

THE MUSICAL PERFORMER AS A CHARACTER IN THE FILMS OF CARLOS GARDEL AND AMÁLIA RODRIGUES: TRANSMEDIALITY, PROFESSIONALISATION AND GLOBALIZATION

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INTRODUCTION ---

As the twentieth century dawned, new technologies for sound and visual production and reproduction globally revolutionized humanity's relationship with sound and image, as well as with entertainment and art. Novel artifacts —phonograph, gramophone, radio, and cinematograph — shaped new consumers, new audiences, and new national and transnational connections among various artistic productions. In this context, two genres of urban popular song developed almost simultaneously: Argentine tango and Portuguese fado, between which it is possible to find some correspondences, both in their poetics and in other aspects of their artistic evolution. Among these, the use of fado and tango by silent and later sound cinema to enrich their plots, casts, and soundtracks stands out for its productivity and persistence. For this reason, we want to analyse

some parallelisms in the way that sound cinema capitalized on the success of Carlos Gardel — a tango singer — and Amália Rodrigues — a fado singer — in their respective countries, to shape the figure of the musical performer as a film character and project them nationally and internationally as identity emblems. To this end, we will focus on some films starring them, where they play the role of singers. Specifically, from Gardel, we will examine *Melodía de arrabal* [Suburban melody] (Louis J. Gasnier, 1932) and *El día que me quieras* [The day that you love me] (John Reinhardt, 1935), while from Amália, we have chosen *Fado, história de uma cantadeira* [Fado, Story of a Singer] (Perdigão Queiroga, 1947) and *Sangue toureiro* [Bullfighter's Blood] (Augusto Fraga, 1958).

Our eagerness in tracing the different affinities between tango and fado was inspired by recent artistic emergences in Argentina and Portugal, which have brought together both genres.

Among these stands out the Argentine singer Karina Beorlegui, who has cultivated a mixed repertoire of tangos and fados since 2009. Her albums —*Caprichosa* [Capricious] (2003), *Mañana zarpa un barco* [Tomorrow a ship sails] (2009), and *Puertos cardinales* [Cardinal ports] (2011)— and her live performances have led to the exercise of bringing together both genres, reinterpreting their traditions in dialogue with each other. In this way, her interventions have become a reinterpretation in a dual sense, as they constitute new performances and critical listening experiences that enable the discovery of connections and differences between tango and fado. Beorlegui's initiative has been followed by other local and international artists. It is worth noting that the relationships between tango and fado date back a century (Gouveia, 2013), and there are even theories suggesting possible genetic links in the origins of both music styles (Moura, 2001; Gouveia, 2013), as well as other types of intersections.

We believe that translating artistic intuition into academic research could yield fruitful results. For this reason, we frame our work proposal within Comparative Arts, a discipline that considers, among its possibilities, the confrontation of genetically independent phenomena and processes, whose study is justified because these involve common socio-historical conditions (Guillén, 2005: 96). Manfred Schmeling refers to this type of comparison as one based on “analogies of contexts” (Schmeling 1984: 23). Indeed, we start from the hypothesis that the convergences that can be found between different aspects of tango and fado are motivated by certain parallelisms in their contexts, namely: their development in urban-port cities, the perceived need to construct national identity narratives during the early decades of the twentieth century, the emergence of iconic singers of strong impact (Dalbosco, 2022), and the globalization of the mechanisms of action of the cultural industry by that time, particularly of records, radio, and cinema.

It is worth noting that this comparative tracing could well be expanded to other countries, since the use of national music and its stars was a constant in Ibero-American sound cinema between the thirties and the sixties. Silvana Flores points out that, in its beginnings, Hollywood musical cinema began to adapt musical revues from Broadway theatre, a trend soon followed by Latin America with its own theatrical productions (Flores, 2023: 258). Thus, a feedback loop was generated that promoted the advertising and stardom of singers and dancers, as the “frequent assimilation between artists and characters” in the early days of sound cinema became “a procedure for the promotion of artists in radio and in musical theatre” (Flores, 2023: 255)¹. This occurred in Spain, for example, with the *cuplé*, the *copla*, and their folkloric singers and dancers, whose incorporation into the big screen gave rise to films colloquially known as *españoladas*. Imperio Argentina was one of the most international figures of this process (Labanyi, 2004: 2). In Latin America, Mexico and Brazil made persistent use of their national musics during the dawn of sound cinema. Mexico projected mariachi and ranchera music to the world, through singers like Pedro Infante or Jorge Negrete. Brazil, on the other hand, showcased samba, marches, and carnival in its musical films, particularly in its famous *chanchadas* (Paranaguá, 1985: 36-65).

Due to these parallel patterns, comparative studies have emerged that address various aspects of the relationship between popular music and Ibero-American musical cinema of this period. To mention just a few, Fernando Morais da Costa presents the analogies in the transition from silent to sound cinema in Brazil, Portugal, Argentina, Mexico, and Cuba, and asserts that in all these countries, centralized political regimes used popular music and cinema to forge national integration and identity (Costa, 2012: 51-60). In *Modernidades primitivas: Tango, samba y nación* (2007), Florencia

Garramuño compares how films starring Carlos Gardel and Carmen Miranda, “figures of an alternative modernity”², contributed to the nationalization of tango and samba, while constructing possible histories of these genres (Garramuño, 2007: 41). Silvana Flores, for her part, focuses on certain correlations between tango and bolero, such as their hybrid nature, which enabled a transnational exchange between Argentine and Mexican cinema (Flores, 2019: 48-72).

Because of the similarities in the connections between music, theatre, and cinema in these Ibero-American countries, it is not uncommon to find, in the early decades of musical film, the character of a singer who succeeds, portrayed by famous real-life performers. This is evident in Spanish films such as *Suspiros de España* [Sighs of Spain] (Benito Perojo, 1939) and *Mariquilla Terremoto* [Mariquilla Earthquake] (1939) starring Estrellita Castro, or *Filigrana* [Filigree] (Luis Marquina, 1949) featuring Concha Piquer, where the singer’s journey is integrated into the storyline. We find a similar dynamic in the character played by Rita Montaner in the Cuban film *El romance del palmar* [The Romance of the Palm Grove] (Ramón Peón, 1938). The Mexican film *Canto a mi tierra* [Song to My Land] (José Bohr, 1938) narrates the professionalisation of a singer, Pedro Vargas; the specular correspondence with the real vocalist is evidenced by the fact that the character in the film retains his real name.

Thus, it is patently clear that the uses of tango and fado, along with their singers, into their respective cinematographies were not merely isolated interventions. Rather, they reflect certain transmedial practices that have extended transnationally throughout Ibero-American cinema, with nuances to be considered in each case. In a first approach, we have chosen tango and fado within the framework of a broader project exploring other poetic and iconic correspondences between both musical genres (Dalbosco, 2020; 2022), which are closer than those found between

INDEED, WE START FROM THE HYPOTHESIS THAT THE CONVERGENCES THAT CAN BE FOUND BETWEEN DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF TANGO AND FADO ARE MOTIVATED BY CERTAIN PARALLELISMS IN THEIR CONTEXTS, NAMELY: THEIR DEVELOPMENT IN URBAN-PORT CITIES, THE PERCEIVED NEED TO CONSTRUCT NATIONAL IDENTITY NARRATIVES DURING THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THE EMERGENCE OF ICONIC SINGERS OF STRONG IMPACT (DALBOSCO, 2022), AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE MECHANISMS OF ACTION OF THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY BY THAT TIME, PARTICULARLY OF RECORDS, RADIO, AND CINEMA

other musical forms³. Moreover, we contend that these two examples, in different languages and on different continents, illustrate fully the transoceanic scope of these processes in cinema. This is primarily due to the profound impact achieved by the chosen figures—Carlos Gardel and Amália Rodrigues—whose filmography is largely centred on the portrayal of musical interpreters.

To carry out our study, we start from Simon Frith’s reflections on the vocal personality of popular music singers. The musicologist explains that this personality comprises the characters that feature in their song repertoire, the character of the singer as a star, created by publicity and advertising, and the character of the singer as a person, that is, how each one imagines the performer really is (Frith, 2014: 348). In the case of Gardel and Amália⁴, to this complex interaction of personalities are also added those of them as film artists and those of the characters played by them in their films. Consequently, we will focus on the cinematic resources employed to shape the singer as a film character. This feedback loop was

such an effective marketing strategy that it was sustained for several decades in Ibero-American cinema.

TANGO AND FADO AT THE EMERGENCE OF SOUND CINEMA

The rise of the phonographic and discographic industry brought about a radical change in the relationship between the listener and the performer, as it transformed the way of listening by making live performance dispensable: the physical presence of the singer was no longer a requirement to hear their voice. This situation, so natural nowadays, was almost magical for audiences in those early days. In her book *Fábricas de músicas* (2017), Marina Cañardo explains that, while at the beginning of the phonographic industry performances were anonymously disseminated without reference to the singers, concepts such as “high fidelity” or “faithful copy” began to spread, and advertising started to regain the performer’s identity and visual aspect. Thus, from 1890 onwards, a star system of the record industry began to develop, leading to the “idolatry of the performer”, which Cañardo sees as a continuation of “the cult of genius within the romantic tradition” (Cañardo, 2017: 73)⁵, further fuelled by specialized magazines, radio, and, fundamentally, by cinema. Alina Mazzaferro summarizes how Argentine publications of the time reflected the growth of the local star system, nurtured by some artists who were both singers and actors/actresses of theatre and cinema: “at first, they would talk about ‘figuras’; by the mid-twenties, ‘estrellas’ would emerge and [...] with the rise of studio cinema, ‘astros’ would become popularized” (Mazzaferro, 2018: 21)⁶.

As we have previously discussed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when various countries began producing silent films first, and later sound films, they immediately made use of the flourishing national music and its artists. This happened with tango and fado, which soon inte-

grated into an increasingly extensive transmedial network, where song lyrics, theatrical and film scripts, and literary narratives exchanged plots, characters, and settings. For instance, in Argentina, many silent films by José Agustín Ferreyra had titles and stories directly extracted from tango songs⁷. Similarly, in Portugal’s silent cinema, the emblematic film *O fado* [The fado], directed by Maurice Mariaud (1924), was inspired by José Malhoa’s homonymous painting (1910). Later, just as the first Portuguese sound film, *A Severa* [The Severa] (José Leitão de Barros, 1931), used fado and the figure of the fadista as symbols upon which to build its narrative, the first Argentine sound film, *¡Tango!* (Luis Moglia Barth, 1933), did the same with tango and its artists. Argentine films started featuring tango figures such as Azucena Maizani, Tita Merello, and Charlo; in Portuguese cinema starred *fadistas* like Ercília Costa, Fernando Farinha, Hermínia Silva, and Carlos Ramos. The key factor was that sound cinema not only combined the singer’s voice and image but also made them accessible to a much larger audience. The singer soon became a frequent and appealing cinematic character in the accelerated production of scripts⁸.

Given these conditions, sound cinema took advantage of the figures who embodied the maximum expression of the cult of the performer of tango and fado: Gardel and Amália. It should be noted that their careers did not coincide in time, as they emerged at different stages of the musical development of their respective genres. While Gardel was the creator of the tango song singer, from his first performance of “Mi noche triste” [My sad night] in 1917 until his premature death in 1935, Amália appeared in fado in 1939, when it was already quite established as a musical genre. Nevertheless, like Gardel, she was the great vehicle for the international projection of fado and its “civilising hero”, in the words of Joaquim Pais de Brito (1983: 160). Thus, numerous correspondences can be found in the career path of these two

artists: from their role in the evolution of tango and fado, the way the media and they themselves constructed their public biographies, to their national and international symbolic projection. Both represented the professionalisation and internationalisation of their respective music styles⁹. Although the film careers of the two artists did not occur simultaneously, there is a striking similarity in their film narratives and the consequent construction of the singer figure as a character.

Already established as Argentina's greatest national singer, between 1931 and 1935 Gardel starred in seven sound feature films made for Paramount abroad, in Paris and New York; some even preceding the production of sound cinema in Argentina. Although he plays the role of a singer in almost all of them, this role stands out in *Melodía de arrabal* (1932) and *El día que me quieras* (1935). In these films and their soundtracks, the attenuation of local colour is often noticeable. The fact that an Argentine product – Gardel and his songs – was captured in its own language but filmed in other countries and projected to the world directly impacted the spatial and verbal configuration of the script. Filmed entirely in studios with artificial set design, even when referring to supposedly real locations in Buenos Aires, these are symbolically suggested spaces. Conversely, Amália Rodrigues' films were mostly shot in Portugal when fado and its artists already had a significant presence in national cinema. In almost all of them, she plays the role of a *fadista*, with this figure being most prominent in *Fado, história de uma cantadeira* (1947) and *Sangue toureiro* (1958).

Despite the differences between Gardel's and Amália's films, both functioned as metadiscourses, tracing "a triangle of blurred boundaries between the film character, the public life of the artists, and the real people" (Dalbosco, 2022: 13)¹⁰. Indeed, the scripts often dialogue with the artists' real journeys, reconstructed in biographies and interviews, and disseminated by specialised magazines and radio. In the four selected films –and in others

as well– the character of the musical performer is constructed around four interconnected axes that shape them both as a cult figure and as a social mediator, akin to ancient cultural heroes: the spatial displacement as an initiation journey, the personal image metamorphosis, the social marginalisation, and the moral and emotional integrity. We will now examine how each of these operates in configuring this film character, focusing primarily on the first two, as they involve a greater deployment of cinematic resources. The other two pertain more to the character's traits as developed in the plot. Spatial Displacement as an Initiation Journey and the Personal Image Metamorphosis.

Both in the poetics of tango and fado from the twenties to the forties, and later in the films based on them, space acquires a significance beyond its value as territory. Consequently, the cities of Buenos Aires and Lisbon, along with their connections between neighbourhoods, the centre, the peripheries, the interior spaces, and even the transatlantic countries, are re-signified as places of identity construction or deconstruction, redefining their boundaries as affective topographies. Numerous studies highlight the importance of space not only as one of the most recurrent poetic themes in tango (Bergero, Matamoro, Ulla) and fado (Elliott, Gray, Queiroz), but also because the relationship between subject and space is crucial in the genesis of both musical genres and in the interweaving of all their components: lyrics, music, instrumentation, and performance.

Noemí Ulla and Matthew Karush, for example, have argued that at least a substantial part of tango lyrics from the twenties and thirties revealed a "Manichean logic of society" (Karush, 2013: 36), where the suburb—a lost paradise—was opposed to the centre—perdition (Ulla, 1982: 36). The ecological displacement from the neighbourhood to the centre carried out by tango itself in the second decade of the twentieth century was, however, what enabled its musical expansion. Similarly, in tango lyrics, such a journey implied certain op-

portunities for social mobility for its characters, so the dualistic vision of space also offers ambivalent interpretive keys. What is clear is that this cartography was not representative of Buenos Aires' socio-environmental reality of the time, which was much more complex.

In the same vein, fado, as a strongly situated music, shapes an affective cartography through the symbiotic relationship established between lyrics, body, voice, song, and space (Gray, 2013: 106-108). Lila Ellen Gray argues that fados whose lyrics celebrate aspects of Lisbon and its neighbourhoods are so frequent that they constitute a poetic subgenre. They often evoke a city suspended in time, viewed through a lens imbued with nostalgia and saudade (Gray, 2013: 108-110). Richard Elliott, on the other hand, considers that whether speaking of Lisbon as a whole or of its fado neighbourhoods—Alfama, Mouraria, Bairro Alto, Madragoa— fado lyrics “provide topographies of loss, that place the city as an object of desire or lack, or as the backdrop to another lost, remembered or desired object” (Elliott, 2016: 66).

In the four selected films, the basic plotline is similar: a talented but local singer transforms into a music star while becoming entangled in a

romantic relationship. Much like cultural heroes, spatial displacement is the milestone marking this transformation, redefined as an initiation journey. The characters portrayed by Gardel and Amália in these films undergo a dual journey: from the suburbs – the periphery – to the theatre – the city centre – and from the national to the international arena. As previously mentioned, this journey reflects the actual path taken by both the music and its protagonists, evolving from local products to national symbols.

Due to the demands of his international projection and the urgency with which the scripts were conceived, Gardel's films rely on simple plots, where spaces are reduced to cardboard scenery and generic labels such as “neighbourhood café”, “university bar”, “theatre”, “suburbs”, etc. Yet, they do not lose their contextual value. In fact, in *Melodía de arrabal*, the space is the first thing that is shown. The film opens with a panning shot intended to represent the hustle and bustle of neighbourhood life until the camera stops to zoom in on the “record shop”, which attracts a large crowd, positioning music as an essential element of neighbourhood life. The next scene already takes us inside the neighbourhood bar, where the camera once again moves around to capture the place's liveliness: musicians, dancing couples, card games, men with suspicious looks.

The script, written by Alfredo Le Pera, is structured around binarisms and duplications, evident in both the spatial settings and the characters' identities. Gardel simultaneously embodies Roberto Ramírez, “the café singer” situated in the suburbs, and a white-collar swindler who cheats at card games, a skill he later exploits under the name of Torres. Likewise, the neighbourhood and the café possess a dual valence. On one hand, they are celebrated by the eponymous song, “Melodía de arrabal”, which serves as a leitmotif, integrated as both diegetic and extradiegetic music throughout the film.

IN THE FOUR SELECTED FILMS –AND IN OTHERS AS WELL– THE CHARACTER OF THE MUSICAL PERFORMER IS CONSTRUCTED AROUND FOUR INTERCONNECTED AXES THAT SHAPE THEM BOTH AS A CULT FIGURE AND AS A SOCIAL MEDIATOR, AKIN TO ANCIENT CULTURAL HEROES: THE SPATIAL DISPLACEMENT AS AN INITIATION JOURNEY, THE PERSONAL IMAGE METAMORPHOSIS, THE SOCIAL MARGINALISATION, AND THE MORAL AND EMOTIONAL INTEGRITY

Neighbourhood... neighbourhood...
 you have the restless soul
 of a sentimental sparrow.
 Sorrows... plea...
 Is this whole thug neighbourhood,
 melody of the suburbs!
 Neighbourhood... neighbourhood...
 forgive me if, when I recall you,
 a tear escapes me,
 which, rolling down your cobblestones,
 is a prolonged kiss
 that my heart gives you¹¹.

On the other hand, the neighbourhood and the café are also denigrated by some inhabitants. For instance, Marga, the tough woman of the café, declares that the “dirty and gloomy suburbs poison her soul” and “trap her in its vice-ridden prison”, or even Alina, who stands in contrast to Marga as a positive female figure. Alina, the virtuous girl and the neighbourhood music teacher, suggests to Ramírez that “to be someone”, “to succeed”, he must cease being the “café singer” to become the “city singer”, whose stage is the theatre. Indeed, it is Alina who intervenes with a theatre entrepreneur, enabling Ramírez’s transition from a local singer to a professional, as highlighted in the second axis marking the singer’s recognition: the metamorphosis of his personal image. While Ramírez sings in the bar dressed in a suit and tie with a handkerchief, neat but suburban, in the theatre he performs in a tuxedo and bow tie, internationally recognized attire symbolizing social mobility (Karush, 2013: 134). Off-screen, Gardel’s image dressed in this way was the most frequent; thus, there is a nod from the fictional character to the real person [IMAGE 1]. The singer’s humble origins –like those of Amália Rodrigues–were, according to Matthew Karush, a central component of his image, so that “Gardel in his tuxedo was the quintessence of the poor boy who made it” (Karush, 2013: 134)¹². The same applies to tango and fado: their popular and suburban roots are neither silenced nor discarded in these films; rath-



Image 1. Carlos Gardel dressed in a tuxedo in *Melodía de arrabal*

er, they remain the source of their appeal, which is refined and legitimised as they move to the city centre.

Just as the ability to project the singer’s image and voice nationally and internationally fostered a cult of the performer, cinema exploited its technical capacities to manipulate sound and visual aspects, thereby achieving various effects on the audience. A prevalent technique in films depicting musical stars involves the deliberate disjunction between image and sound, serving to highlight one or the other. In the film, during Gardel’s initial performance of “Melodía de arrabal”, the camera only pulls away from him to direct its focus onto the captivated audience, thus emphasizing their admiration for his performance.

Gardel’s journey expands and becomes more complex in *El día que me quieras*, also by Paramount but filmed in New York with a script by Le Pera. Julio Argüelles (Gardel) leaves his wealthy paternal home to marry an aspiring actress from a lower social class. From singing in cafes just to barely subsist while his wife agonizes, he becomes a celebrity of the tango and the creole song when, alongside his daughter Marga, he triumphs abroad under the new name of Julio Quiroga – that is, with a new identity–. First in Europe – Paris, London, Berlin– and later in Hollywood, where the metadiscursive circle is completed:

Julio, like tango and Gardel himself, is recognised abroad and becomes a film artist. The singers' journeys are suggested through vertiginous dissolves of images of trains, planes, ships, building facades, and newspaper headlines, a technique inherited from silent cinema.

This international move also brings about a change in the singer's image: while Gardel, portraying Julio Argüelles, consistently dons a suit, reflecting the typical attire of a tango singer, when Julio Quiroga performs in the *mise-en-abyme* scene set within the film, he appears dressed as a gaucho (Image 2). The widespread practice of dressing tango singers as gauchos on the international stage is well documented. However, there is deeper significance here: just as tango lyrics and Argentine films often highlight the dichotomy between the city and the country, and between the centre and the neighbourhood –with its rural roots– in several of his films, Gardel personifies “both rural folklore and the urban traditions of tango” (Karush, 2013: 84). Indeed, he launched his career singing creole music, a genre he nev-

er abandoned. As Karush argues, it was “Gardel's, and by extension tango's, ability to mediate between the countryside and the city, tradition and modernity” that made the genre a powerful symbol of national identity (Karush, 2013: 85).

As we can see, the dualistic cartography sung by tango and reinterpreted in these filmic geographies, which in turn was re-signified in its international projection, was far from representing the actual spatial layout and population composition of the neighbourhoods and the city of Buenos Aires. Instead, it aimed at constructing various narratives about the music, its artists, and national identity.

In the films starring Amália Rodrigues, the journey of the fado singer mirrors that of fado itself and that of the real Amália. In *Fado, história de uma cantadeira*, Ana Maria, an amateur *cantadeira*, transitions from singing in the intimacy of her home in Lisbon's Alfama neighbourhood to local venues, where she catches the attention of entrepreneurs who persuade her to perform in theatres in central Lisbon. Thus, she turns into a profes-

sional artist. Michael Colvin argues that this film depicts the emergence of novo fado, the evolution of fado from its origins as the nineteenth century “song of the defeated”, rooted in Lisbon's marginalized areas and popular neighbourhoods, to becoming a nationally recognized genre performed by professionals and projected internationally (Colvin, 2016: 106).

By becoming professional, Ana Maria undergoes a transformation into a celebrity figure: at the beginning of the film, she dresses simply in house aprons and performs at local venues draped in a black shawl, adhering to the traditional conventions of fado. However, as her career ascends, she emerges

Image 2. Carlos Gardel dressed as an Argentine gaucho on the film set simulated by the film *El día que me quieras*



as a glamorous diva, draped in silk and sequins, attended by a retinue of domestic staff. A pivotal scene depicts Ana Maria awakening in the late afternoon, nestled in a sumptuous bed, engaging in conversation on a pristine white telephone—an overt homage to Hollywood icons like Jean Harlow (Image 3). Through this evolution, cinema, as a transmedial genre, crafts a novel type of artist, a sort of total figure articulated at the intersection of different genres: Ana Maria/Amália emerges as a multifaceted persona, embodying simultaneously the roles of a professional singer, a theatrical luminary, and a cinematic star.

However, Ana Maria's initiation journey does not stop there. Following a breakup with Júlio, her former guitarist and neighbourhood sweetheart, stemming from a misunderstanding, she relocates to Brazil, where she experiences her breakthrough as a singer. Unlike Gardel's journey, the theatre is a place of simulation, with stage designs underscoring their artificial nature, while the *retiro*—akin to the Buenos Aires' café—is depicted as the bastion of authentic fado. Júlio, according to Colvin emblematic of fado tradition and its "fado castizo" (Colvin, 2016: 113), reproaches Ana Maria for no longer singing as she used to since departing Alfama. Several scenes show the theatrical frenzy backstage, among scaffolding and ropes that expose the artifice, in stark contrast with the film's opening scenes set in the Alfama neighbourhood, where characters wander through its sunlit streets, open-air markets, and local houses and taverns.

Nevertheless, the journey of this fado singer comes full circle as Ana Maria returns to the *retiro* where she started and sings the central fado of the soundtrack, "O fado de cada um" [The Fate of Each One], to honour Júlio, in what constitutes a double return with ideological undertones: from the singer to Alfama and from the woman to the man. This fado runs through the entire film and offers an interpretive line, as Ana Maria sings it at the beginning when she is an amateur fadista,



Image 3. Amália Rodrigues in the style of a Hollywood diva in *Fado, história de uma cantadeira*

and then at the end, already a celebrity. The lyrics of "O fado de cada um" reinforce the film's ideological reading, as well as the self-definition of fado in its projection as a national song towards Portugal and abroad. It is one of the many metadiscursive fados that define the genre at the intersection of the word fado as destiny and as music: "Well thought out, we all have our fate / And those born ill-fated, will have no better fate / Fate is luck, from the cradle to the grave / No one escapes, no matter how strong / The destiny that God gives!"¹³. In this final scene, the disjunction between image and sound is used to emphasize the spectacular nature of the return. While the camera focuses on Júlio on the *retiro* stage, playing the guitar with indifference and bitterness, Ana Maria's powerful voice is heard in the background until the camera finally focuses on her walking towards the stage to reunite with her former love, dressed in the classic black fado shawl and not in her diva attire.

The ideological background is more evident in Amália's films than in Gardel's. Regarding this, it is important to note that while Gardel's films, filmed abroad, seemed driven by commercial interests and a somewhat superficial desire for exoticism, the Portuguese films starring Amália Rodrigues were shot during the Salazar regime. Neither fado nor Amália could escape the uses of popular cul-

ture carried out by the *Estado Novo*, synthesized in the famous slogan of the three F's: Fado, Fátima, and Football (Nery, 2004: 241). If in its early days, around the thirties, Salazar's dictatorship implemented measures to sanitise fado, which stimulated its professionalisation and poetic crystallisation (Brito, 1983), later the regime relied on the suggestive alliance of this music with cinema to promote its value system. As Rui Vieira Nery explains, from the fifties onwards, the *Estado Novo* gradually began to overcome its initial ideological distance from fado, seeking to incorporate it into a populist image strategy that extended to all domains of cultural industry, including cinema (Nery, 2004: 238). The prominence and celebrity achieved by Amália as a fado star and a film actress were exploited by the dictatorship to such an extent that this connection overshadowed her career, especially after the Carnation Revolution¹⁴.

In *Sangue Toureiro*, the ideological use of fado intensifies; Adriana Martins states that this film "takes advantage of the fame and social representativeness of the bullfighter and the *fadista* to convey the values of a rigidly stratified patriarchal society with well-defined gender roles, resistant to the transformation of mentalities" (Martins, 2017: 100)¹⁵. This content contrasts with the cinematographic modernity of *Sangue toureiro*, promoted as Portugal's first colour feature film, and characterized by skilful camerawork and lavish use of various cinematic visual and sound resources: panoramas, low-angle shots, voice-overs. The journey of the *fadista* is linear, intertwined with a love story of a different nature, much more connected to the etymological and tragic sense of the word "fado" as *fatum* ('ominous fate'), which both the fado poetics and the discourses about fado and its own artists have drawn upon. Amália Rodrigues embodies a *fadista* named Maria da Graça, already acclaimed by the local audience, who sings in various venues in Lisbon. In one of them, she meets Eduardo, the son of a traditional landowner from the rural area of Ribatejo, who becomes a

bullfighter to win her over, until their love turns into a passionate romance, and they begin an extramarital cohabitation. The young man's traditional family repudiates this situation to such an extent that Eduardo's mother convinces Maria da Graça to leave him, arguing that he should take care of the family estate so that they could continue hiring local workers. The *fadista* then decides to secretly leave Eduardo, sacrificing her love for the sake of others, and accepts a contract to sing in Brazil and later in New York, which propels her to international celebrity. Maria da Graça's journey mirrors that of Amália herself: after her debut in 1939 in Lisbon's venues, Amália travelled to Brazil in 1944, where she recorded her first albums, thus beginning her internationalization phase (Ferreira, 2009: 47-58). At the same time, it could be seen as a nod to the origins of fado, as some musicologists place them in Brazil (Nery, 2004). In addition, in the early fifties, Amália spent more than three months performing in New York.

In *Sangue Toureiro*, the plot's conflict is resolved when each character returns to their original physical, social, and symbolic space: Eduardo to the countryside and the *fadista* to the stage. Space takes on a special role, manifested not only in the plot but especially in the imagery. Indeed, the film aims to showcase a prosperous Portugal proud of its popular culture: rural dances, fado, bullfighting. However, it simultaneously promotes a rigid and conservative social model. The film begins with a long panning shot starting from the river Tagus, to display the local colour and splendour of the Ribatejo, a Portuguese agricultural region. Meanwhile, Portuguese rural music of extradiegetic origin is heard, and a voice-over refers to the symbiosis between the landscape and the Ribatejo people. Another panoramic shot shows the extent of the land, pausing on its traditions and typical dances. Due to the importance attributed to life in the Ribatejo and regional identity as components of an ideological apparatus, Martins categorises *Sangue Toureiro* as a Lusitanian

BEYOND THE SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH OF THE FILMS DISCUSSED AND THEIR UNDERLYING IDEOLOGICAL AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS, THE SPATIAL CIRCULATION IN ALL OF THEM SYMBOLISES THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF BOTH THE ARTIST AND THE MUSIC. THIS CIRCULATION ACTS AS A MECHANISM OF LEGITIMISATION, COMPLETED WHEN NATIONAL BORDERS ARE CROSSED, THEREBY SOLIDIFYING THE GENRE AS A NATIONAL SONG. HOWEVER, THE APPRECIATION OF THIS PROCESS IS AMBIGUOUS, AS IT INEVITABLY INVOLVES UPROOTING THE SINGER AND THE MUSIC FROM THEIR ORIGINAL CONTEXT, THUS PARTIALLY SACRIFICING THEIR AUTHENTICITY

western (Martins, 2017: 102). Throughout the film, this place contrasts with a supposedly modern and sanitised Lisbon. A significant low-angle shot emphasises the height of the building where Maria da Graça and Eduardo live together. Then the camera explores its interior, revealing decor typical of the sixties, which is very up-to-date for the time and aligns with the free and modern way of living love that the film presents as a threat to the traditional family. Moreover, Lisbon's tourist appeal is embodied in the secondary character of a somewhat clumsy American journalist and tourist, who travels around Lisbon documenting its attractions and lightens the tragic plot by causing a series of misunderstandings.

Beyond the specific characteristics of each of the films discussed and their underlying ideological and commercial interests, the spatial circulation in all of them symbolises the professionalisation of both the artist and the music. This circulation acts as a mechanism of legitimisation, completed when national borders are crossed,

thereby solidifying the genre as a national song. However, the appreciation of this process is ambiguous, as it inevitably involves uprooting the singer and the music from their original context, thus partially sacrificing their authenticity.

SOCIAL MARGINALISATION AND THE SINGER AS A SOCIAL OUTCAST

As discussed, spatial displacement serves as the catalyst that transforms the amateur singer into a professional performer, a transition manifested through a metamorphosis of their personal image. However, the singer, as a filmic character, also depends on the construction of a specific social and emotional personality. In this section, we will briefly address this social personality.

Even though the change in attire for the male singer and the *cantadeira* symbolizes their progress and upward mobility, such a shift does not imply integration into the upper class. They may become wealthy, but they do not become aristocrats. Indeed, another mechanism that propels the singer to celebrity status is the process through which the musical performer in the film becomes a kind of social outcast—not in the sense of pejorative marginalisation, but as a figure who, due to his or her unique status, transcends social class distinctions without fully integrating into any. This process operates in two directions: on one hand, it deifies the performer, placing them outside certain social norms applicable to ordinary individuals; on the other hand, it positions them as a mediating figure, a conciliatory presence between classes, capable of generating admiration across social boundaries.

In *Melodía de arrabal*, this process is quite straightforward: through fraudulent means, Ramírez transitions from being a resident of the neighbourhood to living as a wealthy man, but without integrating into the upper class. He assumes a false identity—Torres—which he constantly disavows. His triumph as a singer redeems

him from that reprehensible life, although it does not return him to his place of origin. In *El día que me quieras*, Julio Argüelles's social path is inverse: the son of a heartless businessman becomes a hardworking man—Julio Quiroga—renouncing his inheritance and class affiliation in exchange for emotional and professional independence. The circle closes, however, when Marga, Julio's daughter—also a singer—marries a wealthy young man whose father only accepts her upon discovering Julio's true lineage, which is a concession to the traditionalist conventions of the time. According to Karush, these types of contradictions in the discourse on social mobility were common in radio and cinema. On one hand, mass culture often adhered to a classist and Manichaeian moral vision, which privileged the poor and rejected the rich, while on the other hand, it celebrated individual social mobility (Karush, 2013: 35-36).

A similar dynamic is evident in the portrayal of the *fadistas* embodied by Amália Rodrigues, who, upon becoming celebrities, remain outside traditional social classes. When Ana Maria in *Fado, História de uma Cantadeira* achieves success in the theatres, she begins to receive invitations to events held by the Lisbon upper class, such as the reception at the Spanish embassy. However, her elusive behaviour at these events reveals her lack of integration. For instance, when she learns that a girl from her original neighbourhood—Alfama—who is under her protection is gravely ill, she leaves the party to be by her side. Later, her definitive return to Alfama at the end of the film, in what constitutes a classic Hollywood-style scene, confirms her detachment from social classes: the acclaimed star no longer fully belongs to that neighbourhood either. Maria da Graça in *Sangue Toureiro*, the most tragic figure of the four films, is an outcast from the beginning: admired by the Portuguese upper class, especially by men, yet rejected by Eduardo's traditional and wealthy parents. Their union proves impossible and breaks apart. As Martins states, "Maria da Graça accepts

the fate that society and her condition impose on her and turns to singing fado as a way of atoning for her pain" (Martins, 2017: 113).

MORAL INTEGRITY AND EMOTIONAL SUPERIORITY

Another attribute used to shape the singer as a cinematic character in these films is their inherent kindness and emotional sensitivity, virtues that align them with the cultural hero. The driving force behind the singer's journey is fundamentally emotional; there is no initial excessive ambition for success or desire to make money through singing. Both the male singer and the *fadista* are depicted as characters with exceptional nobility of heart and moral integrity, even when they have exhibited socially or ethically questionable behaviour. For example, Roberto Ramírez, who sheds his false identity as Torres and, with a pure heart, becomes deserving of Alina's love, or Julio Argüelles, who steals from his wealthy father to save his dying wife. Among the characters analysed, the epitome of kindness is represented by Maria da Graça, a nineteenth-century-style heroine who sacrifices herself for the benefit of others, even at the cost of her own happiness [IMAGE 4].

The film's conclusion portrays Maria da Graça in her apotheosis as a *fadista*, yet paradoxically miserable, as evidenced by the last fado she sings, "Um só amor" [A Single Love], and as narrated by an off-screen voice at the end of the film: "Here ends our story. He followed a path of tradition, she chose her destiny as an artist, carrying with her the sorrow of the great and only love of her life". The story of this character ultimately evokes and revives the tales of two fado icons: the mythical Maria Severa Onofriana and her love affair with the Count of Vimioso¹⁶, and Amália herself, who in numerous interviews aligned her life path with the etymological meaning of the word fado, a strategy also employed by many other *fadistas* (Jerónimo and Fradique, 1995: 91-107).



Image 4. *Maria da Graça as a triumphant yet unhappy artist in New York, in Sangue toureiro*

The construction of the musical performer as a personality with an extraordinary heart was demanded by the cult of the singer as a comprehensive figure, with clear Romantic roots, admired not only for their talent but also for their human virtues, much like the ancient cultural heroes.

CONCLUSION

The technological revolution that erupted at the beginning of the twentieth century permeated generic, medial, and spatial boundaries, while enabling the creation of new genres characterized by their intermediality, such as cinema. Sound cinema capitalized on the possibility of capturing sound and image simultaneously and integrated already idolized singers from the early decades of the twentieth century into its star system. Within this framework, the musical performer not only

transformed into a cult figure but also became transmedial, evolving into a regular cinematic character. Thus, the uses of professional singers' voices, bodies, and biographies multiplied. In this context, Carlos Gardel and Amália Rodrigues emerge as emblems not only of tango and fado but also of a new era of cultural industry. Indeed, as outlined at the beginning of this article, if this analysis were extended to other Ibero-American films, it would soon be discovered that several of the coincidences mentioned here were recurring themes in the region's cinematography. Tango and fado, in this sense, were part of a much broader transnational network.

In crafting the portrayal of the singer as a cinematic character, our aim was to illuminate the intertwining of real and fictional journeys within these musical genres and the lives of the artists themselves, as they converge within the emotional geographies traced by cinema. In these cartographies, the triangulation between the national and the international is pivotal: while traversing national borders serves as a means of validation and artistic projection, international travel operates as a definitive act of legitimization, revealing to which extent the globalization of the music and film industries undermines and reshapes spatial boundaries. ■

NOTES

- 1 "Frecuente asimilación entre artistas y personajes", "un procedimiento para la promoción de los artistas en la radio y en el teatro musical". Translation by the author.
- 2 "Figuras de una modernidad alternativa". Translation by the author.
- 3 Already in 1983, anthropologist Joaquim Pais Brito referred to tango and fado as "parallel forms", both stemming from an urban popular culture (Brito, 1983: 171). Daniel Gouveia, on the other hand, highlights the closer relationship between both musical genres and outlines some of their affinities (Gouveia, 2013: 236-241).

- 4 We will mainly refer to these artists by the names by which they are most known: Carlos Gardel as 'Gardel' and Amália Rodrigues as 'Amália'.
- 5 "Idolatría del intérprete", "la tradición romántica del culto al genio". Translation by the author.
- 6 "Al principio se hablaría de 'figuras'; a mediados de los años veinte surgirían las 'estrellas' y [...] con el auge del cine de estudios se popularizarían los 'astros'". Translation by the author.
- 7 Such is the case of films like *El tango de la muerte* [The Tango of Death] (José Agustín Ferreyra, 1917), *Perdón, viejita* [Sorry, mom] (José Agustín Ferreyra, 1927), or *Melenita de oro* [Golden Locks] (José Agustín Ferreyra, 1923), whose titles come from popular tangos.
- 8 It is worth noting that the first American sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), is also based on the story of a man who becomes a professional singer.
- 9 For further exploration of the parallels between Carlos Gardel and Amália Rodrigues, we refer to our previous work (Dalbosco, 2022).
- 10 "un triángulo de borrosos límites entre el personaje de la película, la vida pública de los artistas y las personas reales". Translation by the author.
- 11 "Barrio... barrio.../ que tenés el alma inquieta/ de un gorrión sentimental./ Penas...ruego...
esto todo el barrio malevo/ melodía de arrabal/ Barrio... barrio.../ perdoná si al evocarte/ se me pianta un lagrimón,/ que al rodar en tu empedrao/ es un beso prolongao/ que te da mi corazón". Translation by the author.
- 12 "Gardel con su smoking era la quintaesencia del chico pobre que lo había logrado". Translation by the author.
- 13 "Bem pensado, todos temos nosso fado/ E quem nasce malfadado, melhor fado não terá/ Fado é sorte, e do berço até à morte/ Ninguém foge, por mais forte/ Ao destino que Deus dá!". Translation by the author.
- 14 For further exploration of the relationship between Amália and the Salazar regime, we refer to the revisionist work of Miguel Carvalho (2020).
- 15 "saca partido de la fama y de la representatividad social de la figura del torero y de la fadista para transmitir los valores de una sociedad patriarcal rígidamente estratificada y con papeles de género bien delimitados,

que se resistía a la transformación de las mentalidades". Translation by the author.

- 16 Maria Severa Onofriana, born in 1820, is remembered as the first and most celebrated fadista of the nineteenth century, prior to the era of phonographic recordings. Her mythical story gathers all the ingredients of a romantic heroine: a prostitute who has a love affair with an aristocrat, the Count of Vimioso, and dies of illness at the age of 26.

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THE MUSICAL PERFORMER AS A CHARACTER IN THE FILMS OF CARLOS GARDEL AND AMÁLIA RODRIGUES: TRANSMEDIALITY, PROFESSIONALIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

Abstract

The emergence of sound cinema around the thirties drew plot inspiration from various urban and popular musical genres that were flourishing at the time. Cinema quickly seized the opportunity to capture sound and image simultaneously and integrated singers who were already idolized during the early decades of the twentieth century into its star system. In this context, the musical performer not only became a cult figure but also became transmedial, regularly appearing as a cinematic character. On this occasion, we aim to analyse some parallelisms in how sound cinema capitalized on the success of Carlos Gardel – tango singer – and Amália Rodrigues – fado singer – in their respective countries, to shape the figure of the singer as a film character and project them nationally and internationally as identity emblems. To this end, we will analyse some films starring them, where they play the role of singers. From Gardel, we will take *Melodía de arrabal* [Suburban melody] (Louis J. Gasnier, 1932) and *El día que me quieras* [The day that you love me] (John Reinhardt, 1935), while from Amália, we have chosen *Fado, história de uma cantadeira* [Fado, Story of a Singer] (Perdigão Queiroga, 1947) and *Sangue toureiro* [Bullfighter's Blood] (Augusto Fraga, 1958).

Key words

Tango; Fado; Singer; Character; Argentine cinema; Portuguese cinema.

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EL INTÉRPRETE MUSICAL COMO PERSONAJE EN LAS PELÍCULAS DE CARLOS GARDEL Y AMÁLIA RODRIGUES: TRANSMEDIALIDAD, PROFESIONALIZACIÓN Y GLOBALIZACIÓN

Resumen

El surgimiento del cine sonoro en torno a la década de los treinta del siglo XX encontró inspiración argumental en distintos géneros musicales urbanos y populares, que se hallaban en auge por ese entonces. De este modo, el cine pronto aprovechó la posibilidad de recoger sonido e imagen de manera simultánea e integró a su *star system* a los cantantes ya idolatrados durante las primeras décadas del siglo XX. En este marco, el intérprete musical no solo se transformó en una figura de culto, sino que él mismo se vuelve transmedial y se convierte en un personaje cinematográfico habitual. En esta ocasión queremos analizar algunos paralelismos en la forma en que el cine sonoro sacó ventaja del éxito de Carlos Gardel –cantor de tangos– y de Amália Rodrigues –fadista– en sus respectivos países, para modelar la figura del o de la cantante como personaje cinematográfico y proyectarlos nacional e internacionalmente como emblemas identitarios. Con este fin, analizaremos algunas películas protagonizadas por ellos, donde representan el papel de cantantes. De Gardel tomaremos *Melodía de arrabal* (Louis J. Gasnier, 1932) y *El día que me quieras* (John Reinhardt, 1935), mientras que de Amália hemos escogido *Fado, história de uma cantadeira* (Perdigão Queiroga, 1947) y *Sangue toureiro* (Augusto Fraga, 1958).

Palabras clave

Tango; fado; cantante; personaje; cine argentino; cine portugués.

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