

Literature and Memory, Presence and Absence in Vergílio Ferreira and Malraux

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ABSTRACT

Vergílio Ferreira's memory issue runs through his literary production and establishes aesthetic and literary connections and intersections. On the one hand, its dialogue with Malraux, Existentialism and Nouveau Roman techniques is undeniable. On the other hand, we can recognize an approximation of writing to cinematographic techniques, as shown by certain segments of his novels that seem to have correspondence in cinema. This dialogue also took place in Malraux and in the Nouveau Roman movement which established clear technical affinities and reciprocal influences with cinema. The matrix of Malraux is fully assumed by Vergílio Ferreira and several critics have pointed reasons for this connection.

KEYWORDS: *Vergílio Ferreira, Malraux, Memory, Existentialism, narrative techniques*

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INTRODUCTION

In Vergílio Ferreira, a dialectic is established between presence and absence, in which the value of memory is essential. This value works the systemic relationship between the Present and the Past (and even with the Future), oscillating the writing between these different poles, beyond the obsession of the fact or the person who belongs to the Present to metamorphose in Space and Time. (and beyond them), never ceasing to be seen from the subjectification of the subject (1985, p. 49).

The use of flashback by filmmakers such as Bergman (Betton, 1987; Beylie, 1997), (which Vergílio Ferreira pointed out as the ideal director for adapting Final Canticule), combines the trip to the past with the present narrative, in a game where Memory is coordinated with spatial oscillation, and is a recurring strategy in Vergílio Ferreira.

In the writer, memory is a faculty that orders the Past, in a moment of true sacredness, because it purifies the universe of memories, fading its links with a perfectly delimited Space and Time and creating a bridge of overlap between all these elements.

LITERATURE AND MEMORY

Flashback and editing strategies, often revealed in the text through the use of italics (as happens in Final Canticule), are processes that cinematic techniques have developed and refined. In Night's Call, an inner monologue is instituted that

corresponds to the filmic use of an off voice. On the other hand, the text shows the coexistence of two types of discourse (one of them fully highlighted by italics), showing a dual temporality, a strategy of montage that cinema has so often enshrined. This dual temporality strategy is fully identified early in the novel:

On a dark November night, a large black car drove quietly into the village of X... In front of him, the man behind the wheel and another individual locked in raincoats. Behind, no one.

- Go right. Turn left. It was a July afternoon, in anguished heat, a young man had come to Evora station. Little people had left the train, the sleeping station had shuddered slightly. (Torres, 1995, p. 507)

Often, the narrator travels between Past and Present, in an oscillation that results in a confluence of blurred boundaries, united by the veil of unifying consciousness, which maneuvers the threads of Space and Time, in a torrent of information always modified by his point of view. subjective and ubiquitous that models everything, including the memory of the characters:

It was a choice of yore - Coimbra, how many years ago? Old city "fantastic", when? How far away from the years, but from my affliction! City of youth, city of myth. It was time for the threat of war, old bloodthirsty hatreds, and

the fever of the new and definitive creation of the world. Long nights of readings, discussions, magazines, clandestine newspapers, clandestine books, O illegal emotion! The quiet artists loomed at the window of their tower, disturbed by noise and deed. A clang of epic and protest swelled in their hearts. Gabriel, Fernando Aires, Decio Ramos, Rodrigues - where? Poor Rodrigues... He had planted his life in the dream, the dream had rotted away. Everything went through him so fast... I wanted the dream to last. Holding on to the lost moment - new generations came, left, it still remained. A suicide bullet consecrated him finally young forever.

Now the rain was slowing down, in the barren breeze of the streets was a rumor of travel, the echo of the loneliness of a night beach. But suddenly the man shuddered. Nearby, the latch of a door had snapped, and soon after a night owl would stop at the threshold, probing the night, orienting itself. '(1988, p. 24)

This permanent confluence of perspectives reiterates the value of memory and flashback. With regard to Signal Sign, we note the fusion that is established between the present narrative, the recent past and the past, giving rise to a juxtaposed narrative, which indicates, as we have been saying, an influence of a strategy of montage inspired by the cinema. The past, the object of narration, is brought to the present through flashback, in a premeditated resolution to construct a metaphysical dimension, which recalls the similar effect achieved by Proust, as noted by Julius (1982, pp. 159 - 160). The search for the past coincides with the demand for essentiality, not with the nostalgic encounter, since in the origin it finds the beginning of the present and the future, while it is particularly concerned with the present because it is essential for the affirmation of man. The narrator sees the memory of childhood erupt in the present ("And suddenly, childhood of never, intimate substance of my being. Autumn came slowly, the sun faded into the washed blue, subtly poo in things" (1990, p. 45), interpenetrating the present, blurring the boundaries between the times, creating a vivid and transcendent consciousness in time. We note the existence of coordinates in these flash-back processes. Past and present:

The earthquake struck - was it nine in the morning? I had gone to the square, looking for James, a dyer in the factory. And suddenly. Glancing around, everything was transfigured. The sky darkened a little, a rosy glow circling the horizon. And then, to the warning of the mystery. It was an infernal roar of animals. The chickens, the dogs. The panicking bray of a donkey, neighing through the streets, across the fields. Then, in the cavernous of the earth, a thick roll swelling. It grew to the surface, we heard it. Until suddenly everything fluctuated. The floor floats under my feet, an inner imbalance of me. I hold on to the pillory - a vertigo? I squint at hallucination. I understand finally, I open them dilated with dread. (1990, p. 40)

Episodes such as the new wine (ch. VI), the slaughter of the pig (ch. XI), the death of Peter (ch. XIV), the cake (chs. XIX and XX) and the promise of Corica (ch. XXXI) they mark regressions / presentifications of a past that marked the narrator and which he remembers with deep intensity. On

the other hand, it should be noted that these temporal journeys become consistent and consolidated by a narrator who organizes the whole narrative, bringing together elements of different levels.

We find the narrator, on the beach, remembering the past, but also referring to those who intend to rebuild the village, in a future plan, combining different plans, centralizing them in themselves. Another episode that the narrator builds in different levels of memory is related to the death of the father, a moment revisited in temporal interpenetrations:

And when I get home, my father dies. Returning to the village of the capital, the telegram was explicit: "your father is dying". My mother wouldn't say it if she wasn't. I was going to do exams, I drop everything, I arrive at night, the house full of people. Women in black prayed, the priest had brought my father the unction. He is in bed, breathes the last breath, occasionally screams, nonsense. (...) It was July, clear night of stars. In front of them in the yard, someone was lighting up the potato water from the new corn. It was in July, it was hot. ... He shouted far away, over the whole village, the orders would come to their destination. Old dad. But his father, I didn't know him. By dawn in the winter, he made braces, looms at the foot of the bridge, rode across the villages to the end of the world. ... Now all that remained was for my brother to marry, have children, be a man of respect. (...) But then, it is not known how, Eduardo stopped appearing with the girl. ... Shortly thereafter, it was winter, and in the evening James broke us through the shouting house... My brother had hanged himself from a woolen rope. My God. I should cringe with bitterness. In the hidden mystery of the sign that marked us. I should - what should you owe? Silence. We were three brothers. The Magda, the Eduardo. And I. And when I get home, my father is dying. (1990, pp. 25-31)

In Vergilian romanesque production, we can even identify two distinct uses of flashback: until Brief Joy, this feature is used methodically with sharp boundaries; After this novel, the boundaries between different times and different spaces blur.

Initially, Vergílio Ferreira prefers a vision of the world with order and a narration according to a temporal linearity that shows us the facts in a chained way, being the flashback an instrument at the service of this narrative strategy, because it frames and delimits each event. After Brief Joy, there is an increasingly clear trend towards the interpenetration of times and spaces, creating a fusion between past, present and future, existing as an internal experience of the narrator, as we can see in the step we took from Sign Signal.

Thus, we can outline in Vergílio Ferreira a set of instrumental similarities with the filmic universe, as happened with Malraux. In line with the Vergilian case, let us remember that several authors had already identified in Malraux, among other aspects, the effects of film editing. It seems clear that there is a connection between Eisenstein's model of attraction montage and the conflicting writing technique that the writer used in L'Espoir, especially in the antitheses he created between characters, the spatiotemporal categories and the discursive construction (1999, p. 196).

Malraux becomes an example of the conjugation between literature and cinema. On the one hand, he becomes a creator of the written text and the filmic text, on the other he can rehearse narrative approaches between both. In this approach, a concern is revealed insistently: the inner analysis of consciousness and thought. Regarding this vector, Malraux does not hesitate - like Vergílio Ferreira - to defend the privileges of the novel, especially when he states that the novelist apparently retains an advantage over the film: the possibility of penetrating inside the characters (1977).

Malraux's cinematic experience boils down to just the movie we have already mentioned. This data is manifestly insufficient to unequivocally demonstrate the intersthetic contamination between literary production and the author's filmic production. Some critics saw in Malraux's writing an influence of cinema that would materialize in elliptical style, visual images and narrative rhythm, but others contradict this view, as is the case with Denis Marion (1996, p. 7) which reflected from systematic way about the writer's foray into the universe of seventh art.

The assimilation of cinematic techniques by Malraux's novel may prove to be a mere illusion. Even though, until 1938 (when he received the consent of the republican government to film the Spanish civil war), the writer had no knowledge of cinematic techniques, Denis Marion chooses to value the author's interest in cinema. During the Nazi occupation, Malraux writes a script about an adventurer in Indochina; when he became minister in 1959, he made efforts to increase French film production; and, in 1968, interested people began to adapt *La Condition humaine*, a project that would be abandoned the following year.

The writer is nonetheless interested in the narrative capabilities of cinema - such as Vergílio Ferreira - and understands that the camera has the ability to transform a human face and not just photograph it. The camera can act as a witness of a privileged nature, creating imaginary worlds fed by our interior. Montage is, after all, a powerful narrative medium that introduces innovations in diegesis beyond the first exercise of image capture. Interestingly, Malraux is initially interested in the seventh art due to its proximity to the fine arts, and in particular to painting - new resemblance to Vergílio Ferreira - for its ability to create myths.

It thus seems difficult to demonstrate the thesis of the cinematic influence on Malraux's writing. Despite these contacts, a visually focused set of pages by the writer only seems to constitute one of the novel's traditional techniques: the alternation between description and narration.

Now the matrix of Malraux is fully assumed by Vergílio Ferreira and several critics have pointed reasons for approximation. Gavilanes Laso recalls that a trait that unifies the works of Dostoyevsky, Melville, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Malraux and Camus is a thirst for infinity, of a radical absolute, as happens, for example, in *Appeal of the Night*, with the character Adriano, who systematically questions human existence: "What sustains man to stand in dignity? In whose face are you worthy? Which judges will I be humbled in if my life has no meaning? I will die one day, you will all die one day. And even if you did not die, your justice would die. What a strange force this is from an ephemeral life thrown into the absolute! Because the

absolute of all this is that of a cloud that has passed for millennia under an indifferent sky.. (1989, p. 87)

In this novel, Sartre and Malraux's proposals emerge clearly as the subject of analysis, and such a connection arouses the identification of an affinity between the aforementioned novel and *L'Espoir*, as to the thought / action dilemma as Carmo writes (1971, p. 182-190). Vergílio Ferreira himself also referred to Malraux's influence, and we could point to the novels *Apparition* and *Final Canticle* as two explicit examples of this legacy.

Another relevant element to evaluate the interconnection between Malraux, Existentialism, and Vergílio Ferreira brings us to a common concept in both cinema and literature, which presents itself as a stream of consciousness. Originally from Psychology, this concept was applied in the nineteenth-century novel, but it was only with Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and William Faulkner that it was definitively structured. There was thus an interest in the different levels of consciousness to be portrayed in a novel, often translated by the ubiquity of the inner monologue, which in cinema derived to voice-over narration, the subjective chamber, and the juxtaposition of planes.

In fact, a set of explicit relations between Existentialism and the cinema is known. First, the influence novelists such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James Cain had on postwar existentialist philosophers, and in particular on Sartre's work. From this link between the American "black romance" and Existentialism, we highlight characteristics such as the worldview as unintelligible, the meaninglessness of life and the universe, and the inversion of values, which lead to the birth of a New character: the antihero. This heritage will be worked on by the Nouvelle Vague filmmakers, with particular emphasis on Jean-Luc Godard and the disciples of the Cahiers du Cinéma, continuers of the American "black cinema" line. Films such as Souffle's *À Bout* or Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* illustrate these thematic strands, cultivating to hyperbole the reflective inner character in spiritual convulsion in a degeneracy of values leading to deep selfishness. However, if the films gained in philosophical depth, they seemed to lose in aesthetic dimension, as Kawin writes (1982, p. 5).

CONCLUSION

Literature and Memory in Vergílio Ferreira and Malraux (in novels and films) is a problematic that raises innumerable questions that lead us to the specifics of the mark of consciousness in the work of art. It does not seem possible to transmit a conscious cosmos from a writer to a film product, naturally filtered by another conscious cosmos, that of the director. On the other hand, even if there is a deliberate desire to bring this written cosmos to the screen, there are problems inherent in the film's unique texture that induce a cognitive bounce that makes us think of the very essence of reflexivity. A reflective text acts as face to face mirrors, with the world reflected upon itself, creating a paradoxical effect on the reader. At this point, a clear connection between literature and cinema is the attempt to use the inner monologue of the written text and turn it into voice-over, as can be inferred from Chatman's appreciation for the technical ease of this transformation. But this process is neither linear nor trouble-free, as proved by the *Final*

Canticle and Submerged Morning adaptations. Now the existentialist novel reflects precisely this preponderance of the "I" in the narrative web that no longer identifies with traditional models, thus leading to their repudiation, as Vergílio Ferreira did.

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