

Between words and silence: A semiotic and sociocritical analysis of the language and literature teacher in the films *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Entre les murs* (2008), and *Detachment* (2011).

Entre la palabra y el silencio: Un análisis semiótico y sociocrítico del maestro de Lengua y Literatura en los filmes *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Entre les murs* (2008) y *Detachment* (2011).



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María Luisa Gómez García

University of Guadalajara
(MEXICO)

CE: maria.garcia@academicos.udg.mx

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3787-4804>

Luis Jorge Aguilera Gómez

University of Guadalajara
(MEXICO)

CE: luis.jorge@academicos.udg.mx

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1646-1648>

Carmina Alejandra García Serrano

University of Guadalajara
(MEXICO)

EC: carmina.garcia@academicos.udg.mx

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0333-7381>

Jovany Escareño Davalos

University of Guadalajara
(MEXICO)

CE: jovany.esc@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1348-9920>

Francisco Javier Ponce Martínez

University of Guadalajara
(MEXICO)


EC: rancisco.pmartinez@academicos.udg.mx

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1831-2232>

Joaquin Rodriguez Beltran

University of Guadalajara
(MEXICO)

CE: joaquin.rodriguez@academicos.udg.mx

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9956-285X>

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Abstract.

This article addresses the representation of the Language and Literature teacher in three contemporary films set in contexts of social marginalization: *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Entre les murs* (2008) and *Detachment* (2011). It is based on the assumption that, through literary teaching and the exercise of autobiographical writing, the teaching figures constructed in these film narratives operate as agents of

subjectivation, humanization and emancipation for their students. From a socio-critical approach, the analysis focuses on the initial sequences (*incipit*) of each work, in order to explore the symbolic configurations of the teaching role, the pedagogical models involved, the institutional tensions represented and the writing practices in the classroom. The study relies on tools from structural semiotics -in particular, the actantial model and narrative programs (Greimas, 1993)- as well as theoretical frameworks from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1994), sociology of education (Bourdieu, 1997) and intersectional analysis (Hooks, 2021). Together, these frameworks allow us to propose a reading of the teacher as a liminal, political and affective figure, whose pedagogical interventions question the structural conditions of exclusion.

Keywords: Representation of the teacher in film. Semiotics, filmic sociocriticism. Incipit. Actantial model. Narrative program. Marginality.

Resumen:

El presente artículo aborda la representación del docente de Lengua y Literatura en tres filmes contemporáneos situados en contextos de marginación social: *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Entre les murs* (2008) y *Detachment* (2011). Se parte del supuesto de que, mediante la enseñanza literaria y el ejercicio de la escritura autobiográfica, las figuras docentes construidas en estas narrativas cinematográficas operan como agentes de subjetivación, humanización y emancipación para sus estudiantes. A partir de un enfoque sociocrítico, el análisis se concentra en las secuencias iniciales (*incipit*) de cada obra, con el fin de explorar las configuraciones simbólicas del rol docente, los modelos pedagógicos implicados, las tensiones institucionales representadas y las prácticas escriturales en el aula. El estudio se apoya en herramientas de la semiótica estructural —en particular, el modelo actancial y los programas narrativos (Greimas, 1993)—, así como en marcos teóricos provenientes de la pedagogía crítica (Freire, 1994), la sociología de la educación (Bourdieu, 1997) y el análisis interseccional (Hooks, 2021). En conjunto, estos marcos permiten proponer una lectura del maestro como figura liminal, política y afectiva, cuyas intervenciones pedagógicas interpelan las condiciones estructurales de exclusión.

Palabras clave: Representación del docente en el cine. Semiótica., Sociocrítica fílmica. Incipit. Modelo actancial. Programa narrativo. Marginalidad..

Introduction: the representation of the Language and Literature teacher in the cinema.

The figure of the teacher has been a constant presence in cinematic narrative, functioning as a symbolic device through which both the ideals and the tensions of the educational system are represented. In particular, the Language and Literature teacher occupies a privileged place within this imaginary, embodying not only the transmitter of knowledge, but also the mediator between language, subjectivity and the construction of meaning. His

presence in the filmic classroom is frequently associated with the transformative power of the word, writing as a liberating practice, and the conflict between the literary canon and the life experiences of students.

Numerous films have depicted literature teachers confronted with adverse school contexts or marked by cultural and social diversity. Productions such as *The Dead Poets Society* (Weir, 1989), *Freedom Writers* (LaGravenese, 2007), *Entre les murs* (Cantet, 2008), *The Emperors' Club* (Hoffman, 2002), or *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011), place at the center of the story teachers confronting rigid school structures while trying to open spaces for individual expression and critical thinking through literature. In these films, the classroom becomes a place of conflict and resistance, where the value of literary texts, modes of teaching and forms of youth subjectivation are discussed. This article focuses on the representation of the Language and Literature teacher, understood not only as a transmitter of knowledge, but also as a mediator between language and subjectivity, between the word and political agency.

In order to go deeper into this representation, we analyze the narrative component of the selected film narratives, taking into account both their formal structure and their value dimension. From the semiotic perspective of Greimas (1993), we examine the parts that make up the film narrative -the initial situation, the transformation, the climax and the resolution-, as well as the axiological level underlying the characters' actions. Through the establishment of the Narrative Programs, we seek to identify the values, oppositions and trajectories of meaning that construct the teacher as a symbolic figure. This double approach allows us to articulate the film analysis with a critical reading of the place of the teacher in the contemporary social narrative.

The analysis seeks to clarify the transition from the idealized image of the teacher, characteristic in the history of cinema about teachers, to a more complex and critical representation, focused on how its representation has evolved in contemporary international cinema. Emphasis is placed on how these figures are inserted in school contexts

marked by exclusion, where literature and writing become strategies of survival and resistance.

Theoretical and methodological framework

This analytical approach conceives film as a cultural document that articulates meanings around education, authority, marginality and affect. From this perspective, film is understood as a narrative text. In coherence with this approach, the analysis is based on a socio-critical methodology, supported by the *Incipit* theory proposed by Casetti and Di Chio (1991), which allows us to interpret the opening scenes and titles as symbolic condensations that configure the narrative essence of the cinematographic work. In the same way, the methodology of structural semiotics proposed by Greimas (1993) is used succinctly, particularly through the application of the actantial model and narrative programs as tools of analysis.

The corpus of analysis is made up of three film productions that share the following elements: the Language and Literature teacher as protagonist, the setting in school contexts marked by socio-cultural adversity, the explicit incorporation of writing as a pedagogical practice and as a narrative device, as well as a problematizing representation of the educational link. These elements are approached with conceptual tools from Hooks (2021) and Freire's (1994) critical pedagogy in order to understand how gender, race and class inequalities cross the teaching practices and their filmic representations.

Analytical approach

Incipit theory in film analysis

The notion of *incipit*, originally developed in literary narratology (Cros, 1983), has been adapted by film sociocriticism (Casetti and Di Chio, 1991) as a key tool for analyzing the first scenes of a film. In general terms, the *incipit* fulfills a double function:

- **Disposition of the receiver:** it orients the viewer's expectations, defines the tone of the story and predisposes a specific interpretation.

- **Establishment of the conflict:** it presents, latently or explicitly, the fundamental tensions that will structure the narrative and symbolic story.

As Casetti and Di Chio (1991) state, the beginning of a film "acts as a frame of reception that delimits and conditions the viewer's gaze, establishing the codes that will govern the filmic discourse" (p. 68).

Titles as opening rhetoric and strategic site of meaning condensation. In sociocritical analysis, the *incipit* is considered as the textual space in which the narrative montage and the ideological programming of the text take place. Therefore, the analysis of the titles in their original version helps to unveil the narrative, thematic and semantic relationship with the whole film.

- ***Freedom Writers***

The title alludes to The Freedom Riders, activists who fought for civil rights in the United States in the 1960s (Arsenault, 2006). It is re-signified in the students in the film, who write to resist systemic violence. Writing as an act of freedom becomes the center of the narrative.

- ***Entre les murs***

Translated as "Between the Walls," it underscores the physical and symbolic confinement of the school classroom. It also alludes to the invisible barriers between cultures, knowledge, languages and generations. The classroom is a field of ethical and affective tensions.

- ***Detachment***

It means "detachment" or "disengagement". It alludes directly to the emotional state of the protagonist, but also to the institutional abandonment, the affective crisis and the collapse of the school system. The title encapsulates the impossibility of building community or belonging.

The Opening Scenes: the Incipit as a synthesis of the conflict in the three films. This core describes the opening scenes of the films *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Entre les murs* (2008) and *Detachment* (2011), which function as symbolic microcosms and allow us to trace the discursive and visual transformations of the teaching role:

- In *Freedom Writers* (2007), the *incipit* shows images of street violence and racial division, followed by Erin Gruwell's first day at school. This scene anticipates the racial and institutional conflict that the teacher will face and raises the possibility of transformation through the pedagogical link.
- In *Entre les murs* (2008), the first scene consists of François' introduction to his class. The camera is placed inside the classroom, showing an environment charged with cultural tensions and difficult communication. This *incipit* establishes the classroom as a space of intercultural friction and pedagogical performativity.
- In *Detachment* (2011) the film opens with a voiceover of Henry Barthes himself, who defines himself as "a surrogate of whom one should know nothing". The image shows him isolated in a subway car. This *incipit* configures a skeptical character from the beginning, marked by affective distance and emotional trauma.

The voice of the language and literature teachers. In a complementary manner, analyzing the discourse in scenes of the three films also allows us to identify the symbolic coordinates of the educational conflict.

- In *Freedom Writers* (2007), teacher Erin Gruwell bursts into a segregated classroom, challenging the logics of institutional exclusion with a promise of commitment: "I'm not letting you fail, even if that means coming to your house every night until you finish the work. I see who you are. Do you understand me?" ("I'm not letting you fail, even if that means coming to your house every night until you finish the work. . I see who you are. I see who you are. Do you understand me?") (LaGravenese, 2007,

1:50:06). This statement sets the tone of a militant, affective and disruptive pedagogy.

- In *Entre les murs* (2008), Professor François Marin presents himself as a teacher who is open to dialogue, yet the students' distant response reveals a tension between pedagogical intentionality and structural conditions. The scene anticipates misunderstandings, cultural fractures and the limits of teaching authority:

Prof. François: ...Raise your hand to speak. what's wrong?

Student Khoumba: But we never have a class hour.

Prof. François: Raise your hand to speak.

Student Khoumba: It was the teacher who said. The teachers say that. But we never have an hour of class. We start 8:30 and finish 9:25. That doesn't make an hour.

Prof. François: Yes, it's really 55 minutes. Thank you, the detail is very important.

Student Khoumba: Stop saying that the other schools have one hour of class.

Prof. François: I'm just saying that we waste time. Like now (Cantet, 2008, 00:06:06).

- *Detachment* (2011) opens with a *voiceover* of the teacher Henry Barthes declaring his role as a substitute and his anonymity: "I'm the substitute teacher. There's no real responsibility to teach." (Kaye, 2011, 00:19:14). This phrase installs a universe where emotional distance and disenchantment mark school relationships, showing a teacher caught between ethical duty and affective collapse.

The classroom as a symbolic space. In the three films, the classroom becomes a semantic field where meanings are disputed. From the beginning of each film, it is anticipated how the filmed classrooms are not neutral scenery, but atmospheres where the emotional landscapes of discomfort, disenchantment, resistance or hope are condensed. In this regard, Metz (1972) states that "space in cinema constructs a moral geography" (p. 78). Cinema also inserts a visually structured language where each shot produces meaning.

In *Freedom Writers* (2007), *Entre les murs* (2008) and *Detachment* (2011), classrooms are not presented as neutral scenarios or mere functional sets, but as spaces charged with

symbolic and affective density, where the emotional landscapes of unease, disenchantment, resistance and, in some cases, hope are condensed. Far from being aseptic environments, these classrooms are marked by the social, racial and economic conflicts that traverse the trajectories of students and teachers.

In *Freedom Writers* (2007), the classroom becomes a refuge and a trench, where personal pain finds in the written word a form of collective sublimation. In *Entre les murs* (2008), the constant tension between the teacher and his group reveals the classroom as a discursive battlefield, where identities, languages and powers are negotiated. *Detachment* (2011) shows the classroom as a place of affective emptiness, where emotional disaffection and institutional collapse are reflected in the deep disconnection between teacher and students. In all these cases, the filmed school space becomes an emotional thermometer that translates the fractures of the pedagogical bond and the possibilities -or impossibilities- of the educational act.

As can be seen, the application of the concept of *incipit*, as proposed by film sociocriticism, allows us to approach the analysis of the titles and opening scenes of a film from a perspective that transcends the merely narrative, by integrating in an articulated manner the social, cultural and ideological dimensions of the filmic text. This approach inaugurates a complementary reading path that enriches the critical interpretation of the cinematographic work.

Approach from structural semiotics: A. J. Greimas

In the present analysis, the narrative component of the film is approached from a double perspective. First, we identify and delimit the structural parts that make up the narrative, such as the initial situation, the conflict, the development and the resolution, in order to establish the internal organization of the story. Before going into the analysis of these structural dimensions, it is essential to briefly present the plot of the three films. These synopses allow us to contextualize the symbolic devices that articulate the journey of the

characters -teachers and students- in relation to the values pursued, the obstacles faced and the transformations obtained (or frustrated).

The narrative component: structural dimensions of each filmic text

Freedom Writers (2007) tells the story of Erin Gruwell, a young language teacher at a public high school in Long Beach, California, in the 1990s. Encountering a group of students marked by violence, racism and social exclusion, Gruwell transforms her classroom into a space of listening, writing and resistance. By working with *The Diary of Anne Frank* and writing personal diaries, her students regain the ability to narrate and project themselves into the future.

1. Initial situation

The film begins with Erin Gruwell, an idealistic young teacher who arrives at a high school in a troubled Los Angeles neighborhood. Her students are marginalized teenagers, divided by racial conflict, violence and social problems. The environment is hostile and the students are unmotivated and distrustful.

2. Conflict

- External: Erin must deal with the lack of respect, racial tensions and violence that affect her students. The educational system and her colleagues do not support her, which hinders her work.
- Internal: Erin struggles to find a way to connect with her students and motivate them to learn, while maintaining her idealism in the face of the harsh reality that surrounds them.

3. Development

- Erin implements unconventional methods, such as personal journaling and reading real stories of young people in conflict, to get her students to express their emotions and experiences.

- Students begin to open up, sharing their life stories, which generates empathy and cohesion in the group.
- The teacher-student relationship is strengthened, and they begin to see education as a way to change their destiny.
- The film shows the gradual progress, the difficulties and the moments of personal and collective transformation.

4. Resolution

- Students are able to overcome their differences and show academic and personal improvement.
- Erin and her students demonstrate that, despite adversity, education and empathy can be tools for hope and change.
- The film ends with an inspiring message about the importance of inclusion, understanding and perseverance in education.

Entre les murs (2008) presents the school year of François Marin, a French language teacher at a high school in the 20th arrondissement of Paris. The story, constructed from an autobiographical novel, realistically depicts the daily tensions of the multicultural classroom: cultural clashes, linguistic disputes, disciplinary disagreements. Through exercises such as the narrative self-portrait, the teacher seeks to generate a space for dialogue, although the conflict ends up escalating to the expulsion of a student.

1. Initial Situation

The film opens in a public high school in a poor neighborhood of Paris. It introduces François Marin, a French teacher, who returns to teach a diverse group of adolescent students from different cultural and social backgrounds. The classroom appears as a microcosm of society, with tensions, challenges and complex dynamics between students and teachers.

2. Conflict

The main conflict is the daily struggle within the classroom:

- External: The difficulties in maintaining discipline, managing cultural and social diversity, and transmitting knowledge in an environment where students are unmotivated or show rebellion.
- Internal: Teacher François tries to maintain authority and respect, but faces resistance, misunderstanding and a clash of values with his students. He is also in conflict with himself about how to teach and relate to them.

3. Development

Throughout the course, numerous situations are shown:

- Discussions between teacher and students, conflicts between them, and moments of dialogue and understanding.
- The cultural and social differences of the students generate tensions, misunderstandings and challenges for coexistence.
- The teacher uses teaching methods that seek to encourage reflection, discussion and mutual respect, which sometimes clashes with the attitude of some students.
- The film delves into everyday interaction, showing how bonds are built or destroyed, the role of authority and communication struggles.

4. Resolution

The film ends in an open-ended manner, without a clear or definitive solution:

- The classroom and its conflicts are shown to continue, reflecting the complex reality of the educational system and society.
- However, there are moments of understanding and mutual respect between the teacher and some students, suggesting that education is a difficult but possible process.

- The film stresses the importance of dialogue and persistence in teaching, leaving a message of hope, although aware of the difficulties.

Detachment (2011) is the story of Henry Barthes, a substitute teacher who transits classrooms marked by institutional abandonment and emotional disaffection. The film interweaves fiction with documentary testimonies about the teaching experience and exposes the affective collapse of the school system. The teacher, initially reluctant to commit himself, establishes fragile bonds with some students, although the story concludes in a profoundly desolate tone.

1. Initial Situation

The film begins by introducing us to Henry Barthes, a substitute teacher who arrives at a public school with serious social and educational problems. The situation shows a chaotic environment, with unmotivated students, exhausted teachers and problems both in the school and in the personal lives of the characters. Henry appears as a distant and emotionally indifferent man.

2. Conflict

The central conflict is both external and internal:

- External: Henry faces the difficult reality of a severely troubled school, where he tries to connect with and teach students who seem indifferent or rebellious. In addition, the school has conflicts with administration, troubled students, and lack of support.
- Internal: Henry struggles with his own emotional detachment, pain from his past, lack of meaning and inability to form attachments, which affects his personal and professional life.

3. Development

During the story, several key relationships develop:

- Henry bonds with several troubled students, attempting to help them despite his own inability to become emotionally involved.
- Also present is his relationship with his grandfather, with a co-worker and friend, and with a young prostitute with whom he shares important moments.
- Through these interactions, we see how Henry begins to question his detachment and confront his past and his emotions.
- Moments of failure and frustration are evident, but also of small victories and human connections.

4. Resolution

The film does not offer a completely closed or happy resolution, in keeping with its realistic and melancholy tone:

- Henry remains a person scarred by his past, but he begins to open up to the possibility of human contact and empathy.
- Although the environment does not radically improve, he accepts his role and his humanity, leaving open the hope of personal change.
- The narrative ends on a reflective note, showing that the struggle continues but that there is a glimmer of inner transformation.

The Actantial Model and Narrative Programs

In this nucleus, a review of the axiological level of the text is carried out, understanding this as the valuational dimension that guides the actions of the characters, in accordance with the semiotic theory of Greimas (1993). In this way, attention is paid to the establishment of narrative programs, understood as sequences of actions oriented towards the attainment of a value object, whose realization allows us to interpret the dynamics of meaning, the

actantial roles and the fundamental oppositions that articulate the narrative universe. This approach allows not only a formal understanding of the story, but also a deep reading of the ethical and symbolic tensions that run through it.

Greimas (1993) proposes a model of semiotic analysis that begins by distinguishing levels: from the superficial to the deep, in the text. He divides the text into two planes: that of manifestation (superficial level) and that of immanence (deep level). In the present study, we work only on the superficial level. The analysis starts from the textual level of the story to locate the actors who are the characters of the story. In addition to the actor-subjects, there are actor-objects that establish a subject-object relationship and constitute the story as a search of the former for the latter.

In the story the subject seeks the acquisition or preservation of an object. If the subject (S) lacks an object (O) the subject is said to be in a disjunctive state (U); if the subject acquires or conserves the object throughout the narrative; then, it is in a conjunctive state (\cap). The narrative is constituted as the passage from one state to another. Each loss or acquisition is called a narrative program (NP); specifically, when a transformation occurs. In addition to the subject, a narrative also involves antisubjects (adversaries or opponents) and Adjuvants. Greimas' (1993) actantial theory organizes the narrative through six actantial roles:

1. Subject: the one who undertakes the quest.
2. Object: what is sought or desired to be achieved.
3. Addressee: what motivates the subject.
4. Addressee: the one who receives the benefit of the object.
5. Helper: that which helps the subject to reach the object.
6. Opponent: that which hinders the subject.

In symbolic terms, actantial roles not only represent individuals, but also value-laden narrative functions, so the actantial model provides tools to understand how filmic texts construct meaning from deep structures, by mapping the functions of the characters and the symbolic values that sustain the narrative (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Comparative Actantial Model

Actantial Element	<i>Freedom Writers</i> (2007)	<i>Entre les murs</i> (2008)	<i>Detachment</i> (2011)
Subject	Marginalized students	Multicultural students	Unmotivated students
Object	Recognition, voice, self-improvement	Identity expression, integration	Sense of belonging, escape from indifference
Target	Trauma, shared history	Autobiographical writing	Social and individual suffering
Addressee	The student community and the spectator	The group, the teacher, the school	The students themselves and Henry
Adjuvant	Erin Gruwell (the teacher)	François (the teacher)	Henry Barthes (the substitute)
Opponent	Racist school system, colleagues, gangs	Culture shock, institutional incomprehension	Nihilism, institutional neglect, trauma

Source: Own elaboration

What the narrative programs show: "What do you do to make my life different?"

Teaching is a performative act insofar as it implies not only the transmission of knowledge, but also the staging of a subjectivity that challenges, moves and transforms. From this perspective, teaching becomes a transgression to the established order: it challenges hierarchies, questions crystallized knowledge and opens spaces of possibility where the new can be enunciated. From this performative dimension, the classroom becomes the stage for narrative programs: trajectories of meaning where teachers and students assume the role of subjects in search of a symbolic object -such as knowledge, emancipation or personal transformation.

The application of the actantial model in the three films allows us to observe how cinema turns the teaching of literature into a narrative with an actantial structure. The teacher - as an adjuvant figure in the Greimasian model - accompanies the students in a search for meaning, identity and agency. The analysis of the narrative programs allows us to clarify the extent to which this search is concretized or fractured in each of the films:

Freedom Writers (2007)

Narrative purpose: To have students recognize themselves as valuable subjects capable of narrating and transforming their history.

PN1 - Transformation through literature

S (Erin) v O (Liberatory education) → S ^ O

Actants:

Subject: Erin Gruwell

Purpose: To transform the classroom into a space for listening, writing, and recognition.

Addressee: The unequal education system, which challenges her and provokes her action.

Target audience: Marginalized students.

Adjuvants: The reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the personal diary as a pedagogical practice.

Opponents: Gangs, institutional racism, apathetic colleagues.

Outcome: Successful narrative program. Erin gets her students to move from disjunction to conjunction with the desired object: having a voice and a future. They publish their collective diary.

Entre les murs (2008)

Narrative object: To encourage students' individual expression in a multicultural and hostile context.

PN2 - Failed recognition

S (François) v O (Effective pedagogical communication) → S ^ O (failed).

Actants:

Subject: François Marin

Purpose: To achieve the identity expression of his students and to build intercultural dialogue.

Addressee: The French public school, the autobiographical novel that precedes it.

Addressees: His students, the school community.

Adjuvants: Proposed written self-portrait, shared reading.

Opponents: Cultural barriers, institutional rigidity, racial stigmas.

Outcome: Incomplete narrative program. Although some students speak out, the conflict escalates and culminates in Souleymane's expulsion, thwarting the ideal of conjunction.

Detachment (2011)

Narrative object: To achieve a meaningful connection with students to mitigate the affective void in the classroom.

PN3 - Anti-program.

S (Henry) ^ O (Emotional engagement) → S v O → S ^ O

Actants:

Subject: Henry Barthes

Purpose: To break through indifference and offer meaning in an environment of abandonment.

Addressee: Social suffering and his traumatic family history.

Addressees: Meredith, her students and the viewer.

Adjuvants: Moments of shared vulnerability, literary quotations.

Opponents: Broken down educational system, trauma, nihilism.

Result: Anti-program. The attempted conjunction fails, culminating in Meredith's suicide and the teacher's emotional resignation.

In the three films, the stories offer a symbolic cartography of teaching in borderline contexts. The Greimasian analysis allows us to visualize the tensions between desire and failure, mediation and resistance. In all cases, the teacher acts as an adjuvant, but the success of his program depends on the symbolic and social structure that surrounds him. Only in *Freedom Writers* (2007) does the narrative program succeed in culminating in full conjunction with the object.

Pedagogical models and teaching strategies

From the perspective of Loscertales (2004), film acts as a "pedagogical narrative" that reflects, interpellates and often transforms social discourses on education. The analysis of teachers' representations in film allows us to understand how certain pedagogical models are constructed and made visible, while traditional notions of authority, knowledge and educational ties are put under tension. In this sense, the Language and Literature teacher is a particularly significant figure, since his role is closely linked to the use of the word as a tool of thought, identity and power. Exploring his filmic representation not only allows us to review stereotypes, but also to question the values that cinema associates with the teaching of Literature and its emancipatory potential.

The analytical approach of these filmic texts, in its pedagogical dimension, is complemented with a theoretical-methodological articulation that integrates concepts coming from Freire's (1994) critical pedagogy -especially regarding the conscience of oppression, dialogue and education as a practice of freedom- and the contributions of Hooks (2021), whose work has been fundamental to think a transgressive pedagogy, crossed by the structural inequalities of gender, race and class. From these tools, the analysis seeks to unravel how these categories are inscribed in the teaching practices represented and in the

cinematographic narratives that constitute them, revealing the tensions between pedagogical agency, teacher subjectivity and power structures in the educational sphere.

Each film deploys a different pedagogical model: Gruwell embodies a Freirean pedagogy of dialogue and hope, which breaks with the banking logic of education. Marin attempts a participatory pedagogy, but without affective tools or structures of containment, which prevents him from consolidating a learning community. Barthes represents a nihilistic and defensive model, where distance becomes an emotional survival strategy. The role of the teacher in these films is not that of an omnipotent hero, but rather that of a worker traversed by conflicts, contradictions and affections. The strategies they deploy - shared reading, intimate writing, empathetic listening - reveal a situated, vulnerable and political pedagogy.

Writing and subjectivation: the diary as a pedagogical tool

In all three films, writing appears as a vehicle of subjectivation and a channel of emotional expression. In *Freedom Writers* (2007), students transform the classroom into a narrative community. Reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* and writing their own diaries empowers them and they realize that history is just beginning and that they have the power to write it. The written word articulates a space of memory, recognition and resistance.

In *Entre les murs* (2008), the exercise of self-portraiture allows students to explore their personal histories, though not without resistance. François's pedagogical practice aims to open a space for narration, but cultural and linguistic tensions prevent its full appropriation. One of his students, Souleymane, by integrating photography and storytelling, introduces new forms of expression that reveal the plurality of literacies present in the classroom, so that he elaborates a visual memory about his own life.

In *Detachment* (2011), writing is presented as anonymous testimony. Meredith's posthumous letter expresses the pain of an invisibilized young woman, where she thanks him for having tried, even though she was already gone. Here, the written word does not redeem, but it makes it possible to name the suffering and confront institutional indifference.

The teaching of literature: the literary canon

In the three films analyzed - *Freedom Writers* (LaGravenese, 2007), *Entre les murs* (Cantet, 2008) and *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) - the use of the literary canon and the practice of writing fulfill distinct pedagogical and symbolic functions, closely related to the school contexts that each one represents.

In *Freedom Writers* (2007), teacher Erin Gruwell distances herself from the official plans and resorts to testimonial texts such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Zlata's Diary*, which allow establishing empathetic connections between students -coming from contexts of structural violence and racial exclusion- and historical experiences of oppression. In addition, it introduces extracurricular materials, such as speeches by Martin Luther King Jr. and lyrics by Tupac Shakur, and promotes the writing of personal diaries as a form of subjectification and resistance. Unlike the other cases, the literary canon is re-signified here as a tool for political empowerment and social transformation, and writing becomes a practice that legitimizes silenced voices.

In *Entre les murs* (2008), the teacher François Marin sticks to the official contents of the French school system, focusing his teaching on the grammatical mastery of the language, verb conjugation and academic writing. Although texts from the canon, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, are mentioned, they do not occupy a central place in the pedagogical practice. Rather, the tension emerges when students question the relevance of school content, pointing out its lack of cultural representativeness. Writing, in this case, becomes a space of friction between linguistic normativity and the need for identity expression in a classroom marked by ethnic and social diversity.

In *Detachment* (2011), Professor Henry Barthes introduces his students to texts such as Edgar Allan Poe's "*The Raven*" and thematically alludes to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. These works are not approached from a traditional didactic perspective, but as vehicles for channeling repressed emotions and reflecting on alienation, existential emptiness and loss. The literary canon functions here as a reflection of the emotional state

of both the teacher and his students, in an environment marked by institutional indifference and the collapse of pedagogical bonds.

Overall, the analysis evidences how the filmic representations of the literature teacher configure different relationships with knowledge, language and power, based on his pedagogical choices and his positioning vis-à-vis the literary canon. These choices not only inform teaching practices, but also project a critical reading of the educational system and of the structural conflicts that cross it.

Intersectionality: race, gender and class in the film classroom

The classrooms represented in these films are spaces where inequalities become visible. In *Freedom Writers* (2007), the classrooms of Woodrow Wilson High School are spaces where profound social, economic and racial inequalities are made visible. The majority of the student body belongs to marginalized ethnic minorities (Latinos, African Americans, Cambodians), who live in contexts of violence, poverty and exclusion. These realities are reflected in the classroom, where intergroup conflict, mistrust of authority figures and lack of educational expectations are evidence of a clear breakdown of the social fabric.

Professor Erin Gruwell proposes a dialogic education by breaking with the traditional, authoritarian approach to teaching. Instead of imposing content, she creates a space of active listening and respect, where each student can share their life story through personal journals inspired by the book *The Diary of Anne Frank*. In doing so, it allows them to see themselves reflected in the experiences of other oppressed people and to understand their own experiences within a larger structure of domination.

This dialogic approach denaturalizes power relations, as it does not impose a truth from above, but rather builds knowledge collectively from the experiences of the students. Thus, the classroom becomes a space of conscientization and transformation, as proposed by Freire (1994), where students not only learn to read and write, but also to question their reality, develop empathy and become aware of their dignity and capacity for change.

Hooks' (2021) intersectional approach makes it possible to visualize how gender, race and class cross both school dynamics and the identities of teachers and students, problematizing the supposed neutrality of knowledge and underscoring the need for teaching that recognizes the multiple oppressions that coexist in the classroom. For example, in *Freedom Writers* (2007), the figure of the white teacher who saves racialized students reproduces a narrative of educational messianism that hooks (2021) warns as problematic: "There is no critical pedagogy without an awareness of the affective asymmetries that structural racism produces" (p. 67). However, the film also qualifies this representation by showing the institutional isolation of the teacher, which allows for a more complex reading of her role within an unequal school structure.

In *Entre les murs* (2008), François Marin imposes discursive norms typical of the dominant school habitus, generating friction with students from subaltern cultures. Bourdieu (1997) points out that "the school demands symbolic violence when it ignores the cultural capital of the dominated" (p. 85). The conflict with Souleymane exemplifies these clashes of legitimacy and belonging.

Finally, *Detachment* (2011) offers a fragmentary look at intersectionality, prioritizing the teacher's experience over that of his students. Nevertheless, the racial and social diversity of the characters reveals an undercurrent of structural exclusion that the film depicts starkly.

Conclusions

This study set out to analyze the representation of the Language and Literature teacher in three contemporary films -*Freedom Writers* (2007), *Entre les murs* (2008) and *Detachment* (2011)- set in school contexts traversed by social marginalization. The analysis was based on an interdisciplinary approach that combined tools from filmic sociocriticism (Casetti and Di Chio, 1991), especially through the analysis of the *incipit* as an instance of symbolic condensation and anticipation of the conflict; the structural semiotics of Greimas (1993), through the application of the actantial model and narrative programs; and conceptual

contributions from the critical pedagogy of Freire (1994), the intersectional theory of Hooks (2021) and the sociocultural perspective of Bourdieu (1997).

These tools made it possible to identify how film constructs the teacher as a liminal and politicized figure, whose pedagogical work involves not only the transmission of knowledge, but also a dispute over language, representation and subjectivity. The narrative analysis revealed distinct trajectories of the teaching subjects: from the emancipatory pedagogy of Erin Gruwell, to the silent despair of Henry Barthes, to the conflictive and ambiguous mediation of François Marin. In each case, classrooms are configured as symbolically dense spaces, where pedagogical bonds crystallize or erode.

Writing and the literary canon, far from being decorative elements, act as tools of subjectivation, resistance or distancing, depending on the approach of the teacher and the sociocultural conditions of the environment. The classroom, as a filmic space, operates as an emotional thermometer where both the possibilities of educational transformation and its structural limits are projected. In short, the approach proposed in this paper shows that film not only represents teaching, but also questions, performative and problematizes it, becoming a fertile field for critical reflection on teaching, the symbolic power of language and the place of the teacher in societies marked by inequality and uncertainty.

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