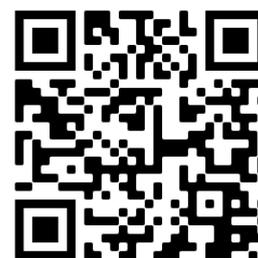


# Vergílio Ferreira and Malraux: Literature, Existentialism and Cinema

Luis Cardoso

## Abstract

Vergílio Ferreira, after a short approach to Neo-Realism, began to be interested in a french writer's ideas who were a turning point to the portuguese writer. Malraux, a huge reference in Existentialism, had conceived the problem-novel, a text centred in a deep focus concerning Man, Life and the understanding of the Human Condition. With this dialogue between Vergílio Ferreira and Malraux, Existentialism enters Portugal and begins a major theoretical dispute between Neo-Realism and Existentialism. Vergílio Ferreira abandons the neo-realism guidelines and embraces Malraux's problem-novel.



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## INTRODUCTION

In fact, after a neo-realistic phase, Vergílio Ferreira begins another path and, as Gavilanes Laso (1989, p. 42 - 43) states, philosophy and art move him away from this movement (Coelho, 1973; 1982). . In a synthesis process, in order to try to envisage the evolution of Vergílio Ferreira, we can identify three phases of Vergilian thought: the intimate phase (particularly associated with the novel *The Way Is Far Away* and his participation in the controversy with the magazine *Presença*); the phase of neorealistic foray (manifesting from the epilogue of the quoted novel until the mid-1950s); and the metaphysical preoccupation phase (beginning in the early 1960s, which includes its specific cultural background as well as relationships with existentialist literature). Although Vergílio Ferreira's ideological evolution has already deserved different studies and numerous attempts at framing, it is the writer himself who defines his main influences (while affirming his individuality): "Thus Eça and the Brazilians; Dostoyevsky and Malraux; Joyce, Kafka, Beckett and the New Romance will be the three milestones of my trip, the three groups of authors I have best known to date. But it is possible that from all that has variously defined me something has resisted to a constant identification, a permanence in what has changed. And that something, of course, is me." (1991, p. 18)

## VERGÍLIO FERREIRA AND MALRAUX

In his existentialist path, a literary personality rises in his reference gallery: André Malraux. In a bio-bibliographic comparison, there are many affinities. Both Vergílio Ferreira and Malraux are men of strong conviction, with no desire for institutional integration with a political cut - but never forgetting their veins as men of the polis - and for reflection on man and man. The proximity between them requires a brief reference to the way Malraux thought of cinema, because this thought belongs to the sphere of his influence. The author of *The Human Condition* (which interested Eisenstein), which Jorge de Sena (2000, p. 5 - 10) considered as an example of the thinker who lives individualism and the cult of art, in a path of solitude and enlightenment. Humanity arouses persistent attention in the Portuguese novelist, even giving rise to a detailed analysis in *Questioning the Destiny*, Malraux. It is precisely here that the novelist sheds light on a central dichotomy in his writer's profile, with which, in fact, he fully identifies himself: 'But Malraux does not cultivate the 'show-novel', but strictly the 'problem-novel', the novel. of himself, of his personal questioning, of his pursuit - hence his work is blatantly and generally a work in the first person, as has interest in an individual: the work most limited to an individualist dimension is precisely what it will least seem to be - the bourgeois novel of 19th century realism. XIX '(1998, p. 179) More than the literary lines of intersection between Malraux and Vergílio Ferreira - already studied in several reference works - we are interested in highlighting the parallelism of the attraction of cinema in both writers. Malraux, some existentialists, and the writers of the *Nouveau Roman* had close relations with the seventh art (as pointed out, for example, by Lauro António (1995). The author of *The Human Condition* has already raised several studies on the connections between literature. and cinema, namely by Jeanne-Marie Clerc. This literary critique sets the beginning of this relationship with Malraux's experience with *L'Espoir* (Sierra de Teruel), and its explicit translation in the essay 'Esquisse d 'une psychologie du cinema'. Malraux reveals very early a strong interest in the seventh art, which will accompany him throughout his literary life and which has as its highest point his experience as a director. Behind the camera, the writer-director is struggling with numerous technical and short-term difficulties, namely power outages, bombing, lack of film and lack of accessories, but opens a technical dialogue between cinema and literature. In *L'Espoir*, the writer introduces

characteristics of clear cinematic influence, in particular a technique of 'mise en situation', in order to make present and visible an action that was often hidden in the word. Similarly, I would shoot the film with an image that predates Neo-Realism, in a strip of style that strips reality. What unites the film and the book is more than a narrative resemblance. Malraux was interested in capturing situations lived through memory and the construction of characters with the help of a visual language, making the unreal present in the center of the real, being the image responsible for the immediate world view, almost an instant reflection. Although criticism has pointed to the film's various shortcomings, such as its fragmentary character, lack of narrative rhythm, and a clear limitation of the diegesis itself, the ability of the writer-director to extract a strong emotional burden from the image also seems consensual. On the other hand, the Malraux exercise proves the clear need for a (re) creation in the process of transposition from book to screen. This adaptation of Malraux's book illustrates the purification of the narrative to its very core, giving rise to characters who, becoming visible to viewers, simultaneously acquire remarkable depth and density, synthesizing the path of transposition from word to image. One question for the writers of the Nouveau Roman centers on a habitual dichotomy that separates cinema from literature: space versus time. In his study of André Malraux, Albersmeier (1973) analyzes this dichotomy and spells out the main differences that, in a traditional view, separate the two forms of art: cinema is art that objectively reflects reality, while romance is art. art of subjective interiority; cinema is the art of space, as opposed to romance which is the art of time; Being an objective art, cinema explores the plane of metonymy, while romance, being a subjective art form, explores the plane of metaphor. This is an extremely reductive view. First of all, cinema does not reflect reality objectively because it is a means of modeling that reality, just like literature; The film can also be a text of interiority and reflection. cinema is not just an art of space, but is organized on the spatiotemporal axis, similar to the novel, having the same virtualities of narrative construction, with respect for its semiotic specificity; In short, associating cinema with a simple metonymic exercise reveals an attitude of aesthetic, semiotic and narratological circumscription. This opposition was to be recurrently debated with regard to the filmic description and the literary description within the Nouveau Roman. Mainly with the intervention of Robbe – Grillet, the movement would lead to an identification of cinematic influences in the novel, which included the desire to approach the word to the image, in a clear attempt to create a novel capable of viewing portions of the diegesis. This influence was highlighted by authors such as M. Lacalamita and Jean Bloch-Michel, cited by Peña-Ardid (1999, p. 165) who argued, respectively, for the existence of a 'cinematic vision' in the Lost Generation, the neorealists and post-realistic, which is translated into the external description of the characters in order to highlight their psychological portraiture, and the use, in certain texts of the Nouveau Roman, of external descriptions to establish a break with the psychological portraiture and subjective evaluations of the author. It is precisely Lacalamita's vision that we find in Malraux and Vergílio Ferreira: the exterior profile of the characters, described in a 'cinematographic' way, contributes to the construction of their interior profile. Remember Sofia's "vision" in Apparition and the relationship between the physical portrait and the immediate construction of the psychological profile: "The black velvet dress, glued to the body, stretched to the neck and to the limit of the thin arms, illuminated her young face, the warm sweetness of the nape of her neck under her hairless hair, the fragility of her hands so white and subtle. But what was above all enlightened was his marvelous gaze, that look of naive violence, secret and moist and blazing like a first sin." This option by Vergílio Ferreira can be an example - although it cannot be seen as typical of an absolute and deliberate systematicity - of what Jean Bloch-Michel identifies as a clear cinematic mark, that is, the

imposition of a cinematic vision to a literature that had a romantic vision, transforming the novel - traditional stage of feelings and meanings - into the stage of visual and no longer literary images. However, we think that Vergílio Ferreira always wanted an approximation between the word and the image, in the sense of what Richardson designated as the commitment that literature must reveal to make visible what is significant, while the cinema must strive deepening the meaning of what one sees (1998, p. 81).

Thus, also some cinematic techniques such as dissolve (fused), flashback, or insert can be approximated to this new form of writing. Like Hiroshima, mon amour illustrates a subjective memory, with intrusions from the past into the present that create a similar status as to reality, so Vergílio Ferreira integrates past experiences into the present, as in Polar Star, since Aida dead, belonging to memory. , is thus closer to the subject. Written in 1962, this novel denounces the influence of Joyce or Faulkner, with a distribution of space and time in the narrative without strata differentiation, and the writer himself acknowledges his links to Beckett's Robbe-Grillet Nouveau Roman. The memory cannot be linear, chronological, recalls Vergílio Ferreira, and the most natural way of describing it can only be by mixing time and space, precisely as it is with the main character's movements (from present to past). ), as in Chapter XVII:

*And suddenly another image assaults me, floods my memory - when was it? We were home, it was a summer afternoon, there was a big heat in the air. I had climbed out of the bookstore tiredly, my wife was waiting for me. No, I didn't want to drink anything, just a cold drink maybe. My wife was too much, but nothing was too much for her sleeping son in the room down the hall. And suddenly, in the drowning silence, my wife heard, I heard, in the muffled, compact, strenuous silence - a gunshot! We suspended ourselves with fulmination, leaping over us, dumb, mad, running down the stumbling corridor - but before we got to the room we heard him scream... Imagine he didn't scream! Imagine you didn't scream - what's the use? And sometime later, it was September... A wind of desolation blows outside, I hear it through the bars of my cell, the dead leaves of the trees must drag across the ground to a corner where they rot in peace. '(1992) , pp. 169-170)*

The overlap of the temporal planes is still capable of projecting the past into the future, as Mario imagines his completed chapel and sees it as a memory that awaits him in the Last Song:

*He reminded the Chapel that he could not see, imagined her dressed in snow, small and lonely amid the vast omen of silence, a fragile sign of divine radiation through love and death, the apparition of beauty and dream, the shadow of presence. of a man upon the earth in a fleeting instant of millennia, "he recalled, growing old, wasting away through the centuries like the dreams of men dreaming before her, like the memory, one day, of their crumbling walls on the bare mountain floor. under the winds and the stars in the still solitude. And something like that seemed again to her that she was right, because she felt that she had exhausted her life in this encounter with her original truth, with the first evidence, that there was nothing more to know and assume, that death was perfect for her as a limit. Something strangely seemed to him to be right in this current of fatality that absorbed him, his poor ruined body, his little dream that had illuminated him, the invention of purity that had once alarmed his whole being, the trail of his voice in the small outer chapel with a brief hint of a startle in the far wall before the gods and life... (1975, p. 54)*

## CONCLUSION

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 (Godinho, 1985). The use of flashback by filmmakers such as Bergman (Betton, 1987) (which Vergílio Ferreira pointed out as the ideal director for adapting *Final Canticle*), combines the trip to the past with the present narrative, in a game where memory is coordinated with spatial oscillation, and is a recurring strategy in Vergílio Ferreira. Behind Neo-Realism. Existentialism is now the path to Vergílio Ferreira.

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