

# A Strange Kind of Feeling: Conflict and Alliance in Literature on Screen

Interview with Lúcia Jorge

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*The film adaptation of A Costa dos Murmúrios (The Murmuring Coast) by Margarida Cardoso has probably brought you a number of positive and/or negative things. What has been the impact of this project on the overall evaluation of your literary work, including how you see the relationship between literature and cinema?*

In some cases, film adaptations do not bring anything positive to the books they were based on, but this is not the case of Margarida Cardoso's work. The film *A Costa dos Murmúrios* came into being sixteen years after the publication of the book. Thus, it allowed audiences to revisit topics associated with the end of colonial empires and particular situations resulting from them. It generated debate on a subject which is still present and relevant in Portuguese society, and European societies for that matter. The film also permitted the book to be revisited, opening it up for new readers. Comparing the two "objects", different compositions transmitting the same message but offering different interpretation possibilities, raises interesting questions. Therefore, I can say that as a novel *A Costa dos Murmúrios* has benefited from Margarida Cardoso's adaptation, especially because this highlighted an extremely contemporary topic.

*The atmosphere of nostalgia in A Costa dos Murmúrios is equally present in the film. In your opinion does cinema do justice to the novel in its capacity to register memory and silence on film?*

The atmosphere of nostalgia that structures the film corresponds to the feeling as it also exists in the book. I would actually say that in that respect Margarida Cardoso, who is much younger than I, and who experienced the atmosphere of the Colonial War as a child, managed to add a very special phantasmagoric element to the film, highlighting this message of

penumbra, unspoken space and the incapacity to write about the Human history, all of which exist in the book. We disagree, however, on the light shed on the memory of the war testimonials. Margarida Cardoso has favored inner spaces, and for that reason the war memories in her film are even more “murmuring” than the murmurs in the book itself. From that perspective, the novel is informed by a cruder type of narrative, much more open, and above all, a lot crueler. Margarida has opted for those things which are suggested and implicit, adding a much more symbolic dimension to the scenes. A good example of this difference is the portrayal of the killing of the birds. In the film, the birds can be seen in the background, the violence in the scene is transferred to the reaction of the women in the foreground. This transference required considerable skill, and the film gains considerably from this. Emphasizing the message itself through the poetic charge, Margarida managed to add to the sequence.

*In what way has cinema influenced your literary production, especially your novels and your shorter fiction, for instance, *Marido e Outros Contos*?*

The influence of cinema is everywhere. Throughout the twentieth century, literature coexisted with cinema, absorbing its narrative techniques, but it also tried to escape from it in order to survive within its own physical space, recreating what it has always been, a sort of “blind cinema” whose limitless fruition is derived from the words themselves. Insofar as interdisciplinarity goes, I feel I am a sort of grandchild, great-grandchild even, of others, a natural offspring of that very tension. That is to say, it is rather difficult for me to talk about the influence you mention, which is both a conflict and an alliance, especially as neither of these tensions can be accurately measured or quantified. What I can say is that there is a strong possibility that I would not write as I do, mindful of the murmur of smaller things, if I had not seen all those Nouvelle Vague films, if I had not been drawn to Buñuel’s mystical diabolism, to Fellini’s celebration of grand feasts, or even to Visconti’s aestheticism. Later on in life, I grew closer to film directors who are capable of drawing remarkable syntheses of all of these things. Some time ago, I wrote a short story entitled *O Perfume*, dedicated to Yılmaz Güney, because of his unforgettable film *Yol*. I wanted to pay homage to him by bringing that story up to date, to our own time and to

our own culture. Still, cinema is like music: both influence us, not to produce analogous objects, but rather to help us create works that are comparable both in quality and skill.

*Just as there are film directors who are extremely literary, we also have writers who are profoundly cinematographic. How do you see the future of this kind of interdisciplinarity?*

In my view, there is no conflict at all. The two domains join forces all the time, being at the same time quite well defined. It is not necessary for me to state that I am an interested party in this matter when I say that in this combination literature leads the way and should feel that it holds a primary position. The fact is that when it comes to the actual mutualization of the two genres, those narrative forms that are exclusively verbal can profit from cinematic techniques. As far as I can tell, the contamination does not go beyond that. The nature of what falls within the domain of the literary lies precisely in the autonomy of the *language of words* itself, an idea which I emphasize. For this reason, and only because of it, the literary contains within itself the ultimate film. That is to say, for better or for worse, cinema is a hybrid genre, literature is a genre that is pure. Film directors know that. The *script* is the go-between linking one *language* to the other. Aware of this special quality and connection, more and more the two genres will move along side by side, ever different, but always close to one another. I would even suggest that we shift the question of interdisciplinarity, which is a settled issue that has been more or less settled by now, onto a different domain — how will Cinema and Literature survive given the expansion of the audiovisual industry of pure entertainment and cultural mass consumption which characterize our world and are set to become reality in the future? Authenticity and refusal to give in to the demands of ready market consumption, there lies the greatest challenge faced by artists.