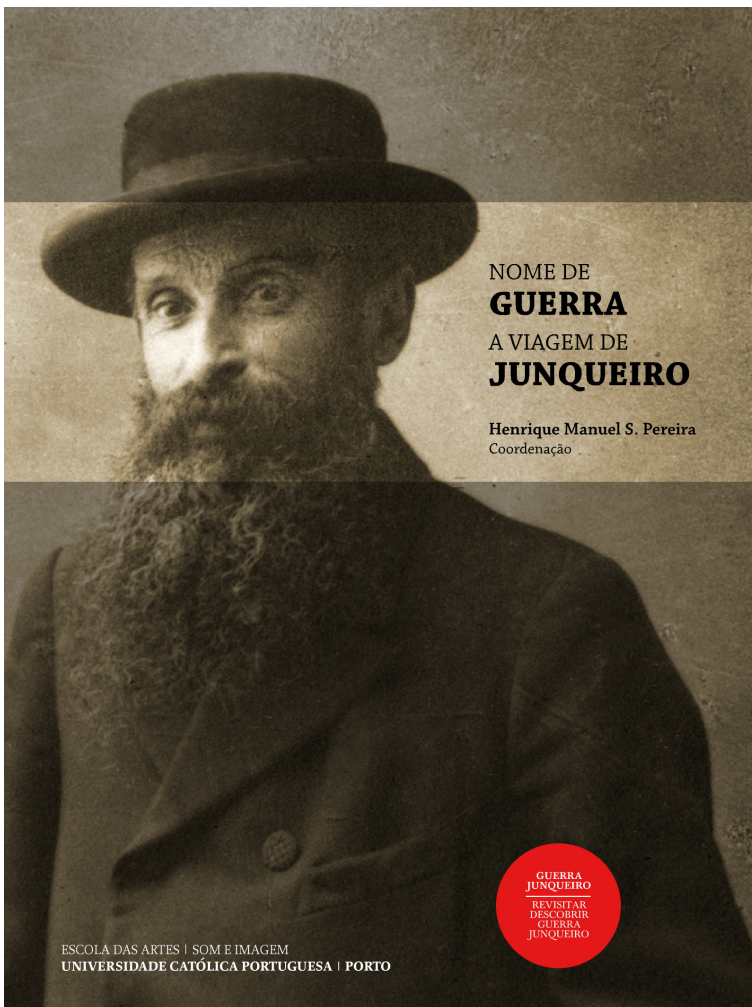


# A NOTE ABOUT *NOME DE GUERRA: A VIAGEM DE JUNQUEIRO*

[Nom de Guerre: Junqueiro's Journey]

Translation by José Neto



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**José Carlos Francisco Pereira**

*Has a PhD in Aesthetics from the School of Fine Arts in Lisbon; he is currently an auxiliary professor at that school. He has published "As Doutrinas Estéticas em Portugal: do Romantismo à Presença" (Hespéria Publishing, 2011); "Neotomismo e Arte Moderna" (Lusiada Foundation, 2002); "A Doutrinação Estética da Revista Brotéria (1920-1960)" (Lisbon, 2003); collaborated on "Dicionário de Escultura Portuguesa", J. F. Pereira (dir.) (Lisbon, 2005); and authored the children's book "O Peixe-Lua no País do Pai Natal", illustrated by Salomé Duarte (Lisbon, 2006).*

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The title of this documentary alludes to *Nome de Guerra* by Almada Negreiros, one of the Orpheu poets, a novel as strange in its time as it is today about a poet that navigates, like Junqueiro, all routes in the Portuguese aesthetic tradition; in Almada's eyes, as in Junqueiro's, art and religion, although they constitute different spheres, do not stand in natural opposition. Fluorescence in one of the mother lodes of Portuguese temperament, *Guerra Junqueiro* provides a mould and inspiration for Portuguese culture in the twenty-first century as he did in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite a few histrionic and reckless statements in early works that he regretted later.

To make a film of patent documental value about one of the matricial figures of Portuguese culture, a film whose scope extends even beyond that value, is in itself an event; moreover, by demarcating Junqueiro's heritage, it prospects the future for the spiritual aspects of the configuration it may take in the second millennium. Encompassing the three major phases of the poet's life, that is, the final period of the monarchy, the foundation of the Republic and his relative disappointment with it, and the period of his greatest poetic and philosophic maturity, the film is likewise structured, it seems, along three fundamental vectors:

As it investigates the poet's life and work, it anchors the research on the direct testimonies of living Portuguese thinkers and philosophers of the highest quality, to which it adds statements by Junqueiro's relatives and persons in whose memories his figure and works still reverberate.

A second vector rests on the gathering and inclusion of images of the time, whose trail was meticulously researched by Henrique Manuel Pereira. A contemporary press report led to a film record of the transfer on July 13th, 1923 of the urn containing

the poet's mortal remains. In 2011, there was also the lucky find of negatives, on glass, of some photographs of the poet, which could thus be reproduced, one being the penultimate photograph shown in the documentary. In this regard it is befitting to emphasise once more the exhaustive investigation carried out at home and abroad, resulting in thirty hours of recorded interviews and one hundred hours of film footage, which necessitated painstaking selection and editing for the final cut. All this is related in the book containing the script, the indispensable tool that complements a full feature film.

There is yet another sustaining vector apparent in the documentary, in which at times it attains a delicate beauty: it consists in the attempt to go beyond an illustration of the nuclei of Junqueiro's work. Particularly with regard to its poetical-philosophical expression, the attempt is to recreate it through pictures that may present it to us in its "primal virginity." In this context, the attempt stands out to convey or translate the theological and artistic value of light – most relevant in Christian tradition, and which Junqueiro assimilates and re-presents in his work – by means of a take of the sunlight reverberating on a tree's branches while the sun disk seemingly dissolves into the tree... The arid path, harrowed into the ground and leading inescapably to heaven, which it seeks and will reparate, is an equally intense cinematographic moment in the film. Such moments translate best that other mode of making cinema, in which the image becomes idea, or symbol, therewith translating what words and their memory express in a different way, in different contexts. In this regard, the editing of the multiple images often falls into a rhythm whose cadence seems at times to spring from the charmingly simple, lyrical sound of Junqueiro's poetry, notwithstanding the occasional impression that the cadence

drags a little, albeit not excessively, due to the sudden introduction of some of the testimonies. It is curious to realise that, not a few times, the spirituality of Junqueiro's work calls for the kind of religious setting that painting – particularly the "vanitas" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – can give us, and which Visconti skillfully invoked in some of his films.

This documentary attempts at a polyhedral vision of Junqueiro's work. Such an approach is required and imposed by the work itself – hence, we often pass from politics to religion, from art to collectibles, from diplomacy to ethnographic fieldwork, from poetry to poetics, from family memoirs to the nostalgic invocation of the descendants of the "simple folk" of yore.[1] Yet, a feeling remains that it lacks some binding element that might sew it all up together, over and above the fact that those various dimensions characterise and are conjoined in the same historical person.

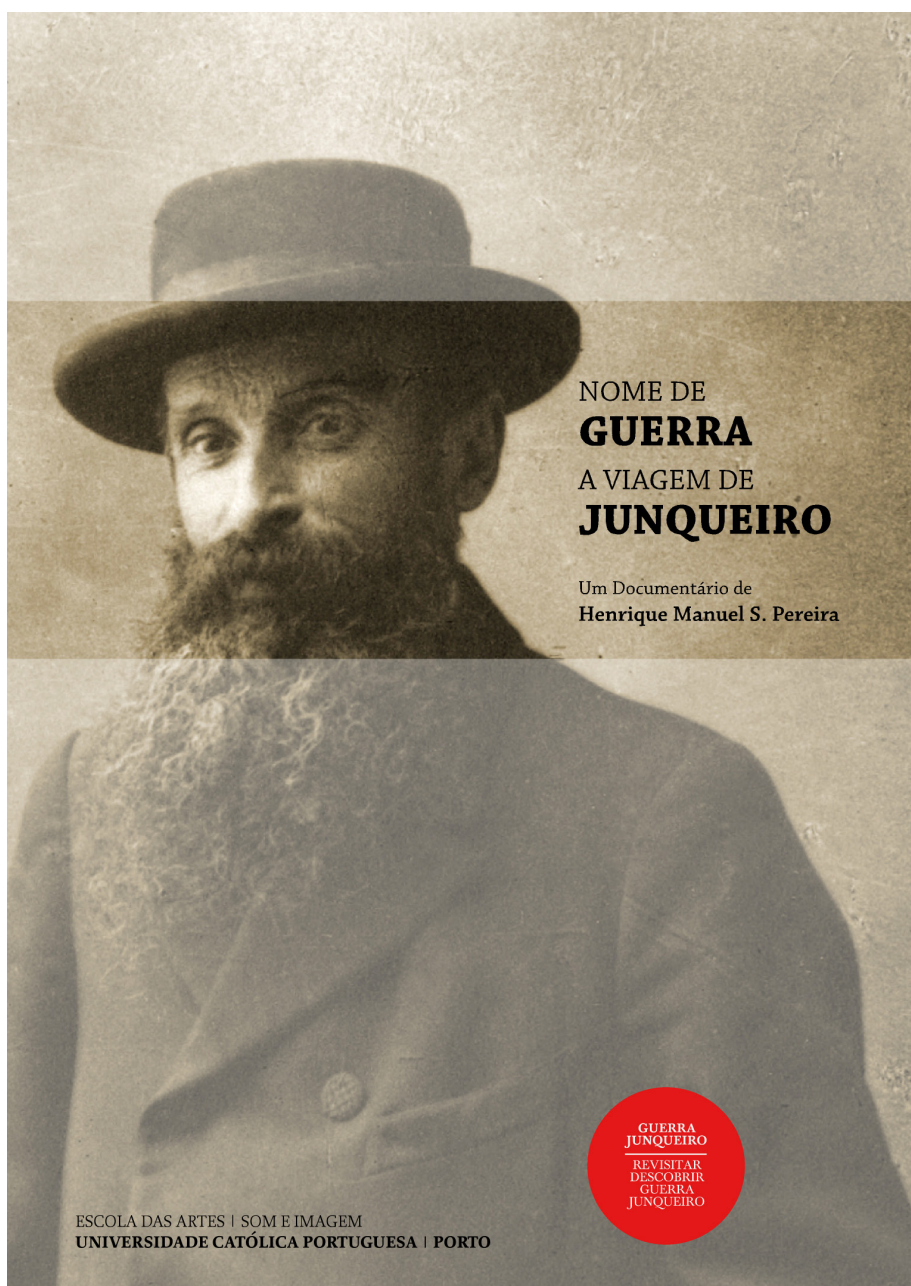
It is important to remember that, in his life, Junqueiro was the opposite of what he is in death – for now, at least, someone almost forgotten. And perhaps the testimonial voice may obscure the theistic, even pantheistic setting that the aesthetic captation of nature can still translate in a matchless way. Indeed, this is the "ideal" in which God appears revealed in a canticle – in music –, in Nature, that cosmic art that the poet translates as Love, as a perfect state of beauty, which this film does have but does not contain fully. There are some very beautiful images, occasionally very unexpected takes; yet, a certain – albeit praiseworthy – paedagogic-didactic dimension seems to seep into places where even the music, entirely composed with the poetic work as its basis, apparently wishes to marry another art form, a different plasticity. Invoking Junqueiro's ironic facet is not enough to obviate the required synthetical harmony.

Imperfection is a sign of the presence of divinity, in Junqueiro's eyes, because the divine condition is also fulfilled there – it is a reintegration of what is multiple into the One. This is the metaphysical vision he defends, which is not free of some contamination by evolutionism. Therefore, the documentary might have included a few recorded images of scientific phenomena, and that might draw the staunchest sceptics and rationalists to Junqueiro's own prophetic, ethical, and metaphysical universe.

Akin to moonlight, which seemingly trembles as it shimmers on gentle waves, this film, in our view, would deserve a continuation if it were possible – a second, more leisurely visit to the work itself, looking into its forms, on the one hand and, on the other, into its metaphysical and transcendental contents; somewhat like a follow-up lesson, turning now to aesthetics and metaphysics rather than history or politics, so that Junqueiro's legacy might attain a visibility in the cinema that it has not enjoyed in bookstore windows or in the everyday reading habits of the Portuguese. Inserted into a vaster program, this film must be regarded, nonetheless, as one more piece in the Junqueiro universe, which Director Henrique Manuel Pereira now tries to illuminate, based on a wide-ranging aesthetic, historical and scientific project combining music, literature and cinema.

José Carlos Pereira (FBAUL)

[1] *Translator's note*: Allusion to one of Junqueiro's best-known poems, "Os Simples", in the book with the same title.



NOME DE  
**GUERRA**  
A VIAGEM DE  
**JUNQUEIRO**

Um Documentário de  
**Henrique Manuel S. Pereira**

GUERRA  
JUNQUEIRO  
REVISITAR  
DESCOBRIR  
GUERRA  
JUNQUEIRO

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