



LITERATURE AND SEMIOTIC READINGS IN FILM ADAPTATION: VERGÍLIO FERREIRA'S NOVEL *MANHÃ SUBMERSA*

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Abstract:

With the publication of the novel *Manhã Submersa*, writer Vergílio Ferreira highlights a clear separation between his neo-realistic past and adherence to the characteristics of Malraux, Camus and Sartre's Existentialism. His writing, centered on the concept of 'problem romance', becomes even more complex, philosophical, and self-centered. The director Lauro António decided to adapt this novel but had the close complicity of the writer, which is revealed even in his participation in the film as an actor. From novel to film, the director's semiotic options are clear, while maintaining a link to the original text, separating themselves from literature and creating an independent aesthetic object.

Keywords: Portuguese literature, Vergílio Ferreira, *Manhã Submersa*, adaptation, cinema

1. Introduction

When Lauro António decided to adapt Vergílio Ferreira's novel, he faced all the dilemmas that limit an adaptation, as well as another difficult point to ignore: the metaphysical specificity of the author of *Manhã Submersa*'s writing (António, 1995).

In all the textual and video documents we consulted, a deep respect emerges from the director's relationship with the writer, which translates into Lauro António's particular care throughout the adaptation process.

Always seeking the support, advice and connivance of the writer, explicit or implicit, the filmmaker tried to impregnate his work with a dimension of fidelity assumed by Vergílio Ferreira's interventions in different stages of production (including his participation as an actor).

This director's concern does not detract from the contemporary concept of fidelity as an interpretation. That is, when Bazin writes "Pour un cinema impur", he defends adaptation as a reproduction of the literary text, but no longer in the narrow sense of fidelity to the book. Bazin proposed a search for filmic equivalents for the characteristics of the literary text, with a view to further studies, namely by Boyum (1985), who emphasizes as an ideal in an

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adaptation the respect for the voice of the written text, in articulation with the reading made by the interpretive community, stressing the readings considered valid, as opposed to those that would constitute examples of 'betrayal'.

Thus, a reading would be lawful if limited by certain coordinates, avoiding a plurality of interpretations beyond the sphere of the literary text itself. These thoughts translate Stanley Fish's proposal for an 'interpretive community' (Sousa, 2003, p. 19), leading Boyum to state: "*I've already suggested that a film might be considered faithful to its source to the extent that its implicit reading remained within the confines of that work's interpretative possibilities, to the extent that it was not violated or diminished*" (1985, p. 77). We think that, in the wake of these assumptions, all semiotic transposition marked by fidelity necessarily implies a link to the original text and also a reading and interpretation process that is made by the director, reconfiguring the written work, marking it with his impressions of reading. The cinema, working from another modeling system, is not restricted to that same system, but is capable of transforming it into a foundation for a new semiotic and aesthetic building, or if it was not a film an effective fictional operation - as legitimate as the literary one. - by modeling the original matter and giving it another form. As stated by Aguiar e Silva (1988, p. 718) if we adapt a novel to a film, even if it is manifestly faithful, the diegesis will never be exactly the same in the source text and the arrival text (the same). would happen if Benjamin Constant's novel *Adolphe* were rewritten, for example, according to specific techniques of *nouveau roman*).

2. From the novel to the film

In the case of *Manhã Submersa*, which José de Matos-Cruz characterizes with the following words: "*1940s. The disenchanting experience of a young seminarian, coming from the village and of modest origins, under the protection of an austere lady who thus proposes to take off. him to an environment of misery and ignorance. Without vocation, António will yield to the subtle arrogance of D. Estefânia, sacrificing himself for the social promotion of the family...*" (1999, p. 193), we can verify that the director did not fail to imprint on his filmic creation some personal marks, especially in the way he filmed the seminar's concentration atmosphere and Antonio's self-mutilation, reflections of the epocal context he intended to portray (curiously, the author's intention is to use this episode of self-mutilation as an example of reinforcing the novel's existentialist line) Says Carina Infante do Carmo: "*Quite rightly Eduardo Lourenço, Vergílio Ferreira himself considers self-mutilation and, above all, the death of God as sufficient reasons to safeguard Submerged Morning from the abjuration to its early stage of social writer and militant*" (1998, pp. 174-175).

At the same time, it did not fail to show an explicit tendency towards respect for the parent book. This dilemma of the faithfulness and conditioning of the film work by a given context raises a reflection. Fidelity usually overlaps with the concerns of historical nature, and it is evident in these cases that the inherent forgetfulness of the phenomenon of creation and the created product is seen as part of a meaningful context that surrounds and defines them in space and time.

We conclude, therefore, that an adaptation is always conformed by historical, geographical, social, political, economic, cultural, aesthetic and ideological environments (Sousa, 2001, p. 27). At this point, both *Manhã Submersa* and *Cântico Final* exemplify the influences of the historical context on the writers' reading of novels, resulting in narrative options with a clear ideological dimension.

A particular feature of Lauro António's film is the participation of Vergílio Ferreira as an actor. This fact, besides bringing the writer and director closer to the conception of the artistic object that is the film and to reiterate the facet of representation that the author had - without which he claimed that it was not possible to teach - is also an explicit manifestation of sponsorship and authority.

Participation in the film can be interpreted as an example of the author's sanction, as noted by Teresa Gonçalves (1995, p. 5). We would add that it is a support for a form of aesthetic creation that appears to be the work of an 'epagon', even though they work on distinct semiotic objects. This act of the "master" does not fail to give the mark of his authority and approval to the work of his "disciple", in the classic line of the concepts of auctor and auctoritas (this concept comprises several facets. Originally, it comes in a context of action Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira, translating Pöschl's definition, presents the following conceptual delimitation: "*It is not exercised by function, persuasion and conviction, but only by the weight of the person or corporation that makes or sanctions a decision*", 1984, p. 352) sanctioning the film and at the same time adapting its novel.

We also remember the words of Eduardo Lourenço (1994) about the "*existential exorcism*" that was this novel, having reached its highest point when Vergílio Ferreira put on the Rector's garment.

Choosing the same title of the novel for his work also reinforces this link between the two texts. This process, which also took place in the *Final Song*, makes explicit the identification of the novel as a gene object, establishing in the recipient a horizon of expectations that include this new sanction. It was a semantic affiliation in the original novel whose title directs the reader to a search for meaning and confirmation in the text of that meaning. It appears that this homonymous contagion implies the desire of the director to assume "that" novel as an act of aesthetic elevation of his work. In choosing a text from a well-known author, Lauro António - as Manuel Guimarães had already done - tries to bring to his creation a halo related to the writer's dimension and consecration. However, this choice is not sufficient for its creation to be the object of consecration.

Vergílio Ferreira's novel, abandoning Neo-Realism and revealing existentialist lines of force, aroused in Lauro António a set of values that were still pertinent in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the ideological trajectories of the book and the film reveal an intricate complexity and different ideological options.

Manhã Submersa corresponds to a transitional phase in the literary production of Vergílio Ferreira. Although he has always marked his ideological itinerary by an equidistance from movements and influences, we can discern two major stages in the writer's literary journey.

With *O Caminho fica longe* (1943), *Quando tudo foi morrendo* (1944) and *Vagão J* (1946), we find a triptych of neo-realistic features, grounded in the social thematic, the vision of the problems that affect the oppressed in a society of hermetic totalitarian contours. This proximity to neorealist ideals results more from an epocal atmosphere than from a firm adherence to a set of aesthetic and ideological values with which he was fully identified. In fact, its connection with the movement is more in line with the neo-realists' opposition to the presentist models.

But Vergílio Ferreira progressively moves away from neo-realist heterodoxy and in different titles (confronting the current account volumes) reflects on their separation (as in *Um escritor apresenta-se*), until the symbolic edition of *Mudança*, a work that deepens intimacy and introspection to the detriment of social problems.

Manhã Submersa constitutes a confluence between neorealist reminiscences and existentialist problematics, and the narrator's status accompanies this symbiosis. Deriving from existentialist reflection, the literary narrator offers extreme difficulties to Lauro António regarding the options of his transposition to the canvas. In fact, the director lived the complex relationships between a narrator of a written text and a narrator of a filmic text that Imelda Whelehan summarizes as follows: For Giddings et al. it is point of view which is particularly crucial in the shift from fiction to film: "*first-person novel point of view is not the same as seeing the action from the camera; in the novel, the narrator tells and the reader lists, but there is no equivalence, rather a warm intimate relationship*" (1999, p. 11).

One of the most pertinent features of the novel is its intertextuality with *Vagão "J"*. Although the narrative web shares some threads with his previous work, in *Manhã Submersa*, António is no longer just a member of the Borrvalho family. Action, time and space undergo a transfiguration operated by the conscience of António, adult and living in Lisbon, who recalls his life path, in a narrative process clearly constructed by a self-diegetic voice of existentialism.

Thus, from the social concerns of his early novels, Vergílio Ferreira evolves into problems of philosophical content, which include the reflection on the value of culture in contemporary society, the appearance of the subject to himself, the failure of materialist models of transformation of the world and the valorization of the body and the Art.

We found that Lauro António did not use some features of the narrative plot such as the hostility of the common population towards seminarians, the boys' awareness of this attitude, and immediate response through the strengthening of their ties. On the other hand, it introduces new data such as the character of the physically disabled employee who will give the film a decisive impetus for Antonio's deliberate choice of self-harm.

These were options of the director as narrator, which reminds us of the observation of Juan Hernández Les when he reflects on the status of narrator / director, identifying different paths of narrative construction, citing different directors / authors such as Hitchcock, Bergman, Ford, Antonioni, Truffaut, Godard and Röhmer (Les, 2003, p. 78). In other words, we can say that Vergílio Ferreira narrated the story in one way and Lauro António narrated it differently.

The path that Lauro António found to build his diegesis focused on the social rather than the individual sphere. When Antonio enters the Seminary, we begin to follow his dilemmas, but always with a double eye: António as an individual and Antonio as a seminarian. It is precisely this last dimension that the filmmaker prefers to highlight, opposing seminarians as an oppressed group and priests as an oppressor group. To this oppressive group is joined, in the young man's home village, the family of D. Estefânia, with the guardian's hardness, the sharp look and the humiliating speech of her son, and the repeated irritation provoked by Mariazinha.

In the movie, the choice of director seems clear. In the seminary, the youth is one of the group of the oppressed. Through his experiences, we know the oppressive maze in which he finds himself cloistered, notably by his rituals and persecutory processes such as excessive modesty in the dressing room, asphyxiating discipline, silence and lack of contact between colleagues, class disputes, loss of religiosity by the multiplication of religious acts imposed, and the obligation to deliver open letters.

The director was not indifferent to the epocal context. Just as Manuel Guimarães made changes to his film, derived from the recent revolution of 1974, so Lauro António did not fail to bring the cinematographic project closer to certain coordinates of his choice: between the social vector and the existentialist of the novel *Morning Submerged*, the first highlights clearly in your final work.

Lauro António also felt the transformations that occurred during and after the revolutionary period. In his professional career we identify marks of this communion with the time that surrounds him. In 1974, he publishes *Introduction to Hungarian Cinema*; The following year, he edited *Elements for the History of Cuban Cinema*; In 1978, he filmed a short film entitled *The Little People in the Revolution*; In the same year, he published *Cinema and Censorship in Portugal*. *Submerged Morning* comes only six years after the revolution and we do not think it is unreasonable to argue that the filmmaker may have chosen this novel in line with his previous reflections of full social and political involvement. This novel mirrored the embarrassing and oppressive relations of a corseted society and allowed an ideological revisitation at this time. Notwithstanding these motivations, the filmmaker also chooses the novel for a gallery of other reasons already invoked in this work.

The critic welcomed this adaptation of Vergílio Ferreira's novel. The success of the film is explained by João Bénard da Costa in the following words: "*Old Portuguese anticlericalism appreciated the slippery adaptation of this story of a young seminarian's years of learning and gave the film an audience that no other film had in the past decade.*" Reducing the success of the film to the support of "*old Portuguese anticlericalism*" seems subjective, imprecise and unfair to Lauro António's work. Widespread public adherence does not mean, we think, that they are all anticlerical; On the other hand, the film is not in itself anticlerical, although neither is it an apology for the life of the Seminary, which only reinforces our criticism of Bénard da Costa's opinion.

Luís de Pina (1986, p. 193 - 194) highlights the appreciation of the public for this film, but also analyzes the adaptation process judging it to be careful, cautious and impressive, highlighting that the film symbolizes the closed country of that time, having narrative plot

been defined with sensitivity. As for the actors, he praises the protagonist, as well as Eunice Muñoz, all who represented the priests of the Seminary, and Vergílio Ferreira himself "*who makes an excellent rector.*" This critic is clearly more objective than Bénard da Costa. He is quite benevolent in his evaluation, especially when he generally praises the artistic performance of our writer.

Luís de Pina, in a work organized by Jean-Loup Passek (1982, p. 58), underlines the compliments to the actors. He highlights good color photography and says the film can perfectly define the oppressive, closed atmosphere of a 1940s Provincial Seminar through a sensitive portrait of a young man without vocation, a prisoner of his family's economic needs. In this same work, José Matos-Cruz analyzes the narrative web centered on the sacrifices of young António, victim of the subtle arrogance of his protector and the intolerance and secular repression, mechanisms that fail to curb the process of opening his senses and desires. These will lead you to a muffled protest and a silent rebellion that will reach the apogee with the final episode. José Matos-Cruz points out "*A Visible Atmosphere of Clair-obscur, Reflections and Transparencies, Tension and Jeu D' Influences, which Exploded in a Crisp Photogram, toile Inhibit the Assistance of Perverse and Degrading Couples*" (1999, p. 143).

3. Conclusion

About *Manhã Submersa*, Lauro António does not hide the indelible mark that the reading of the novel left him in his youth, especially the way Vergílio Ferreira describes the society of a country immersed in dictatorship, with the desire suppressed by a paternalistic despotism. In addition to his low budget, the director faced several difficulties: the nature of historical reenactment that involved the novel, different scenarios, staging many children and adult actors simultaneously, and above all working with a narrative structure that was difficult to adapt.

Lauro António's debut was a happy one, and despite some technical difficulties (mounting and lighting) and 'playing defense', the filmmaker "*manages to transform the bitter awareness of the tragedy that stands out in Vergílio Ferreira's work into the serene realization of a certain sadness / national castration*", as Ramos writes (1989, p. 245).

The filmmaker drew on the novel of the same name, but avoided two major risks that his work could take. Lauro António did not build a film against religion or religious education, describing only by simple evidence the existence of clear boundaries for the formation of consciences (Coelho, 1983, pp. 112-113).

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