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stripped of their pathos, with only a skeletal vision of the changes undergone by the central character, and other important figures reduced to ciphers.

Set in 1938, story covers a crucial month in the life of Pereira (Mastroianni), a widowed, overweight, solitary former news reporter, now in charge of the cultural page of a mediocre Lisbon newspaper. Being both predisposed toward the literature of the past and fixated with death, he hires a young assistant, Monteiro Rossi (Stefano Dionisi), to prepare advance obits of aging writers.

Monteiro Rossi begins to submit politically outspoken articles that are unpublishable under the Portuguese dictatorship. Realizing that the young man, who professed to be apolitical, and his impassioned g.f., Marta (Nicoletta Braschi), are both involved in the underground revolutionary struggle, Pereira still keeps him on.

Almost imperceptibly, the apathetic old man is shaken out of his belief that literature is the only cause worth pursuing. His awareness of the political turbulence in Europe is fed by whispered daily reports from Manuel (Joaquim De Almeida), a waiter at his local lunch-time haunt.

A further nudge comes from a German Jewish woman (Marthe Keller, in a brief but incisive appearance), who urges him to use his position as a man of culture to alert the public to the injustices being committed.

Pereira publishes his own translation of a boldly anti-German French short story, which slips past the censors and gets him into hot water with his editor (Mario Viegas), a regime toady. When Monteiro Rossi disappears to devote himself to underground activity, Pereira sends money via Marta.

But the journalist's decisive encounter is with Dr. Cardoso (Daniel Auteuil), a heart specialist and philosopher he meets at a seaside health clinic. Cardoso (who narrates the story) encourages him to let his conscience steer him into action.

Both Mastroianni and Auteuil approach their roles with intelligence and humor. In his first stint in an Italo feature since Francesca Archibugi's "Towards Evening" (1991), Mastroianni fleshes out Tabucchi's formidable creation as a pathetic figure revitalized by the political events to which he contributes. Auteuil shapes an immensely likable character out of the probing, somewhat unorthodox doc, making his instant rapport with the intellectually starved Pereira entirely believable.

Younger thespians are more problematic. As the politically driven g.f., Braschi is dismally inadequate, with wooden delivery and one-note earnestness. As the young activist, Dionisi ("Farinelli") emerges only slightly better, as an affable but insubstantial mechanism for Pereira's reawakening.

Tech credits on the \$3.3 million pic have the same undistinguished proficiency as Faenza's direction. Production designer Giantito Burchiellaro's elegant period settings, Blasco Giurato's dusty, height-of-summer lensing and Ennio Morricone's score, which apes Portuguese tunes of the era, are all pro. Post-synched dialogue in the Italian version could be sharper. —David Rooney

ACCORDING TO PEREIRA

(SOSTIENE PEREIRA)

(ITALIAN-FRENCH)

A Mikado Film release (in Italy) of a Jean Vigo Intl. (Rcme)/KG Prod. (Paris) production, in association with Mikado Film, Fabrica de Imagens. (International sales: UGC Intl., France.) Produced by Elda Ferri.

Directed by Roberto Faenza. Screenplay, Faenza, Sergio Vecchio, Antonio Tabucchi, based on the novel by Tabucchi. Camera (Technicolor), Blasco Giurato; editor, Ruggero Mastroianni; music, Ennio Morricone; art direction, Giantito Burchiellaro; costume design, Elisabetta Beraldo; sound (Dolby), Eric Vaucher; assistant director, Joao Cayatte. Reviewed at Intl. Recording screening room, Rome, March 24, 1995. Running time: 104 MIN.

Pereira Marcello Mastroianni
Dr. Cardoso Daniel Auteuil
Monteiro Rossi Stefano Dionisi
Marta Nicoletta Braschi
Manuel Joaquim De Almeida
Signora Delgado Marthe Keller
With: Teresa Madruga, Nicolau Breyner, Filipe Ferrer, Mario Viegas, Joao Grosso.

Arguably the outstanding work of fiction to come out of Italy in recent years, Antonio Tabucchi's novel "According to Pereira" provides Marcello Mastroianni with one of his best roles in some time. But this screen version of the story of a lonely old Portuguese journalist whose political conscience and soul are roused out of retirement by a series of chance encounters is a diluted, dramatically impotent take on the book's poignantly conveyed themes. Limited Euro-circuit exposure looks certain, however, thanks to the strong cast.

Director Roberto Faenza and co-scripter Sergio Vecchio are uncommonly faithful to the book, whose main character was inspired by a Portuguese dissident writer Tabucchi met while in exile in Paris.

But the film remains soulless and literary. Robbed of the nuances of Tabucchi's prose, events are