'scattered' and 'crumbled' character, functioning 'almost as a citation' rather than marking an actual presence in the film (Martins, 2003). It is precisely this characteristic that sets this film apart from *God's Trilogy*, which is a narrative-driven saga focusing on the adventures of the main character.

After that, in 2002–03, Monteiro directed his final film, *Vai, e vem* [*Come and Go*] where João Vuvu is also played by Monteiro and might be perceived as a 'distant relative' of João de Deus. Nevertheless, in addition to these films not specifically relating to the character of João de Deus and his personality and while both these films have pre-existent music that shapes the narrative in various ways, there are no musical components specifically emphasising the sexual nature of the character interpreted by Monteiro. Consequently, for all these reasons, they do not serve as examples in this particular analysis.

It is also important to note that the film *God's Spousal*, which does form part of the Trilogy, was not analysed in this article as the perversion associated with inhibition ceases to be the gravitational centre of its diegesis. After receiving 'divine money', João de Deus, the

self-appointed Baron of God, proceeds to lead a life of luxury, free of inhibitions, at least until the scene when he is arrested in the final part of the film. In this work, he becomes involved with Elena and ends up accompanied by Joana. Unlike in previous films, the scenes representing the sexual nature of both relationships are not accompanied by any musical pieces.

Hence, the pivotal examples central to this article are the use of Schubert's music in *Recollections of the Yellow House* and the incorporation of Wagner and Haydn's music in *God's Comedy*. These instances best illustrate the intricate relationship between the music, the narrative, and the sexual perversions of João de Deus, as examined below.

### **João de Deus's voyeurism and Franz Schubert's music in the film *recollections of the yellow house* (1989)**

The film *Recollections of the Yellow House* was directed by João César Monteiro and premiered in 1989. It reports on the memories of a patient admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Lisbon. The patient is João de Deus, and he narrates several episodes of his life that would culminate in his hospital internment. When the protagonist is taken to the *Yellow House*<sup>2</sup> of the title, the narrator becomes a mere participant and we begin to see and hear the story at the same time as the characters who are living it. At the end of the film, João de Deus leaves the hospital and returns to the city streets through a sewer door, in allusion to Murnau's classic *Nosferatu* (1922).

Soon after the recitation of a text by Céline<sup>3</sup> and the opening credits, there comes a slow travelling over Tagus river (Rio Tejo). During this trip, we listen to João de Deus, a character we are allowed to hear but not to see – an *acousmètre*, as Chion would call him (1994, 19) —, telling us about his sleepless night. As the character finishes speaking, we begin listening to the first theme of the second movement of the Trio op. 100 for violin, piano, and cello composed by Franz Schubert (1828). This piece continues to play in the next visual take, as João de Deus passes by a chapel.

At the end of the film, when the protagonist leaves the Yellow House, the same trio is revisited, this time with the second theme of the same movement. This empathises the repetitive nature of the narrative, which begins and ends in the same physical space and with the same musical piece. Simultaneously, this characteristic is contradicted by the evolution of the musical theme – the first theme is heard at the beginning of the film and the second at the end – thus, not repeating the excerpt. Sound is intrinsically temporal. Thus, if the change in theme induces the temporal progression of João de Deus's life, the revisitation of the same musical

piece shows its stagnation. At the beginning of each of the three films mentioned above starring this character – *Recollections of the Yellow House*, *God’s Comedy*, and *God’s Spousal* –, he starts over, portraying another *persona* in the same character, with another occupation, and another life.

This repetitive tendency of always returning to the beginning is apparent in the narrative of João de Deus’s life and points to what Freud terms the ‘conservative nature of the living’ (Freud 1955, 36). He defines it as the instinctive tendency to repeat or restore a previous stage of life. This is immediately evident in the way the *remembering* is portrayed: instead of merely narrated, it is re-enacted by João de Deus. The same instinct is noticeable in the elapsing of his life, in which identical gestures are repeated and culminate in quite similar consequences, despite being inserted in contexts that differ to varying degrees.

Throughout the film, we witness the unfolding of João de Deus’s obsession with Julieta, the daughter of the boarding house owner from whom the protagonist is renting a room. He establishes a voyeuristic relationship with the girl, listening behind the bathroom door, watching through the window as she comes in (Figure 1), and perching himself on her balcony to see her in her most intimate space.

One day Julieta arrives home as João de Deus is listening on the radio to the song *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, a lied for piano, voice, and clarinet composed by Schubert. This scene opens a key sequence in João de Deus’s voyeuristic relationship with Julieta: as she enters and leaves the room, he spies on her, gasping and dominated by conflicting feelings of excitement and fear of being caught (Figure 2). At the end of this sequence, we once again hear the same lied, on the same radio, while João de Deus lies in bed recovering from his voyeuristic ecstasy. The music immediately stops when Violeta turns off the electricity in the house.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the plot, she represses João de Deus, and it is she who interrupts Julieta’s sexual violation by the protagonist.



Figure 1 - João de Deus spying on Julieta (*Recollections of the Yellow House*, 0:29:48).

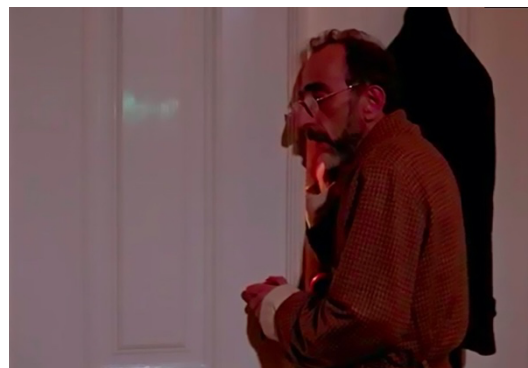


Figure 2 - João de Deus spying on Julieta (*Recollections of the Yellow House*, 0:30:31).

For Freud, voyeurism constitutes a provisional sexual goal, probably originated in childhood sexual fantasies based on the anguish of castration and repressed during the latency period. This voyeurism may be placed in one of its extremes, either emphasized or minimized. The inhibition of the genital sexual goal and the consequent negation of the pleasure principle ‘demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure’ (Freud 1955, 10). In the case of João de Deus, voyeurism does not suppress the final sexual goal as the scene depicting the act of rape demonstrates but it postpones it. It is the question of the delay of final satisfaction that we intend to relate to the characteristics of the musical excerpts chosen by the director: Schubert’s *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, *Julieta’s Fado* [Fado da Julieta], and the musical theme of the film *Paris Texas* (1984).<sup>5</sup> They all play a decisive role in intensifying the portrayal of João de Deus’s perverse behaviour.

Schubert’s music serves as accompaniment to the relationship between the two characters throughout the film, and the lied *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* is heard during the scene in which João de Deus’s voyeuristic act reaches its climax when Julieta arrives home and João de Deus spies on her the entire time.

The lied’s lyrics (love made impossible by the distance that separates the lovers) reflect this clear distance mirrored in the act of merely gazing upon the object. Closeness is longed for, but it is made impossible by reality that keeps apart the two characters of the poem. In the film, this impossibility of union is presented as the result of a set of external and internal factors, and the lyrics reiterate this fixation on voyeurism. João de Deus doesn’t dare go beyond the intermediate sexual stage.

The musical excerpt corresponds to the measures between the 11th and 26th in the score (Figure 3). The element is diegetic – it is listened to on the radio that João de Deus bought – until the beginning of *Julieta’s Fado*, which is then replaced by the musical theme of *Paris Texas* (also diegetic, heard on the television). At the end of the scene, measures 52–57 of the *lied* (still diegetic) are heard until the element abruptly comes to an end.

The melodic design of both musical sections of Schubert’s song is constructed from arpeggios and descending and ascending scales. The piano accompaniment is isorhythmic (a feature evident in the entire work). Despite the time signature with binary time division, the insistence on triplets, both in the accompaniment and in the main melody, denotes the presence of a natural *rubato* that results in a rhythmic tension that is not resolved in the bars heard during

the film. There is a tendency towards non-resolution and melodic insistence on the dominant (tension value). Take the first passage heard in the film where the melody is in the clarinet.

Figure 3 - The first excerpt of Schubert's Trio heard in the voyeur sequence. Measures 8–27.

It is possible to notice, especially in the first musical phrase heard in the film (the piece's second melodic phrase), a prevalence of dominant harmonies that provoke a feeling of tension. These harmonies, instead of being cadenced, are linked together in a transition into the next phrase (repetition of the first musical phrase of the piece). The repetition of the first phrase (from measure 19), though less evidently by maintaining a B-flat (I) harmony in the first two bars, also remains in unresolved tension until the end of the excerpt. The excerpt ends with an ascending bass chromaticism in the last four measures, and in the last two measures a clarinet chromaticism ends on the note E flat.

Schubert's lied is superimposed and linked together with *Julieta's Fado*, an original theme from the film, in which we hear a man (Vasco Sequeira) singing *a cappella* a song directly addressed to Julieta. The melody follows the chromaticism of the end of Schubert's piece, almost as a continuation of it. Apparently out of tune and deformed, it transports the narrative into a dysphoric space easily associated with a sense of displeasure.

After this element that accompanies Julieta up the stairs of the building, we hear the musical theme from the film *Paris Texas*.<sup>6</sup> This theme, apart from the dissonant sound of the augmented fourth interval between E flat and A and the distorted timbre of the instrument in which it is played, reminds us of the desert landscape of Wild West films, with all the connotations they imply, and, by alluding to the narrative of Wim Wenders's film, once again refers to the impossibility of love, not for lack of desire but due to internal and external factors.

Thus, in direct correspondence with Freud's terminology, we hear a tensional sound accompanying João de Deus's movements. The movements that favour the satiation of the provisional sexual goal result in a *crescendo* of sexual tension, which, unites pleasure with displeasure. In this sense, the musical elements reflect the psychic movements of João de Deus, accompanying the expression of the unresolved dichotomy mentioned above.

Regarding the timbral characteristics of Schubert's piece, the sonority of the clarinet stands out. With this presence, atypical in the musical genre of lied, Julieta is sonically represented. Julieta is a clarinetist who plays her instrument in several scenes of the film and thus, this instrument becomes a metaphor for the character and its sonic presence represents her metonymically.

Here we argue that sexual overvaluation, which to Freud triggers the dispersion of sexual goals (Freud 1953, 150), presents itself throughout the film not only through the voyeur's gaze but also through the meticulously chosen soundtrack. Schubert's scales accompany the comings and goings of the main character, delaying harmonic and melodic resolution. The lyrics refer to the impossibility of the protagonist's love for Julieta, a character musically represented by the clarinet. The musical theme from *Paris Texas*, with its unresolved melodic tension, and *Julieta's Fado*, featuring an out-of-tune melody alongside a mocking text, infuse the scene with a tension that alludes to João de Deus's perverted behaviour. It is worth recalling the scenes in which João de Deus listens behind the door of the bathroom where Julieta is. Commenting on these scenes in the film script, César Monteiro (1989) describes the sound heard by João de Deus as 'the profuse and crystalline noise of Miss Julieta peeing', followed by the 'inevitable and prosaic flushing'. In this context, the perverse character of João de Deus's listening can be added to his voyeurism: the overvaluation also occurs through sound, as evidenced by the protagonist's fixation on the clarinet that Julieta plays, represented by two musical elements that we hear in the scene (see the reference to the 'clarinet' in the lyrics of *Julieta's Fado*). The sound of the clarinet highlights not only Julieta but also the sonic dimension of João de Deus's perverted hearing.

**“Mild und Leise”, *Liebestod*, and the overvaluation of Rosarinho by João de Deus in the film *God’s comedy***

In the second film of the trilogy, *God’s Comedy*, João de Deus, the manager of the ice cream shop ‘Paraíso do Gelado’ [‘Ice-cream Paradise’], takes part in another story in which he establishes other perverse relationships. Throughout the film, he becomes involved with Rosarinho, a newly hired employee at the shop. In this section we focus on one of the most peculiar scenes in the film – the out-of-water swimming lesson - in which João de Deus performs a ritual dedicated to Rosarinho, who is lying on a table in the centre of the visual shot (Figure 4). While the woman makes swimming gestures, João de Deus moves around her, bringing his hands close to her almost without touching her. Throughout the scene, we listen to the *aria* ‘Mild und Leise’ from the opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1857–9) composed by Richard Wagner. The protagonist’s behaviour constitutes an expression of the overvaluation of the sexual object (Freud 1953, 150), although fixed on the visual contemplation of Rosarinho and preventing him from going any further during the encounter. In the scene, physical touching between the characters seems to be consciously avoided.



Figure 4 - Rosarinho lying on the table (*God’s Comedy*, 0:45:31).

The framing of the shot places Rosarinho on a table in the centre of the image, as if on an altar. With this reference to liturgy and to the sacred table, the scene takes on a ritualistic and sublimated dimension, which divinizes Rosarinho, transforming her into a kind of sacred, and as such prohibited, object of desire.

In addition to the visual framing, the imaginary representation of the water, although invisible to the viewer and suggested only through the bathing suit and Rosarinho’s movements, has a metaphorical value. In César Monteiro’s cinematography, water acquires

meanings related to the divine, the feminine, and the creative power, but also to time and death. As Muga (2015, 197) states, ‘the theme of water runs through Cesarean cinema from one end to the other, full of meanings’. Water is also associated with a complex imaginary in different cultures, from the origin of life (the maternal womb, materialized biblically in Moses ‘saved from the waters’) to the diluvian punishment, the fantasy of the eternal return, and the Heraclitean aphorism on the flowing river, which symbolizes the passage of time and continuous change.

Thus, water is suggested by Monteiro as mythical and philosophical matter, itself elevated, sacralized, and projected upon Rosarinho, emphasizing João de Deus’s erotic desire. On the other hand, his physical distancing underlines the principle of inertia, which Freud associates with the death drive.<sup>7</sup>

During the swimming lesson, we hear exclusively a musical element consisting of the *aria* ‘Mild und Leise’, from the opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1857) composed by Richard Wagner. Although this is an acousmatic element, it seems to be diegetic, as it is heard by the characters in the scene, João de Deus and Rosarinho, who move to the rhythm of the music. About this musical element, Monteiro (2005, 423) commented: ‘The erotic component comes from the music that acts upon the bodies, whether of the girl or of the character João de Deus. It is clear. João de Deus is attracted by the music, and it is music that drives his representation’.<sup>8</sup>

Freud (1955) considers that human instincts favour repetition and therefore are conservative, insofar as they always urge regression to a – inertial – previous stage of the living. As such, ultimately, they always aim at non-living (natural death): ‘the aim of all life is death and, looking backwards, [that] inanimate things existed before living ones’ (Freud 1955, 38). Thus, they seem to stand apart from and even in opposition to life (sexual) instincts. This opposition derives from the fact that the instincts of self-preservation, let us say of death, are turned towards the I, while the sexual instincts are turned towards the object. Thus, the lines that define the categories of love and death are quite blurred in Freud’s theory.

The *aria* we hear in the film is sung by Isolde about the death of her great love Tristan. Isolde’s lament materialized in the *aria* ‘Mild und Leise’ is commonly referred to as *Liebestod*, a term meaning love/death. The term was used to name the prelude to the concert version of the opera and the lament was titled ‘transfiguration’. Still, the word *Liebestod* became a characterizing element of the love between the two protagonists.

The concept of *Liebestod* is also important in a broader context when we think about the popular association between love and death in the Romantic period. As Saul (2009, 163) notes, ‘[i]t used to be commonplace to link German Romanticism intrinsically with a suspicious

ideology of love and death, and in particular with the erotic death cult most prominently exemplified by the *Liebestod* of Richard Wagner's doomed *Tristan and Isolde*'.

With the lyrics sung by Isolde, we understand what Monteiro was referring to in the interview cited above when he talked about the erotic component of this scene arising from the music. However, the representation of *Liebestod* transcends the universe of sound. Visually, the representation of overvaluation and elevation contrasts with that of death, as Rosarinho lies on the cushion practically immobile, like a dead body, and, after the musical ecstasy, the movements of the characters are transformed into stillness, peace, and silence.

In the lyrics sung throughout the scene, we have the 'transfiguration' (title of the musical section in its concert version) of Isolde's feelings – from mourning and sadness to peace and happiness when she sees Tristan's face with the smile of one who was 'unconsciously swallowed' (free translation of the lyrics). Simultaneously, we notice a kind of musical 'transfiguration' with which it is possible to observe a contradiction between musical elements, which sometimes refer to peace and sometimes to the agony that comes from this game of 'love and death'. Let us look, by way of example, at the first two motifs in the voice line:

These motives, referred to by several authors as '*Liebestod* motives' (see Scruton 2004, 205), constitute one of the melodic bases for the construction of the *aria*. The articulation of chromatic and diatonic elements, both in harmony and melody, gives this musical phrase an ambiguous character, according to the usual standards of the time and the composer. The initial melodic motif is constructed with a perfect fourth interval that transforms into a major third from a descending half-tone (Figure 5). The chromatic movement alludes to a sombre, mournful atmosphere, through the musical topic *pianto* (crying), which has a strong tradition in Western music (see 'pianto' in Monelle 2000). The predominantly major harmony gives the same motif a lighter character. The second set of notes, on the other hand, is determined by a diatonic contour that culminates in a descending perfect fourth interval (Figure 6). With this dichotomy between chromatic and diatonic, the elements of the motive gain a contrasting character. Thus, in the analysis of this phrase, which constitutes one of the pillars of the melodic construction of the *aria*, we noted the ambiguity of Isolde's feelings.

Isolde  
Mild und lei - se  
Bog. trem.  
Vc. (get.)  
Bog.  
Cb. (nur 2)  
pp  
Sehr mässig beginnen

Figure 6 - The first measure of the excerpt of Wagner's "Mild und Leise" heard in the swimming lesson sequence.

wie er lächelt,  
(4)

Figure 5 - Second measure of the excerpt of Wagner's "Mild und Leise" heard in the swimming lesson sequence.

Another recurrent element in the musical work heard in the film is the Tristan chord, for which the opera is most recognisable. Again, it emphasises meanings that are ambiguous and that, at the time of the composition of the musical work, were unexplored. As mentioned by Scruton (2004, 102), the same chord '[. . .]' has an important dramatic function in connecting the subversive (chromatic) desire that has enraged Isolde with the normal and womanly (diatonic) feelings from which it arose'.

This opposition of antagonistic motifs is evident throughout the musical excerpt. There are also some less recurrent motifs, such as the one presented below, heard initially in the woodwinds (Figure 7). This motif, due to its timbre, its high register, and the stepwise motion, resembles the sound of a bird, representing the divine (associated with the sky and therefore the bird in flight), the afterlife, and the hope that Isolde has for Tristan's rest.

Hb.  
p dolce

Figure 7 - Melodic motif of the excerpt of Wagner's "Mild und Leise" heard in the swimming lesson sequence.

The ambiguity of the musical element (in sound and lyrics) evokes the evident confusion in João de Deus's mind. On the one hand, the fixation on Rosarinho is caused by the sexual desire the protagonist feels for her. On the other, this same fixation sacralises Rosarinho, thus becoming perverse, since the protagonist inhibits himself from going beyond visual contemplation, avoiding touch, for example (during the scene, in very few moments does João de Deus touch Rosarinho).

Thus, the musical element under analysis represents the mental and emotional state of the protagonist João de Deus. The idea of 'transfiguration' expressed musically and textually by this element highlights paradoxes and articulates the tension between pleasure and displeasure associated with João de Deus's perversion.

### **Haydn, fetish, and Joaninha's panties in *God's comedy***

At a later point in the narrative, in the same film, João de Deus meets Joaninha, a young girl who enters the ice-cream shop. Discovering that they are neighbours and that Joaninha has even seen João de Deus in his pyjamas, they arrange a meeting at the protagonist's house. This meeting, which is ritualistic and sexualized, is composed of a set of eroticizing events, from the dressing up to the milk bath and the cornucopia of 'Bataillian' eggs. When the 'Champagne Ceremony' ['Cerimónia Champanhesa'], as director César Monteiro calls it, is over, João de Deus takes the child's underwear and moves with it to the sound of the *Adagio* from Joseph Haydn's Symphony in F minor.

In the scene in which João de Deus dances with Joaninha's underwear, we see this transformation of her underwear into what Freud calls fetish, reiterating the sexual nature of the relationship that João de Deus develops with the child. Freud (1961, 155) argued that fetishism is based on the dread of castration, revealed in the determination of sexual goals associated with the 'underclothing' of the individual. It is thus a question of substitution of the sexual object with another, associated with desire in a contiguous way. Thus, as in the case of voyeurism, we can see the expression of this perversion in the individual's inhibition when it comes to putting into practice other types of sexual goals, especially if we consider the paedophilic nature of the relationship,<sup>9</sup> highly censored by society.

In the image, we see João de Deus sitting down and picking up an object with a shape that we can associate with the *phallus*, an absence he intends to fill. It is with this object that he picks up her underwear, thus obtaining the image of filled underwear. The absence hidden

under the clothes becomes stated, repelling the dread of castration through the repositioning of the *phallus* underneath the fetishized object.

In justifying the panties as João de Deus's fetish object, keeping in mind that they hide a symbolic object, which does not exist, and that it is in this act of hiding that such an object becomes a fetish, it is worth noting Lacan's observations on his portraying of the veil, which can easily be related to the images of this scene in the film: 'The veil, the curtain in front of something, is still what best allows us to illustrate the fundamental situation of love. [...] The curtain is, one might say, the idol of absence' (Lacan 1995, 157).

Next, João de Deus smells Joaquina's panties, evoking coprophilia, another reference to objectual fetishism and then puts them on over his pyjamas (Figure 8). There we have the expression of another dichotomy that is established in this form of perversion, allowing us to conclude that the act of João de Deus wearing Joaquina's panties constitutes part of this process of capturing the object not only through sight but also through touching with his own body. Here we once again encounter the filling of the absent with his *phallus*, making up for the nonexistence of the same in Joaquina.



Figure 8 - João de Deus dancing with Joaquina's underwear (*God's Comedy*, 2:23:20).

This shot is followed by another one in which João de Deus searches thoroughly for a pubic hair in Joaquina's underwear to add it to his objects compiled in the 'Book of Thoughts' ['Livro dos Pensamentos']. The pubic hair is another of João de Deus's fetish objects in *God's Comedy*. It goes back to the first film of the *Trilogy*, in which the protagonist watches Julieta in her bedroom shaving, after drinking the water left over from her bath, leaving us with a close-up of one of Julieta's hairs. In *God's Comedy*, the protagonist opens the 'Book of Thoughts', and we notice that it is filled with a collection of pubic hairs, highlighting the fetishist and phantasmatic relationship that the character develops with the female body. As he

turns the pages of the 'Book of Thoughts', we observe João de Deus's great concentration, dazzlement, a jubilant and restrained expression. It turns out that he is looking at a photo album, but one without faces, only partial metonymic symbols that allow him to (re)live interrupted sexuality indirectly.

This is where the music chosen for this scene plays its role. The musical element heard over the take in which João de Deus dances with Joaquina's panties is composed of an excerpt of the *Adagio* from Joseph Haydn's Symphony No. 49 in F minor (*La Passione*) (1768). Although the music is acousmatic, the fact that João de Deus's movements are danced creates an ambiguity that is typical of some of the sound elements heard in the *Trilogy*.

The title attributed to the symphony – *La Passione* – was not chosen by its composer. However, through this paratextual association, relations are established with the feeling of passion, which has direct parallelism with the nature of João de Deus and Joaquina's relationship. We can still relate this title to the overestimation of the sexual object on which the notion of fetish is based. However, as Sisman and Clark point out, the title commonly attributed to the musical work is not only revealed through its association with the feeling of passion:

The familiar title 'La passione,' coming from a single source in Schwerin dated 1790, deserves scrutiny. In Schwerin, a north German city where secular music had been banned in 1756 and reinstated only in 1785, there was a longstanding Holy-Week oratorio tradition. It seems likely that the title referred to the circumstances of performance, rather than to the nature of the work itself. (Sisman 1990, 331)

Another work from this time, no. 49, 'La Passione,' similarly directs the listeners' thoughts to Holy Week, and thematic material here may also have plainchant origins. (Clark 2005, 105)

This liturgical connotation of the title of the musical work from which the element under analysis was constructed may not be consciously detected by the spectator of the film, but it is worth remembering that the associations made between the sacred and the characters throughout the *God's Trilogy* are often determined by religious musical references. With these references, the characters become 'worthy of worship' by way of a sacralization through music, reinforcing their overvaluation. We notice the presence of other elements constructed from works by this same composer in scenes where the character Joaquina is highlighted, elements

which reiterate João de Deus's overvaluation of the object, such as the *Benedictus* of the *Missa Sancti Joannis de Deo* at the end of the 'Champagne Ceremony' (see Pinto 2021).

As far as the musical excerpt of the Symphony No. 49 in F minor is concerned, it consists of the first part of the first movement of the work (Figure 9). It begins with the presentation of a theme that will be part of the accompaniment of the first melodic phrase. This ends in a dominant chord to transition to the beginning of the melodic presentation by the first violins and, like the aforementioned (first) phrase, is built in the key of F minor. The slow melody is in a high register in relation to the accompaniment, which is almost exclusively a continuous bass filled by the second violins and the violas. Such disparity of registers between the melody and the harmonic accompaniment affirms the prevalence of the former over the latter and brings to this first phrase an essentially melodic character further emphasized by the little marked rhythm of the lower lines. The melodic design in *piano*, filled with *legatos* and built from the offset of the interval of minor sixth it begins with (through the succession of joint degrees in descending scale), gives it a melancholic character. The second part of the first melodic phrase ends in the 14th measure with the beginning of the transition to the second theme in the relative major of the tonality (A major flat). In this second theme, we find a strong dynamic and a more pronounced rhythm (especially with the fuller construction of the accompaniment), almost danceable, with a character that contrasts with that of the first theme (although it contains some melodic and rhythmic references that confer uniqueness to the musical part). The excerpt ends in the *cadenza* of the first part of Haydn's movement in A-flat major. The *cadenza* is composed of a set of elements from the two themes presented in that musical section.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the first movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 49. The tempo is marked 'Adagio'. The score includes parts for Oboe, Corni in F, Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello e Basso. The first melodic phrase is in F minor, and the second theme is in the relative major, A-flat major. The score is numbered 11 at the beginning of the second system.

Figure 9 - First melodic phrase of the excerpt of the Adagio from Haydn's Symphony No. 49. Measures 1– 17.

Now, with this musical excerpt, the fetishist character of the central object of the scene – Joanhina’s panties – is reinforced. The first part, which has a particularly melancholic character, corroborates the idea of exchange and substitution. Under the musical excerpt, the relationship between the fetishized object and the original sexual object is reiterated – the first part of the melody determines the nostalgic feeling of the protagonist while interacting with Joanhina’s panties that remind João de Deus of this character.

Concerning the transition melodically constructed from the insistent repetition in intervals of minor second, it is important to note the symbolic meaning that comes from this same interval. In his important work on musical signification, which develops the Theory of Topics proposed by Ratner (1980), Monelle (2000) states that the *pianto* topic constructed from the descending interval of the minor second is evident at least in the Western classical and romantic repertoire. This topic constitutes a reference to weeping, lamentation, and, by affinity (or indexicality), mourning and sadness. Monelle tells us: ‘Composers heard in the descending semitone the moan of a person weeping; it commonly illustrated words like *pianto*, *lagrime*. In this music, the figure was generally consonant, so it is not strictly an appoggiatura’. (Monelle 2000, 67)

If we follow Monelle regarding the insistence on this element, we may wonder if this is not further evidence of João de Deus’s longing or the impossibility of his moving forward in his relationship with Joanhina. The danceable character of the second theme of the excerpt refers, on the one hand, to João de Deus’s movements and, on the other, to the pleasure that comes from this provisional sexual goal of fetishizing her underwear.

## **Final remarks**

In his book *Audio-vision*, Chion defines the concept of added value as

The expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it, that this information or expression ‘naturally’ comes from what is seen and is already contained in the image itself (Chion 1994, 5).

Starting from the idea that music and sound actively contribute to the construction of a film’s meanings, considering that they add value to the image but also that they are added to by the image, and that it is through this interaction that the final form of a film is constructed,

we proposed a multidisciplinary analysis – together with a comprehensive overview of the cultural context – of these three case studies. The purpose is to look at cinema and its sound and musical components to understand the profound interrelation that they establish with each other, especially in the case of a director who was also a melomaniac. João de Deus, the protagonist of the *Trilogy* of films directed by João César Monteiro, acts within a perverse framework made up of paradoxes and ambiguities, populated by sexual ghosts. He himself possesses a ghostly appearance, in his cadaverous thinness and on the threshold of death. Considering the need to reflect on what surrounds him within his filmic reality, we focused our study on how his behaviours are reflected and articulated musically. By analysing the different musical elements, which were carefully chosen by the director, we can conclude that they are determining factors in the formation of the diegesis and the representation of João de Deus's performances.

In the first and second films of the *Trilogy*, several scenes representing João de Deus's obsessive fixations are constructed from the articulation of images, dialogues, and musical excerpts of various types. These different types of elements converge in the musical representation of the character's sensations, which are characteristically ambiguous, combining pleasure with displeasure, as is common in perverse sexual expression. The character fixates on provisional goals, postponements of a pleasure that, when reached (see the sodomization scene in *God's Comedy*), is represented silently (not set to music).

This article analyses film music as the starting point for examining various dimensions of the character of João de Deus. As this character is built on an idiosyncratic identity complex and due to his perversive behaviour, we deploy Freud's concepts to describe his several facets. By delving into specific instances, such as his voyeuristic behaviour towards Julieta, the sexual overvaluation of Rosarinho and the fetishism surrounding Joaninha's underwear, we have demonstrated how the musical facets of these films decisively contribute to constructing and consolidating the perverse nature of the João de Deus character. Through the musical elements, a space of tension is created, one that is apparent in the voyeuristic contemplation experienced and relived by João de Deus, in his overvaluation and elevation of the sexual object, and in the fetishist substitution of that object with another. The musical excerpts chosen by the director enhance this conflict and this ambivalence with their agonistic character and dramatic intensity.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> During Monteiro's early years as a film director, Portugal was under a dictatorship and censorship significantly restrained production and distribution practices in filmmaking. Even after the revolution in 1974, Portuguese directors struggled to obtain public funding for their films, and with private producers facing substantial difficulties in recouping their investments, particularly in '*auteur* cinema' due to the dominance of Hollywood films in Portuguese cinemas and the limited success of such cinema among Portuguese audiences at that time. However, institutions such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, operating through the CPC (Portuguese Cinema Centre), and later the state-run IPC (Portuguese Cinema Institute), played a crucial role in funding films that would never manage to achieve profitability in Portugal (for more information on this matter, see Cunha 2018; Monteiro 1995).

<sup>2</sup> This term is commonly used to refer to psychiatric hospitals in Portugal.

<sup>3</sup> Luísa Jorge's translation of *Mort à crédit*.

<sup>4</sup> Violeta is Julieta's mother and a repressive character who, according to Cunha (2010,52), is a 'recreation of the dictator who zealously and diligently runs his fief, watching over and controlling the deviations of his tenants'. This gesture by Violeta once again implies her strict control over João de Deus by restricting his 'light privileges' and consequently interrupting his moment of relaxation after his voyeuristic climax.

<sup>5</sup> The film's soundtrack has a guitar solo composed by Ry Cooder, based on the song 'Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground' written by Blind Willie Johnson.

<sup>6</sup> This sound excerpt from *Paris Texas* comprises of snippets of dialogue (which mention the name of the film) and segments of the main musical theme. When João de Deus arrives at the house, he enters the living room where Violeta and other tenants are watching TV. Despite being off-screen, we see the light reflected on the characters and listen to the dialogue that at a certain point includes the words 'Paris Texas'. João de Deus then goes to his room. When the door is closed, we can no longer hear the music of the film but when he opens it again to spy on Julieta, the musical theme is both heard and easily recognisable.

<sup>7</sup> As Haute and Westerink (2020, 100) comment: 'Whereas Eros and the pleasure principle push the individual to new objects, further development, and greater complexity, the (narcissistic) identification we are discussing here is more in line with the principle of inertia that Freud associates with the death drive'.

<sup>8</sup> The sexual component of the relation between João de Deus and Rosarinho is noticeable in other scenes through the fetishization of Rosarinho's hair and the sodomization act in the ice cream shop.

<sup>9</sup> Joaninha says that she is 14 years old.

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