

The Metamorphosis of Birds

(A Metamorfose dos Pássaros)

A film by Catarina Vasconcelos



101 min/Portugal/Portuguese with English subtitles/2020/Cert tbc/
Winner of the FIPRESCI Prize Encounters section– Berlin International Film Festival 2020

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SYNOPSIS:

A documentary reflection on the director's family.

Beatriz (the director's grandmother) married Henrique on the day of her 21st birthday. Henrique, a naval officer, would spend long periods at sea. Ashore, Beatriz, who learned everything from the verticality of plants, took great care of the roots of their six children. The oldest son, Jacinto (Hyacinth), the director's father, dreamed he could be a bird. One day, suddenly, Beatriz died.

The director's mother didn't die suddenly, but she too died when she was 17 years old. On that day, she and her father met in the joint loss of their mothers.

Further information and downloads [here](#)

Photo set for download [here](#)



CAST

Manuel Rosa
João Móra
Ana Vasconcelos
Henrique Vasconcelos
Inês Melo Campos
Catarina Vasconcelos
Cláudia Varejão
José Manuel Mendes
João Pedro Mamede

CREW

Writer and Director	Catarina Vasconcelos
Producers	Pedro Fernandes Duarte, Joana Gusmão, Catarina Vasconcelos
Cinematography	Paulo Menezes
Editing	Francisco Moreira
Sound	Adriana Bolito, Rafael Cardoso
Sound Design	Miguel Martins & Rodolfo Cardoso
First Assistant Director	Mariana Veloso
Production Coordinator	Maria Inês Gonçalves
Production Company	Primeira Idade

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CATARINA VASCONCELOS

Catarina Vasconcelos was born in Lisbon in 1986. After graduating from Lisbon's Fine Arts Academy, she moved to London where she pursued an MA at the Royal College of Art. Her final project, the short film "Metáfora ou a Tristeza Virada do Averso" (Metaphor or Sadness Inside Out), was her first film. "Metáfora" premiered at Cinéma du Réel in 2014 where it was awarded the prize for the Best International Short Film. The film screened at various festivals such as RIDM - Montreal International Documentary Festival, where it won award for Best international Medium Length film, DokLeipzig, Moscow International Film Festival and Doclisboa. Her first feature film, "A Metamorfose dos Pássaros" (The Metamorphosis of Birds") had its premiere in the Encounters section at Berlinale 2020.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2020 *The Metamorphosis of Birds*
- 2014 *Metaphor or Sadness Inside Out (short)*



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

For many years, I believed that my grandmother was a photograph: that picture of Beatriz, tall, vertical as a tree, with her coat over her shoulders and a smile as mysterious as Mona Lisa's, could be found in the homes of every member of my family. In my father's house, the photo was always on the cupboard where my mother's memories and collections were kept. My grandmother, who liked to be called Triz, had always lived there. It was as if she was watching over my mother's keepsakes.

This photograph, resembling a shrine in every home, always made me feel that there was something for me to know. I was happy for the fact that this photo could be my grandmother. At the age of six, I decided that my grandmother, Triz, was a photograph. When I was 11, my mother fell ill. When I was 17, my mother died. I didn't immediately realise how that brought me closer to my father but we found each other in the absence of the word "mother".

A few years passed. I left Portugal and went to study in England. I arrived in London during an economic crisis in Portugal that coincided with a personal one. One day, over Skype, my father told me that my grandfather, Henrique, wanted to burn the correspondence between Beatriz and himself. I was extremely shocked. My father listened to my arguments, all highly emotional, and ended the conversation with: "Yes, Catarina, but these are their personal letters. It's their intimacy and that's no one's business." My father didn't give me any hope that I might have access to the letters. At the same time, he gave me all that I needed to convince me that I wanted to make a film about Beatriz. Because it isn't fair for dead people to die twice. This was 2014.



When the process of selling my grandparents' house was initiated, I knew that the letters would soon be destroyed. That saddened me, since I believed that Triz lived in those words. I went down to the house's basement, where the trunks containing my grandparents' correspondence lay under a patina of dust. Aware that I was committing an offence, I opened one of the trunks and saw a bundle of telegrams. It wasn't Beatriz's handwriting, but they captured her essence in simple words: "Children OK. I pray God that everything is good. Miss you tremendously." And I, who have never believed in God, immediately believed in Beatriz.

Grandmother Beatriz was not a photograph. She existed, and I needed to know who she was. I wanted to know everything: I read about the dictatorship, about being a woman in Portugal during that time, and about what women could and could not be. I researched the associations where my grandmother had worked. I went to Ajuda cemetery, where she is buried and St. Dominic Church numerous times, as well as the mass at the Jerónimos Monastery... but Beatriz didn't live in any of those places.



I began a series of talks with my father and uncles about their mother. Through them, I understood and found out things not only about grandmother Triz, but each one of them and about a particular time. It became obvious that this film was not just about Triz. It was about my father's mother – my mother, mothers' mothers, mothers' mothers' mothers. But also about a certain historical period that I had not experienced: a very different time from the present one, which we have the duty not to forget. It is a great privilege to be able to live in freedom.

Some elements of the film have not happened exactly like that. But they could have. Different dates, characters, words; my ideas projected onto my father's and uncles' teenage years; my anxieties projected onto their pain. Throughout these years, between the many things that my family has told me about Triz and my mother, there are enormous gaps. Because there are many things that families don't tell you. They are part of what I fondly call the "mystery of families".

Families are a collection of secrets. This film could never be a documentary in the sense of a film that depicts reality: which reality? And what is reality anyway? If I couldn't have the letters, I had to invent them. If I didn't know my father and uncles when they were young, then I had to imagine them. As for Beatriz... she grew from what they told me, what I observed, and what I imagined she must have been like, as if it were a puzzle. The dead don't know that they are dead. Death is a question for the living. Maybe that is why Beatriz made a vinyl record to send to Henrique during one of his sea missions. At sea, Henrique could listen to Beatriz's and his children's voices, who were growing up without him being able to see them. The record survived Beatriz's death, allowing those who remained to believe that she is always nearby. This film is a home for the ghosts and their memories.

