



**LITERATURE AND FILM: THE CONTRADICTIONS
OF THE HUMAN CONDITION IN THE ADAPTATION OF
DOMINGO À TARDE, BY FERNANDO NAMORA –
A JOURNEY TO QUESTION LIFE AND DEATH**

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Abstract:

The novel *Domingo à Tarde*, written by the Portuguese author Fernando Namora, was adapted by António de Macedo to a film, centred on the life of a doctor that sees death in front of him, on the face of a patient and by this incarnation of death itself, thinks about the human condition in a journey to find himself. The novel and the film are connected by this character and his voyage, a metaphor for us all, and gives the spectator a portrait of the Portuguese “New Cinema”. Fernando Namora himself would integrate the dialogues between literature and cinema in this “Cinema Novo”, namely with the adaptation of *Domingo à Tarde*. This film reveals the aesthetic proposals that emerged with the discussions about cinema in Portugal and signify the technical and aesthetic consecration of a cinema that has been wanted since the 1950s, but that the economic conditions of film production in Portugal have not allowed happening.

Keywords: Portuguese literature, Fernando Namora, adaptations, cinema

1. Introduction

The issue of adaptation continues to constitute a complex labyrinth of paradigms and paradoxes. On this polymorphic question, Cutchins, Krebs and Voigts wrote:

“To study texts as adaptations absolutely require the scholar to hold multiple things in his or her mind at the same time. Comparing a simple fairy tale to a film, for instance, requires the scholar to imagine the tale, or at least big chunks of it, at the same time he or she studies scenes from the film, or vice-versa. And that’s just the beginning. The scholar also may be forced to consider the creative roles played by publishers, reviewers, screenwriters, directors

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producers, actors, and cinematographers, not to mention the reading and viewing public. Moreover, cultural, social, economic, racial, or historical facts almost certainly affected the production of both texts. And there's always the possibility that other literary or film texts influenced the process at any stage. That may be sound daunting, but it should also feel exciting and inspiring." (2008, p. 5)

The multiplicity of challenges inherent to the adaptation phenomenon is clearly inspiring, particularly when we try to examine the director's reading of the book he adapted, for example. Speaking on the relationship between literature and cinema, Ingmar Bergman, in an essential text for understanding the relations of dissent and approximation between letter and image, stated, in a Manichaeian way: "*Film has nothing to do with Literature*" (MacCann, 1996). The alchemy of the image was able to attract the literary text itself, leading the novel to two types of reaction: the approximation of the letter to the image (when the novel reflects the vision of the cinematographic camera) or the distancing of the letter from the image (when the novel values the inner monologue, eg, preventing translation by the image of the character's flow of consciousness).

Jean-Claude Carrière (2016), reflecting on the relationship between literature and cinema, argues that the film narrative cannot remove the legacies of the literary text. Furthermore, in the cinema, the adaptation process is one of its intrinsic characteristics, similar to different communicative phenomena that include the action of a decoding subject. In the genesis of these questions, we find an essential problem. João Mário Grilo identifies it as a premise that distorts the analysis of adaptation, since the elucidation of literary adaptations is often reduced to the analysis of the film, according to the literary semiology, and to the evaluation of the argument in a logic of narrative reductionism, which leads you to a set of questions. First, we ask what the status of cinema is, especially when an analysis of a film is initiated in a logic of dependence on a literary source (Grilo, 1995-1996). With this stance, we find a methodological "sin" with a strong historical tradition in the analysis of the relationship between literature and cinema: placing the film in explicit dependence on the literary text. This perspective contains a preambular addiction that affects the development of any analysis. The lack of value of one universe in relation to another only allows a reflection of valorization/devaluation concerning the starting point, preventing an autonomous characterization of each semiotic system.

2. From the novel to the film

Thus, we must try to reflect on the issues of adaptation according to an approach that does not favour a taxonomy of cinema based on literature. In the universe of adaptations, we find yet another problem that is not simple to understand or ready to solve. When a director decides to adapt a text, he engages in a chimerical journey, given that, by semiotic nature in the strict sense, an adaptation can never be total. In this sense, any attempt is irremediably condemned to constitute a partial vision, an interpretation or a reading. As

noted by Lothe (2000), the entire adaptation process implies deliberate choices on the part of the agents involved in the transposition.

Such actions lead to interpretation and comparison exercises, mainly by the public, or as Lothe tells us, an adaptation becomes a reductionist process, because it illustrates a single representation at the visual level, but it provides different interpretations to the spectators, or that is, it allows them to make a more or less positive assessment of the process. Furthermore, an analysis of dichotomous outlines arises, given that a film that is an adaptation of a book can be understood and interpreted differently by those who see it - whether they know the original work or not. When we look at Fernando Namora's adaptation of *Domingo à Tarde*, these and other issues emerge and frame semiotic transposition. In 1952, the magazine *Imagem* interviews Fernando Namora and debates the relationship between literature and cinema. The novelist states the following:

“Cinema is the most gifted expression and with the greatest communication capacity of all the arts, although also the one with the greatest frustration, the one that least resists the wear and tear of time, and there is still a passionate desire among us, everywhere. renewal of transmitting to the public, by all means of language, lands and environments were considered incompatible with aesthetics, it would be impossible for literature not to aspire to collaborate with the cinema, all the more since they have recently been valued. The problem, however, has not been just a bleak lack of arguments (and without a good story, a good film is not made) or a deficiency in technique or interpretation; - the problem lies in the confusion between easy negotiation and cinema. The opportunists transformed what could be, or become, Portuguese cinema into a trade that has nothing to do with the most elementary artistic expression. The rare exceptions serve as always to confirm the rule. That would serve reasonable arguments, at least honest, without an organization that defends them from being run over, from those inconceivable run over that has been done in the name of half a dozen recipes considered until now, despite the failures and the example of other countries’ ‘commercial’ cinema?” (1952)

Still, in the same interview, the author analyzes the problematic relationship with the public (so often debated in national cinematography) and adds:

*“We have deceived the public; we have tired the public and also the good faith of many who risked their money in a business that they should have and have every chance of success. This is how the idea of a new cinema begins to be debated among film writers and critics in the *Image*, always maintaining the need that reforming the cinematographic environment consisted of the aesthetic use of its possibilities, imposing them on industrial and commercial uses. of cinema, which Fernando Namora and Manuel da Fonseca point out as the deficiency of Portuguese cinema - too concerned with pleasing the “bad taste” of the mass audience with easy plot comedies.” (1952)*

This and other texts contributed decisively to a change in Portuguese cinema that was forever marked “Cinema Novo”. Fernando Namora himself would integrate the dialogues between literature and cinema in this “Cinema Novo”, namely with the adaptation of *Domingo à Tarde*.

Domingo à Tarde is another audacious project by producer Cunha Telles who works together with director António Macedo to adapt the writer's novel. The film narrates the relationship between a doctor and a terminally ill patient. The desire and the impossibility of living mark the romance between Dr Jorge and Clarisse that can be read as a kind of archetype of Portuguese society at the time, suffocated by the Salazar dictatorship. This film is part of a triad with *Os Verdes Anos* and *Belarmino*, which reveals the heterogeneity of aesthetic proposals that emerged with the emergence of discussions about cinema in Portugal and signifies the technical and aesthetic consecration of a cinema that has been wanted since the 1950s, the economic conditions of film production in Portugal did not let it happen. The three films represent the same concern from the formal point of view, as they represent breaks with the narrative cinema previously produced, the same desire to represent social reality and the same belief and trust in man, which brings together the three protagonists of the films mentioned also in an archetype of Man that was wanted at the time: restless and confident that something, at some point was going to happen and that this was capable of transforming everything into something new.

António Macedo recalls the genesis of the adaptation of the film shot in 1965 and premiered in 1966:

“I was a friend of Fernando Namora ... And while we were in this impasse, I met Fernando Namora on the street and went for coffee. Namora asked me if I had already read his last book, Sunday afternoon and I disguised it as I could because I didn't know the work. Suddenly he proposes to me to make a film about Sunday afternoon, offering even production help. I knew he was a neo-realist, it was nothing in my line, but I was his friend, ready. I left running to buy the book and after I read it, I was horrified. It is a heavy romance, full of mental dramas. Those people spend all the time thinking. I soon thought about exploring those dramas from what interested me that it was a certain type of philosophical existentialism not of the Sartre type, but the Heidegger type because I always liked German metaphysics very much. And when I decided, I spoke with António da Cunha Telles. António da Cunha Telles had no money to make the film, but Fernando Namora was so enthusiastic about the idea that he found funding for the film. (...) Note that Sunday afternoon still had good reviews together with The Green Years and Belarmino... Those three films appeared in the 1960s, between 62 and 65, and intellectual criticism sold that as being the big news, the great freshness, was a new cinema.” (Sales, 2011, p. 185)

Eduardo Prado Coelho, reflecting on the adaptation of Fernando Namora's novel to the cinema, points out the opposite paths between the writer and the filmmaker:

"...this film starts from a misunderstanding of reading: where Namora, author of the novel, intended to make a work that was, in the end, and despite everything, an appeal to life, Macedo, the director, used the argument provided by Namora's text to develop some of his most insistent obsessions (which we find more uninhibitedly in later works): the problematic of the sacred and the sacrilegious, the fascination of death, the pleasure in the decomposition of bodies and decrepitude. That is why it is difficult to review this work without feeling the discomfort that surrounds it: on the one hand, it is the expression of a profound disagreement (leading to blockages, which are not aesthetically productive) between two authors who, for a moment, crossed paths; on the other hand, it is a film that sustains itself from the panic produced in the contemporary world by the imagery of the "incurable disease", and which removes much of its income from the spread of that panic." (1983, p. 23)

Criticizing the complications of narrative content such as the use of flash-back, the use of voice-over, the excess of fixed planes, the reflections of the confused metaphysics of the sacred and the transgression that constitutes the axis of Macedo's work, effects artificially superimposed on a too schematic plot, culminating in the following observation: *"And we still have a halo of metaphysics that hovers in a way that only by distraction can be considered" Bergmanian*", and that intends to compensate the film of the disconsolately melodramatic level where it entangles itself and away from romance.

Eduardo Prado Coelho pauses in a scene that illustrates how Macedo does not achieve the metamorphosis of thought resulting in a pale image on the canvas without equivalence or significant depth:

"But the most difficult thing to bear about the work is, without a doubt, the whole development, supposedly pathetic, of this love story. An example of this is the scene, which should be "strong", of the car ride, in which Clarisse leads Jorge to accelerate foolishly so that he shares the risk of death in which she is involved. There, the whole dialogue ("advancing to the horizon", "my horizon is you") is so loose and unconvincing that the scene passes completely by the viewer's emotion." (1983, p. 24)

In the novel, published in 1961, where the author continued the psychological analysis of the characters intending to achieve detailed radiography of the human condition, going down to the depth of the complexity of being. In this work, it is the opposition between life and death that constitutes itself as a nuclear leitmotiv of intrigue, looking for a possible answer to this essential question of the existence of Man. In Fernando Namora's novel, there is no extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator who presents the hero objectively. However, the protagonist's first-person discourse, which compositionally replaces the discourse of this external narrator, re-emphasizes the other characters in the story. Clarisse, Lúcia and Mereia, among others, are objects of a speech "by default". Their voices appear only in the form of direct speech, as moments of the enunciation of Jorge, the only known subject in history. His discourse - perhaps because

it is no longer an inner discourse, but a self-fiction in which, despite the coincidence between narrator and protagonist, the narrator can distance himself from the narrator, objectively apprehending him from an outwardly stable field of view - it is far from developing as a philosophical drama, as is the case with Dostoevsky's heroes. It is, on the contrary, a perfectly organized narrative, written so that the protagonist can achieve clarity, as he admits with another distinctive element: the close and intimate relationship, one might say almost confessional, that the narrator establishes with the narrator. Let's remember the novel:

"Now that it has come to my mind to tell you a few things that I cannot be proud of, it is much preferable to use the necessary words. [...] Before proceeding, I want to tell you that the list of patients used to visit my clinic. I really believe that I should have started there, as circumstances force me to wear the chronicler's uniform of the events that will follow. Who should have written this narrative was Clarisse, because it is hers, and only her, that we will talk about (what I will say about me is, after all, pretentious and abusive) - and then I am sure that the reader would soon feel a punch in the chest, foreshadowing exciting expectations if she attacked him with a logical start [...]" (2017, p. 11-14).

We witnessed a picture of solidarity with the suffering of others, in the protagonist's words and attitudes towards the most disadvantaged patients, which Jorge assumes unequivocally that so much pain, so much suffering and so much death ended up changing his character, leading him to a permanent and in-depth analysis, not only of himself but also of all those around him. As Armindo Nunes observes:

"In the first instance, it is up to you to come to know your true psychological dimension. And when you ask - "What was wrong with me?" (id. : 67) -, it is all it's existential problematic that briefly equates and intends to decipher. He concludes, then, that his existence comes down to a daily experience of routines, even if at times positive, an existence of lack of love, despite knowing that "the love of others was urgent!" (id. : 60), an existence filled with death, which also forces you to suffer from the living." (2017, p. 408)

Let's revisit the novel:

"We could sometimes predict the outcome with a terribly insignificant margin of error. In the last phase, the disease already put the masks aside. From one day to the next, the fire started, the fire was a flash and, soon after, ashes. Ashes that still took time to cool down until it was over. And whenever someone died, it was the others, the living, that I thought. They had seen all the degrees of devastation." (id. : 68)

And the author adds:

“The protagonists of O Homem Disfarçado, Cidade Solitária and Domingo à Tarde present themselves, in this way, with marked duplicity, a truly distinctive mask between who they were and who they are, seeking, in vain, to solve the deepest existential contradictions and overcome their anxieties, through the desired return to a primordial identity stage. They are, as Roxana Eminescu points out, “the same character, male, adult, in full consciousness” (Eminescu, R., 1983b: 23). These works consequently reflect an accentuated human warmth due to the diversity and intensity of psychological experiences that they parade in them, which will continue in the subsequent works of fiction. It is precisely the question of thought that cannot be transported to the screen by the director, thus suffering a metamorphosis, an object of incisive criticism by Jorge Leitão Ramos, for example, which highlights the unhappiness in the construction of dialogues and the consequent fragility in the work of the actors, even though Ruy de Carvalho, due to his austerity and dryness, manages to remain safe in the performance, unlike Isabel de Castro, with an irregular performance. Concerning adaptation, Jorge Leitão Ramos states that António de Macedo preferred to “play it safe”, following the novel and avoiding betraying it. However, the theme of the film, a young woman condemned to die of leukaemia who lives an intense and desperate romance with her doctor, was already somewhat warm in 1965, in addition to the existentialist tone that the director attributes to the narrative and the characters.” (2017, p. 156)

On the other hand, António de Macedo, an author who is a fan of fantasy and science fiction, did not resist including elements of fantastic (which contrasts with the science of the medical plot of the film) like this "film-within-the-film", in which a priest (who is, after all, a supernatural being) comes to judge sinful humans. The first scene with the soundtrack overlaid with an image of the audience watching the film is replaced by a black image with the sound of that scene, and another scene of the spectators when the priest goes on the way to the prisoners is cut off entirely by the lack need for the accompanying soundtrack (and therefore to replace it with an image).

3. Conclusion

In summary, and remembering our initial words, a perfect adaptation is a perfect chimaera. Undoubtedly, the history of adaptations is tainted by countless failures, especially when the original book is dominated by intrinsically literary characteristics, but not for that reason certain authors marked by a dimension of reflection or interiority. It, therefore, means that, in this context, more important than assessing loyalty relationships between the film and the book that inspired it, is to view the film object independently, as a creation - and not just as a recreation - performed by a creator in a given context. Nevertheless, if António de Macedo chose the path of proximity concerning Fernando Namora's novel, it becomes clear that the attempt to a metamorphosis of thought, from text to image, is very far from the relevance of the text of writer, and, as Jorge Leitão Ramos states, *“Being, in terms of direction (planning), António de Macedo’s best film, Domingo*

à Tarde is not an important film, even in the first wave of “Cinema Novo”, in which it is integrated.” (1989, p. 128).

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