

Literature and the Word Metamorphosis: Vergílio Ferreira and the Adaptations of His Novels

Cardoso, L

Department of Languages and Communication Studies, Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre,
Centre of Comparative Studies – University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Vergílio Ferreira's literary production aroused the interest of several filmmakers who wanted to adapt their novels to the cinema. Despite an initial reluctance, Vergílio Ferreira accepted and felt involved in the adaptations of the novels *Cântico Final* and *Manhã Submersa*. However, adapting Vergílio Ferreira's writing proves to be a complex work because of the difficulties raised by the philosophical and aesthetic style of the author that do not favor an immediate translation into the cinema, so this whole process constitutes a true metamorphosis of the word.

KEYWORDS: Portuguese Literature, Vergílio Ferreira, novel, film adaptation

How to cite this paper: Cardoso, L
"Literature and the Word Metamorphosis:
Vergílio Ferreira and the Adaptations of
His Novels"
Published in
International Journal
of Trend in Scientific
Research
and
Development (ijtsrd),
ISSN: 2456-6470,
Volume-4 | Issue-1,
December 2019, pp.793-797, URL:
www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd29679.pdf



IJTSRD29679

Copyright © 2019 by author(s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)



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). One of the most pertinent connections between literature and cinema that we can find in Vergílio Ferreira is the set of adaptations of his books to the screen.

Relegating the unfinished adaptation projects to the background, we chose the two literary texts that met with a metamorphosis of the letter to the image.

The main problem in this field of reflection is the transmutation of the metaphysical and ideological maze into which the word Vergilian is inserted in the written text, into the aesthetic, narrative and ideological maze of cinema that interprets the original text and tries to translate it through the image.

Thus, the directors Manuel Guimarães and Lauro António felt the specific difficulty of the Vergilian text to be transfigured to the plane of images due, above all, to the spherical dimension of the reading process that comes from the philosophical and reflective nature of the text, between

immanence and transcendence, between the empirical world and the inner cosmos of the thinking subject. In this plan, the filmmakers faced the maze of options that an adaptation entails.

We intend to consider the options of Manuel Guimarães and Lauro António, evaluating the narrative construction in the film and the dimension of referentiality concerning the written text, always respecting a coordinate that we have invoked many times: book and film are aesthetic objects that are worth per se. According to this premise, the book is only the point of departure and the film the point of arrival. We will evaluate the criterion that the filmmakers chose to carry out the transmutation process: fidelity. Thus, with this work, we wish to evaluate the narrative, aesthetic and ideological options of the filmmakers in the construction of their filmic texts. With our text, we investigated the building of the film and its relations with the source and, in this sense, we will not characterize the novels as a hermetic object, but rather as the genesis for the hypertext, because the novels in question have already deserved numerous studies. strictly literary nature. We will use the concept of fidelity with the meaning the filmmakers had in mind: respect for the author, respect for the original text, searching for image equivalents for the word of the novel.

FROM LITERATURE TO CINEMA

In the case of *Cântico Final*, the first Vergilian novel to be transposed to the screen, we find that Manuel Guimarães

deliberately opted for an adaptation that followed the "letter" of the text. José de Matos-Cruz synthesizes the narrative fabric of the film with the following words: «Mário Gonçalves, a high school teacher threatened with death due to cancer, spends his last life in the village where he was born, in Serra da Estrela. There, he expresses his talent as a painter in the intimate decoration of an abandoned chapel. This is also the twilight time of unsubmitive memories: love and precariousness, options and contingency, perennial dissatisfaction... "(1999, p. 160)

This is our view that the director used Vergílio Ferreira's text in such a literal way that it illustrates the absence of virtues in extreme loyalty. The director tried to feed his script with excerpts of the novel, forgetting that a movie is not an illustration of the text. Thus many situations were created in the film of a strange and almost caricatural "theatricality" in the performance of the characters, "cut out" of the Vergilian novel without proper semiotic transfiguration. This is an excellent example of a loyalty that has failed by its exacerbated nature, showing the validity of Gimferrer's following judgment: "... the story of the cinematic adaptations of famous novels offers an eloquent master of sterile allegiances..." (2000, p. 67)

Manuel Guimarães intended ab initio to be close to Vergílio Ferreira. The writer, enthusiastic about the project, did not curb his interest and actively participated throughout the process (in fact, a similar link between director and writer would later take place in *Submerged Morning*). According to the writer, the only condition that placed on Manuel Guimarães was the maintenance of the "spirit" of the work (1975, p. 243). The final product turns out to be far from the novel if we equate aesthetic merits of the two works. Although Vergílio Ferreira was clearly benevolent in his appreciation of the Guimarães film (he still felt the flattery of a novel of his being chosen for a film adaptation), he nevertheless pointed to less happy marks of this transposition, from the choice of actors to narrative architecture (spatial options, construction of dialogues - in which the writer still operated some transformations - temporal options). Regarding these divergences, Teresa Maria Gonçalves recalls that the proposal that was made about the adaptation of her novel focused on the circumscription of the film in the painter's immediate life and its difficulties of realization, locating a utilitarian society and focusing on the social dimension of the book. In fact, the revolution of 1974 had not left the director indifferent, as indeed seen in the inflection that he introduces at the end of the film, in the shooting scene.

Cântico Final would reveal, once again, that an adaptation is always a reading. Notwithstanding the wishes of Guimarães and Vergílio Ferreira to create a film faithful to the novel, the procedures of Dórdio Guimarães' filming and subsequent editing gave rise to a "vision" of the original text. An adaptation, even if marked by an explicit fidelity to the semantic essence of the original text, always implies a transfiguration, perpetrated in an exercise of aesthetic recreation, from which we cannot separate the respective epochal implications, that is, a cross between lines of the matrix text of social and historical movements, psychological and cultural contexts, and formal procedures (Sousa, 2003, p. 26). This influence of the historical context clearly conditions the director's options, especially the outcome of the film, which is absolutely different from the novel.

In the case of Vergílio Ferreira's novels that were transposed to the screen, it is important to choose the situations of divergence that the filmic texts illustrate, in order to find a distinctive ideological reading.

We have established an analysis between what Genette termed 'hypotext' (text A) and 'hypertext' (text B), without Damocles' explicit and eternal sword of fidelity hanging over comparative studies between a book and a film, because they denote a curtailing view that considers the cinematographic work a mere 'translation' or a 'transference', once again highlighting the subordination of the filmic text to the writing. Thus, we seek the marks of aesthetic, narrative and ideological dialogue and the capacity for (re) creation of the filmic text.

The dialogue begins with the title of the works. Guimarães maintains the same title of the novel and deliberately establishes a connection that translates into the narrative matrix of the film, with various similarities with the Vergilian text. In the movie we find a final journey of a painter returning to his home village to find the physical end, already close due to his terminal illness. But this ending will coincide with one last effort of aesthetic creation, the painting of a chapel, which truly constitutes a "religious" statement, a final song. This diegetic thread reproduces the main narrative vector of the novel and perspective the director's options in the adaptation process.

The choice of the same title intensifies the semiotic ties between romance and film. In Vergílio Ferreira, the title of the novel is not just a choice but a symbol of the book's essence, a reflection of its deeper meaningful axis. A title is a reading orientation with semantic and pragmatic consequences, directing the decoding path. In certain novels, the title may have a symbolic, metaphorical, or mythological record; in other titles we can glimpse the request for a path of interpretation that is rooted in the same title and intertwined with the diegese, as Carlos Reis and Ana Cristina Lopes (1997, p. 397) write, as happens in *Cântico Final* and *Manhã Submersa*.

The writer himself confesses that the choice of a title is the result of a thorough work of selection and semantic relevance: «A title should already be as much of itself as possible, a work of art. I make an effort for it. Hence I pursue a title much longer than Flaubert is said to pursue an adjective. Hence, in my titles there is a "history" or evolution, from the phrase-titles to the Giono (or the way of the Brazilian Érico Veríssimo) to the variety they have had and I will not story. But it is good to consider that titles in general have a history in literary history... ', as Perfecto-E writes. Square (1989, p. 12).

Fifteen years separate the novel and the movie. It is a separation that also contemplates different historical and sociological coordinates. Guimarães chooses to devalue the aesthetic orientations of the novel that cross the thought of Mário and his circle of friendships, raising the political and ideological context. The film precisely reflects the atmosphere of the 1974 revolution, the most obvious allusions being the scenes in which Mário and his friends debate ideological guidelines, and the outcome of the film, with the introduction of the scene of the shooting of prisoners by PIDE agents, about which Guimarães did not

inform Vergílio Ferreira, giving rise to a negative criticism from the writer.

Despite the similarity between book and film reflected in the choice of the title by the Portuguese director, the differences are many. On the one hand, we are evaluating a book and a movie, two works, two realities, with the same title but with different identities. In the dissimilarity, we find that they are artistic products of different art forms, as well as projects that reflect two personalities and two authors, as Perfecto-E says. Square (1989, p. 11).

Throughout the book-film comparison exercise, it is not enough to look for signs of fidelity or filmic equivalents for the text. These two criteria, in addition to working instruments that are difficult to characterize, slip into an analysis that establishes a dependency between the two texts. And as Lauro António suggests, comparative analysis without imposition is the one that is most faithful to the creative process itself, as we view the film as re-creation through a new language and a new context of production. In short: «Because the film is a work that begins and ends in itself, ending it completely» (Perfecto-E. Cuadrado, 1989, p. 230).

According to these assumptions, we can only understand the film if we start by analyzing the reasons that led Guimarães and choosing Vergílio Ferreira's novel.

Manuel Guimarães chooses Vergílio Ferreira's novel as a strategy to obtain aesthetic and social recognition, in a context of the time dominated by the difficulties of affirmation of a Portuguese cinema totally dependent on state support. In 1974, the Portuguese Film Institute, which existed under the Ministry of Information and Tourism, was the only guarantee for the viability of a film project. Only the figures grateful to the regime and ideas without political or social protagonism received the necessary financial support for its materialization.

Guimarães had an aesthetic path with very evident social characteristics. From *Saltimbancos* (1951), *Nazaré* (1953) and *Vidas sem um* (1956), the director had chosen the social theme as leitmotiv for his narratives, following the main coordinates of Neo-Realism, in an effort of ideological purification and adaptation to the Portuguese reality. The director was also influenced by the Soviet tradition of the 1920s, Eisenstein and Pudovkine, the American cinema of Griffith and Ford, the German realism of Pabst and May, and the poetic realism of Prévert and Carné. His social orientation had earned him the Censorship intervention that cut back on his production at the time, the most striking case being the elimination of more than 50% of his film *Lives Away*.

Apart from this social influence of Neo-Realist inspiration, Manuel Guimarães recognizes his interest in literature. Many of his films reflect the inspiration in literary texts of explicit social background: *Saltimbancos* is the adaptation of a text by Leão Penedo; *Alves Redol* writes the argument for *Nazaré* and the dialogues for *Vidas Sem Rumo*; *O Crime da Aldeia Velha* (1964) is an adaptation of the homonymous work of Bernardo Santareno; *O Trigo e o Joio* (1965) is based on the work of Fernando Namora; *Sold Out* (1971) reflects the work with Mario Braga (who developed an idea by Artur Semedo).

Combining their interest in neo-realist social themes, the influences of filmmakers who took to the screen social problems or who used a realistic record, and the relief of literary inspiration in many of their films, we uncovered three major vectors that drive Guimarães until Vergílio Ferreira. In the writer's work, the director would find social themes (mainly in the neorealist phase), a literary support for the film and a recognition for working a text by a well-known author. Depois de várias tentativas para realizar um filme sem ceder em absoluto às obrigações impostas pelo Instituto Português de Cinema, trabalhar um texto de Vergílio Ferreira constituía um projecto de resistência artística e pessoal. A escolha de *Cântico Final* é justificada por Lauro António, que equaciona o trajecto neo-realista de Guimarães e a dimensão existencialista do romance, e encontra uma motivação particular: «Para um cineasta combativo, de tradição neo-realista, este *Cântico Final* poderia surgir como uma viragem algo existencial na sua trajectória. Mas a verdade é que o romance foi progressivamente agarrando Manuel Guimarães (que a princípio se mostrava mais inclinado para adaptar uma outra obra de Vergílio Ferreira, *Alegria Breve*). Cremos que foi sobretudo a luta de Mário Gonçalves pela capela que foi lentamente prendendo Manuel Guimarães ao seu filme. Trajecto paralelo, se viria depois a saber. Trágico prenúncio, lamentamo-lo agora» (Perfecto-E. Cuadrado 1989, p. 233)).

When the director is already shooting in Serra da Estrela, the April Revolution comes. On the one hand, he feels that he can finally devote himself to a free cinema, centered on the values he believed in, but on the other, the identification with Mario of the Vergilian novel grows ever deeper. He prefers to leave his most prominent ideals for another project and continues to play *Final Song* (but nevertheless includes the aforementioned firing scene in the epilogue).

The choice of this novel by Vergílio Ferreira was not only due to the identification with Mario or the factors that we have already mentioned. *Final Song* evidences cinematographic influences that can also be found in other texts of yours. A construction that uses flashbacks, past returns, associations of ideas, the combination of space and time within the central character are fully noticeable marks. Recall the beginning of the work, which crosses Mario's return to his village and the memory of his teaching career, between the narrator's words and the protagonist's experiences, a parallelism illustrated by the two ways in which the text was written: «For a brief December morning, a man drove up a mountain road. Thin, linear morning. The man stopped a little while the engine cooled, and looked around wearily. Here I am. Returned from everything. (...) After graduation, he had entered a Lisbon high school as a drawing teacher. "Small" profession, with something small, pitiful.» (1975, p. 9 - 10)

These facets, which we have already mentioned, also reflect the value of the past in the construction of neorealist characters, the combination of ideas and the intersection of times and spaces of the Nouveau Roman. Like Lauro António, we think that Vergílio Ferreira translates into *Cântico Final* an intersection of literary and cinematic influences.

In order to understand the heart of the novel and the main problem in its filmic transposition, we must devote ourselves to Mario and the representation in this character of the (meta) physical status of Art.

We will highlight the character Mario - as we will do with António Lopes - because the other characters and all categories of the narrative gravitate to this one, which is yet another archetypal Vergilian main character. In fact, understanding Mario or Antonio, or any other hero of the writer, results simultaneously in understanding the Vergilian "archipersonagem", because it is usually the one that runs through the narrative, highlighting the maturation or evolution of a path, translating and exemplifying the writer's thinking, as Helder Godinho writes (1989, p. II).

This centrality of the main character in the Vergilian romanesque process is also noted by Eduardo Lourenço when he highlights, for example, in *Apelo da Noite*, Adriano's profile as hero-author, representation of the constant interrogation, inserting this drawing of the protagonist in the wider field of One of the influences suffered by the writer: "this universal presence of the author's voice is the opposite expression of the dissolution of the novelistic character itself, in short, an equivalent, albeit still full of contradictions, of the basic tendency of the European novel which in conscious form - perhaps too much - it spilled into what is called a "new novel" "(1994, p. 95).

Basically, when we analyze Mario or Antonio, we discover the web of relationships between all the elements of the novel, internal and external, from the narrative categories to the thoughts that gave rise to the book, in a creative symbiosis that crystallizes. To use Eduardo Lourenço's words, "The ideas of a novelist are his characters..." (1994, p. 97), so they translate his inner universe, the pillars of his consciousness and the turmoil of his inner maze. At the same time, although we point out that in the creation of a novel the secondary characters cannot reflect this intimate universe because of its heterogeneous nature, nor can they be understood without being linked to an empirical and historical world, we recall that the heroes of the novel can represent facets of its author and reflections of his conscience (1988, p. 601).

Given this unquestionable importance of the protagonist in the Vergilian novel, the processes of adaptation of *Cântico Final* and *Manhã Submersa* could not be easily materialized.

Manuel Guimarães proceeded to drastically simplify the characteristics of Mario in the novel, as can be easily seen from the set of facets he decided not to explore, such as the frustration of not realizing himself as an artist, having to survive economically as a high school teacher. Abandoning this material need, the director does not explore this problem of existential duplicity, highlighting his painter aspect - projection of the director - and devaluing the social dimension of the character. Interestingly, having Guimarães a clear neo-realistic dimension in his previous productions, we would expect him to explore this theme. On the contrary, it makes the character distinctly more existential and less social. It is not integrated into a social context, having as its guidelines of thought the fight against its disease and the impossible love it dedicates to Elsa.

Another big difference lies in the diminished exploration of the aesthetic tensions that run through different moments of debate in the novel, and which only appear in the film to better explain certain behaviors or ideas of the characters. We refer to the debate between a perspective of neorealist

art and a more formal one, which cuts across many of the ideological conclave of Lisbon in the novel and which are sparse in the film, as is the case with the dialogue about atheist artists who painted chapels. Guimarães chooses to highlight this aspect only to highlight the action of Mario who paints in defiance of the gods, replacing them, leaving a perennial monument, immortal testimony of Art or, as Eduardo Lourenço states, faces of man's resistance to oblivion: « This is what Vergílio Ferreira reads for us meditating on the album in *Apparition*, in the tombstones of eternal inscriptions, in *Brief Joy* or in the painting of *Final Song* or in the *Four Seasons* of Vivaldi still in *Brief Joy*: victories, all this, over death (...) '(1994, p. 101). With regard to these options, the filmmaker's objective seems clear: to focus attention on Mario, highlighting his existentialist artistic aspect and relegating his social aspect to the background.

We understand that in any adaptation process it is always necessary to make choices because bringing a novel to the screen in its entirety would be temporally impossible, but Guimarães forgets the whole epocal context of historical and aesthetic debate that could make his film a document. However, perhaps this was precisely the desire of the director: to abandon themes close to the context of the time and to explore the timelessness of art. Moreover, forgetting this neo-realist guideline took his film away from the censorship limitations he had suffered on previous occasions and won in philosophical debate.

Manuel Guimarães leaves the Lisbon space line, the aesthetic and ideological debates, not exploring the characters that give it voice. Deliberately, he chooses the return trip to his native village, the mountain, the characters of this space, the experiences centered on it; relegates Lisbon to the time of memory, revisited in analepses, recalling the ideological debate, the show where she meets Elsa, the studio where she paints her, and the beach house where her passion lives. The past is Lisbon, coincides with Elsa and her loss; The present is in her village, coinciding with Elsa's memory and her metamorphosis in the chapel painting.

The novel is also far from its deeply intimate and introspective dimension, conveyed by the heterodiegetic voice - which the filmmaker tried to translate by the voice off - the central dimension of the novel that can only be shown in the film, ie, becomes more descriptive. because if in the book we felt Mario inside, in the movie we see Mario from outside. In fact, in the book, the writer describes Mario's view of his dead body, seeming to be written by the protagonist himself, although it is actually in the third person; Guimarães, in the film, deliberately chooses a third person narration, which transforms the diegetic essence: his work is not a movie of Mario, but a movie about Mario.

When we think of the final sequence of the shooting, we see Manuel Guimarães' aesthetic and ideological choices, different from the Vergilian matrix.

In the Vergilian novel, the situation is triggered when Matos shows Mario a magazine with pictures of a shooting. When Mario falls asleep, a dream begins. Mário imagines that he is part of a group of men who will be shot and after the shot, he finds himself on the floor, next to the other convicts. It is this narrative perspective that arouses the reader's fascination:

he is a heterodiegetic narrator, but the protagonist seems to project himself into the external narrative entity, creating an ambiguity in the voices, a symbiosis between character and narrator capable of revealing a miscegenation. psychological This closeness leads us to think that both *Cântico Final* and *Apelo da Noite*, for example, third person novels, are above all conditioned by the viewpoint of Mario and Adriano, respectively, so that the third person is just a facade of a first discourse, a narrative strategy (Seixo, 1987, p. 129).

This problem is particularly interesting when we compare this novel with *Manhã Submersa*.

CONCLUSION

After Vergílio Ferreira worked on the model of self-diegesis in António Lopes, shaping the truth and emotion of the author that are extracted from the writer's own experience, we would think that this option remained in the *Final Canticle*. The choice for heterodiegesis entails a more arbitrary relationship between mode and voice, elevates other points of view, and diversifies temporal structuring, unlike the autodiegetic model. On the other hand, both narrative options maintain the centrality of the character and the submission of the entire textual universe to their point of view. The narrator will not narrate from the outside, but will almost be absent, replacing the narrative with the description that follows from the vision of the character.

In this novel, although Mário has an undisputed axial value throughout the narrative, there is a focus that elevates other characters that are also seen from within, not as intensely as the protagonist, but proving a clearer degree. of autonomy. This type of heterodiegetic narrator will also trigger other transformations such as the fact that he becomes less ubiquitous than the autodiegetic narrator, allowing different characters to be noted in the diegesis according to the validity of their inner portrait, able to get the attention of others. who presents the narrative. On the other hand, this strategy in the treatment of the characters allows the clear identification of the author's intentions that line them with clear ideological profiles, at an intersection of description, narration and reflection. Rosa Maria Goulart clarifies this issue and notes a submission of everything narrated to the main Vergilian questions: the existential problematic and the artistic dimension of Man (1990, p. 227).

As for the Vergilian text, with a strong inheritance from Malraux (Laso, 1989, p 176), we do not forget that the writer had read *Psychologie de l'Art* before 1952 and its re-foundation in *Les voix du silence - Vergílio Ferreira himself*

confirms this. A Writer Introduces himself - and in this line, Mario has a final project, an ideal of existentialist clipping, of someone who lived on a pilgrimage journey without identity and is now found in this ultimate goal that is the Chapel.

So, in conclusion, we can state that the adaptations made from Vergílio Ferreira's novels really had to deal with complex writing and ideology and the metamorphosis of the words, being the main challenge, not always were perfect, but on the other hand, we can't forget that an adaptation is a point of view and therefore independent from the basis. Considering all this, we must praise the director's efforts in this process because they accepted the challenge and created a visual lecture of the vergilian novels.

REFERENCES

- [1] Cuadrado, P. (1989) «Análisis del proceso de creación y su contexto», in *Anthropos*. Barcelona: Editorial Anthropos
- [2] Ferreira, V. (1975) *Cântico Final*, (4^a ed.). Lisboa: Arcádia
- [3] Ferreira, V. (1975) «Do livro ao filme» in *Cântico Final*. Lisboa: Arcádia
- [4] Gimferrer, P. (2000) *Cine y literatura*. Barcelona: Seix Barral
- [5] Godinho, H. (1989) «Vergílio Ferreira, hoje», in *Anthropos*, Barcelona, Editorial Anthropos
- [6] Goulart, R. (1990) *Romance lírico. O percurso de Vergílio Ferreira*. Lisboa: Bertrand
- [7] Laso, J. (1989) *Vergílio Ferreira. Espaço Metafísico e Simbólico*. Lisboa. D. Quixote
- [8] Lourenço, E. (1994) *O Canto do Signo*. Lisboa: Presença
- [9] Matos-Cruz, J. (1999) *O cais do olhar. O cinema português de longa metragem e a ficção muda*. Lisboa. Cinemateca Portuguesa
- [10] Reis, C. & Lopes, A. (1997) *Dicionário de Narratologia*. Coimbra: Almedina
- [11] Seixo, M. (1987) *Para um estudo da expressão do tempo no romance português contemporâneo*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda
- [12] Silva, V. (1988) *Teoria da Literatura*. Coimbra: Almedina
- [13] Sousa, S. (2003) *Literatura e Cinema. Ensaios, Entrevistas, Bibliografia*, Coimbra: Angelus Novus