

The Novel *Cântico Final* and the Metaphysical Value of the Art in Vergílio Ferreira: From the Novel to the Film

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ABSTRACT

In *Cântico Final*, the main character, Mário is torn between the metaphysics of art, the physical dimension of the ruined chapel, the transcendent project of painting it, in an absolute limit situation that is his return to his native village to die.

The protagonist proves to be a Vergilian instrument to demonstrate the (meta) physical nature of Art, translated into the transcendence / immanence embodied in the Chapel. In this sense, the narrator is a fundamental piece for understanding the narrative web. In this novel, he establishes an almost metaphysical proximity to the protagonist, letting him spread the author's ideals, namely the value of the work of art. While the book systematically explores the value of art and the mystery surrounding the painting of chapels by non-believing artists, the film pays little attention to it. The film is just a story of a man who painted a chapel, while the book reflects on the mission of art, in line with Malraux's thinking.

KEYWORDS: Portuguese Literature, Vergílio Ferreira, *Cântico Final*, Art

INTRODUCTION

In *Cântico Final*, the main character, Mário is torn between the metaphysics of art, the physical dimension of the ruined chapel, the transcendent project of painting it, in an absolute limit situation that is his return to his native village to die. This physical space allows the confluence of past and present, of characters and spaces, memories and desires, building a metaphysical dimension of being and creating. In the novel, Vergílio Ferreira describes Mário's (meta) physical mission, in a segment marked by the consubstantiation in the visible matter of the distinct invisible and even unspeakable inner forces:

And it was here, between the forms of time and transfiguration, that Mário discovered, most visibly, what was radiant, legendary and nocturnal in his chapel. (...) An obscure force thus arose before Mario, the anointed painter of threat, ancient, elemental force, where the permanence of mystery, spaces and silence converged, the tenacious memory of innocence and confidence, the deaf voice of the impossible and of perfection, the peace that inhabited the dream, the desolation of the abandoned hours, the illumination of grace in the moments of the miracle, the vertigo, the serenity, the taste of the end and eternal... From the two stained glass windows would radiate to the inner recollection., moons and stars blue, yellow, red, oblique stars, of irregular rays, beaded in desperate angles, iris the space of the immemorial chant of prayer,

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re-inventing the oscillation of an unreality of time. (1975, p. 209-210)

This confluence between different times is a narrative strategy that reminds us of the Nouveau Cinéma. On this issue, remember Alain Resnais's films where past and future, imaginary and real intertwine, often illustrating a filmmaker's strategy of presenting a moment in the past and how Betton writes (1987, p. 27). : '... This is how it happens in *L'année dernière à Marienbad* and in *Hiroshima, mon amour*, one of the most beautiful French films (in 1959 in Hiroshima, a martyr city, during the shooting of a film, a young Frenchwoman, Emmanuelle Riva, lives a brief and pathetic love with a Japanese, Eiji Okada. This connection reminds her of another relationship lived in Nevers during the German occupation of France) ».

THE VALUE OF THE MAIN CHARACTER

The protagonist proves to be a Vergilian instrument to demonstrate the (meta) physical nature of Art, translated into the transcendence / immanence embodied in the Chapel. In this image of Heideggerian project space, leaving the village, living in the city and purifying return to the same village, Mario does not intend to rebuild a Chapel, but to build a contemplation of the mystery that is life, in a crystallization of the Absolute that is Art. , an artistic redemption, like other painters such as Matisse, Goya, Braque, Chagal, Léger or Lurçat. This is not a religious

conversion. On the contrary, it seems a challenge to the divine when Elsa slowly emerges from the brush of Mario, a substitution of the divine for the human - a central line of the Vergilian novel - as the painter celebrates Art itself, the true Absolute and the divine by human choice. derived from the existentialist concept of "death" of God and which results in an identification of Art with the Sacred (present in Carta ao Futuro, Espaço do Invisível I and Invocação ao meu corpo).

Mario, like other Vergilian heroes, is in constant demand, sees himself as a historical agent, but with a unique dimension in relation to religion. The novel does not show an image of the desecrated man, but a return to an atmosphere of discovery and amazement at this space of the sacred, an attitude that results from the mediation of Art, the counterpoint of an existence and a world apart from a spirit of unity. primordial. Between myth, the religious and the symbolic, Art attempts to unveil the deepest and most intrinsic essence of religiosity (Laso, 1989, p. 193).

The Chapel allows a reunion with the sacred, which in the Village is confused with a conversion - an interpretation that is also mentioned in the film -, a return and a liberation, a triumph over the lurking death of the painter, a victorious "final song" of the man over the inexorable, in which Art is the agent of redemption. Man is also proudly contemplated, as is the picture of the rooster, painted by Mario, a symbol of resistance, rebellion against all limitations of life, and attachment to the continuation of that same life, for example, by Mario's desire. to have a child, an ideal denied by an Elsa who is a passing body, of a "miracle", of an instant, of an "apparition". After Elsa's disappearance, Mario decides to eternalize her. The novel becomes the scene of this dilemma between the physical and the metaphysical.

To overcome and resolve this dichotomy, Art is in Mario, the pure overcoming of physical (meta) antagonisms, because it allows, by creation, an attitude of emancipation of Man, as Laso writes:

Faced with the pure stylism of the formula of "art for art" that sees the aesthetic object as an absolute value, in Final Song, through the central character, art is configured as the essential pleasure of the human creature, as a way of updating an idea. emotion, as the only thing that allows man to transcend the limitations inherent in his condition, as the only possibility of being fully realized through creation. Through art it becomes more present, visible, and manifests itself to us, albeit sporadically but with fulminating and revealing, what is beyond our limits, is called invisible, irrational, transcendent, etc. (1989, p. 205)

In this sense, the narrator is a fundamental piece for understanding the narrative web. In this novel, he establishes an almost metaphysical proximity to the protagonist, letting him spread the author's ideals, namely the value of the work of art. That is why, when Vergílio Ferreira states, "It is in the work of art that the invisible is particularly visible" (1981, p. 16), we also foresee Manuel Guimarães's desire to film this novel in a way that reflects the (meta) physical dimension. of Art, also because he, being a painter, had within himself these same concerns.

In the film, Guimarães does not use the ambiguity between narrator and protagonist that we have in the book. The camera shows the existence of an external narrator, removed from the protagonist. While it is clear that in

cinema the usual narrative voice is external, while the options of adaptation favored this choice over the complex symbiosis we have described, the director takes his choices further into the narrative process. Returning to the scene in question, we find that the camera always follows Mario, but the perspective reveals an external narrator.

Another difference between the two narrators results from different ideological perspectives. The writer describes this scene with two aims: to put Mario before death, to analyze his reactions and to condemn all shooting in the abstract, since it is not presented in the book with details that allow his spatial identification - only temporal, with the use of a "today". Manuel Guimarães selects a well-defined context. The scene takes place in Portugal, during the Estado Novo, and denounces the persecution of PIDE to communist militants. There is no doubt whatsoever. The shootings in the film give life to freedom, the working class, and communism. This movie sequence was rewritten after April 25 and would not be possible in the previous period. It is a very distant view of the ideological choice of the novel that Mário Jorge Torres criticizes by stating: "Manuel Guimarães cannot resist, under the regime change and the end of censorship, to circumstantialise what in the novel was more densely generalizing, giving following the shootings a fragile and unnecessary (and contradictory) pamphletary character" (1995. P. 506 - 507).

Another major difference between the novel and the movie is the construction of Mario and Elsa. The impossibility of bringing all the dimensions of the two novels to the screen conditioned the adaptation, but the (im) possible dialogue between Mário and Elsa in the novel became even more difficult in the film due to the director's choices.

Although Mário is the protagonist in both narratives, his profile in both texts illustrates different conceptions. In the novel, we find Mario divided between profession and art, between Lisbon and his native village, between his ideological conceptions and those of his friends' group in Lisbon. In the film, these dichotomies fade and an axis looms to the narrative surface: Mario painter-village.

As we have already stated, the need for narrative simplification to bring the novel to the screen greatly explains the options. On the other hand, the director's projection on the protagonist helps us to understand his decisions. Finally, Guimarães's ideological choices condition the whole narrative.

The director did not take advantage of the social facets of the novel (thus avoiding confrontation with Censorship), but did not fail to introduce a clear ideological note when he altered the aforementioned sequence of shooting, in another political context.

The aesthetic and ideological path of Guimarães is nonetheless surprising. Director of a social matrix, adept at the neo-realist relationship between the artistic phenomenon and the socio-economic conditions, he did not bring to the screen this dimension of the literary text, which is already very dim compared to the early novels of Vergílio Ferreira. In fact, the progressive abandonment of social themes by the writer would deserve violent criticism from Baptista-Bastos. In The Movie and Realism, Baptista-Bastos criticizes Vergilian innovations, considering his text as close

to the caricature, far from detail, and overly centered on anguish that must be seen as a crisis, a feeling like all others. He does not hesitate to bring the writer closer to filmmaker Elia Kazan, presenting them as explicit denials of concrete reality, when they should have deepened it. This clearly neo-realist orthodox position leads him to criticize the central character, Mario, as an abstraction, far from Portuguese real time, underestimating his responsiveness and overestimating the universe of thought in a one-sided character, reducing it to a shadow.

This narrative action would bring Vergílio Ferreira de Fellini closer and move him away from the "good" examples Balzac and Visconti. That is, for Baptista-Bastos, the path that Vergílio had chosen - Existentialism over Neo Realism - is a wrong choice. (1959 and 1962)

Another option of the director was based on the relationship between Mario and Elsa. In the novel, this pair is the matrix of many of Mario's reflections on Art, the main theme of the Vergilian text. In the film, the complex relationship boils down to a loving connection, in a clear decharacterization of the ideological relief of the characters. But the director's decision merely highlights the central consequence of adaptation: aesthetic reconfiguration. The one who adapts has not only an interpretation in mind; the result will be, cumulatively, an interpretation in an exercise of aesthetic transmutation and, as Aldo Vigano notes, a filmic transposition necessarily entails a debate on the issue of creativity, as Sousa writes (2003, p. 20).

In the novel, Elsa arouses in Mario a range of problems. We do not think that is a character that is little defined in the book, as Lauro António opines. On the contrary, it is essential for Mario to define himself, and for this, it is not necessary to participate in all chapters of the novel, just as it serves as a warning in the consciousness of Mario. Elsa is a woman's ideal. Beloved woman, woman who gives herself totally to her art, woman who brings life in intensity, but above all an ideal woman.

The relationship between Mario and Elsa goes beyond the flashes of sensuality and reaches an erotic dimension that the author had already worked on in his essayistic texts and which performs a metamorphosis from the physical to the metaphysical, from the body to transcendence. Eroticism is a way of sharing with the Absolute, just as the relationship between Mario and Elsa is a contact between two expressions of that Absolute, translated into Art. The text reflects a reading of the erotic, elevated by a mystical and symbolic vein that transcends the superficial level of Eros and resizes it in a sublime way (Paiva, 1984, p. 155).

If in the novel this problematic (meta) physics stands out, in the film it is summarized by sparse contacts between Mario and Elsa, in a relationship vaguely marked by the painter's desire and thirst for infinity, while the fleeting and illusory ballerina fades into a portrait of fuzzy outlines. The writer himself had been pleased with Elsa's profile in his novel, as well as the size of the story. In the checking account, he states: "It seems to me that the dancer is a beautiful and strong character. Above all, it seems to me that "history" is a find, in its intersection of eroticism, death, art, metaphysics, in its stray with an adventure and limit."

In the film, the director tries to define Elsa as an ethereal figure. From the first sequence of the ballet, in which she appears walking around the stage in a dress that wavers according to the movements of her body in a bird and seduction measure, in which the character is never truly present. By the way, she excels precisely in the absence, provoking successive reactions in Mario: the desire to paint it that originates the relationship, the abandonment of Mario after a loving experience on a beach, the subsequent creation of Elsa by the memory of Mario until its crystallization in the painting of the Chapel. In addition, Guimarães did not use in his film one of the book's central moments, Elsa's naked dance at night on the beach, losing a symbol of the novel and Elsa's clearest contours.

In fact, Elsa is becoming a volatile presence. Whenever she was physically present in the sequences of the film, the physical translation of Beauty, Art, the timeless lightness of gesture and love of Art, a millenary movement of praise for Life and the miracle of be alive. In the movie, his physical presence slowly disappears, leaving only a deep image recorded in Mario, in memory and feeling. This process is triggered by the dancer herself. When they meet at Mario's studio, she states: «Will you know the value of the instant the miracle doesn't last? Live this miracle at the exact moment I dance. Leave no trace of me. You, the arts, the letters, still don't believe in the future. The future... I believe only in the moment that passes. But how fascinating to think that nothing will be left of all this, that I myself..."(1975, p. 293)

This idea of ephemerality is reinforced throughout the film. At the beach house, Elsa addresses Mário and explains the absolute value of the present moment and in the painter's final agony, when Guida appears, his speech summarizes the nature and essence of the dancer.

On the other hand, there is another female figure who is practically forgotten in the novel: Maria, granddaughter of Mrs. Ana. Manuel Guimarães deliberately explores this character and elevates her in the narrative plot that surrounds Mario. The director is replacing Elsa's ethereal memory with the physical presence of Maria, a concrete, material woman, whom actress Ana Helena knew how to transform into a presence. The absence - presence, or Elsa - Maria dichotomy deepens as the narrative thickens. The director thus prefers the actual materiality of Mary - the social side - over Elsa's ephemerality and its repercussions within the subject - the existentialist side.

Maria also begins by being a shy presence behind Mario. However, its materiality is secondary to Elsa's fairy dimension. Guimarães favors a woman from the village, harsh and pure, rather than a sophisticated, cosmopolitan and fickle fleeting image. This Mary, real and present, will bring the message of a distant Elsa, eventually getting even closer to Mario. Subsequently, she is the one who accompanies Mario, she is the one who stays when the ghosts stop being by her side, she is declaiming the poem of Fernando Pessoa, true epitaph of Mario and Manuel Guimarães himself.

Mary's presence is ideologically relevant. On the other hand, we remember that Ana Zanatti became ill, preventing her from recording two scenes as Guida. These were transferred to Maria, who appears at the end of the film as a physically

present woman, as opposed to the ethereal Elsa. In any case, even if it had been Guida to represent the scenes, the director's message would continue, we think, to be the same. In the novel, the relationship between Guida and Elsa is analyzed with a depth not found in the film. The deeper conscience that comes from the fact that they are sisters, that Guida loves Mario, is lost, and so she can make up for Elsa's lack of love correspondence. Guimarães turns Guida into a secondary character, and at the end of the movie it is Lady Ana's granddaughter that makes her forget, as well as Elsa. In the filmic work, Mrs. Ana's granddaughter establishes herself as the main element of connection with the work of Mario, not Guida. This presence disturbs one of the pillars of the novel, the value of loneliness, because we get the impression that Mario does not die alone, and this value, in the memory of Pascal's "on mourra seul", is lost in its transposition (Godinho, 1984), p. 436).

These changes are also analyzed by Mario Jorge Torres, who highlights the autobiographical proximity between the director and Mario, much clearer than the relationship between the character and the novelist. Emphasizing the aesthetic legitimacy of the director, he nevertheless negatively evaluates this film: "However, with the retrospective distance that time allows, Manuel Guimarães's film was neither good nor bad nor reasonable; to enter the field of value judgments, I would risk only one careful formulation: an interesting failure" (1995, p. 506).

Other critics are torn between ruled praise and sharper devaluation. Jorge Leitão Ramos does not even consider Guimarães' work as a film, but as a simple montage Guimarães had passed away and the final montage was done by his son Dorio - cataloging it as a deficient, "failed, unfit," work. unable to grasp the depths of Vergílio Ferreira's novel ». More benevolent, Luís de Pina highlights Abel Escoto's excellent photography, considering it "a personal film, generous, sore, vision of a man struggling with death, in a strange symbiosis between art and life." Moreover, he writes that "Vergílio Ferreira's existential humanism is entirely in the images, perhaps a little tarnished by the convention of the word and by a direction of actors not always happy." In fact, these less positive aspects greatly diminish the final quality of the film.

In the novel, Art assumes itself as an ideological axis. In Vergílio Ferreira, this problem feeds countless texts of his, because for the writer, it has a dimension of eternity and mystery. In the end, it is life itself and its mystery that are revealed in art, in a space of understanding and reading (s), of invisible borders, in which man is finally drawn. Art for Vergílio Ferreira is a genuine way of being alive, a connection with metaphysics through physics, or in the words of José Antunes de Sousa: "Art is itself an appeal of Transcendence, a transcendence that Vergílio includes but in the absolute of immanence, since it is its appearance...".

On the other hand, we know the gallery of Vergilian characters marked by Art (Guida, Paula and Elsa of Final Song; Alberto, Cristina in Aparição; Adalbert of Estrela Polar; Júlio of Rápida a Sombra), especially the painters (Mario, Garcia Polar Star, Daniel de Na Tua Face), perhaps a mirror of Vergílio Ferreira's own desire. Painting to be alive, as Marius states in the novel. Paint to be aware. In fact, in Cântico Final awakens, in ultimate despair, in anguish of a questioning cry at death, the problematic of the end. The Chapel becomes a metaphysical symbol that condenses

everything that man has within him in turmoil, an empty exercise of a godless liturgy, but in the awareness of the immanent experience of life - which eliminates any absolute need for transcendence - and Elsa exemplifies "a kind of ideal and imaginary transmutation of the lacerating set of problems for which, thus, in transcendent reason would be found a calming transparency, a totalizing purpose".

CONCLUSION

While the book systematically explores the value of art and the mystery surrounding the painting of chapels by non-believing artists, the film pays little attention to it. In the book, the writer explores the convergence between modern and sacred art, in a close view of expressionism that Fernando Pernes justifies: «It is that, we can say that expressionism is the possible parallel in the field of art, which we can call, in terms philosophical existentialism" (Godinho, 1989, p. 432). This coordination between literature and philosophy, in line with a literary expression of metaphysical features, becomes clear in Vergílio Ferreira and axial for the comprehension of his text. Basically, the writer also explores the dimensions of the sublime, the sacred or the incomprehensible, working on the "metaphysical qualities or essentialities of the literary work" in the expression of Roman Ingarden (1965, p. 315).

The writer's literary interrogation was not taken up by Guimarães, who also failed to bring to the film the problematic of Neo-Realism - centered discussions, which are well present in the literary text. The film is just a story of a man who painted a chapel, while the book reflects on the mission of art, in line with Malraux's thinking. For Fernando Pernes, "Vergílio Ferreira understands artistic expression, not in a discursive plan of visual communication, but, moreover, in a capacity and need to affirm authentic communion in the unspeakable through the visible" (Godinho, 1989, p. 432).

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