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EDITORIAL

With the success of Silviano Santiago's *Nas Malhas da Letra*, a collection of essays published earlier this year, Brazilian literary criticism has veered more openly toward a new direction – the unabashed study of contemporary fiction as a cultural phenomenon of significant importance. Unlike other most notable Brazilian critics, Santiago ventures a wide assessment of the trajectory of Brazilian contemporary fiction, attesting to the anarchic forms reflected within its Postmodernist thrust as well as to the surging vitality of the novel as a malleable genre, alive and well, despite the protestations of those who seek the comforting unity of epics and other traditionally mimetic narratives. Along with a deft evaluation of Modernism as a contrast to contemporary literary currents, Santiago provides an incisive and propitious view of twentieth-century Brazilian literature from the optic of the 1980s which, as a decade of mounting disappointments, is now coming to its frustrating end just as the century's last decade is about to begin. The dashed expectations of the New Republic, the failure of the Cruzado Plan, and the dissatisfaction with the political programs of candidates in the long-awaited free elections, made the 1980s a vivid mirror for viewing the contemporary crises and changes, cultural and otherwise, that chronically plague Brazil.

If Santiago's book of essays heralds, for a wider Brazilian public, the open discussion of contemporary fiction and Postmodernity, albeit the latter's proclaimed demise among international literary theorists, there are other signs that this debate is commanding more recognition and study in Brazil. Already in 1986, the prestigious *Revista do Brasil*. Nº 5, edited by Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, had dedicated this issue entitled "Literatura anos 80" to Postmodernism, with essays by such critics as José Guilherme Merquior, Flora Sussekind, Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, and others, including Silviano Santiago. And more recently, the *Jornal do Brasil* (Sept, 2, '89) announced and published a winning essay, "Nos Trilhos da Ficção", on Postmodern fiction, submitted to the much-coveted Prêmio Idéias Lufthansa de Ensaios 1989. This essay by Nízia Villaga and Márcio

Salgado brings to the newspaper public a critically lucid picture of contemporary fiction, as though the declared shift from the elitist to the popular reader of literature, in a postindustrial consumer society overpowered by the mass media, were being extended to literary criticism as well. Discussing such issues as the semiological proclivity of Postmodernist thought opposition to Modernism's semantic approach of logocentric autonomy, or the unifying and totalizing direction of the modernists in contrast to the incomplete and mutilated posture of the postmodernists – so appropriately evoked in the title of Rubem Fonseca's latest novel, *Vastas emoções e pensamentos imperfeitos* –, the above prize-winning essay confirms the arrival on the Brazilian cultural scene of a more visible debate revolving around contemporary fiction with its problems and provocations. The modernist quest for national identity, frequently symbolized by the individual hero, no longer dominates contemporary Brazilian narratives. Rather than an individual identity, we instead have the many individual masks of the individual haunting the hearts and minds of contemporary writers.

Sensitive to this exciting direction manifested in contemporary Brazilian literature and criticism, *Brasil/Brazil* includes in its third issue a contribution to this debate with the essay “Da Utopia à Nostalgia” as well as a review of *Hotel Atlântico*, a bestselling postmodernist novel by João Gilberto Noll. Also, in view of our on-going interest in the vibrant voice of Brazilian feminine fiction, we have selected an essay on Clarice Lispector along with reviews of recent fiction by two other established women writers, Lygia Fagundes Telles and Nélide Piñon. In addition, the reassessment of the past, distant as well as immediate, appears in the essays addressing the demise of cultural myth in Lima Barreto and the idealist programs of the CPCs during the 1960s. Rounding out this issue's contributions, and affirming *Brasil/Brazil's* binational impulse, is the first English translation of “Retábulo de Santa Joana Carolina,” a major short story by Osman Lins. As we close the 1980s with this issue, *Brasil/Brazil* looks to the 1990s with ever-increasing binational articulation.

Nelson H. Vieira
Regina Zilberman

CONTEMPORARY BRAZILIAN CULTURE: FROM UTOPIA TO NOSTALGIA

As an assessment of contemporary Brazilian culture, this essay addresses Brazil's chronic struggle with cultural authenticity in view of the staggering socio economic and political problems facing the New Republic. A shift in Brazil's cultural direction from the 1960s' idealist dreams of a political and cultural utopia to the present nostalgia for that past aspiration with its once unified and clear struggle of political resistance—suggests that the current cultural climate no longer strives for the totalizing implications once supported by the blur of national identity concepts used to combat the terrors of socio political repression. Rather, fragmentation, difference and dispersion appear as reactions to the present 'triumph of the technology of culture', which, via its massification process, forces artists to question the actual validity of cultural expression. With the mass media's homogenization of culture, artists appear to retaliate with individualized and localized versions in an attempt to affirm their dissatisfaction with the present state-of-affairs. In relation to this crisis, the powerful cultural industry and the victory of consumerism are also posited here against such factors as a crisis of ethics and the continuing domination by a small cultural elite, thus explaining to some extent the increasing state of alienation in Brazilian civilization. Despite its critical, 'post-utopian' hard line, this study recognizes the need to underscore this position with the hope of providing insight into Brazil's difficulties and evaluating these as part and parcel of its period of transition and adaptation toward democracy and liberalism.

Ensaio
Essay

"Em vez de luz tem tiroteio no fim do túnel.

(. . .)

e agora você quer um retrato do país
mas queimaram o filme.
E enquanto isso, na enfermaria
todos os doentes estão cantando
sucessos populares"

RENATO RUSSO (Do Legião Urbana)

Há uns dez anos, escrevi num pequeno jornal universitário de Fortaleza um artigo sobre a literatura brasileira, no qual formulava uma série de indagações a respeito do fazer literário no contexto da sociedade e da cultura brasileira. Perguntava-me, por exemplo, dentre outras coisas: "como fazer a literatura deste país? Existirá um ponto em que se diga: eis o Brasil? Haverá uma unidade possível? Ou será esta unidade mais uma ficção?"

Se ontem me via indagando, como todo jovem escritor, a respeito da construção literária e da situação cultural do país, hoje pretendo responder a algumas daquelas minhas antigas perplexidades, compartilhando com vocês essas respostas — que sei provisórias —, tendo como horizonte de reflexão a cultura brasileira atual.

O Brasil dói no meu coração e na minha mente. Lamento afirmar isso. Dificilmente encontraremos, hoje, um brasileiro satisfeito com seu país. Respira-se um certo clima de ceticismo e de desilusão. Mas sei que há igualmente, no fundo, a esperança de que um dia as coisas vão melhorar.

A cultura brasileira de certa forma se encontra impregnada desse clima. Se eu disser que ela está em crise, não acrescentarei muito, pois sempre esteve em crise. Desde o período de nossa formação que a cultura e a literatura nacional sofrem a crise permanente de autenticidade. Da alienação colonial e árcade, passando pela percepção ingênua da realidade dos românticos à visão crítica dos modernistas até chegar aos limites da "consciência possível" (Darcy Ribeiro),¹ que visava transformar a sociedade brasileira nos anos 60 e 70, o percurso da cultura brasileira tem persistido no drama de que nós "brasileiros e latino-americanos fazemos constantemente a experiência do caráter postiço, inautêntico, imitado da vida cultural que levamos", como assinala Roberto Schwarz.²

Dito isso, quero arriscar ao dizer que o problema da cultura brasileira não se limita, agora, a uma crise de autenticidade, mas decorre precisamente da falta de crise, isto é, da falta de poder *crítico*, de confronto e tensão histórica e social capaz de conferir-lhe legitimidade e impulso. No lugar da transgressão, há uma aparente dispersão e acomodação dos produtores culturais. Um afrouxamento da arte e do pensamento; o predomínio do acento individual sobre o coletivo. Do lirismo sobrevivencialista sobre a utopia comunitária e transformadora. Novos tempos.

Quais as razões desse afrouxamento e distensão? Evidentemente várias e interligadas são as causas. Tentarei esboçá-las aqui, consciente, entretanto, da incompletude do quadro e da falta, por certo, de maior profundidade de minha análise.

No campo propriamente da cultura, cabe registrar três fatores: a contundência comunicativa dos meios de massa, sobretudo da televisão; a falência da educação pública; e, no plano da arte e do pensamento, o ocaso das vanguardas e dos sistemas ideológicos com que se representava a realidade e se orientava a experiência.

No âmbito conjuntural, vale apontar os fatores econômicos e políticos do momento, junto aos valores comportamentais e éticos dos governantes e governados. É preciso lembrar, nesse jogo interativo, a composição estrutural das classes sociais. E, *last but not least*, gostaria de tocar nas peculiaridades de nosso momento pós-moderno, como fator de época que nos interliga à respiração histórica do planeta.

Vejamos, então, o que ocorre no contexto das comunicações de massa.

O que chama a atenção de pronto, no Brasil, tem sido o extraordinário desenvolvimento tecnológico das comunicações, principalmente da televisão. Saindo da precariedade dos anos 50, quando foram criadas as principais emissoras de TV do país, passando pelo período de experimentação dos anos 60, chegando à consolidação vitoriosa dos 70 e à hegemonia dos 80, a indústria cultural brasileira experimentou uma expansão gigantesca. Hoje, por exemplo, o país representa o 7º mercado mundial de televisão e publicidade, o 6º na produção de discos, além de possuir a 4ª maior emissora do mundo, a TV Globo.³

Sem dúvida, estamos assistindo a um processo novo, de extraordinária vitalidade. Se o final dos anos 50 e a década de 60

representaram, na cultura brasileira, um momento oswaldiano – de invenção – e, politicamente, marcusiano – de intervenção –, a década de 80 parece ser nosso momento frankfurtiano – de massificação.

Com efeito, cumpre-se, agora, no Brasil, a profecia benjaminiana da mercantilização da cultura. Com o advento da indústria cultural entre nós, Adorno falaria da instalação de uma vez por todas da violência da sociedade industrial: “o mundo inteiro é forçado a passar pelo filtro da indústria cultural”.⁴ No caso brasileiro, pode-se dizer que não só o mundo, mas o país inteiro, não obstante suas especificidades regionais e culturais, está passando pelo filtro do Big Brother televisivo.

Tal processo indica a tendência, tantas vezes denunciada, da homogeneização da cultura, seguindo a lógica típica hegemônica dos meios de massa. O objetivo é incorporar o Brasil inteiro, com sua diversidade e antagonismos, a um padrão cultural, de forma unilateral e autoritária. Tem razão Renato Ortiz ao afirmar que a indústria cultural, nesse sentido, converte-se numa instituição disciplinadora que age enrijecendo a cultura.⁵ Richard Morse diria que ela apregoa “a mensagem de adaptação e desistência de reclamações”⁶ por parte dos indivíduos administrados como sujeito único. Isso converteria a história, segundo Connerton, numa espécie de “destino administrado”, desembocando na pós-história.⁷ Uma das consequências disso consiste na despolitização da sociedade, como podemos verificar no Brasil de hoje: não obstante os graves antagonismos e conflitos sociais, políticos e econômicos, as manifestações e movimentos surgem meio sem rumo, faltos de maior aderência coletiva e ideológica.

Outra consequência se observa no deslocamento de questões antes fundamentais para o entendimento da cultura e da realidade brasileira. Refiro-me aos temas da identidade nacional e da cultura popular, conceitos inseparáveis, na década de 60, do debate intelectual e da produção artística. Sobre os dois, projetava-se o arco político revolucionário que se desejava então para o país.⁸

Quanto ao tema da identidade, evidentemente que vem de longe. Basta recordar a preocupação nativista de nossos românticos, com José de Alencar à frente, na defesa de uma literatura autêntica, “brasilista”, capaz, dentre outras coisas, de refletir “o eco profundo e solene das florestas”.⁹ O esforço dos modernistas no sentido de expressar criticamente a realidade social brasileira

foi notável, quer através da literatura (Mário, Oswald e Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Raul Bopp e Manuel Bandeira), querer através do ensaio (Gilberto Freyre, Caio Prado Jr., Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, dentre outros), sem falar no chamado romance de 30, outro momento de extraordinária revelação de nosso ser social.

De forma mais próxima, quero me referir à década de 60, em que praticamente todas as manifestações artísticas e intelectuais da época – os CPCs, o Teatro de Arena, a MPB, as artes plásticas, a literatura, etc. – retomaram e ampliaram a questão da identidade nacional, tendo em vista a opção revolucionária que se desenhava no horizonte utópico de então.

Na década de 80, os produtores culturais não parecem reconhecer, entretanto, a grandiosidade do tema, além de se sentirem politicamente desmotivados. Não podemos, porém, deixar de nos referir à aparição, em 1984, do romance *Viva o Povo Brasileiro*, de João Ubaldo Ribeiro, o qual, em minha opinião, encerra a tradição explicitamente nacionalista da literatura brasileira, iniciada com José de Alencar. Agora, os motivos são outros. A construção metafórica e abrangente da realidade cede lugar à metonímica e particular. Do regime alegórico passa-se ao simbólico. Do painel chega-se à fragmentação, como expressão artística.

Dai o registro hiper-real, centrado antes nos pequenos dramas do cotidiano urbano do que nas grandes causas. “Os ficcionistas, hoje, não querem produzir a grande obra. Preferem projetos localizados, que proponham a fragmentação ao invés da unidade. Que busquem o mínimo detalhe, ao invés do todo”, opina Ítalo Moriconi Jr.¹⁰ Rarefação, aridez, minimalização dos recursos formais, “planura” psicológica e ideológica marcam a tendência da literatura contemporânea no Brasil. É o caso dos escritores João Gilberto Noll, Sérgio Sant’Anna, Marilene Felinto, Zulmira Ribeiro Tavares, Rubem Fonseca, na ficção, e Paulo Leminsky e Armando Freitas Filho, na poesia, dentre outros. Recusam todos eles a idéia de que suas obras sirvam de moldura ao país, desejando “ser apenas um diminuto, mas penetrante, foco de luz sobre a tela”, segundo José Castello.¹¹ A literatura vem se transformando, deste modo, no tribunal das pequenas causas.

Se a década de 60 funcionou como o momento épico da cultura brasileira – marcado pela tentativa de compreensão totalizante e transformadora da realidade –; se os anos 70 foi nosso instante dramático – de resistência e luta frente à ditadura militar

—, nos 80, a atitude lírica parece predominar, sobretudo nesses últimos cinco anos. Tal lirismo, entretanto, se faz amargo, sem transcendência e idealidade, expressando antes a consciência individual da decadência social do país do que um enfrentamento do mundo.

Assim, a questão da identidade nacional não mais se impõe ao produtor cultural de hoje, da mesma forma que a da cultura popular, pelo menos nos moldes da década de 60. Houve um deslocamento do processo. Escritores de então, comprometidos com um teatro político e popular, empregam presentemente seu talento à dramaturgia televisiva, satisfeitos com o fato de atingir 50 milhões de pessoas através de uma novela, de um programa ou série. Dias Gomes, um dos nossos mais importantes dramaturgos, por exemplo, alude ao fato contraditório de que aquele teatro (popular) era visto somente pela elite e que agora a televisão lhe “ofereceu essa platéia popular”.¹²

Para concluir este tópico sobre a indústria cultural no Brasil, gostaria de me referir novamente à efetiva mercantilização dos bens simbólicos promovida pelos meios de massa.

Há, pelo menos, três aspectos importantes a considerar como reflexo dessa tendência: 1) o mercado, como interlocutor óbvio e privilegiado da produção cultural do momento; 2) a acentuação do caráter profissionalizante dos escritores e artistas como forma até de atingir com mais eficácia esse mercado; e 3) a dissolução dos conceitos e das fronteiras entre alta cultura e cultura de massa.

Evidente que tais tendências não ocorrem somente no Brasil, podendo ser detectadas da mesma forma nos EUA e na Europa. O fato novo, para nós, é que tais tendências inexistiam simplesmente na década de 60, ampliando-se na década seguinte para se consolidarem de vez nos 80. A propósito, creio ser pertinente assinalar o fato de que o caráter marginal das artes e sobretudo da poesia, nos anos 70, não buscava apenas *resistir* à censura e ao autoritarismo vigentes, mas indicava também uma resistência ao avanço da indústria cultural e editorial. Daí a feição artesanal, algo romântica, com que os livrinhos eram feitos, ao lado da distribuição e venda pessoal dos mesmos. Também o acento vivencial e confessional dos poemas reforçam a atitude de resistência à impessoalidade e frieza dos grandes esquemas editoriais.

A década de 80 provou que nem a *idealidade* dos 60, nem a *marginalidade* dos 70 têm vez, agora, no parque de diversões culturais. Experimentalismo e linguagens de exceção, obscuras e auráticas, *dançaram*. Venceu — sem possibilidade de retorno — a lógica hegemônica da sociedade de consumo em que a cultura se torna mercadoria, seja para aquele que a fabrica ou a consome. Assim, produtores e consumidores fazem parte de um mesmo pólo, reforçando a dominação racional, de acordo com Renato Ortiz.¹³ É a vitória final da *consumidade*.

Ilustrativa, nesse sentido, a afirmativa irônica do escritor Márcio Souza: “Não converso com escritor que ainda não vendeu pelo menos cinco mil exemplares”.¹⁴ Ou, ainda, do diretor de redação da *Folha de S. Paulo*, Otávio Frias Filho, responsável pela edição do suplemento cultural, *Folhetim*. Diz ele: “É nossa opinião de que a obra de arte é, sobretudo, mercadoria, com vantagens e desvantagens decorrentes”. Planejador da política cultural do mercado, tem sido acusado de deificar o mercado como instância e momento legitimador da cultura, descartando, assim, outros parâmetros de avaliação da mesma.¹⁵

Como resultante dessa mercadomania, os escritores e artistas tendem cada vez mais a se profissionalizar, como medida mesmo de sobrevivência. O critério de competência, de um modo geral, passou a ser não o atingir objetivos estéticos mas mercadológicos. Daí a afirmativa de Flora Sussekind, de que o escritor tem “a necessidade de dialogar, agora, não apenas com os próprios pares ou com o leitor cúmplice, mas com um público de traços mais indefinidos, anônimos, e passível de registro unicamente pelos índices de venda.”¹⁶

Se esta profissionalização traz obviamente vantagem para alguns artistas, que se vêem mais bem remunerados, traz igualmente seus riscos ao estabelecer com o público relação servil e concessiva, com uma possível banalização da arte, segundo fórmulas de sucesso. Silviano Santiago observa que o escritor brasileiro, atuando hoje sob pressão mercadológica, encontra-se indeciso “entre a obra de caráter jornalístico e a obra de caráter livre”, denunciando com isso “uma crise aguda de imaginação entre nós”.¹⁷

Esta hesitação entre o jornalístico e o literário, entre o consumível e o artístico, orbitando em torno do deus Mercúrio, tem

contribuído enormemente para a dissolução das fronteiras entre a alta cultura e a cultura de massa.

O tema hoje está em voga, não só no Brasil, mas alhures. Alain Finkielkraut, por exemplo, na França, com seu badalado livro *A Derrota do Pensamento*, afirma, dentre outras coisas, que a pasteurização e os modismos derrotaram o pensamento. Porque, agora, “nivelam-se por baixo todas as práticas (culturais), sem distinção entre criação e tradição”, ou seja, entre uma prática repetitiva da vida e uma prática que a transcenda, permitindo o desenvolvimento, a evolução do homem. Denuncia, igualmente, o abandono da imaginação, a qual, segundo Baudelaire, é uma modalidade do pensamento que conserva a arte no mesmo nível da ciência. Enfim, diz ele, verificou-se na França, nos anos 60 e 70, “o triunfo da concepção tecnológica da cultura”.¹⁸

O mesmo pode ser dito em relação ao Brasil nos anos 80. Observa-se a dissolução dos conceitos e da própria dimensão constitutiva da cultura “como dimensão que funda algo, projeto, relação, comunidade de destinos”, no dizer de José Maria Cançado.¹⁹ Verifica-se a perda de transcendência do sujeito e da História. Se na década de 60, por exemplo, o indivíduo sentia-se “participante” e em confronto com a história (oposição ao “establishment”, à guerra do Vietnam, à ditadura militar, ao imperialismo, etc.) e, portanto, integrado a ela, através de um projeto político mais ou menos comum de transformação da sociedade — no qual a cultura e a arte serviam de mediação entre o indivíduo e a coletividade —, hoje, o quadro difere radicalmente. Ao invés de mobilização e entusiasmo, os produtores e consumidores culturais experimentam a dispersão, a “esquizofrenia” solitária do presente, diferentemente da “paranóia” utópica e grupal dos 60, para utilizarmos a terminologia de Frederic Jameson.

Sem futuridade e oposição crítica, o que se vê é uma tendência, de um modo geral, na arte e no pensamento, ao conformismo e individualismo. Talvez por aí se explique a onda nostálgica na cultura brasileira atual. Filmes como “Dedé Mamata”, “Banana Splitz”, “A Dama do Cine Shangai”, “Feliz Ano Velho”; peças como “Splish Splash” (anos 50) e “Emoções Baratas” (anos 40) e a telenovela “Anos Dourados”; livros recentemente publicados, como “1968 — O Ano que não Acabou”, de Zuenir Ventura, atual sucesso de livraria, “68, A Paixão de uma Utopia”, de Daniel Aarão Reis Filho, “68, Relato de Guerras”, de

Fernando Perrone, "Tropical, Sol, Liberdade", de Ana Maria Machado, todos voltados para os anos 60; a revalorização na música da vintenária Bossa-Nova, tudo isso parece indicar, na cultura, uma tendência regressiva, ligada ao sentimento de que o passado é mais desejável, seguro e nítido do que o futuro, desconhecido e assustador.

Verdade que essa inclinação retroativa da cultura coincide, já há alguns anos, com o ocaso das vanguardas artísticas. Se olharmos a década de 50, no Brasil, pensaremos imediatamente no movimento concretista dos irmãos Campos e Décio Pignatari, na ficção originalíssima de Guimarães Rosa e na arquitetura arrojada de Niemeyer, em Brasília, sem falar, em termos esportivos, da aparição genial de Pelé e Garrincha no futebol. Os anos 60 decolam com a Bossa-Nova e o Cinema Novo, fechando a década, em 68, com as vanguardas tropicalista e política. Tudo isso parecia ansiar o novo, exigindo a transformação e mutação nas artes e no comportamento das pessoas. Se a imaginação não chegou ao poder, a utopia e o sonho por certo triunfaram nas artes e no pensamento de então.

Bem ao contrário dos anos 80, em que o declínio da imaginação utópica e da invenção parece delinear a expressão atual das artes. Tudo indica que cessou, entre nós, a vertigem profética e política da arte modernista, na busca de desenhar o futuro, rompendo-se com o passado. Tratar-se-ia, segundo Octavio Paz, do esgotamento da "tradição da ruptura".²⁰ Em suma, estaríamos vivendo, no plano estético, um tempo pós-utópico, antiexperimental e simbólico, mais conteudístico e comunicativo do que formal. Mais na base da versão do que da invenção.

Estarei dizendo que já estamos vivendo a cultura pós-moderna proveniente das matrizes civilizadas da Europa e dos EUA?

Se considerarmos, dentro de nossa própria tradição, o esgotamento de certas práticas ideológicas e estéticas, ao lado de certos aspectos dissolutivos e homogeneizadores da indústria cultural, é possível que sim, sobretudo nas grandes cidades. Também se considerarmos que o pós-moderno, de acordo com Peter Buerger, advém da consciência da crise da modernidade, atingindo já o cotidiano, aí não temos dúvida, pois em matéria de crise o Brasil desponta como campeão. Se considerarmos que o pós-moderno é sinônimo de opacidade, como quer Habermas, também nos enquadraremos no conceito. É impossível um retrato totalizador do

país, o que igualmente nos confere um ar pós-moderno, ainda mais pela pluralidade de mundos que exibimos. O desenvolvimento da indústria de informática nacional e da produção do saber, como quer Lyotard, também pode ser um dado indicador de nossa pós-modernidade. Até um gostinho de apocalipse nuclear tupiniquim experimentamos no acidente com o célio radioativo em Goiânia, o que nos tornou de súbito e concretamente conscientes da ameaça atômica global, preocupação sem dúvida pós-moderna. Próximo disso, está a questão ecológica. A nova constituição do país, a propósito, traz um dos capítulos mais avançados do mundo sobre o assunto. Por último, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht destacaria que, “politicamente, o exemplo brasileiro é muito típico para as condições do pós-moderno. Porque no Brasil há um sentimento de decepção, mas não há tampouco uma grande decepção, uma decepção dramática”.²¹

É verdade, porém, que em vários aspectos e em várias regiões o Brasil continua mesmo é pré-moderno. Quero dizer: atrasado. Em busca dramática da modernidade, difícil de ser alcançada. Porque esbarra em certos pré-requisitos à sua realização, tais como uma distribuição mais equitativa das terras, condição *sine qua non* para o próprio desenvolvimento industrial e social do país. Em termos culturais, as razões de nosso atraso residiriam, segundo o historiador Carlos Guilherme Mota, na incapacidade de “inventar paixões novas nem reproduzir as velhas com igual intensidade”, como diria Lezama Lima; na tradição corporativista, que permeia as academias, os partidos, os quartéis, a igreja, as gerações; e nos velhos populismos políticos. Diante desse quadro, conclui Mota que, no Brasil, “perdeu-se o bonde da modernidade”.²²

Acredito que não é só isso. A questão de nossa inatualidade cultural passa, ainda, por outros fatores mais graves, a saber, o da educação pública, o da distribuição de renda e o da estabilização da economia. Tentarei descrever rapidamente esses fatores no contexto atual.

Apesar de termos alcançado um estágio de atualização plena em termos telecomunicativos, possibilitando o surgimento de uma forte cultura de massa, o que vemos por trás da tela colorida e sedutora da tevê é uma cinzenta paisagem pré-guttembergiana, formada por milhões de analfabetos.

Dados atuais revelam que, dos 130 milhões de brasileiros, somente 9% da população adulta possui os oito anos básicos de escolaridade. A título comparativo, a Argentina tem 80% de seu povo alfabetizado. A taxa de repetência, uma das maiores do mundo, é de 50%. 78% das crianças abandonam a escola na 3ª série.²³ Pesquisa publicada recentemente mostra que 40% dos estudantes universitários abandonam a escola.²⁴ Conclusão: a educação pública do país está falida. Evidentemente que, nessas condições, todo o sistema cultural fica afetado. Não admira, por exemplo, que a tiragem média de um livro no Brasil é de apenas 2 mil exemplares.

A deficiência educacional repercute igualmente na esfera social, dificultando a mobilidade e inibindo uma melhor distribuição de renda, que por sinal é uma das mais concentradas do mundo. Não obstante os avanços na produção industrial, a precariedade educacional faz com que se reduplique, à beira do ano 2000, a mesma estrutura servil do século passado, a dualidade de se “pertencer” ou não à sociedade. Das disparidades sociais. Em termos de estratificação sócio-econômica, o Brasil revela ter, no momento, 40% de sua população em estado de pobreza e miséria absoluta, vivendo com até um salário-mínimo (cerca de 50 dólares); 10% situam-se na faixa de 3 salários-mínimos (150 dólares) e apenas 1,2% ganha mais de 10 salários-mínimos (mais de 500 dólares).²⁵ Os ricos e muito ricos representam uma faixa pequeníssima da população. Conclusão: a nossa herança social permanece praticamente a mesma do século XIX, não se tendo alcançado os mínimos padrões de modernidade. Nesse contexto, a cultura é negócio de elite. De privilegiados. Com a iniciativa cultural toda ela concentrada nas mãos da classe dominante.

Creio que todos estão sabendo que o Brasil atravessa a maior e mais grave crise econômica de sua história. A inflação brasileira ultrapassou em 1989 a casa dos 1.000% ao ano. Sem falarmos na nossa gigantesca dívida externa. Um dado curioso: o setor de carros novos e de luxo no país aumentou suas vendas em cerca de 31% em relação ao mesmo período do ano anterior, enquanto o consumo de gêneros alimentícios decresceu na mesma proporção. Tradução: com a escalada inflacionária, a disparidade social aumentou, tornando os ricos mais ricos e as classes média e pobre mais pobres.

Resultado: o povo brasileiro se encontra frustrado, desiludido e cansado de promessas. Depois do fracasso do Plano Cruzado e da desmoralização política da Nova República, muitos brasileiros estão indo embora. Antes, eram os exilados políticos; hoje, os exilados econômicos. Se ontem havia uma ditadura militar, agora, enfrentamos uma ditadura econômica. Há, em vista disso, uma crise ética; o predomínio da Lei de Gerson (o tirar-vantagem-em-tudo). Alguns já diagnosticam uma forma particular de medo e de reação ao pânico, que é a cultura narcísica da violência. Segundo o psiquiatra Jurandir Freire Costa, “esta cultura nutre-se e é nutrida pela decadência social e pelo descrédito da justiça e da lei.”²⁶

Sei que desenhei um quadro um tanto amargo da situação brasileira, em termos culturais, sociais e econômicos. Creio, entretanto, que a árvore da esperança só pode germinar em solo realista.

O Brasil é um país novo, matinal. Os desacertos e impasses com os quais vivemos, pode-se dizer, são pecados da juventude e certamente passarão.

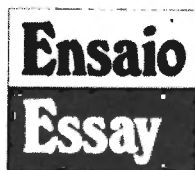
Verdade que ainda hoje contamos com dificuldades tremendas para não só nos inserir plenamente na economia internacional, mas também para vencer as dificuldades internas, agravadas, bem sabemos, pela longa ausência de uma efetiva democratização da sociedade.

Contudo, compartilho com Richard Morse a idéia de que, se o liberalismo e a democracia não puderam ser assimilados pelo Brasil com a mesma rapidez com que os EUA o fizeram, não se pode ver nisso um fracasso, mas sim um processo de adaptação ainda não realizado, que tem a ver com nossas heranças ibero-católicas de base mais orgânica que individualista, mais espontânea que racionalista.²⁷

Dá por que nossa sociedade não se fez compartimentada nem egófica, valendo a esperança de que, com imaginação e um pensamento político mais globalizante, saberemos propor construções alternativas da realidade social, impondo a originalidade de nossa cultura.

NOTAS

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- ³ V. Renato Ortiz. *A Moderna Tradição Brasileira*. São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1988. p. 202.
- ⁴ Adorno/Horkheimer. *Dialética do Esclarecimento*. Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar, 1985. p. 118.
- ⁵ V. Renato Ortiz. op. cit., p. 148.
- ⁶ Richard Morse. *O Espelho de Próspero*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1988. p. 124.
- ⁷ Paul Connerton. *Tragedy of Enlightenment*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980. p. 54.
- ⁸ V. Renato Ortiz. op. cit. (especialmente o capítulo "O Popular e O Nacional"). p. 148.
- ⁹ V. José de Alencar em sua Carta Primeira sobre "A Confederação dos Tamoios". In: *Caminhos do Pensamento Crítico*. org. de Afrânio Coutinho, Rio de Janeiro, Pallas, 1980. p. 81. v. 1.
- ¹⁰ Entrevista ao Suplemento Idéias do *Jornal do Brasil*, em 20/2/1988.
- ¹¹ V. José Castello. "Os Anos 80 deram Romance?". In: Suplemento Idéias do *Jornal do Brasil*, em 20/2/1988.
- ¹² Apud Renato Ortiz, op. cit., p. 180.
- ¹³ Renato Ortiz, op. cit., p. 146.
- ¹⁴ Apud Flora Sussekind, *Literatura e Vida Nacional*. Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar, 1985. p. 88.
- ¹⁵ V. *Leia*, nº 117, julho de 1988.
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PEDAGOGY AND POPULAR ART FOR THE MASSES FROM THE CPC

Após uma introdução às origens do *Centro Popular de Cultura*, a discussão concentra-se na peça *Auto dos 99%*, um dos maiores sucessos do grupo. Parte do circuito pelo Brasil patrocinado pela *União Nacional dos Estudantes* em 1962, a peça adota muitos dos elementos do “auto” tradicional para realizar outra função característica do gênero: educar o público. Através da linguagem inventada e exagerada dos personagens, a peça mostra como as origens da dependência econômica na época colonial estão ligadas às condições antiquadas da Universidade nos anos sessenta. Embora a ideologia do CPC fosse fundada na conscientização do “povo”, o *Auto dos 99%* demonstra que a criatividade do CPC funciona melhor quando relacionada à própria realidade do grupo, isto é, à realidade universitária.

The *Centro Popular de Cultura*, founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1962, was one of several socially and politically active groups working in Brazilian cities and in the countryside to educate and politicize the disadvantaged lower classes during the populist presidency of João Goulart (1961-64). The most famous group, the *Movimento de Cultura Popular* from Recife, benefitted not only from the pedagogical theories and practice of educator Paulo Freire, but also the financial support of both Recife's mayor and the governor of the state of Pernambuco. Like its parent the CPC also pursued pedagogical goals but it developed different formats based on its organizers' talents and resources. While the MCP chose to build schools, organize technical groups, provide medical care and sponsor artistic programs, the CPC restricted itself to political education and indoctrination through artistic endeavors. Never an official government body, it sought and obtained funding from the leftist student organization, the *União Nacional dos Estudantes*. All of the CPC's activities, such as films, records, book publishing, local and national theatrical performances, art exhibitions, and the organization of other CPCs, served the double purpose of educating the audience and promoting the socio-political goals of the group.

Oduvaldo Viana Filho (1936-1974), one of Brazil's best known dramatists, organized the CPC out of frustration after leaving Teatro Arena, the nationalistic, experimental theater group of São Paulo organized by José Renato. He criticized Arena for not reaching out to the working class audience. For Viana, the role of the theater in society was one of consciousness-raising: "É preciso produzir conscientização em massa, em escala industrial". Viana wanted to organize artists and intellectuals and to use their talents to politicize union workers and farm laborers (Gullar 45).

The theoretical concerns on which the CPC based its operations were developed by the two presidents of the original CPC in Rio, Carlos Estevam Martins (1934-) and Ferreira Gullar (1930-). Estevam's "Anteprojeto do Manifesto do CPC" and Ferreira Gullar's *Cultura Posta em Questão* explain the CPC's commitment to "popular culture" and the manner in which such culture can be utilized to indoctrinate the "povo." The most important word in the name *Centro Popular de Cultura* is "popular" because it conveys the group's belief that the only true national culture comes from the "povo." In the eyes of the CPC the existing fare of national art was either consumer oriented, which meant elitist and/or imported (Gullar 9), or popular but without a reformist intent. The CPC saw its task as reintroducing popular art forms to the original producers and imbuing those forms with a revolutionary ideology that would bring about social reform. Members of the CPC believed that the educated and privileged could identify themselves with the "povo" and through that identification communicate both cultural and political values to and for them (Estevam, "Anteprojeto" 71,76).

The CPC was directly influenced by the work going on at the *Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros* through Estevam Martins. The ISEB, a think tank of economists and political scientists, had provided the economic model of industrial expansion for President Kubitschek (1956-1960). That model was based on the theory of developmental nationalism which held that by expanding industrialization and nationalizing foreign-owned industries Brazil could pass from an underdeveloped to a developing nation (Burns 332-36). Under Estevam Martin's leadership the CPC adopted ideological underpinnings similar to those of the famous research body. Members of the CPC were convinced that through their efforts in the arts, Brazil would develop socially from an archaic landowner society to a progressive society responsive to the needs of the working class (Gullar 23).

Along with its film department, the CPC's department of theater was the most important outlet for spreading its message. Originally the members of the theater division planned to write full-length plays and perform them in union halls and neighborhood associations where they imagined the urban working class to congregate. They immediately encountered problems with this

model when they discovered that the audience they hoped to reach did not meet in the halls where performances were scheduled. They also underestimated the intimidating role of the police in the peripheral areas of the city they had hoped to visit (Damasceno 84). Given such handicaps, it is not surprising that the CPC was unsuccessful at establishing any lasting relationships with labor groups or neighborhood associations. As a result of these failed efforts, the CPC abandoned full-length plays and union halls for a more immediate or situational theater. The plays were performed anywhere the group could collect an audience and were developed around recent events of social or political concern (Costa 53-4, Neves 43). The CPC soon found a receptive audience on college campuses where the clientele was educated and privileged and either shared or was open to the CPC's viewpoint (Estevam, "História" 78).

Although few scripts of these short performances are available for study today, fortunately, *Auto dos 99%*, one of the group's most popular plays, did appear in print in September 1962, not long after it was performed, and then again in March, 1980. The play was written in haste but revised several times during a three-month tour sponsored by the *União Nacional dos Estudantes*. The tour of Brazilian capital cities was organized in order to undertake consciousness raising on a national scale and to help organize more CPC groups. The travelling repertoire consisted of three plays, each covering a controversial topic, and each aimed at a specific audience in need of political awakening. *Auto dos 99%*, the most popular of the three plays, addressed the need for university reform. It joined the playbill with *Brasil, versão brasileira*, a play about labor unrest, and *O formiguinha*, a study of agrarian problems (80).

The following discussion will analyze one play from the repertoire of the CPC, *Auto dos 99%*, in order to identify its ties to the popular *auto* tradition. Secondly, the play's subject matter and manner of presentation will be studied for evidence of the CPC's ideological and theoretical concerns. The CPC wrote several other *autos* (*Atto do Tutu Tá no Fim* and *Auto dos Cassetetes*), but they are not readily available for study, since the CPC was much more concerned with performing than with preserving its art. However, *Auto dos 99%* amply demonstrates both the CPC's creative use of existing popular forms and its

problems of turning its theories of popular art into truly popular performances.

The *auto*, on which *Auto dos* 99% is based, is the oldest and most popular dramatic form written in verse introduced to the New World. It came to Latin America with the explorers and missionaries from Portugal, where it was practiced by Gil Vicente in the early 1500's and from Spain, where Calderón de la Barca established the form in the 1600's. Although today the word *auto* is often associated with plays about the Eucharist and Corpus Christi, owing to the fame of Calderón's *autos sacramentales*, the earliest European *autos* were not concerned with the sacrosanct (Quackenbush 29-31). In Latin America the *auto*, evolving independently from its model of the Iberian Peninsula, developed its own themes and modes of communication (43).

In Brazil, Padre José de Anchieta composed and performed *autos* to facilitate catechizing the Indians and to correct the behavior of wayward colonists. His religious *autos* combined Portuguese, Spanish, and Tupi with historical, religious, and allegorical characters in order to reach his public more effectively (Bosi 26). The allegorical nature of the form and its reliance upon clear oppositions between good and evil, virtue and vice, encouraged an immediate response from religious recruits or disobedient colonists. The language of Anchieta's *autos* always drew on imagery from the everyday lives of the Indians and the colonists in order to turn religious doctrine into understandable experiences (24). It appears that Anchieta was the first Latin American playwright to perceive the advantages of the *auto* for non-religious purposes (Quackenbush 34). For Anchieta "the *auto* was a didactic weapon to counteract the subversive social and anti-governmental acts of the Brazilian colonists" (42).

The characteristics of the *auto*, especially its simplicity and focus on popular daily life, have made it an attractive theatrical form for 20th century writers. Brazil has witnessed a resurgence of the *auto* form especially among writers interested in popular culture or in communicating with non-traditional audiences. From the standpoint of the CPC, which wanted to educate and politicize the masses, the *auto* was a stunningly appropriate form. Traditionally, the *auto* was a portable art form designed to entertain different audiences from a float. This feature made it

well-suited to the CPC's goal of consciousness raising on a national scale. As a didactic form, the *auto* favors a rather simplistic treatment that breaks complex ideas down into more accessible parts. Clearly the CPC could more easily explain educational or agrarian reform if it were presented in this manner. The *auto* allows combinations of singing, dancing, jokes, and even the supernatural. This type of spectacle has the power to captivate and hold an audience's attention. Finally, the *auto* often featured combinations of historical characters and events with circumstances from quotidian life. The CPC took advantage of this link between the past and the present in both pedagogical and ideological ways. From a pedagogical standpoint the CPC could populate its plays with a variety of historical events and figures from different epoches in order to teach the audience about Brazil's past. At the same time it could show on an ideological level how conditions from the past had contributed to the social problems of the 1960's.

It is likely that the CPC's choice of the *auto* form was influenced by the success of Ariano Suassuna's *Auto da Compadecida*. Suassuna was one of the founding members of Recife's *Movimento de Cultura Popular*, which became the model for the CPC. His play, which drew on both medieval forms and Brazilian folk culture, was written in 1955 and performed in Rio de Janeiro in 1957 by an amateur group and then again from 1958-59 by a professional group (Ratcliff 284). *Auto da Compadecida* combines Brazilian folk culture and the *auto* form to criticize social and moral corruption of the church, commerce, and society in a Northeastern community. The last section of the play parallels a traditional religious *auto* in which the characters must answer for their sins committed on earth.

Following the model of Padre Anchieta and Ariano Suassuna, the CPC used the *auto* form to criticize social and political problems and to influence behavior. *Auto dos 99%* argues that the educational system is contributing to social ills by depriving most Brazilians of self-improvement, and by supplying those who do get into the university with meaningless or trivial information. The play studies the historical relationship between economic exploitation, political power, and education. It adopts the position that the colonization of Brazil led to the formation of

an empowered class that protected itself by maintaining exclusive access to the educational system.

The CPC altered only a few of the components of the traditional *auto* form. Instead of creating allegorical figures to represent Hope, Truth, or Love, the play uses representatives of social or racial groups. In the script these individuals are called Indian 1, 2, and 3, Student, or Old Person 1, 2, 3. In addition there are four historical figures that appear by name, Portuguese Cabral and Caminha and former rulers Dom João VI and Napoleon. The characters in the play can be easily divided into two opposing groups, the powerful and the powerless. The play consists of three historical moments in which the two groups come into conflict. The powerful, represented by institutions like the church, colonial or imperial government, or the university faculty, "defeat" those who have no social status, no voice nor organization, represented by the Indians, African slaves, and aspiring university students.

The chorus of *Auto dos 99%* preserves the traditional use of verse and the traditional function of the visionary or the commentator speaking to ongoing events. Unlike the characters who are restricted to the time and place of the events being dramatized, the chorus is privy to information from all centuries of Brazilian history. The chorus is able to provide the context that both integrates and explains the actions and words of the characters. In the body of the play the chorus links the historical periods together as the play moves rapidly through time from the discovery of Brazil to the present. It explains how changes in government and in economic development failed to produce changes in the exclusiveness of the university. It reveals that the 99% in the title of the play refers to those who cannot gain entrance into Brazil's universities.

Finally, like many traditional religious or social *autos* the play is designed to influence behavior. But, in the hands of the CPC the focus is not on the ways in which the past represents a good model to follow, but rather on how the past explains the conditions of the present. In the CPC's play, history reveals a pattern of economic exploitation supporting privilege. This pattern prevails from the colonial period into the 20th Century and permeates the institutions of higher learning. Through the repetition of this model the CPC hoped to show how and why the

university had arrived at its current state. By revealing the causes of the problem the CPC also hoped to suggest that viable solutions were possible.

The CPC develops the thesis that the Portuguese colonization of Brazil imposed an elitist, conservative social and economic structure on a native, and later a *mestiço*, population. Such an organization was unnatural and contrary to the better interests of the indigenous peoples and it was exclusionary in its relations with its *mestiço* population. The events of the play are organized to demonstrate this thesis through two major historical divisions that are not labeled as acts. The colonization of Brazil represents the past while the Brazil of the 1960's represents the present. A transition scene between these two divisions provides a rapid summation of key events that occurred between the two periods.

The opening scene, set at the time of the discovery, conveys an idyllic portrait of a Brazil rich in resources and with Indians who lived and worked in cooperation with one another. The arrival of the colonists and priests brings ruin to the country. The CPC characterizes the priests as the first capitalists and imperialists for the Catholic church and the colonial economy.

The CPC continues its criticism of Portuguese rule in a transition scene which treats the rule of Dom João VI. The monarch escapes from Napoleon and establishes a new empire in Brazil. Although Dom João brought social and cultural advances to the country, the educational institutions founded during his rule were only open to the privileged. Here the CPC spells out the prejudices of the colonial power that gave its own offspring access to education while at the same time denying it to the growing *mestiço* population.

The final scene in the play demonstrates the stifling conditions within the university in the 1960's. Students listen to an endless stream of meaningless and monotonous lectures given by professors who are depicted as ancient and out of touch. In fact, they rise from a sarcophagus to deliver lectures. The students are passive and do not even seem to think about what is being said.

In the closing moments of the *auto* the CPC moves into the realm of encouraging political activism. It satirizes the self-protective nature of university professors who meet only to

discuss trivial or superficial matters. Furthermore, it provides an example of action to take in the form of a protesting student who interrupts the faculty meeting and demands reforms. Although the student in the play is thrown out of the meeting, the CPC seems to be challenging its audience to do better.

There is little action and even less open conflict in the *auto*, so that language itself becomes the major dramatic vehicle providing both the information and the entertainment of the play. The CPC exaggerates the characters' speech and personality in humorous ways to explain, in simple terms, Brazil's economic dependency on foreign sources and its antiquated university curriculum. The action of the play begins in the past where the dependence of Brazil as a colony and as a provider of raw goods is established.

The CPC exaggerates the virtues of the natives and the opportunism of the priests to show how economic patterns of exploitation characterized the initial presence of the Portuguese in the New World. The natives are portrayed as ignorant and innocent individuals who are easily outwitted by the priests and who are sent off into the forest to cut down "pau-brasil." Their use of sub-standard Portuguese reflects their primitive nature. They speak without conjugating the verbs and always refer to themselves in the third person: "Índio eu não deu boa caçada" (Auto 89). The Indians' positive qualities, respect for nature and generosity with each other, only serve to make them more vulnerable to the machinations of their colonial masters. Although eventually the Indians realize they are being mistreated by the priests and they rebel, the system of exploitation continues. The Indians are replaced by African slaves who do not even get trinkets in return for their work.

Although the priests are clearly the "bad guys", as witnessed by their deeds, their language composed of corrupted Latin combined with Latinized slang expressions makes them more interesting if not more likable. History tells us that the priests were sent to convert the Indians, however the major preoccupation of the priests in *Auto dos 99%* seems to be making money and instilling the work ethic among the native tribes. Any refusal on the part of the Indians to continue cutting down trees is condemned in terms that sound like a sermon. "Non sinhoribus. Essa essere onda de comunistorum. Mi paga para que trabalhorum

maiorum. Cada um por si et Deo por todos. . ." (91) The CPC includes religion in its criticism of colonialism by showing that the Catholic Church was involved in justifying inequity: "Deus dividiu os homens em dois tipos: os brasileiros e os inteligentes. Brasileiro trabalha, inteligente comanda."

A similar relationship of domination and dependence is developed between university students and their professors in the second half of the play. Exaggeration is used to emphasize the weaknesses of both professors and the faculty government of the university. Professors are great manipulators of language, much like the priests of the colonial period. They have numerous techniques with which to obscure the content of their lectures or their conversation. Their speech is overly pedantic, or they employ disclaimers, or emphasize theoretical details rather than application. For example, the professor of Architecture states:

Nos três últimos anos fizemos um estudo até certo ponto aprofundado da coluna jônica. Pena que o curso só tenha cinco anos. Para observar o significado íntimo desta coluna é preciso uma vida, uma eternidade. (95)

The students, like the Indians of colonial times, are easily overwhelmed by the self-importance of their instructors. They accept detail as being all important and the lectures as truth. But, after one student finds himself unable to convert the theoretical aspects of the classroom experience into a practical response to workers who are demanding a salary increase, the students also rebel against their "oppressors" by invading a faculty meeting and demanding reform.

The students in *Auto dos 99%* are the least exaggerated characters and the ones whose language appears to move ever toward political awareness and action. Unlike the other characters whose language undermines their credibility, the students' vocabulary and historical moment are contemporary with that of their audience. In this fashion, when a student interrupts the faculty meeting to demand change, he/she appears to be a spokesperson, even a model, for the audience, as well. In the following citation a rebellious student decries the irrelevance of the university curriculum in words that echo student protestors of the 1960's in Brazil, and world wide.

É preciso mudar tudo, professor. As coisas que se ensinam aqui nós não usamos, ou não são verdadeiras, ou são mentidas, ou são esquecidas, ou são roubadas! Nós saímos daqui jovens e ficamos velhos em duas semanas numa monotonia de estupidez que ninguém agüenta! (91)

The major link between the audience and the play is the chorus, which serves both as the interpreter of the events and as spokesperson for the CPC's political orientation. Its commentary transcends the historical limitations of the moment to predict the outcome of events underway and then directs those thoughts toward the audience. Its language, although sung in verse form, sounds like common wisdom, full of popular street vocabulary. The chorus orients the audience's appreciation of the events by defining and then reinforcing the meaning of each scene. Like other choruses from traditional Greek theater, the chorus of *Auto dos 99%* speaks mostly of doom, failure, and destruction, but many of its messages are softened with humor. In the following prophetic moment, the chorus equates the exploitation of the Indians with exploitation of Brazil's beautiful women in the present.

Indio quer bugiganga.

Mesmo que continue de tanga.

Parece que será essa a história do Brasil:

Cheio de bugiganga,

Sempre de tanga. (90)

Through the words of the characters and the chorus of *Auto dos 99%* the audience learned the major components of the CPC's reformist ideology. The play taught that there was an historical and economic cause for what amounted to preferential treatment in Brazilian universities. It also affirmed that access to the university was the only means by which young people would gain power to change society. Finally, it saw the university's primary responsibility as one of training individuals to use their knowledge to improve social conditions. The CPC believed that the university should serve a larger constituency so that more human resources would be prepared to engage in social reform. The members of the group constructed a play about economic and educational exploitation in order to question both national policies and to challenge rules governing the university.

Like other reformist or revolutionary groups, the CPC suffered from a disparity between its theory and its practice of creating and disseminating popular art. In theory, the CPC believed that its art was popular sources and designed to speak to the masses. In practice, the CPC was most effective when communicating with its peers. *Auto dos 99%* captures the classroom environment and academic oratorical style with great insight, insight drawn from creative minds, but also from familiarity with its subject matter. The group might have chosen the "popular format" of the *auto* to speak to the common man or woman, but in practice the audience best prepared to understand the vocabulary and the exaggeration of this particular play were other students.

Recent studies of the CPC (see Kuhner, for example) suggest that the group was not so much a populist movement for social reform among the disadvantaged classes as a consciousness-raising movement for the privileged. Even though the group failed to reach its proposed audience, its performances of plays, along with other cultural activities, left an indelible mark on Brazilian arts. First, the CPC was an organizational experiment and an example that succeeded because of the limitless energy given by the young people associated with it. Nothing like the CPC, with its intellectuals, artists, and students, had ever been tried before in Brazil (Kühner 184-190). The list of accomplishments, including publications, films, and theatrical performances, is remarkable for a two-year tenure. Secondly, the CPC was a technical training ground for cinematographers, poets, artists, and dramatists who, in turn, carried their skills with them when they entered the professional world. Finally, while plays like *Auto dos 99%* may not become part of the theatrical canon, they serve as testimonies to the creativity and resourcefulness of the CPC. By capitalizing on the strengths of the *auto*, its power to communicate and to educate, the CPC developed a dramatic form that was both "popular" and at the same time reformist. The performances of plays like *Auto dos 99%* were successful at bringing entertaining and understandable theatrical forms and social/historical content to a student audience throughout Brazil.

Soon after the coup of 1964 most of the popular/political groups such as the CPC and the MCP were dismantled. The CPC and its parent the União Nacional dos Estudantes were declared

illegal and the UNE headquarters in Rio de Janeiro was burned. Many student activists associated with CPC/UNE as well as its own directors and participants were jailed or called before boards of inquiry (Terrorismo 257). Many of the other reformist organizations suffered the same or a similar fate.

Since the move toward a democratic government began in the late seventies, interest in recovering the history and the art of groups like the CPC has grown.¹ The lessons to be learned from these enterprising organizations are numerous. In a country like Brazil where illiteracy and social inequality continue to limit the opportunities of its citizens, popular art forms offer one viable means to educate the public. The pioneering efforts of the CPC provide models which can be reviewed and revised so that present and future generations of artists and educators will achieve greater success than their forebearers in communicating with the masses.²

NOTES

¹ Examples of renewed interest in the CPC can be seen in both journal articles and in several monographic studies. See Helofsa Buarque de Hollanda, *Impressões de viagem: CPC, vanguarda e desbunde: 1960-70* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980); Buarque de Hollanda and Marcos Augusto Gonçalves, *Cultura e participação nos anos 60*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1982; Buarque de Hollanda and Carlos Alberto M. Pereira, *Patrulhas ideológicas, marca reg.: arte e engajamento em debate*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980.

² I am indebted to Leslie Damasceno for sending me photocopies from the manuscript of her dissertation. Her insights on Oduvaldo Viana Filho and the CPC were invaluable.

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THE DEMISE OF MYTH IN
TRISTE FIM DE POLICARPO
QUARESMA

Este ensaio dedica-se ao estudo da desvalorização dos três mitos fundamentais brasileiros em *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma*. Trata-se do mito da terra fértil, o mito da influência do índio na cultura brasileira, e o mito do brasileiro pacífico. Policarpo Quaresma, a personagem principal do romance, na sua aventura de procura do verdadeiro Brasil, descobre a falsidade dos seus mitos, descoberta que é acompanhada pela degradação geral da sua condição na vida, sendo o último passo desta degradação a morte de Policarpo. A sua morte então é a consequência última da sua tomada de consciência da falsidade do mito. O estudo aprofunda as causas da morte de Policarpo por meio de uma consideração das consequências sérias e ambíguas do mito, que ao servir de ópio às massas converte-se numa ferramenta poderosa nas mãos do Estado que o utiliza para atingir os seus próprios fins. Artigos recentes de Krista Kamenetsky e Wolfgang Mieder aprofundam o grande êxito da apropriação do mito de raça pura pelo Estado Nazi com o fim de promulgar e promover a sua ideologia. A significação da contribuição de Lima Barreto à tipologia do mito é ter reconhecido tanto a capacidade destrutiva como a construtiva do mito.

Ensaio
Essay

In *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* Lima Barreto¹ portrays Brazil in the early days of the Republic focusing in particular on the period that falls between Deodoro da Fonseca's attempt to become a dictator and Floriano Peixoto's reprisal of the Revolution of 1892. Most historians have considered this period to be of crucial importance in the process of consolidation of the republican system of government in Brazil.

Lima Barreto chooses to portray the young, emerging nation from the perspective of Policarpo Quaresma, a middle aged civil servant obsessed with seeking the "true" Brazil. Barreto's focusing on Policarpo creates a multi-panoramic perspective for the reader who is thus afforded the opportunity of viewing Brazil not only through historical, geographical and travel texts read by Policarpo, but also through situations of his daily life which include descriptions, analyses and perceptions formulated by Policarpo's acquaintances.

From this multi-panoramic perspective, I see the emergence of the unifying, overriding theme of an individual's loyalty to his country being not at all contingent upon his having a true understanding of what his country is, but rather upon his belief in national myths. Because those who hold political power realize the importance of national myths for the preservation of nationhood, they relentlessly persecute the people who challenge them.

In the course of the novel the main character Policarpo Quaresma sets out to test his country's pivotal myths, an act for which he is condemned to die, but not before his bitter recognition of their falseness and futility. The textual fabric, however, in which Policarpo's quest and demise take place, allows for the emergence of a critical image of Brazil, a composite view of myth and reality which find its validation in

the works of present-day historian and sociologists, such as E. Bradford Burns, Glauco Carneiro, Gilberto Freyre, and Philip Reisman.

The three myths, tested by Policarpo Quaresma, are at the core of the Brazilian cosmos's shaping mythology. These are the myths of the land, of the Indian, and of the non-violent Brazilian. The myth of the land glorifies its fertility, the myth of the Indian glorifies Indian influence on Brazilian life, and the myth of the peaceful Brazilian glorifies Brazilian docility and non-violence.

The myth of the land was consolidated in *História da América Portuguesa*, written by Sebastião da Rocha Pita in the first half of the eighteenth century in which "nature especially was praised in all her splendor in a Gongoristic exaltation of the beauty and opulence of Brazil."² This view of Brazil summarized many of the books on Policarpo's shelves and was the one he initially embraced and defended with vigor. Led by a false sense of patriotism, Policarpo disregarded the much more realistic view of Brazil contained in the other works he owned, such as those written by Southey, Varnhagen, Marcius, Capistrano de Abreu and others. From every source he extracted only the myth of Brazil's superlative virtues, as can be seen in his vigorous defense of "proeminência do Amazonas sobre todos os demais rios do mundo" (25). An outline of his views summarizes perfectly the myth of the superiority of Brazil's land and the docility of its people:

Tinha todos os climas, todos os frutos, todos os minerais e animais úteis, as melhores terras de cultura, a gente mais valente, mais hospitaleira, mais inteligente e mais doce do mundo. (35)

Policarpo, however, did not just glorify the Brazilian land; he rejected everything that was not Brazilian. He envisioned a national isolationism as the best way to appreciate Brazil, evidenced in his irate remark to a colleague dreaming of Europe: "Ingrato! Tens uma terra tão bela, tão rica, e queres visitar a dos outros! Eu, se algum dia puder, hei de percorrer a minha de princípio ao fim!" (27)

While Policarpo did not manage to fulfill this dream of traveling across his land from one end to the other, he did come to know it better. Following his release from a mental asylum, he

engaged in farming a small *sítio*, ironically called "Sossego", located two hours from Rio. Believing as he did that "A nossa terra tem os terrenos mais férteis do mundo" (86), he was easily persuaded by his niece to take up this farming venture with wholehearted vigor. When the work proved to be exceedingly hard and his inexperience had to be compensated for by the wisdom of his hired man, Anastácio, "Não se agastou com as primeiras ingratidões da terra. . . Capinava e capinava sempre até vir jantar" (91), he resisted facing reality by doubling his work effort.

Gradually, however, Policarpo saw the myth of the fertile land whither on the vine. His disillusionment began with the invasion of fire ants, the fight against which became an all-consuming activity (129) and culminated with the death of "Duquesa", his sister's favorite duck, overcome by a three-day-long lethal paralysis (133). While Policarpo refused to give up easily, maintaining continually that with just a little bit more effort he could solve Brazil's land problems (134), his niece Olga understood immediately the sad and sorry state of desolation in the Brazilian land and its rural inhabitants:

O que mais a impressionou no passeio foi a miséria, a falta de cultivo, a pobreza das casas, o ar triste, abatido de gente pobre. . . Por que, ao redor dessas casas não havia cultura, uma horta, um pomar?. . . Não podia ser preguiça só ou indolência. . . Seria a terra? Que seria? (119).

Articulated by Olga, the closure and the demise of the myth of the land did not convince Policarpo who continued testing it until his emergency leave to join Floriano Peixoto's forces against the 1892 insurgency. Yet the difficulty experienced by Policarpo in this process of testing the land myth leads to the validation of the thesis contained in the descriptions of Southey and Varnhagen, a thesis which emphasizes the hostility of the land and the inaptitude of the colonizer.

Similarly the myth of the Indian was embraced initially with vigorous devotion and belief by Policarpo. Indianism, as explained by Bradford E. Burns, is a natural outgrowth of anti-Lusitanism,

"In Brazil, anti-Lusitanism, understandably unleashed by independence, reverted to the exaltation of the Indian as the legitimate and true ancestor of Brazil's nationality. . . the phenomenon was not new, since Gregorio de Matos in the 17th Century had been able to deride those who boasted of their aboriginal ancestors"³

The myth was easily elevated to an unprecedented height by the romantic model of the noble savage. The importance of the Indian in the formation of Brazilian culture and the universality of the Tupi language were further confirmed by reputable historians such as Karl F. P. von Martius, whose 1848 account, *How the History of Brazil Should be Written*, doubtlessly exerted great influence on Policarpo's feverish imagination.

When he first began to research national music, Policarpo discovered that all the music available to him had come from Europe. Possessed by true anti-European and anti-Lusitanist sentiments, he found in the Indian culture the essence of all things "truly" brazilian, be they customs, lifestyle or language. Policarpo tested this myth of the Indian by practicing Indian customs. The rebuke received by this practice leads the reader to understand what the ultimate consequences of *Indianismo* would have been, had it been taken seriously.

Significantly, Policarpo first decided to use his Indian customs to greet two visitors, his Italian *compadre*, Vicente, and his daughter, Olga. Neither of the two could relate to Policarpo's ceremony of crying and hair-tearing on seeing visitors. Their reaction was best summarized by Vicente, who, acknowledging that the custom might well be Brazilian, described it as a "sad" custom nonetheless. His remark was reinforced by his daughter's comparison of this display of "joy" to a bad omen, "parece até agouro" (43). Subsequent testing of the myth in the form of Policarpo's request to the National Assembly that Tupiguarani be recognized as the official language of Brazil (60-62), followed by an absentminded issue of an office memo in Tupi (69), resulted in his hospitalization in an insane asylum.

Policarpo's hospitalization, the result of the violent clash of the myth of the Indian with a Brazilian reality dominated by European influence, demonstrates a negative attitude to things

truly Indian in a society in which only the "idea" of the Indian is glorified. The idealized view of the Indian held by the demented Policarpo, interested in emulating the Indians' language, customs and lifestyle is counterbalanced by the view held by his sensible niece, Olga, who considered the Indian to be an uncivilized savage, quite removed from the Brazilian reality of her day.

... e se lembrou que, por estas terras, já tinham errado tribos selvagens, das quais um dos chefes se orgulhava de ter no sangue o sangue de dez mil inimigos. Fora há quatro séculos (215).

The internal logic of the two views of the Indian contained within the text, brings this myth to a closure by allowing the reader to conclude on his own that Indian language, customs and lifestyle simply did not fit in contemporary Brazilian society. The falseness of the myth of the Indian imposed upon the reader by the internal logic of the text clearly echoes the opinion expressed by Capistrano de Abreu, paraphrased as follows by Sílvia Romero.

He [Capistrano] understood the weakness and inevitable death of romanticism and launched the beginning of another literary formula for poetry and for art in general. He appropriately appraised the necessity to examine all the old base for Brazilian sentiments and he introduced the true ethnographic principle into Brazilian criticism and history, until then falsified by the mania of Indianism.⁴

Each time Policarpo tested a myth and found it did not work, he suffered severe consequences. On discovering that in the Lusitanian-European Brazil the myth of the Tupi language and its influence could not have much substance, Policarpo Quaresma landed in a mental hospital. His coming to terms with the demise of the myth of the land was postponed when he joined Floriano's forces of reprisal against the Revolution of 1892. And it was only while testing the third and perhaps the most powerful national myth – the peacefulness of the Brazilian people – that Policarpo came to terms with the demise of the land myth, which in turn had a profound impact upon his attitude toward life. The contented, self-satisfied man that he had been once gave way to a

somber and moody personality, aware at last of the falseness of his illusions, as evidenced in a letter written from jail to his sister:

Esta vida é absurda e ilógica; eu já tenho medo de viver, Adelaide. . . O melhor é não agir, Adelaide. . . para que do fundo de mim mesmo ou do mistério das cousas não provoque a minha ação o aparecimento de energias estranhas à minha vontade, que mais me façam sofrer e tirem o doce sabor de viver. . . (197).

He realized that his constant search, motivated by his desire to find the truth, led to his action of testing and destroying the sacred myths which until then had sweetened his life. However, once destroyed, these could never again bring him the peace and calm he desired, the purely material pleasure of living the "sensação material pura e simples de viver" (198).

While the realization of the demise of the first two myths – the land and the Indian – made Policarpo's life very difficult, the demythifications of peacefulness and docility of the Brazilian people was not only the most painful and difficult to accept, but it actually cost Policarpo his life. His final horror on perceiving the falseness of this myth in Brazilian reality is equalled only by that of the present-day revisionist historian, Glauco Carneiro. Early in the text, Lima Barreto shows Policarpo's faith in the myth of "a gente mais valente, mais hospitaleira, mais inteligente e doce do mundo", (35) being gradually eroded and constantly contradicted by everyday experiences in which acquaintances, such as Genelício, demonstrated with every move, every word, every action that Brazilians were not the way he expected them to be: sweet, devoted, unselfish and courageous. Albernaz, Genelício's future father-in-law, cultivated Policarpo's friendship because of family interests but when Policarpo could no longer be of any use to the family, neither Albernaz nor Genelício demonstrated any concern for him during his hospitalization following the memo in the Tupi episode. Albernaz only reiterated self-righteously that, indeed, Policarpo was as mad as he had suspected. "É o que eu dizia" (58). The myth of the Brazilian people's kindness, constantly eroded in the course of daily life and abundantly described throughout the narrative, was dealt the death blow by Policarpo's realization of the Brazilians' aptitude for and practice of violence. Having witnessed accidentally a mass execution of

political prisoners (204), Policarpo sent a letter of protest to the government, which resulted in his imprisonment and subsequent sentence. In prison, Policarpo realized how foolish he had been for having cherished all those myths about his country. Sane and recovered from his mythomania, Policarpo reviewed accurately his myth-testing experience:

O tupi encontrou a incredulidade geral, o riso, a mofa, o escárnio e levou-o à loucura. Uma decepção. E a agricultura? Nada. As terras não eram ferazes e ela não era fácil como diziam os livros. Outra decepção. . . Onde estava a doçura de nossa gente? Pois não a via matar prisioneiros, inúmeros? Outra decepção. A sua vida era uma decepção, uma série, melhor, um encadeamento de decepções (207).

Policarpo's personal bitterness is echoed in the writing of the famous revisionist historian Glauco Carneiro:

Contrariando a crença geral de que o temperamento brasileiro é essencialmente pacífico, detestando a violência, a Revolução Federalista, que rapidamente evoluiu de dissensões locais para ampliar-se numa guerra civil contra o Governo Federal, caracterizou-se pela ausência quase completa de cavalheirismo nas lutas entre "maragatos" (federalistas) e "picapaus" (republicanos), sendo tais combates responsáveis pela fama de selvageria que durante muito tempo acompanhou os brasileiros do Extremo Sul.⁵

Glauco Carneiro supports his position with that of another horror-stricken historian, Arthur Ferreira Filho, who describes this war's activity in most graphic terms, "nessa guerra civil soltaram-se instintos maus dos homens e atentados monstruosos macularam os mais nobres sentimentos da humanidade". Thus Glauco Carneiro uses the historical data generated by the *Revolução Federalista* to put to sleep forever the myth of Brazilian pacificity:

Alinharemos a seguir alguns fatos demonstrativos da impiedade e selvageria da Revolução Federalista e da repressão que se lhe seguiu, os quais. . . jogam por terra a idéia geral de que todos os movimentos brasileiros são pacíficos devido à boa índole do povo.⁶

Having lost his faith in this last Brazilian myth, Policarpo felt devastated by his former acceptance of all these deceptions. His whole life had been made up of a series of beliefs in false illusions. Yet he had to pay dearly for his newly recovered sanity because his testing of Brazilian mythology finally resulted in the loss of his life as if life were the one and only price that could be paid for the loss of myth. Policarpo Quaresma thought that he had to die because he no longer believed in the myth, when, in fact, he died because by testing the myth, he destroyed it on both the personal and social levels. On the personal level, without the myth, his life had become empty and pointless.

... e assim é que ia para a cova, sem deixar traço seu, sem um filho, sem um amor, sem um beijo mais quente, sem nenhum mesmo, e sem sequer uma asneira! (208)

It was therefor unnecessary for him to be tried for the nonexistent crime of the loss of myth, because without the myth his life was worthless and so the sentence was an appropriate way to end it. "E eu, que não tinha crime algum, nem era ouvido, nem era julgado: Seria simplesmente executado" (208). The reader can perceive that on the social level, Policarpo had to die, because of the extreme danger that he, as a myth breaker, presented to society in general and, in particular, to those in power.

Having confronted myth and reality, historian Glauco Carneiro leaves the Brazilian reader devastated with no place to turn. Having done the same, however, novelist Lima Barreto suggests another posture, a posture that seems to be both sane and bearable. At his hour of death, Policarpo may have realized indeed that he had spent his life pursuing a chimera, inventing a country that had never existed: "A pátria que quisera ter era um mito" (207). But while Policarpo's last moments are filled with bitter disillusionment, the reader knows that his very belief in myth had made his life bearable. His life, which, in his letter to his sister, he described as "absurda e ilógica" (197), stood out above others. His life made him notable, and made him forget his lack of family, love and other earthly comforts (207). The myth gave his life color and texture and made it worth living. It was this very myth that moved both Ricardo and Olga to immortalize Policarpo's memory (215). The texts of both the historian Glauco Carneiro and the writer Lima Barreto do indeed destroy the

Brazilian myth, yet, unlike the historian, the writer takes into account the vital importance of myth in daily life, which he seems to perceive as an organizing element analogous to "thought and action", a process articulated by Lucien Goldmann. For Lucien Goldmann, "thought and action" have the vital function of organizing "social structures so that life becomes more acceptable."⁷

If an often-mentioned similarity between Don Quijote and Policarpo Quaresma does in fact exist, it lies in both characters' test and destruction of myth. They both die upon unmasking myth's falsity. Each character's death, a direct result of the demise of the myth, may lead the reader to assume that preservation of the myth is essential to human survival, that to render life bearable on the level of everyday reality, myths of sustenance are necessary on the level of the imaginary. The death of myth on the level of the imaginary would then necessarily translate into death of the individual on the level of reality. Through the figure of Policarpo himself, the reader discovers how the belief in myth can lead to the illusion of well-being and satisfaction. The acts of questioning the myth and discovering its falsity led Policarpo to a state of depression and unhappiness, which finally culminated in social action—his letter of protest.

It is precisely this dissatisfaction followed by social protest that is perceived as most dangerous to those in power. Citizens who believe in the national myths maintain an illusion of contentment and satisfaction while those who lose faith in national myths are moved to protest and social action. Hence, the death of national myths represents not only a direct threat to the stability of the state but also a challenge to the very foundations of the concept of statehood. The execution of myth breakers therefore may be seen as justifiable in defense of statehood. However, while the historian exposes the myth for what it is, the novelist deftly uncovers its double-edged property. On the one hand Lima Barreto's text reveals the myth as constituting a citizen's "opium". Driven by his belief in the myth, Policarpo was a happy, orderly, productive citizen. The loss of his belief in each myth was accompanied by a subsequent loss in productivity, orderliness and contentment. On the other hand, Lima Barreto suggests that governments, aware of the powerful influence of myths, exploit them for their own purposes, and are thus forced to

silence anyone who might challenge or destroy these myths. Therefore, in the novel, Policarpo's death is the logical outcome of his myth-testing while, paradoxically, death is the outcome he desires, for without myth his life is not worth living.

Governments have always been aware of the power of myth to calm and appease the citizenry, or to move it to war, if necessary. However, only recently have studies demonstrated the pernicious influence of myth when appropriated by the state for its own purposes. The Augustan model, probably known by Lima Barreto, shows only the positive effects of myth appropriation by the state. R. M. Ogilvie's analysis of Augustus' success in bringing about peace and prosperity relates it very closely to Augustus' ability to revitalize and circulate old religious myths. "For the social and constitutional recovery which he [Augustus] engineered could not have succeeded unless it had been based on a widely diffused religious confidence to make it succeed".⁸

Yet, while beneficial in its contemporary effects, the *Augustan* model provided the modern state with the ability to inflict enormous damage through the use of myth. The appropriation of myth by the state has become the object of serious inquiry by such respectable myth scholars as Krista Kamenestsky and Wolfgang Mieder as well as such literary historians as François Pérus. François Pérus develops in great detail the exploitation of the myth of the gaucho in the effort of unifying the Argentine nation in the 19th century,⁹ while Wolfgang Mieder and Krista Kamenestsky conclude that Hitler's work would have been impossible without the expansion of myth through the folktale for the preparation of Third Reich Ideology and the promulgation of anti-semitism based on the "racial parasite" myth, a process described at length by Wolfgang Mieder.¹⁰ Krista Kamenestsky points out further that the Nazi state was quite aware of the power of the folktale for the promulgation of racial and political ideology:

The German folktale gained significantly in status and popularity during the National Socialist Regime, as the Party promoted it actively within the context of German folk education. A Party official put it quite plainly in 1935: 'The German folktale shall become a most valuable means for us in the racial and political education of the young'.¹¹

Thus the folktale was elevated to a special status in Nazi days in order to disseminate national myths among the young.

Whether Lima Barreto did in fact anticipate the potentially dangerous use of myth in the modern Nazi state is open to question. But a reading of Krista Kamenestsky's summary of the use of folklore as "an effective and potentially dangerous tool of the Nazi Socialist Weltanschauung"¹² certainly suggests that Lima Barreto was far more aware of the profound double-edged implications of national myths than is obvious at first glance and therefore deserves a significant marker in the topology of myth.

NOTES

¹ Lima Barreto. *Triste fim de Policarpo Quaresma*. 28th ed. (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1982). All quotations are taken from this edition. The English translation is *The Patriot*, trans. Robert Scott – Bucclench, London: Rex Collings, 1978.

² E. Bradford Burns. *Perspectives on Brazilian History*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967). p. 45.

³ Burns, p. 50.

⁴ Quoted in Burns, p. 68.

⁵ Glauco Carneiro. *História das Revoluções Brasileiras*. (Rio de Janeiro: O Cruzeiro, 1965). p. 75.

⁶ Carneiro, p. 91 (cf. with Burns, E. Bradford. *A History of Brasil*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980. p. 293-300).

⁷ Lucien Goldmann. Structure: Human Reality and methodological Concept. In: *The Structuralist Controversy*. eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. p. 110.

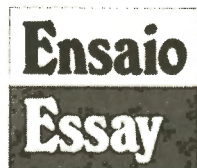
⁸ Ogilvie, R. M. *The romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (New York: W. W. Norton & Col, 1969). p. 124.

⁹ François Pérus. *Historia y Crítica Literaria* (La Habana, Cuba: Casa de las Américas, 1982). p. 262-263.

¹⁰ Wolfgang Mieder. The Promulgation of Anti Semitism and Stereotypes through Folklore. *Journal of American Folklore*, 95: 378 (1982) p. 435.

¹¹ Krista Kamenestsky. *Children's Literature in Hitler's Germany*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1984). p. 70.

¹² Folklore as a Political Tool in Nazi Germany. *Journal of American Folklore*, 95:378 (1982) p. 235.



**FEMALE QUEST TOWARD
“AGUA PURA” IN CLARICE
LISPECTOR’S *PERTO DO CORAÇÃO*
*SELVAGEM***

Em seu estudo sobre a narrativa da busca, o mitógrafo Joseph Campbell afirma: “A mulher, na linguagem imagística da mitologia, representa a totalidade do que pode ser conhecido. O herói é aquele que consegue conhecer.” Mas se cabe à mulher representar a “totalidade do que pode ser conhecido,” como pode ela empreender a sua própria busca? Traçando a busca da protagonista Joana em *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, a primeira das muitas “buscas por mulheres” presentes nos romances de Clarice Lispector, proponho várias respostas a essa pergunta. A busca de Joana se compõe de três etapas – a primeira “feminina,” a segunda “masculina”, e a terceira “feminista” – com cada etapa contribuindo diferentemente para a crítica, a abertura e a revisão da temática e da estrutura patriarcal da busca, que Lispector realiza já neste seu primeiro romance.

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The quests of heroes, from Gilgamesh and Odysseus, Apuleius and Augustine, to Stephen Daedalus and Carlos Castañeda, have been recorded throughout history. Joseph Campbell in his classic work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* charted the journey of the hero in many cultures. . . . But if the hero has a thousand faces, the heroine has scarcely a dozen.

Carol Christ, 1980

While the thematic and structural importance of quest in the fiction of Clarice Lispector has received substantive critical attention,¹ Lispector's tendency to depict female rather than male protagonists on quest has all but escaped comment,² as if sexual identity were of little consequence in her remarkably persistent engagement with this mythic narrative. Yet feminist literary critics who have noted the relative scarcity of female-centered quest narratives prior to the last century, have also suggested that the proliferation of female protagonists on quest in female-authored literature of the contemporary period is bringing about a re-casting of the quest story itself. Because "the simple act of telling a woman's story from a woman's point of view is a revolutionary act," asserts Carol Christ, ". . . the quest motif. . . appears in different form in the new literature written by women (7,9)."³ In light of such cues, it is appropriate to reconsider the complex relationship between the quest myth and the female-centered fictions of Clarice Lispector. In her many depictions of female protagonists on quest, does Lispector simply replay, however profoundly, an age-old archetype of *busca*? Or does her specific engagement with female perspectives involve her in gender-related revision of the quest myth itself?

It is telling that Christ describes the difference between male and female quest as one of "form," for the predominance of male questers in the patriarchal literary tradition has conditioned the very structure of this mythic paradigm. Premised on the difference, tension and attraction between a questing "subject" on the one hand, and a quested "object" on the other, the binary and hierarchical narrative structure of the quest story exhibits a marked affinity for the paired constructions of

“masculinity as transcendent subjectivity” and “femininity as immanent otherness” which Simone de Beauvoir identifies as the cornerstones of patriarchal ideology.⁴ In his study of the quest myth as it appears in various cultures and time periods, Joseph Campbell observes that, “Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the Totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know (1968, 116).” Whether the binary narrative structure of the quest myth is inextricable from the patriarchal ideology of gender, is a question which would take us far afield of the present article. In narrative practice, however, the congruity between the quest and patriarchal ideology has been so sweeping and persistent that patriarchal conception of masculinity and femininity are regarded by myth scholars as Campbell to comprise together the structural foundations of the quest story.⁵

Given this relationship between quest and patriarchal gender, the very possibility of “female quest” is thrown into question. As Beauvoir so wryly puts it, “What would Prince Charming have for occupation if not to awaken the Sleeping Beauty (207)?” Called upon to embody “the totality of what can be known” by the masculine hero, “woman” is not favorably positioned to make her own quest for knowledge.

How, then, does an author such as Lispector produce fictions of female quest? How does she contrast or reconcile the female’s conventional role as “waiter” with her new identity as “quester”? How does she imagine the “object” of the female protagonist who, in patriarchal narrative, would herself be confined to the role of object? By what narrative twists and transgressions does she circumvent or overcome the patriarchal bias against female journey, and how is the quest story itself transformed by this process of mythic revision?

So unorthodox and multiple was Clarice Lispector’s own *busca* as a writer, that responses to this question are at least as numerous as her works of fiction. The female quest undertaken by Joana in *Perto do Coração Selvagem* is a good place to begin, however, since it involves a three-step journey and, consequently, suggests three distinct “types” of female quest. In the stage, which will be referred to as the “quest of the heroine,” the quest myth may be said to be “feminized” in order to accommodate the protagonist’s conventional feminine identity. In the second stage,

which will be referred as “the quest of the female hero,” the female protagonist is conversely “másculinized” in order to accommodate the conventional masculine-centrism of the mythic paradigm. While both of these stages depend on patriarchal notions of gender identity and, consequently, reinscribe what we have seen to be the patriarchal narrative structure of the quest myth, the third stage will entail a rejection of this binary paradigm, as the protagonist travels toward a non-gendered variety of identity in a movement which will be referred to as “feminist quest.” Although the “genderless” Joana is certainly the exception rather than the rule among Lispector’s numerous and often quite “feminine” female protagonists, the three-step typology suggested by her journey away from patriarchal conceptions of gender will, it is hoped, suggest directions for reading Lispector’s later female-centered quest fictions.

The Quest of the Heroine

Part I of *Perto do Coração Selvagem* comprises an exploration of the “feminine side” of the patriarchal quest narrative. How does it feel to be an “Other”? And, critically, what is the “story” behind the identification of woman with otherness?⁶ Alternating between Joana’s childhood and married life, the chapters from “O Pai” to “Otávio” reveal the journey by which the female protagonist relinquishes her own inclinations for subjectivity and quest, in order to play the role of the feminine other in the quest of a masculine hero.

Drawing on the one/other structure of the word pair hero/heroine, we will refer to this story as the “quest of the heroine.” *Woman*, writes Beauvoir, “is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her (xix).” Similarly, the “quest of the heroine” does not make sense on its own terms, but only as a sub-narrative of the hero’s quest for his feminine other.

In the opening chapters of Lispector’s novel, we learn that Joana has a propensity for “quest” in general and for “heroic” quest in particular. Oddly detached from the objects, people, ideas and words of which her environment is comprised, Joana betrays, already, a curiosity about the relationship between gender and language, and an intimation of the possibility of genderlessness: “‘Nunca’ é homem ou mulher? Por que ‘nunca’ não

é filho nem filha? E 'sim'? (15).” If the girl fails to understand why some words are gendered while others are not, she also demonstrates “confusion” as to the “proper” gender of the word “hero,” harboring an ambition which is revealed through her father’s indiscretion: “Me disse que quando crescer vai ser herói. . . (26)” Like the cross-dressed saint for whom she is named, Joana translates her own penchant for “questioning” into a desire to play the role of the masculine hero on quest.

The conflict between Joana’s heroic self-perception and patriarchal notions of propriety is most richly conveyed in the shoplifting incident, where, redoubling the mythical overtones of her narrative, Lispector invests her young protagonist with promethean and satanic associations. The act of stealing a book, which may be read as a metaphor of Joana’s ambition to appropriate the masculine-centered narrative of the hero for the purpose of understanding and constructing her own female experience, is promethean insofar as it establishes Joana’s at once secondary and subversive relationship to the “powers that be.” Yet whereas Prometheus’ mythic act of defiance fits neatly into the patriarchal tradition of hero’s quest, the female protagonist’s defiant attempt to steal onto the masculine side of the quest myth is of another order, not a mythic transgression so much as a transgression of myth. Accordingly, the figure of St. Joan who has been translated into a female Prometheus, is once again remythologized, this time as the satanic “vfbora (53).” Associating Joana with the snake who ruptured the perfect closure of God’s paradise, the girl’s aunt unwittingly identifies her as a threat to the “paradisiacal” circle of patriarchal mythology.

In the convent school to which she is banished, Joana learns to relinquish her mythic identities as “hero,” “Prometheus,” and “Satan,” in favor of another, more “suitable,” mythic costume: that patriarchal conception of femininity to which Beauvoir refers as the “myth of woman.” This “educational” process begins in the chapter “O Banho”, when Joana is transformed by the water of her bath:

A jovem sente a água pesando sobre o seu corpo, pára um instante. . . Atenta para o que está sentindo, a invasão da maré. Que houve? Torna-se uma criatura

séria. . . Mal respira. . . Sobre o mesmo corpo que adivinhou alegria existe água – água. Não, não. . . Agita-se, procura fugir. Tudo – diz devagar como entregando uma coisa. . . E essa palavra é paz. . . (69)

In the view of Olga de Sá, this passage represents “uma metáfora do ritual da fecundação, da iniciação para a vida, tangível agora, na alegria da puberdade (267).” Yet if this is a scene of “initiation,” it is also one of violation. So unpleasant is the sensation of being “invaded” by the “tide” of her bath, that Joana puts up verbal and physical resistance. If following such struggle she does seem to give way to the invading water, finding “peace” in the word “tudo,” even this moment of acceptance contributes to the impression that the over-all experience has been one of loss, of sacrifice, for it involves an “entregando,” which, upon Joana’s emergence from bathtub, is revealed to comprise a surrender of identity itself: “Quando emerge da banheira é uma desconhecida que não sabe o que sentir. . . Enxuga-se sem amor, humilhada e pobre . . . (69-70).” Stripped in this way of her previously heroic sense of selfhood, Joana is well-positioned to assume the role of patriarchy’s passive, otherly, and, above all, selfless, woman.

As the humiliated protagonist departs from the bathroom to “slide” through the “dark,” “red” and “discreet” corredor (70), the joint connotations of birth and of menstruation signal that she is undergoing a process of rebirth, and, in particular, that she is being reborn as a woman (Sá, 268-69). From the meditative episode in which this rebirth culminates, furthermore, it is clear that Joana’s new “womanhood” is defined in patriarchal terms.⁷ Emerging from the corridor into her tiny bedroom, Joana’s subsequent contemplation of rain and stars through a window amounts to an experience of “awakening” and “opening” milder than, but analagous to, her violation in the bath: “A chuva e as estrelas, essa mistura fria e densa me acordou, abriu as portas de meu bosque verde e sombrio, desse bosque com cheiro de abismo onde corre água (70).” Whereas Joana began by resisting the invasion of the bath water, an invasion by which she felt her very self to be corroded, she has learned to welcome the sensation of being traversed by the water which, on the basis of its function in

the bath scene, we may take to be symbolic of masculine libido. Despite Lispector's odd and, as we shall see, critical transgression of the patriarchal association between water and femininity,⁸ Joana's identification with passive features of nature indicates that she has accepted at last her "proper" mythic position as the immanent natural landscape through which the questing hero travels.

Of note is the similarity between Joana's meditation by the window, and a convention of female-centered story which feminist literary critics have come to refer to as the "voyage in." Responding to Beauvoir's assertion that in myth woman's sole function is to wait, Marianne Hirsch argues that quiescence and anticipation do not necessarily imply passivity, but may be seen as aspects of an inward progression characteristic of feminine experience:

Sleep and anticipation can be seen to outline a movement . . . opposite the young man's adventurous departure, . . . a progressive withdrawal into the symbolic landscapes of the innermost self (23)⁹

If Joana's introspective movement toward recognition of herself as "um bosque verde e sombrio" may be seen as a voyage "opposite the young man's adventurous departure," however, it does not lead her to the "symbolic landscapes of the innermost self" so much as to "the innermost self as symbolic landscape." At least in the case of this Sleeping Beauty, the "voyage in" is not an assertion of female subjectivity, but a milestone in the patriarchal suppression of the female as subject.

Trained by her experiences in the convent school to receive the annihilating visitations of free-floating masculine libido, Joana is prepared to assume her role as feminine other in the story of a specific and concrete masculine hero. In his quest to know "vida e morte em idéias, isoladas do prazer e da dor, tão distantes das qualidades humanas que poderiam se confundir com o silêncio (89)," Otávio is a manifestation, if an intellectualized one, of that hero who would know "Logos" by means of the "Eros" embodied in the figure of a woman. Prior to his meeting with Joana, this figure has been Lúdia, a character who prunes herself to the requirements of her feminine role with considerable self-consciousness and effect: [Lúdia] sentia que [Otávio] sofria. . .

e que ela só poderia ajudá-lo usando de toda a passividade que dormia em seu ser (94).” When Joana agrees to replace Lfídia in this passive, secondary role, her “quest of the heroine” manifests its structural and ideological containment within the larger patriarchal tradition of the “quest of the hero.”

Serving in this way as a prescription for the association between femaleness and otherness on which patriarchal quest depends, Joana’s “quest of the heroine” is not a new story, but has a handful of precedents in the quest tradition outlined by Campbell. Whereas the hero’s quest for “triumphant” union with a representative of the “Queen Goddess of the World” forms part of his more general project to accede to “mastery of the universe,” writes Campbell, the heroine’s trajectory toward more or less forcible sexual possession by “the heavenly husband” is motivated by her desire to “*be* the mastered world” (1968, 109, 119, 136). Joana’s experience of sexual violation, loss of subjectivity, and rebirth as immanent otherness corresponds to this description: not a quest so much as the story of an involuntary alienation from the impulse to quest, it fits the female protagonist to be “mastered” by the masculine hero.

Even as we recognize the way in which Lispector reinscribes the patriarchal heroine’s journey away from quest, however, it is important to note that she does not do so uncritically. As Joana basks in the illumination of “love” after her marriage, Lispector sees that she stumbles:

“O amor veio afirmar todas as coisas velhas de cuja existência apenas sabia sem nunca ter aceito e sentido . . . Não poderia mais negar. . . o quê? – perguntava-se suspensa (105).”

The hesitation and suspense, the eclipse and the dash, the question “o quê?,” tear open a space in the supposed satisfaction of the protagonist, a sense of self-division which Beauvoir, following Sartre, would diagnose as resistance to existential inauthenticity.¹⁰ “Otávio transformava-a em alguma coisa que não era ela mas ele mesmo (32)”: capable of becoming like a woman, Joana is incapable of the leap of (bad) faith required to *be* a woman. Despite the fact that she undergoes the narrative pattern of the heroine’s quest, Joana does not journey toward feminine *i* *entity*, but toward femininity as mask.

The subversive self-division of the protagonist, furthermore, finds a parallel in authorial duplicity. As Ana Luiza Andrade has observed, the “elasticidade” of Lispector’s language allows her to reproduce conventional plots without becoming fully compromised by the ideologies inscribed therein (53). Given our attention to the mythic dimension of *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, perhaps the most compelling example of such elasticity in this novel is that which manifests itself in Lispector’s manipulation of mythic symbolism. Just as Lispector mimics the binary and gendered narrative logic of the patriarchal quest myth, so she tends to employ specific mythic symbols at conventional moments and in conventional ways: the gender-defying girlchild is associated with the figure of Joan of Arc; the heretic is linked with the satanic snake; “woman” is equated with natural images of forest and woods. In the convent-school episodes of *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, however, the symbol of water is displaced from its conventional association with immanence and femininity, to become a symbol of dynamic masculinity, a purposeful sexual aggressor who prepares the coming of the heroic Otávio. By this “mis-use” of water symbolism, Lispector, like the *vibora*, plies the ruin of patriarchal myth from within.¹¹

The Quest of the Female Hero

Although the purpose of the “quest of the heroine” was to quash the strong sense of selfhood Joana possessed as a child, the *effect* of that journey, as we have seen, was to send that pre-gendered subjectivity into a variety of internal exile, to cover it with the mask of femininity, to split Joana into two. As Part II of the novel opens the post-feminine chapters of Joana’s life, the first lines comprise a summons from this exiled self: “Joana lembrou-se de repente . . . dela mesma em pé no topo da escadaria (111).” Reminded of herself as she stood poised to descend a fearful staircase, the married Joana is recalled to the Joana who had not yet been called down into the Hades of gender, of marriage and of self-division. Her ensuing quest will express her desire for reunion with that pre-gendered subjectivity, a desire which presupposes the possibility of a whole and centered subject.

While Joana’s quest toward the pre-feminine self implies a quest toward genderlessness, it is also a quest toward a self once

labelled as "heroic." Consequently, it is not surprising that Joana's strategy to retrieve undivided subjectivity is to mimic the masculine side of the "quest of the hero" paradigm. In this stage of quest, Joana for the first time is explicitly perceived as an incarnation of Saint Joan of Arc: "Joana, nome nu, Santa Joana, tão virgem (174)." As Marina Warner has observed, "Ironically, Joan [of Arc]'s life, probably one of the most heroic a woman has ever led, is a tribute to the male principle, a homage to the [masculine] sphere of action (155)." In the "quest of the female hero," Joana, like Saint Joan, rejects her patriarchally defined identity as feminine other, not with the intention of conceiving a new identity uninformed by patriarchal gender constructs, but in order to adopt the role of the masculine hero.

In the realization of this project, the feminized "homem" plays a critical role. Modeling her own identity on that of the masculine hero of patriarchal myth, Joana quests, as does he, after a feminine object. Since the culmination of the hero's quest for woman is literal or figurative sexual intercourse, Joana's continuing biological identity as a member of the female sex sets up a narrative choice: while Lispector might have opted for a lesbian relationship, instead she preserves the heterosexuality as well as the hetero-gender of the patriarchal quest myth, casting a biological male in the role of Joana's feminine other. Like the female heroine whose "quest" is conceived as a state waiting and, ultimately, as a loss of selfhood inflicted by the aggressive sexual visitation of some masculine hero, "o homem" anxiously awaits each visit from Joana, his "single reality," and "stops existing" each time she enters to "violate" his soul with "light" (176, 200). Harking back to the convent-room episode in which Joana's induction into patriarchal femininity was signalled by her identification with images of immanent green nature, the relationship between "o homem" and Joana may be read as direct inversion: while "[o homem escorrega] muito fundo dentro de si, [e paira] na penumbra de sua própria floresta insuspeita (176)," Joana "[cresce] . . . fina como um pinheiro, muito corajosa também. . ." and "homem assim era Joana, homem. . . (183)." Filling the role of feminine "floresta" with the meditative "homem," Lispector slides Joana away from her previous association with immanence of forest and woods, associating her

more specifically with "narrow pine," and, from there, with the erect, courageous figure of "man."

Just as Joan of Arc's heroic garments are burnt away in the "purifying" flames of the patriarchal order, however, so Joana is stripped almost immediately of the masculine mask she so heretically has adopted. If we continue to read the passage which announces Joana's metamorphosis into a man, we discover an apparent contradiction: ". . . homem assim era Joana, homem. E assim fez-se mulher. . . (183)" Who, or what, is the agent of this abrupt re-transformation?

In understanding Joana's sudden return to womanhood, the pathetic and grotesque woman who keeps house for the "homem" is key. Viewed through the eyes of Joana, the "mulher" is not only repulsive per se, but, with her "orelhas grossas, tristes e pesadas, com um fundo escuro de caverna," and her "lábios úmidos, emurhecidos, grandes. . . (178)," evokes repulsive images of female genitalia. From one perspective, this excessively ugly figure might be seen to form part of Joana's faithful, if mis-sexed, enactment of the quest of the hero paradigm. In the patriarchal quest myth, as DuPlessis observes, the hero not only seeks the feminine other, but, in particular, seeks to "[sever]. . . the creative. . . aspects of the female from the baleful . . . aspects, becoming the custodian of the 'good' and the repressor of the 'wicked' aspects of female power (133)." In light of this analysis, it is extremely appropriate that Joana not only ascends a hill to "liberate" a man who lives secluded in an ominous, tower-like house, but that the house, like the man, belongs to a monstrously female "mulher."

The problem with this interpretation, however, is that Joana feels an uncanny affinity with the ugly woman: "Joana [e] aquela mulher. . . O que as ligava afinal (178)?"¹² As in the female-authored English literature of the 19th-century analyzed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the "saintly" female protagonist has a monstrous feminine double. Because in Lispector's novel the aggressive and masculinized woman occupies the saintly side of the pair, however, Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of the monstrous double as a locus of repressed aggression will not serve us here. The repulsive "mulher" does represent a repressed aspect of Joana, but it is her *femininity* rather than her aggression. Even at the height of her

enactment of the masculine hero, that is, Joana is haunted by a sense of lingering, and grotesque, feminine otherness.

The tenacity of Joana's femininity, far from pointing to an essential link between femaleness and femininity, is a symptom of Lispector's sensitivity to the *de facto* intransigence of the patriarchal order. Of critical significance is Joana's observation that her own love affair with the "homem" depends on the grotesque woman's performance of certain material tasks: "o quarto onde o homem dormia e recebia Joana, aquele quarto com as cortinas, quase sem poeira, [a mulher] o arranjara certamente (178)." The "homem," for all his willingness to enact on a mythical level the role of the feminine other, is not about to assume the material duties with which, on the level of socio-economic sub-structure, that role is conventionally associated. As these tasks fall to the "mulher," it becomes clear that, even in the supposedly sexblind territory of the quest of the female hero, the patriarchal association between biological sex and socially constructed gender is still very much at play. Or, to rephrase in contemporary terminology, Joana is that "token" woman whose construction of herself as masculine contributes to the feminization and oppression of other women.

Joana's strong sense of identification with the "mulher," meanwhile, is more than a sign of sore social conscience: in keeping with the fact that tokenism sometimes backfires even on those women who at first appear to benefit from it, the doubling between Joana and the "mulher" is a premonition of the female protagonist's imminent reentrainment in patriarchal femininity. As the story of Joana's relationship with the "homem" develops, the protagonist's *heroic* courage is increasingly reinterpreted as *maternal* courage, her link with her lover becoming less one of female hero and male other, and more one of mother and son. Allowing the "homem" to burrow against her body like "uma ameba, um protozoário procurando cegamente o núcleo, o centro vivo, . . . como uma criança (182)," Joana lulls him with stories. If in the patriarchal order the *writing* of stories is conventionally associated with masculinity, the act of *telling* stories to *children* is, of course, suggestive of the maternal mode of femininity. Furthermore, the content of the stories told by Joana – "nasceu um menino chamado um nome (177)" – prophesies the way in which the "homem" will be reborn out of the substance of

Joana's body and into the world. Described by Lispector as a space of "recolhimento(169)," of "luz fechada (183)," the womb-like bedroom has served as a double for Joana's motherly body, as an accomplice with her in the task of incubating the "homem." Inexplicable on a purely thematic level, the sudden departure of the "homem" in the chapter entitled "A Partida dos Homens" makes sense if we consider this incubational connotation of his relationship with Joana: the moment of "partida" is the moment of parturition, the moment when the child leaves the mother's body to initiate its own journey in the world. Departing from Joana in this way for territories unknown, the "homem" "corrects" the male/female inversion by which their story has been characterized, reassuming the role of the masculine quester and reimposing the role of immanent body on Joana.

By means of this "correctional" re-inversion, the "quest of the female hero," like the "quest of the heroine," terminates on the protagonist's (re)assumption of patriarchal femininity. Deprived of the possibility of continuing her heroic quest up the hill, Joana takes up as in the convent the conventional woman's position by the window, embarking once again on the heroine's obediently introspective "voyage in": "Despia a roupa que vestira para ir ver o homem. . . Aproximou-se da janela. . . Perscrutou-se, . . . atenta como se tivesse avançado demais. . . (201-202)"

In the painting of the ship on water which hangs above the bed of the "homem," Lispector furnishes a symbolical gloss on Joana's incapacity to maintain the "roupa" of the hero. Precisely because Joana's "quest of the female hero" has been such a "perfect" (in)version of the masculine hero's quest, preserving intact the patriarchal ideology of gender according to which females are barred from the exercise of subjectivity, the protagonist has been doomed from the start to return to the position of feminine other. Consequently, it is appropriate that a parodically "perfect" representation of sea journey hangs above the bed in which Joana has lost the struggle for sexual supremacy over the "homem." In the "quest of the heroine," the perverse masculinization of water was a sign of the disruptive sexual inversion which was to come in the next phase of female quest; in the painting of the ship on water which appears in the "quest of the

female hero, " by contrast, water is restored to its passive position beneath a voyaging ship, thereby signalling the full restoration of patriarchal myth. Joana's attempt to cross-dress her way into masculine privilege has manifested itself as a faithful, as an all-too-faithful, reproduction of the patriarchal story of the masculine hero.

Feminist Quest

As the inward meditation begun in "A Partida dos Homens" extends into the chapter "A Viagem," it develops into a journey much different from the heroine's "voyage in" with which it shared an initial resemblance. Reaching once again for that sense of undivided selfhood she associates with childhood, Joana remembers:

Que foi que perdi?. . . Talvez tivesse aprendido a falar, só isso. Mas as palavras sobrenadavam no seu mar, indissolúvel, duras. Antes era o mar puro. . . Havia de reunir-se a si mesma um dia, sem as palavras duras e solitárias. . . (202-204)

Returning to the symbol of water, Lispector now uses it to evoke a time prior to Joana's entrapment in, and division by, the "indissoluble," "hard" and "solitary" material of "words." Spurred to renewed quest by this memory of a time when the water of self flowed unobstructed by the reification of individual words of names,¹ Joana will reject in particular that pair of words which name patriarchal gender identity, undertaking a journey beyond "masculinity" and "femininity" alike in the chapter "A Viagem."¹⁴

Because the movement toward genderlessness renders obsolete the hero/woman structure of the patriarchal quest myth, the final chapter of *Perto do Coração Selvagem* necessarily forges a new form of quest as it moves out into what DuPlessis would call the space "beyond the ending" of patriarchal narrative. On the basis of definitions of feminism provided by DuPlessis and Julia Kristeva, we will refer to this journey toward protean subjectivity and mythic transformation as "feminist quest." If Lispector's insistence on the essential freedom of the human subject is more Sartrean than Kristevan, her depiction of a voyage in which Joana sheds the masks of patriarchal gender in order to create herself anew is a vivid instance of Kristeva's

conception of feminism as a process by which gender identity is deconstructed in favor of more dynamic varieties of selfhood.¹⁵ Furthermore, because the telling of such a story involves a fundamental recasting of narrative, Lispector may be counted among those writers who practice what DuPlessis refers to as feminist mythopoesis (34, 105-141): the critique and transformative re-creation of those mythic narratives which have served to convey the oppressive ideology of the patriarchal sex-gender system.

This narrative transformation begins with the collapse of the distinction between inward and outward voyage. Consisting of the purposeful flow of meditations undertaken by Joana as she stands onboard an outbound ship, the protagonist's movement in "A Viagem" is neither reducible to the heroine's voyage in nor to the hero's voyage out, but combines and surpasses them both. Although Joana, like the feminine Sleeping Beauty, is penetrated to the innermost regions of her being, this penetration is not accomplished for the purposes of an external Prince, but by, and for, the protagonist's own subjectivity. Although Joana, like the masculine hero, sets out on a boat, the waves through which she travels not confined to the space outside of the voyager and her ship but swell from the depths of her own memory as she seeks to reinstate a time when the distinctions between inward and outward, subject and object, and masculine and feminine, were easily dissolved in the oceanic breadth and movement of the pre-gendered self.

As Joana "[deixa escorrer] as primeiras vagas" of her journey (211), the double meaning of the word "vaga" is an indication that the protagonist's voyage toward seamless selfhood will entail an encounter with nothingness. Recognizing the deceit inherent in her attempts to play the roles of "herói" and "mulher," Joana has longed to be one with the originative self anterior to and responsible for the creation of such façades. Yet boring inward through the masks of socially imposed identity, Joana discovers instead that this "tenro ser de luz e de ar que tentava viver dentro dela (205)" is not a "self" at all, but an absence of self: "Não era obrigada a seguir o próprio começo. . . Doía ou alegrava? No entanto sentia que essa estranha liberdade. . . era o que iluminava sua matéria (210)." A poetic intuition of what Sartre would call the "nothingness" by which "being" is

animated, this "liberty" which "illuminates material" is for Lispector, as for Sartre, manifested in the self-conscious aimlessness of individual human consciousness.¹⁶

"Dofa ou alegrava?" In continuing affinity with the Sartrian vision, the intuition of self-nothingness is welcome insofar as it allows the protagonist to recognize and to assume the existential responsibility for self-creation. Empowered by the knowledge of nothingness to assert the inessentiality of patriarchal gender – "Como poderia ser herói? . . . Não era mulher. . . (215)" –, Joana exults in the newfound multiplicity of her own potential, approaching, at last, that oneness with "pure water" toward which she has quested:

Um dia virá em que todo meu movimento será criação, nascimento. . . a um gesto meu minhas vagas se levantarão poderosas, água pura submergindo a dúvida. . . estarei criando instante por instante. . . me ultrapassarei em ondas. . . (216)

Whereas patriarchal myth disempowers the symbol of water, associating in with passive feminine immanence, Lispector slides water away from the poles of patriarchal sexual identity, imagining it as a symbol of the protagonist's capacity to assume a multiplicity of identities, to become a succession of "ondas," according to free and spontaneous choices through time.

This dynamic self-multiplicity comprises, paradoxically, the seamless variety of selfhood for which Joana has quested. Just as the distinct words which comprise the epiphanic final paragraph of the novel flow together in a linguistic rush, so the waves of self surge and break in such rapid succession that they come to comprise a state of self-oneness:

. . . erguerei dentro de mim o que sou um dia . . . não haverá nenhum espaço dentro de mim para notar sequer que estarei criando instante por instante, não instante por instante: sempre fundido. . . serei brutal e malfeita como uma pedra . . . (216)

Reaching through self-process toward self-wholeness, Joana attains that state of existential authenticity which Sartre would refer to as "presence to [her]self": "a way . . . of being in a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute

cohesion without a trave of diversity and unity as a synthesis of multiplicity(77)” Because the moment of “self wholeness” is the moment of self-creation, the moment prior to the separation of created mask from creative self, the moment prior to the reification of mask as self, it is through perpetual self-creation, through the continuous displacement of one self by another, that Joana can maintain the experience of self-unity.

An enormous difference between the self-professedly atheistic doctrine of Sartre and the feminist vision of Lispector, however, is that, for Lispector, this dynamic state of “presence to self” is divine. Punctuated with calls to “Deus”, the flow of consciousness rendered in “A Viagem” reproaches the diety it evokes: “Deus por que não existes dentro de mim? Por que me fizeste separada de ti (213)?” While at first glance this complaint might be interpreted as the conventional feminine mystic’s masochistic desire to lose herself in communion with a masculine diety (Beauvoir, 743-53), in fact it announces the protagonist’s intention to appropriate back into the space of herself the divine creativity which patriarchal religion inauthentically has projected onto an external and masculine “God.”¹⁷ That the attainment of dynamic selfhood, a state characterized by the free and perpetual exercise of creativity, is also the attainment of this self divinity, is confirmed by the image of self-apotheosis which surges in the final lines of the novel: “Então nada impedirá meu caminho até a morte-sem-medo, de qualquer luta ou descanso me levantarei forte e bela como um cavalo novo (216).” In traditional mythology, as Campbell points out, the horse functions as a symbol of God, and, specifically, as a symbol of God as masculine patriarch (1976, 206-209). Appropriating this image as a symbol of a female protagonist who has achieved a state of genderless selfhood, Lispector not only renders the apotheosis of her protagonist, but also redefines the concept of “God.” Whereas in patriarchal myth “God” is “Logos” and “Logos” is a closed system comprised of the subordination of “the Feminine” by “the Masculine,” in the mythical landscape of Lispector God is the fruitful absence of which human consciousness consists, and by which being is animated in free and creative movement.

Having unearthed the subversively sacred vision which serves as the lifeblood of *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, we may better understand the abruptness with the novel breaks off.

Taking Alan Dundes' notion of myth as "sacred narrative" as our working definition, it is clear that non-closure is as integral to the quest narrated by Lispector, as is closure in the case of patriarchal quest. While the patriarchal quest of the hero mirrors its gendered and monistic version of God by means of a gendered and closed narrative structure, Joana's quest beyond the margins of patriarchal narrative withholds closure and definitive meaning in order to image the fruitful absence which it takes to be the essence of the divine.

To appreciate the feminist significance of Joana's quest to be reunited with the divine creative power at the heart of herself, it is useful to refer to DuPlessis' distinction between "arquetypal" and "prototypal" narratives (133-34). While "arquetype" refers to a closed narrative structure which represents itself as universal, eternal, and invariant, "prototype" indicates a narrative which, by its deliberate lack of closure, invites, even insists on, its own revision. A clear example of arquetypal myth, the closed circle of the "quest of the hero" narrates, and imposes, the search for and discovery of the patriarchal concept of god. The open-ended quest portrayed in *Perto do Coração Selvagem*, by contrast, is the non-authoritarian and collaborative narrative of prototype: prying open the patriarchal structure of the hero's myth in order to spill the newly fluid substance of language toward an indeterminate future, Lispector leaves the reader with a textual "blank canvas," with an invitation to, and locus for, the exercise of freedom, creativity, selfhood, and, in the Claricean vision, divinity. In this way, Clarice Lispector's first novel comprises a forceful expression of that literary feminism which rejects the "hard, indissoluble words" of patriarchal gender, in favor of new, and shared beginnings.

NOTES

¹ In what has become one of the canonical works of criticism on Lispector, Benedito Nunes observes, "Do primeiro ao último romance de Clarice Lispector, a ação propriamente dita se desenvolve na forma de uma errância, ao mesmo tempo interior e exterior das personagens. . . [que] corresponde, implícita ou explicitamente, a uma busca ética ou espiritual (151-52)." More recently, Daphne Patai's analysis of quest in *A Paixão Segundo G. H.* has implications for Lispector's other novels as well (esp. 80, 89).

² Although the majority of Lispector's protagonists are female, this fact rarely has been taken into account by these critics interested in Lispector's repeated rendition of the quest plot. A notable exception is Peixoto's discussion of female *bildungsroman* in *Laços de Família*.

³ Similar conclusions are to be found in the work of Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Annis Pratt.

⁴ As Beauvoir herself points out (esp. XV-XXXIV), the analysis of female oppression outlined in *The Second Sex* is premised on the ethical theory of human subjectivity developed by Sartre. Because the work of Lispector also is characterized by a marked affinity with Sartrean existentialism (Nunes, esp. 95-155), Beauvoir's writings are an excellent basis for feminist work on Lispector.

⁵ To cite a scholar more specifically concerned with the relationship between mythic narratives and literature, an "unspoiled or redeemed female" is identified by Northrop Frye as the object of the "Eros quest" which gives onto the "Logos vision from the mountaintop" (1970, 264). See also Frye, 1957, 304. Among feminist critics, DuPlessis (133) and Judith Little (16-17) address most explicitly and persuasively the way in which the patriarchal ideology of gender adheres in the very narrative structure of the "quest of the hero."

⁶ Shifting the focus of the quest myth from the masculine to the feminine perspective, the "quest of the heroine" is a clear example of that variety of narrative revision to which DuPlessis refers as "displacement": "Narrative displacement. . . offers the possibility of speech to the female in the case, giving voice to the muted (p. 108)." In keeping with the present argument that "the quest of the heroine" fails to challenge the structural premises of the patriarchal quest myth, DuPlessis distinguishes between the thematic revisions involved in narrative displacement, and the structural transformations involved in the more profound process of narrative "delegitimation": "The [writer's] attitude toward the tale as given determines whether there will be a displacement of attention to the other side of the story, of a delegitimation of the known tale, a critique even unto sequences and priorities of narrative (p. 108)."

⁷ Further evidence to this effect is the fact that Joana's "rebirth" into womanhood is actually an inverse passage toward *pre-birth*: ". . . desliza pelo corredor - a longa garganta vermelha e escura e discreta por onde afundar no baixo, no tudo . . . Na cama [do quarto] . . . aconchega-se como no ventre perdido e esquece (70, emphasis added)." As the protagonist returns to a state prior to consciousness, the movement from heroic childhood toward womanhood is not a movement forward, but a retreat, a retreat not only from the exterior world but from subjectivity itself.

⁸ As Ana Luiza Andrade observes, a similar symbolical inversion is implied in *Uma Aprendizagem ou o Livro dos Prazeres*, when Lori, after drinking the water of the ocean "como o líquido espesso de um homem," wonders to herself: "Como explicar que o mar era o seu berço materno mas que o cheiro era todo masculino? (Lispector, 1982, 85, 121)" In the case of *Aprendizagem*, where intercourse between protagonist and sea is not inflicted but chosen, Lori ventures the following response: "Talvez se tratasse da fusão perfeita (121)." Whether or how such an explanation serves in *Aprendizagem* is beyond the scope of this essay; in the case of Joana's experience in "O Banho," however, in which intercourse water is experienced as rape and humiliation, the masculinization of water does not result in the "fusion" of "androgyny," but in the near erasure of the "feminine" connotations of water, in the *appropriation* of this symbol by and for patriarchal masculinity. Nevertheless, as the present essay will demonstrate, even this appropriation forms part of Lispector's progressive destabilization and transcendence of patriarchal gender. In arriving at this conclusion, I am indebted to questions posed by Edward Ahearn in a conversation at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, November, 1988.

⁹ *The Voyage In*, a collection of essays on the meaning of inward journey in female-centered fictions, includes Peixoto's article on *Laços de Família* as well as the Hirsch article cited here. Especially given the inverse direction of Joana's "rebirth" as a woman (see note 7), the journey undergone by this protagonist in Part I of *Perto do Coração Selvagem* would seem to exemplify this paradigm of movement. . . opposite the young man's adventurous departure."

¹⁰ See note 4.

¹¹ See note 8.

¹² In full citation, this passage links Joana with the "esposa" of the professor as well as with the "mulher" of the "homem." As Joana simultaneous repulsion for and identification with the professor's wife in an early episode of the novel suggests (see 54-65), the "esposa," like the "mulher," embodies the patriarchal femininity against which Joana resists and yet within which she continues at this stage to feel entrapped.

¹³ This development would seem to bear out Hirsch's argument that the "voyage in" has the *potential* to deliver the female protagonist to an intuition (if not an experience) of self as subject. See my discussion, p. 9.

¹⁴ This use of water as a symbol of the genderlessness toward which Joana quests in "A Viagem" is foreshadowed in an episode of intercourse between protagonist and sea which precedes the "educational" events in the convent school. As Joana and the sea pass dynamically between the masculine and feminine poles of patriarchal gender, "trading" positions between themselves so continuously that neither of them ever assumes even momentarily one position or the other, Lispector provides a vision of childhood as a time of genderlessness, and of ocean water as symbolic of this time. See 38-41.

¹⁵ In addition to Kristeva, see Moi, 11-13.

¹⁶ The ensuing analysis will rely heavily on Lispector's well-documented affinity with Sartrean existentialism, and on the feminist implications of such an outlook as developed by Beauvoir (see my note 4). Although a story such as "Amor" in *Laços de Família* suggests that Lispector was familiar with certain of Sartre's writings, I follow Benedito Nunes' example in stressing that, particularly in the case of a writer as self-professedly non-intellectual as Lispector, "affinity" is not meant to imply a relationship of "influence" or even familiarity, but, instead, a case of remarkably and perhaps quite unselfconsciously overlapping visions.

¹⁷ Whereas Sartre outlines a similar project, in his writing the human reappropriation of the creative power which has been absorbed in the fabrication and maintenance of an alien diety explicitly equated with the destruction of the concept of "God" (see Hazel Barnes' introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, p. XXXI). Because Sartre's analysis of and response to religious alienation follow closely the ideas of Marx, contemporary reading of Marx as a thinker who humanized rather than rejected the notion of God (despite his own intentions to the contrary) are useful in understanding Lispector's view of the human creator as divine. See for example Richard Comstock.

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THE WAY OF ST. JOANA CAROLINA**by Osman Lins****THE FIRST MYSTERY**

Falling stars and those that endure, meteors, comets that cross space like reptiles, vast nebulas, rivers of fire and of magnitude, the orderly agglomerations, expanding space, boundless reaches reflected in the mirrors of Time, the Sun and the planets, our Moon and its four quarters, all measured in the invisible scales, pollen in one pan, the constellations in the other, which regulate, with unchanging certitude, distance, vertigo, weight, and numbers.

⊕ I followed Joana and her family for many years. There am I, young and black, weighing her in my hand, under the intense eye of Totônia, who asks: "Is it people or a man?" Because her husband's exact name is unknown. He lacks a definite face; sometimes he's bearded, other times he's clean-shaven with either long hair or short—his eyes changed color too. He only comes home to create babies or surprises, until one day he disappeared on the wings of a journey. Those four children looking at us, lined up on the other side of the bed, holding their dreary destinies in closed fists clutched to their breasts, are the signs of those unannounced and brief stops. Suzana, João, Filomena, and Lucina. I plucked all of them from the prodigious insides of

Totônia, who dropped children easily, like ripe fruit. They say children are like things you plant, promises of help. With all these, Totônia will end her days in poverty. Suzana, the wife of a coarse man younger than she, will arrive at old age eaten up by jealousy, seeing in every woman, even her mother, a covetous eye directed at her husband. He is an animal, capable of coupling in the forest, howling, even with a priest and images of saints, with anything that reminds him of a woman or women's clothes, even with the devil himself, horns, tails, cloven hooves and all, if he wore a skirt. João, a man who would never accept a slight, will live without a secure means of livelihood, always changing jobs and cities, crippling legs, arms, fingers, in stabbings and shootings. Filomena, the wife of a gambler, will cultivate every form of greed, incapable of offering anyone a glass of water. Lucina will become Totônia's enemy, denying her hand and her voice. Joana, only Joana Carolina, in spite of poverty, will be her support: the old woman will die in her care, in her house, thirty-six years from now, on Serra Grande plantation. Lucina will walk three leagues, to kneel at the foot of the bed and ask her forgiveness, in tears. Neither Filomena, nor she, nor Suzana will offer their sister any assistance. In order to dress her children in mourning, Joana Carolina, already a widow, will buy black cloth on credit. It will be hard to pay that debt. The shopkeeper, as if holding in his hand the scales that weigh our virtues and our sins, will write her a letter, reminding her that none knows the hour of his death and therefore we should settle our debts so as not to suffer the furies of hell. I will sell a pig, lend Joana Carolina the money, she will pay the shylock. My words: "If you never pay back the loan, Joana, there is no reason to torment yourself. You are a faithful woman. In your heart you will never owe anyone."

THE SECOND MYSTERY

The house. Along with trees and the sun, the first and most common children's drawing. The place of table, bed, and hearth. The outside walls and the roof shelter us, so we do not dissolve into the vastness of the Earth; the inside walls, at the same time they permit isolation, establish rites, definite relations between place and act, demarcating the dining room and preventing us from

begetting our children on the luncheon tablecloth. Through the doors we have access to the rest of the Universe and from it we return; through the windows, we contemplate it. A band of men form a horde, an army, an encampment, or an expedition, always something nostalgic and wayward; a group of houses makes a city, a frame, a fixed point, a here, from which depart roads, into which converge highways and ambitions, which stagnates or grows according to its own forces, and will perhaps be destroyed, buried in the earth, and even so can shine from underground, silently, from the darkness, through its name.

□ It is in November that they used to change—and perhaps still do—the directorate of the Brothers of Charity. Joana, who was eleven last month, looks at me with her hands flattened, not knowing how to explain the reason for her act and frightened by our green surplices. Behind us, some crosses and a eucalyptus tree. To the left of the group, holding her son's hand, Dona Totônia, half humble, half enraged, has her foot raised above the scorpions that I found among the coins. A little to the right, its door open, is the Votive Box, a small constrution like so many others around the city, intended for alms from passersby and transformed almost into a sanctuary (some light candles there, pray for their dead). On this Friday I, as Assistant Treasurer, with a small chest, a handful of keys and an open parasol because of the heat, examined it for the first time. On the ground, as large as lobsters and yet smaller than the copper pennies, are the same scorpions that Dona Totônia was crushing, one of which is crawling up the bare arm of our President. Joana's explanation: "I wanted to give something." "But why scorpions? And not, for example, pieces of glass?" "I didn't have any pieces of glass". "What did you do so they wouldn't sting you?" "They don't bite." Through that same spot, years from now, Joana will pass at night, holding the tiny hand of Laura. Her daughter will be shaking with fear, fascinated, seeing the will-o'-the-wisps in the cemetery, her terror will mix with a happiness that will impregnate her memory because of the smell of coffee, of bread on the fire, coming from the workers' houses, at nightfall, like the sounds of a party. The smell of coffee, or of bread, is not frequent in Totônia's house. Joana lacks amusements. A few

weeks back, she discovered two things that cost no money and give her pleasure: attending the funerals of children, and a nest of scorpions in the back yard. She puts them in a can and plays with them; she goes to the cemetery and remains next to the Votive Box, until the smell of bread and coffee blends into the light of sunset. Here we are, standing about her, interrogating her, because she decided to combine her two pleasures: she brought her can of scorpions to the burial, and gave her animals to the poor, ticking them through the slot as if they were money. The President of the Brotherhood screams that no one can pick up a scorpion. Joana Carolina: "I can." She encloses them in the palm of her hand, softly. She lets them go. "If the little girl can do that, then through the power of God, so can I." The President rolls up his sleeve, his arm white and tender. The scorpion crawling up his wrist, stinger in the air, bent backwards, the color of fire; afterwards, with the three on the ground, moving toward Dona Totônia; she crushing them with her feet. Grabbing her daughter by the arm, she leaves us. We argue, believing in pacts with the devil, for we accept him much more readily than we do angels.

THE THIRD MYSTERY

The square, the temple. A gathering place. Men come together for discussion, amusement, prayers. Questions and more questions, answers, dialogues with God, marches, sermons, speeches, processions, musical bands, circuses, carnivals, images of saints being carried, masts and flags, merry-rounds, booths, the sound of bells, girandoles and fireworks launched into the sky in the direction of the towers, the horizontal space of the square.

♂ Joana is barefoot, dressed in white, her golden hair blowing in the breeze. She wears on her breast the framed image of St. Sebastian. Over her shoulders, covering her arms and hands, so long that it almost touches the ground, has been placed a crocheted altar cloth bearing figures of centaurs. The heavy arrows in the saint's chest appear to traverse him and bury themselves firmly in Joana. Behind her, in a crooked line, singing

in their high pitched voices and carrying burning candles, are many women. The December night has not yet fallen completely; some trace of day hovers in the air. I can see that Joana's eyes are large and blue; and that her face, though disfigured, for she is still convalescing, differs from that of any I have met, both firm and dedicated at the same time. A crystal dagger. Even I, long absent from the city, knew of her illness. Half blind, not recognizing things, feverish, her legs useless. Her mother made a vow that if she were cured there would be a candlelight procession through the streets. Thus, in the brief space of that glance, the first we exchanged, binding us with all that it implies, I see in Joana Carolina only the adolescent saved from blindness and paralysis by a miracle so she could come to me on her serene feet and discover me. Ignorant though I am, I sense a feeling of grace. I am certain that in this triply illuminated young woman—by the sun, by the candles, by my ecstasy—infirmity, more than a punishment, was a design to shelter her until she could emerge from the entrails of time, at this moment. In her reside life's good fortunes and by joining myself to her, I possess greatness that I can neither understand nor even guess. Speared in my depths by her glance, I offer myself with the greatest openness, imagining that with this pride suddenly sprung up in my spirit I can buy peace and exultation. I am unaware that this arrow loosed to the sound of the women's hymn is a seed whose fruits none can foresee and whose joys will be almost as nothing next to the suffering, the depredations of our lives, above all in the existence of Joana, my victim.

THE FOURTH MYSTERY

The green of foliage, the sun of arteries, invisible cloak of the earth. Inciter of fires, voice of windmills, broken oar of becalmed sailing ships, road without beginning or bounds for all animals that fly—bats, moths, birds of wingspan great or small. Stirrer of oceans, wrath of whirlpools, hurricanes, windstorms, tornadoes. Shepherd of mastodons, dinosaurs, gigantic reindeer, led in herds over blue pastures, and whose bones, whose hides and horns become the rain and the rainbow.

✓ Our father loved animals. He trained a black-throated cardinal to ride on the back of a goat called Gedáblia and urge it on with short whistles. Nô and I will inherit that tendency. In a way, it's because of it that, some years from now, when our mother is mourning our father, who is already dead, at Serra Grande plantation, that we will go out into the world, looking for work. We will leave her with Teófanés and Laura, our younger brother and sister, who haven't been born yet. Later we will take her from the plantation, back to the city. For now we are two small boys, resting on banana leaves, our mother bent over us, trying to encourage the fire with lavender. A sickening smell penetrates the entire house, the smell of our ulcerated bodies. Maria do Carmo, our only sister, died two days ago, the tenth of the year. It was hot, that January heat that suffocates us all, and she asked for water. She died in thirst. Our father tries to distract us with the bird and Gedáblia, making the cardinal ride on goatback around our beds of leaves, but we pay him no heed. He is a train conductor and is never home. In his free time he takes us to the forest, catches birds and tries to domesticate them. He does not earn much. To help him, our mother set up a small hotel near the train station, where other railroad workers eat. But who wants to sit at a table in a hotel with this smallpox epidemic, killing people and leaving scars on the skin of those who manage to cure themselves? Even if there were customers, my mother wouldn't open the hotel. She hasn't slept for a week, watching over us day and night, by our bedside, without anywhere to go for help. Almost all the doors are bolted; we barely hear footsteps of the singsong voices of peddlers, no laughter at all. We are plunged into a silence punctuated by shouts, and my dreams are peopled by threatening goats that trample me and by great birds with red heads that fly over me, tearing off pieces of my flesh. Not even that will make me hate birds and goats. The owner of Serra Grande plantation will be jealous of his orange grove. In the sadness of those future days, when food will be even less abundant than now, when there is already little, my joy and Nô's will be the same as our father's: finding small newborn birds, raising them close to the fire, taming them. Our revenge on life, an animal incapable of domestication. The plantation owner will catch us inside his grove. He will think the downy birds in our hands are oranges and complain angrily to our mother. Then she

will send us away, and we will look for work and one day come to get her, taking pride in ourselves. Smallpox has a more terrible effect on Nô than on me. It will cripple his arm, his left one, for a long time. Our mother will massage it every day with sheep fat, every day, patiently, never missing a day, until he can move his arm again, and steal small birds from their nest with me. Until one day we will take our mother away, bring her a small portion of the peace and security that our father, never achieving it, desired for her.

THE FIFTH MYSTERY

The slow rotation of water, around its variegated nature. Its oscillation between the peace of glasses and floods. Perhaps it is a mineral, a mythological being or a plant, a bond linking continents, islands. It may be an animal, an immense fish that swallowed darkness and abyss, with all their shells, anemones, dolphins, whales and treasures of shipwrecks. It might wish to have, say, the definition of stones; and it never defines itself. Invisible. Visible. Crossable. Hard. Enemy. Friend. There are cyclones, waterspouts. The striking of fins? And the clouds, fruits which, when ripe, fall as rains. The fish absorbs them and grows. Then, does this green and ramified fish, made of silver and salt, nurture itself from itself? Does it drink of its own thirst? Does it eat of its own hunger? Does it swim in itself? We shall never know about that fleeting being, lustral, dark, clear and overpowering. I have it in my eyes, within my pupils. Therefore I do not know whether I see it, or whether it is it that sees itself.

⊙ I saw the mark of death in that young man, when he asked me for Joana's hand. The warning. The sign. I tried to dissuade him. We were people without possessions, with little schooling. "It doesn't matter. Since I saw your daughter in the procession. . . Excuse me, but since that time I have imagined her as my wife. I so want to protect her!" "You are mistaken. She is the one who will protect you." "I work. I'm a railroad man. I'll win promotions." "What is your name?" "Jerônimo José." "Mr. Jerônimo, pardon me for saying it, but I have seen few men as

frail as you. I don't mean of body. Inside. Born to work as a Jeweler. Or imagemaker, seated in himself and making Our Ladies and Baby Jesuses. Do you like to read?" "I read a lot." He had no father, no mother. He burst into tears, squeezing my fingers as if I had discovered the weaknesses he had most sought to hide. I was always a hard woman. I have two towers on my head, I am the wife, the Church, I am of the earth, the one who pollutes herself, who bears the children, who transforms her own blood into milk, the fragile one. Is that not what the liturgy says? Well, if I am weak, then I must be like stone. I am stone; but I also wept. "Joana will marry you, my son. (This is what I called him.) Don't be ashamed of your boyish qualities. Your weakness, your ignorance of things. The visions that almost all others think is crazy. Those are also things of value." Other requests did not move me; they were crude men. But spirit, the presence of a spirit will always disturb me. The comings and goings of that poor young man, just to put together his house! Four chairs brought from Natã; a kerosene lamp bought in Recife; a chamber pot someone gave him; a couple of ornaments from a stall selling gifts; the tie clip sold to meet the latest expenses. All in order to live those ten years, till he died suddenly, with two dollars in his pocket and a few more pennies in the drawers. He should be buried in a blue coffin, like little boys. He was so good that I often asked myself an evil question: if Joana felt any pleasure, a woman's pleasure, in lying with him. He was so different from the man I married, who seemed to be in the world only to learn nocturnal arts. He had hardened his flesh by dips in the river, sleeping in the open, so that I always yielded to his order, opening myself like the Red Sea before Moses—knowing that in nine months there would be another child with mouth and intestines, and not an extra penny—and he would pierce me with his troops of fire and joy, the brightest of banners waving on the masts. This may be the reason my other daughters led such dismal lives. Suzana poisoned by lust, Filomena crooking her nose and fingers with greed, Lucina angry at everyone, even at me. João Sebastião wandering but without support, must be the work of his father, his reflection. But Totônia, why give such a vague origin to the shortcomings of your children? Why should such grave errors spring from a tendency of the flesh, which after all no one can control, rather than from your usual way of acting, your lack

of drive? Even if you deceive yourself, even if you are hard on yourself, you must believe that the errors of your children are children of your errors. Do not allow that to afflict your soul, Totônia, for humility believes itself capable of error, while pride thinks that mistakes and faults are always for others. Even if you have lost your way in raising your children, isn't Joana compensation enough? Look at her steadfastness. She could raise her arms to heaven, accusing herself, accusing the times, trying to do over what can be done but once, or be filled with fear, or always be oblivious. She does not make of her pain a banner but keeps it like a secret. Buried deep in her heart. She does not wish to shut out the sun, which comes in through the window; nor to silence the tambours, bass drums, guitars, flutes, and rattles that wander through the streets on this Carnival Sunday; she does not even think that some other day would be better for death. She knows that no day is better for misfortune than any other; that man sees the sun but the sun does not see men; and that when people are happy, they are entitled to that happiness, for each one has his days of sorrows and the tears of one are not always those of all. And who better than Joana could forget, wipe from her mind, those truths? She could tell me that if she had gone to Belém when her husband sent for her, he'd be alive. Strange! That delicate young man had an impetuous streak, unexpected gestures, as if hiding a willful wing, ready to take flight at his call when necessary. The Englishmen who ran the railroad wanted and demanded that he close the hotel, for a second-class conductor an unworthy sideline. What was worthy to the foreigners, was a cripple's wage and going hungry. "Either close the hotel or you're fired." He lost his job, bought two cans of kerosene, poured them over two of the railroad's cars, set them afire, and left for Belém. There he became a shyster, found a position as a judge in the interior, and wrote Joana telling her to come. She asked me if I would go. "How can I? As old as I am, almost seventy? At my age the only trip I'll take is to the cemetery, if God grants me the boon of not dying in a fire or drowning in one of those floods that carry off even oxen and rooftops. But you must go." She refused. She was the only one of the children left, the others were of no use to me. She would come to visit, go to mass with me, have me spend Sundays with her, even give me gifts: a clay bowl, one or two dozen straight pins, a

canary trained by Jerônimo. She was my stay. A strong hand. The source of happiness. The opposite of loneliness. He understood, made no complaint, and came. Joana asked his forgiveness. The reply: "It was a mistake for me to call you. The opportunity was a good one, and I was tempted. Many may think you should have gone. But home is not always where the husband is; home is where there is peace of mind." He showed me his new law books and a small box of revenue stamps. He was brought to trial by the Great Western railroad as an arsonist, defended himself and was acquitted. He had courage, but not to waste; he had enough to get by. So when at the Barra plantation they explained to him the state of affairs between the Barnabós and the Câmaras, who had hired him to argue their case in a land dispute, he decided to come back at once. "Any lawyer who takes the case will be shot. And besides, you know: the Câmaras aren't to be trusted either. When devils fight, can either be right? They're all outlaws. Furthermore, in your place I wouldn't lose a second. I'd turn my horse around and head home. These people love an ambush." When he spurred his horse he felt the pain in his chest and thought he was going to die. Death also loves to catch people in an ambush. The horse is the proof of what my son-in-law's journey was like. "Joana, I came home to die". The horse's hooves fell like shards of glass. Jerônimo settled into the hammock, asked for tea, and called his five children. The water was boiling, and Joana brought the drink, hot enough to burn the sick man's lips. He did not even finish the cup. Doesn't Joana have reason to despair? Instead, she cuts the bread for the afternoon snack of her five children, two at her left, the others at her right. Through the window, people in masks contemplate the dead man in the coffin; one of the masqueraders holds a banjo to his chest. The horse rests, a bundle of veins, its eyes purple, its feet bleeding. Two visitors stand on each side, two angels, two candleholders, I have one arm dangling, the other extended, my hand resting on Jerônimo's brow. Above our heads flies one of the birds that he domesticated and had flown away; it will return through the window at nightfall and land silently on Joana's slippers.

THE SIXTH MISTERY

"What does man do, in his need?"

"He pierces and lacerates. He kills tigers in the water, hawks in the jungle, whales in the air."

"What does he invent and use, in these impossible acts?"

"Artifice and eye, arm and noose, horns and horses, falcons, silence, steel, caution, packs of dogs, and explosion."

"Has he no compassion?"

"No. He has majesty."

"From necessity?"

"It is his condition."

"Does he always find his game? His fish? With his dark net, his bright arrow, his fiery fishhook, his unfeeling musket, does he always discover the animal in flight, in the shadow, in the abyss?"

"Not every time. And in the end it is his turn to be executed."

"By what greater executioner?"

"Death, whose cold tooth devours fishes and fisherman, hunter and hunted."

I resemble the devil much more than a person. *Vade retro*. But that's not what women thought. With my fishing pole over my shoulder and a string of fish in my hand, I look at Joana the way I look into the depths of a river. A pointed beard, the brim of my hat raised on both sides of the head like horns. Terrifying, a real badman. I wasn't like that. I would bathe with water from the well, with soap, my hat was sparkling white, pulled down over the eyes, I wore sideburns and enjoyed hunting, not fishing. I would approach women gently, I had a weakness for widows and married women, but I never took advantage of the innocent. Virgins were safe with me and I never had a single child that I didn't look after. That's how I ruined myself, threw away everything my father put together. Of the twenty-two children I gave my name to, by eighteen different women, not one of them recognized me as their father after they grew up. They surely saw me as I never was: a goat's beard, hoover, the smell of sulphur. Joana the teacher wards me off with a ruler and ferule in one hand, making a kind of open compass with the instruments; her

other arm protects her five children. Nô, the vivacious one; Álvaro, the smart one; Teófanés, the resigned one; Laura, the concentrated one; Maria do Carmo, the second with that name, who will also die in childhood. It was my father's foolish idea, things an old man does, to accept a teacher in these lands. To teach those wretches? Anyway, the county paid her, all we did was give the teacher a place to stay. . . She traveled six leagues a month, three there and three back, to get her pay. How many wretched people there are in this world! Leaving her house, with her string of children, to teach from seven till two, not eating so much as a cookie, cramming letters and numbers into the heads of thirty-some colts. In the end, one of them writes on the blackboard her pay, her reward: "The teacher is a bitch." She arrived around Easter. I don't really know her age. She was in her March, the end of her summer. She spent over seven years here in Serra Grande. When she left, she had aged twenty. Her face was hard, burned, without its earlier clarity, her spine was bent; she had lost some teeth. Even so, I would look at her and sometimes feel disturbed. There came from within her a serenity that we find in the images of saints, the crudest ones. A sound of eternity. My conscience is clear: I did what I could to get her to go to bed with me. It was not easy, I took over a year for my first thrust. She had a shield that I had to overcome a little at a time, an invisible defense, of composure and silence, a dome of strength, royalty. She looked right at me, her blue eyes as hard as a man's. I provided good lodgings for her in our best house, near the old slave quarters. A wide door, a window on the front, another at the side, a large room for the useless classes; the hallway served as a kitchen. The cavernous, dark bedrooms were not good: you had to go down a few steps to them; but they would do. Joana slept in the first with her daughters; the boys slept in the second. The side window looked out on the cacao grove, from which I could see her during the lessons, and be seen by her. No grove was ever better tended. I polished the ground with my boots; I think the back-and-forth of my shadow shined the trunks. She might at least look out at the grove; but it was as if the window didn't exist. In the afternoon she would disappear; surely she was in the kitchen, preparing food for the next day. At twilight she would close everything and start crocheting. She never asked me for a grain of corn, a blade of grass. How could she live? Did she

multiply the loaves and fishes? An absurd woman. I never understood her accounts, she had the gift of multiplication. So did I, in my own way: that year two children were born to me. But I wanted one by Joana. I began to seek out women that looked like her, but found none. I spread about my (false) intention of marrying an educated woman. I continued to be ignored in the cacao grove. I decided to have a talk with the widow. She received me well. She saw I was burning up, and offered me water, or coffee. How could I hold a glass or cup if my hands were trembling? I didn't say a single word of what I had prepared. There was a hook in my tongue, and I stood there mute as a fish. My father was never insulted on a half-breed horse he acquired in Bahia; on other horses, or on foot, his authority was reduced. There are things like those, that give a person support. I decided to transfer her a larger house, where her strength might weaken. "You'll move this very week. I'm going to tear all this down, it's a good place to put up a shed. I need to increase my income. I've made a lot of mistakes, but I'm going to put my life right, start a family." "You already have so many! One more can't make any difference!" I pretended not to hear and left with my ears burning. I ordered everything razed to sweep from my sight the window where I was never seen. I never built anything on the site. The house where I moved Joana with her school and her children was very large. It had been partitioned and part of it had been a distillery. Even so, a shout from the living room would barely arrive at the kitchen. Damp walls, high ceilings, huge rooms with space for six double beds and some chests of drawers. Some nights you had to light a fire to keep from freezing to death. There, all at the same time, her children took sick. The little girl died. Her mother, who came to visit from time to time, died there too. Nothing moved the woman. I spent three and a half years circling that house, till one day I lost my patience and asked her, all kinds of wild promises, if she wanted to be my lover. She did not answer. She stared me straight in the eye with that harsh look of hers. "Are you going to answer or not? Say something. What are you made of? Wood? Stone?" The look continued. I decided to grab her, find out what her haughtiness was made of. When I came to I was walking in the cane field, as if an invisible being had carried me off. That being, beyond any doubt, was my own shame. Then came the Holy Missions. I went to confession and

baptized the eight children I'd had in the last five years, resolved to follow the path of justice, took the teacher out of that large house and put her in an old stable. Cloth screens took the place of walls. I besieged her only to humble her, to destroy her pride, but had no success. It's true that I never again spoke to her about going to bed with me. I would complain, criticize her, insult her, go on about the sin of pride. Her answer, once: "You are not without a certain wisdom: you speak of what you know." I decided to ask her to marry me. I could not bring myself to say the words to her, not even when I learned she was leaving. For some years I hated her. I would get women pregnant and hate the children who were born, because none of them was hers. With time, the hatred passed, replaced by a kind of rapture, perhaps of gratitude. I came to think that Joana Carolina was my transcendence, my share of amazement in a life so poor in mystery.

THE SEVENTH MYSTERY

Those who thread and weave unite and order scattered materials that would otherwise be useless or almost so. They belong **SPINNER SHEEP SPINDLE WOOL** to the same lineage as those who study geometry; like these they establish laws and points of union for disunity. Before the spindle, the distaff, the loom, the inventions destined to stretch the **WOOL LINEN COCOON COTTON WOOL** threads and cross them, cotton, silk, it is as if they were im-**WEAVER WARP LOOM WOOL** mersed in limbo, in the darkness of the inchoate. It is the appeal to order that summons them to light, transforms them into works, thus into human objects, illuminated by the spirit of man. It is not **WOOL WOOF CROCHET PATTERN WOOL** because it is useful to us that burlap or linen represents a triumph of our inventiveness, but because they are cloths, because in them sings order, the serene, firm and rigorous union **TAPESTRY FRAMEWORK DISTAFF WOOL** of the warp, of the entangled threads. It is thus that his noblest expressions are those in which, with even greater dis-**WOOL SEWING NEEDLE COTTONSEED WOOL** cipline, flourishes the ornament: in crochet, in carpets, in **SPINNER SHEEP SPINDLE WOOL**

brocade. Then, it is as if by some kind of alchemy, algebra, magic, that cotton and sheep, cocoons, fields of linen rise again with **WOOL WOOF COCOON COTTONSEED WOOL** a less rebellious life, but one more lasting.

○ We did not even have a syringe. My mother, bent over, gives us an enema of bitter smartweed, using the bladder of an ox and a tube from the castor oil plant, smeared with lard. The sickness was fever; our bodies were covered with spots. We ate little, and always tended to get sick. First it was a hacking cough. We all coughed, and Álvaro's scalp chacked behind his ear. He was the one who suffered most. He took two spoonfuls of liver oil a day, and half an orange after each spoonful. He liked oranges and wanted to suck a whole one, but Ma wouldn't let him: it was too expensive. Everything was by halves. Half an orange, half a loaf of bread, half a banana, half a cup of milk, half an egg, one shoe on our feet and the other put away. We would only wear both shoes when she took us to the city to get her pay, three leagues there and three leagues back. That same road for eight years, never by horse or ox cart, or on a donkey. We all walked. At first she went to speak to influential people, asking for a position less remote. It was too far and without transportation. She couldn't bring her five children, she would bring one, or two, or three; the others stayed behind, and this worried her. They would wrinkle their brows, shrug their shoulders. She had to be patient. When it was possible. . . It was never possible. Ma spent three years without insisting on her request, going to the city every month. Lots of hills, deserted patches; pieces of road where you couldn't hear even a dog bark; stretches of sand, which were more tiring than the hills; an area full of round pebbles shining on the ground, which injured our feet. In the summer we would cover our heads with straw hats. What arm could bear to hold a parasol all that time, no matter how light it was? The only thing the hats did was keep us from getting burned too much on the face and neck. And our brains from boiling. The groun—the sand, the pebbles—blew heated air that was difficult to swallow and made it hard to judge distances. Parched dust, which seemed like salt, such was our thirst, drifted

everywhere. And along some miles the trees fled, put to flight, the only shade from our own hats. It was even worse when winter came. The swollen rivers were not always passable. And sometimes there was no crossing them and we would still cross, so great was our need. Or we would cross them over crumbling bridges, with the roaring water lapping at our feet. Once, Nô was almost gored by a dead bull carried by the currents. In a manner of speaking, everything turned into mud. The wood of the bridges was covered with mud, the rivers were muddy masses rushing toward us, and even pebbles seemed to dissolve, transformed into mud. Then—was there anything else we could do? — we would carry umbrellas, clutching the handle with both hands until our arms were numb. The high wind would come in the second half of winter, a rapidly growing crop that sprouted with the first hard rains. It swirled endlessly through those parts. It pained our ears and twisted the umbrella poles, making it difficult to put one foot in front of the other, hard work. Every road became a hillside. And never did we meet with decent men on the road; we only ran into drunkards. Ma was afraid, I'm sure of that. She never let it show, except one time. Just she and I had gone together. As was usually the case, we had arrived at nightfall. Ma slept, picked up her pay, sold some needlework; when she realized it, it was already too late to return. She decided to stay another night and leave in the morning. She confused the time and the signs, thought the moon was the coming of morning, woke me, and we set out for home. Outside the city, we saw a man was following us. "Day will break." Day did not break. Over her shoulder, Ma observed the moving figure and increased her pace; so did he. She would slow down, and the unknown man would slacken his steps. Ma stopped near a small farm, by a stable, her eye always on the shape, pretending that our journey had ended; the follower stood still. We went down a hill almost at a run; when we looked, we could see the distance between him and us had hardly changed. She said, "I made a mistake about the time," like one who says, "I drank from a poisoned well." We had the poison of night in our bodies, unable to vomit it, a poison of error, of abandonment, of helplessness. We encountered no one on the road—and the guy on our heels. It was that way the entire journey, until we arrived at the plantation. Then she took me in her arms and ran. She yelled for her sons like someone wielding a weapon:

they were men's names. The first light of day was dawning on the mountains. Nô came to open the door with a lantern in his hand, she went in so quickly that she bumped him, and the lamp's chimney fell amidst the three of us and shattered on the floor. Once the door was closed, she sat down and asked for a glass of water. She was trembling from head to foot. Joy and abundance we knew only when my grandmother Totônia would come from the city for a few days. Not that she was cheerful. Austere, of few words, measured smiles, her forehead held low like a goat getting ready to butt. But what other event did we have to celebrate? Ma would make cakes, candy, she did not have to tell us to go to the coconut trees and make her welcome. We would all five go, the boys on foot, me on the sheep, Maria do Carmo on the lamb. They were almost like brothers to us, those two animals; we would talk to them, we lived with them, and when the cold was at its worst, they would sleep in our beds. There were seven of us running toward our grandmother Totônia, yelling, when she first appeared, wearing a shawl, a smock and a long skirt, her step firm, her speech relaxed, as if she had come from nearby and not afar. Once she would arrive to fall sick and die within a few days, while the smell of food that Ma had made to cheer her coming still wafted through the house. At that time there were only me, Téó and Ma. Nô and Alvaro had left. They'd found work in a store and begun their lives. Maria do Carmo, Carminha, my dear sister, my true companion, because she was a woman, had died of that disease whose name we never learned. She is the one Ma is giving the enema, with the ox bladder at one end of the tube. My little sister resembles a grotesque glass blower. I am the one in braids. Nô, Álvaro, and Téó did not appear. But they were there, huddled with us in that room, all of us burning with fever. We had been forced to leave the house where we were living and come to this one in the woods; that was where they isolated the people with smallpox. We did not have smallpox. But we were bedridden, all of us, with a strong disease that might spread. They told us to go. We went. At that very spot, among the trees, Carminha was buried. In my fever I heard Ma digging the grave. The sheep bleated for a long time, a different kind of breathing, sorrowful. I had nightmares in which they had been bleating for seven years. Our food, during the entire period of illness, was plantains with coffee. There was an outbreak of

bubonic in the city, it was forbidden to go there, so the enemas of bitter smartweed were our only medicine. When that season was over, Ma once again asked for a place nearer the city, only to hear the same denials. And so more years went by, month after month, summers, winters, one month, then others, a year, still more, in the sun, the wind, Ma passing drunkards, running from mad dogs, from bulls strayed from their pens, three leagues there, three leagues back, to receive her pay for a entire month's work, from seven till two, every day, excepting Sundays. Some say, "Childhood is an April." Mine was a windy and stormy August, which ended when a black man with warts on his face showed up one sunset, bringing a letter: "The daughter of the woman who owns Queimadas plantation remembered me, after all this time. They're going to open a school, her mother wants me to be the teacher. They have an attorney in the city, I won't have to travel to get my pay." Tears sprang from Ma's weary eyes, worn out from all those years of crocheting towels by lamplight, to sell in the city. Only then did she confess: "I was so afraid of those trails! And then too, I feel more tired all the time. However hard I try to be strong, my legs refuse. It seems unreal, not to have to make those trips." For the only time in her life, she raised her fist, an incredibly fragile fist, in a brief revolt against those roads one hundred and eighty times traveled. How had she been able to hide her fear for so many years? The same black man with warts on his face took us to Queimadas plantation. We went by horse, Téó on a gray, bursting with joy, me and Ma on a sorrel. At the edge of Serra Grande plantation, at a knoll, she turned her head. From there we could see cane fields and houses, the mill culvert, the waterwheel, people, mules, goats, chickens and horses, a piece of the road so often taken. I heard her say: "Seven years, seven months, and seven days I lived in this hell. Seven years, seven months, and seven days. It seems like a sentence written in a book." She raised her open hand and ran it over the landscape, with the same gesture she used with the blackboard, erasing what had already been taught and learned. For me they had been pitiless years. But at that moment, seeing the end of a cycle and a world, there came to me, from the depths of remembrance, a regret. We had to skirt the cemetery to enter the city. We would get there, almost always, about six or seven. I was afraid of the crosses and was hungry. I would close my eyes in order not to

see the tombs, the will-o'-the-wisps, I was like a blind person; and, with the whole of my being I smelled the odor of coffee and bread that enveloped the shacks, which for me was also the smell of rest, of respite, of streets, of safety, lights inside houses, the scent of journey's end. I missed those precarious moments. Avarice or fervor of memory which, even in adversity, stores in its saddlebags every grain of benefit.

THE EIGHTH MYSTERY

Clay soil, sugar cane, Cayenne cane, purple cane, brown sugar, the belt, the mill, the spigot, honey, the vat, the still, brandy, sugar, the cleared field, the mill workers, the foreman, the overseer, the owner, the second harvest, the third, the plant, the replanting, the rake, the plow, the ox, the horse, the cart, the driver, the moldboard, the furrow, the grafting, the hole, the winter, the summer, the flooding, the drought, the fertilizer, the bagasse, the fire, the weeding, the scythe, the cut, the ax, the knife, the grinding, the grinder, the reckoning, the company store, the fence, the pond, the hoe, the rifle, the help, the yoke, the bandit, the godfather, he who is commanded, he who commands.

⊕ Totônia lying down, her lids closed, her hands above the sheet. The bull's head, with its inward curving horns, takes up almost the entire window frame. Carrying a tin basin, I bend over the sick woman. At the foot of the bed (the three of them forming a kind of fleurettée cross) Lucina on her knees, dressed in white, Suzana at her back, in blue, her fists raised, and on the other side of the group, also kneeling, Filomena, of whom only her arms, with their fluffy red sleeves, are visible. To the left, Joana Carolina, prostrate, touches the floor with her forehead and the palms of her hands. Through the open door Laura observes them. Through the walls, shining over the countryside, the bright May day and the undulations of the earth, above us great white birds, their gracious heads crowned with a horn, the brightness heavy on their wings. The rider is on the trail, the boy alone and the covered wagon, drawn by four oxen, a pair of reds in the rear, a

darker pair in the lead. The driver carries a black danner at the end of his switch. The rider is Nô and Álvaro, at Joana's bidding. The boy, Teófanés, by himself, is taking a letter to the pharmacist. We are in the wagon, with the dead woman. Her idea, which I disobeyed, was to wait until a cowboy appeared, or at least a young man, to escort the two of us. We were in the middle of the enclosed field, she and I, with no trees nearby, when the Bull leaped unexpectedly from the ground with his horns. We threw ourselves down, faces in the dung-covered dirt, protecting our necks. The Bull flung her purse into the distance, and tried to gore her in the ribs, I wanted to get up, scream, scare him off, but had neither voice nor strength, nor legs. The man on the horse appeared, wearing a hat and sideburns, drove away the bull, came down, spoke, smiled, and took us both by the arm. To the other side of the fence. To think that I almost kissed his hands, not knowing that he bore in his doublet the beasts of evil with their iron-shod hooves, their pointed horns! In the four days while Totônia was dying, Joana's house was full. Only he, to tell the truth, did not appear. He and his father, who was unbalanced and spent his days on the porch in a robe, swinging in the hammock and scouring pots. The son, if he had been anyone else, would have come; the Bull belonged to him. Totônia, it's true, arrived as if nothing were wrong, ate Joana's cakes, said her litany and chaplet. It was later that she began to weaken, one side of her body without feeling, although there were no wounds. But it was plain to see that she was dying because of what happened in the enclosure. After I bathed the deceased and dressed her in her best dress (it was darned at the hem), Joana called me and gave me instructions. Totônia hated the thought of conferring her remains to alien ground, so it was necessary to take the body home and bury it among inscriptions bearing familiar names, which in life she might have heard with displeasure or hatred, but which were part of her world. Joana asked to borrow or rent an ox cart. The man asked if I was part of the family. "By the color of my skin, you can see I'm not." "Then why are you here?" "For a friend. In the same basin with which I bathed the deceased, I gave the first bath to all her children." "That does not entitle you to anything. Tell the teacher to come herself." Seeing me at Joana's side, he screamed at me to stay outside. Blacks weren't allowed in the chapel. He shut himself in the chapel, next to the plantation

house, conspicuously slamming the door. He no longer even seemed the same man who had saved us from the Bull. He must be having a bad day, I thought. There was a silence! The hammock on the porch, the squeaking of the hooks, marking time, his father slowly scouring the copper pots. I pricked up my ears to hear what was happening in the chapel. I didn't understand why he was making so much fuss. Was so much called for because of what he asked? Then the calm was shattered, I listened. The man's words, the price beyond measure. How did he find the courage to make such a brutal demand in the presence of the saints? I waited for Joana's protests, cries of anger. All I heard was her voice, which was not even aggrieved, a voice without inflection, word upon word, each like the rest. Then the man's tone subsided and Joana's continued, unchanged. There was a blow, a kick on the wooden floor or a fist against a door, and both voices stopped. Until the man's voice rose again, resounding yet plaintive, shouting out his condition: "Yes or no. This very minute!" Joana was about to answer. Perhaps I should have waited, learned everything, accepted the responsibility of the moment. In the middle of the field, the Bull before us, I had stood suspended, my feet finding no ground, and discovering within myself an ever greater weakness, a despair consuming me. I now felt the same thing: within the silence, some kind of monster was turning its shadowy horns toward me. I lacked the courage to wait for the answer, I ran to the porch, to the old man and his madness, where for an instant I felt safe. Joana appeared, and I did not ask if the cart would make the journey. The road back without a word exchanged, together only in body, our souls remote. The house filled with people and her sisters in tears, but with their purses shut; Joana seated, her eyes dry and staring at the floor, hands between her knees, with me standing in front of her, two hours, three, waiting for some kind of piercing, moaning sound to come, to approach. I saw the wagon cover, the driver's stick with its black cloth. Joana said: "We are going to take our mother away. She will rest where she wished." "You did all you could for your mother, and more. God bless you." I discouraged her when she sent to the city for medicine: "Don't waste your money, this sickness has no cure." "How do you know?" "It's the way you can tell a prostitute or a man who used to be a priest: something underneath, that you hear more than see." "I don't

think she'll escape either. But it's a rule with me, always to act as if the impossible were not." In the room, holding the basin, bending over Totônia to give her a hot footbath, I curse the dumb beast that destroyed her. I think that, like all of us, she lived in the world like someone in the middle of a herd of cattle, surrounded by horns, torn by horns. In the cart, carrying her away dead and listening to the wooden wheels creak on their axles, I think differently; I have the impression of going with her to meet God, in a carriage pulled by oxen with great wings, half angel, half ox, angel-oxen. In the world, life and people, and perhaps even God, are angeloxen. We must eat of it all with the same failing teeth, the horn portion, the wing portion.

THE NINTH MYSTERY

WORDC
APITA
LPALI
MPSES
TCALL
IGRAP
HYHIE
ROGLY
PHPEN
CODEX
BOOKP
ARCHM
ENTAL
PHABE
TPAPE
RSTON
ESTYL
USILL
UMINA
TIONH
ANDWR
ITING

The world was twice created: when it came from nothingness into being, and when, raised to a subtler plane, it became the word. Chaos thus did not end with the coming of the universe but when man's awareness, giving name to the created, thereby creating it anew, separated, ordered, and unified it. The word, however, is not the symbol or reflection of what it signifies, a servile function, but its spirit, the breath into the clay. A thing does not truly exist until named. Then it adorns itself in the word that illuminates it, and achieving identity, likewise acquires stability. For no two twins are equal; only the word twin is identical to the word twin. Thus in its own innumerable twin, it is the word that endures, it is the center, the invariable, unmoved by fluctuation around it and saving that which is expressed from the transformation that would finally negate it. So evocative is it that a place, a kingdom, will never disappear completely while remains the name that designated it (Byblos, Carthage, Sumer), the word is the imagination-exists, and still continues. It is incorruptible like the splendor of what has been, capable, even transmigrated, even forgotten, of reintegration into its original clarity. It distinguishes, fixes, orders, and recreates: behold it.

⊗ The two of us arm in arm, faces interlaced, seeming to look at each other and forward at the same time. Behind us, our

two horses, flank to flank, their necks crossed, one's tail to the left, the other's to the right, white, ample, dragging the ground like a bridal gown. Shining above us, two large blood-red stars. Δ One above Miguel's head: it looks like a rose. ○ Another above Cristina's head: it looks like a pomegranate. ○ We are the lovers, the fugitives, the pursued, the found, the saved. We did not know what route to take, what our fate would be. We wanted to go where chance would take us, to be happy if only for a single day, to sleep somewhere and not think of the hour that was to come, though knowing we were pursued, ○ by Cristina's father's men, we didn't know how many, following our tracks, surely with guns. Δ It was not likely my father would have the gunmen kill me, but Miguel would not be spared. Running away with me, Antônio Dias's daughter! ○ That's right, running away with her, the only daughter of Antônio Dias, the owner of three sugar mills, who when he became a widower never remarried, in order to leave his entire inheritance to her, without division or partition! Δ It wasn't for that reason, but from wisdom. Mom was a woman of caliber; it's hard to find her qualities in a second wife. ○ That's what you say, not the people: Antônio Dias, with the land of those three mills, wanted to bury your life, marry you to whomever he pleased. Δ Well, maybe. ☺ Because his name was Antônio, on the 12th of June he would call together friends and relatives, slaughter pigs, yearlings, and turkeys, light bonfires as tall as a horse, and have dozens of men, blunderbusses in hand, fire into the air. Δ He would order pots of sweet hominy, green-corn cakes, cooked corn, peanut brittle, cracknel, meringue kisses, and tapioca balls. He would fire girandoles of a hundred and twenty rockets, ☺ bring in barrels of fresh wine, and singers, release balloons with the name of the Saint and the three sugar mills, and hire the best accordion players. The dancing would begin before seven, continue into night, steal into morning, end in daylight. When it was all over, he would lower the banner of his patron saint from the flagpole, light the last skyrocket, and sleep for twenty-four hours. Δ It was in that interval that we fled. I told one of the black servants that I was going for a ride and, still wearing my party clothes, mounted my horse and went to meet Miguel. ○ I waited, not believing she would come. It may even be that I wanted that, hoped for some obstacle that would keep

her from coming. I had my ranch, my few possessions. Even though all I wanted in the world was to be united with Ana Cristina, whatever might happen, like any man I was afraid of the enormity. I was frightened by the space suddenly open before me that might swallow me in its light. Δ I sensed that fear on Miguel's face and asked him if he wanted to change his mind. He replied: "Even if I wanted to, I no longer could. Your beauty compels me." I don't know if my beauty was capable of compelling anyone that way, but I accepted his words. I felt a splendor inside me, and on my face, because I bore something within that moved a man to abandon his safety and cast himself to fate, to rise above all the dead hours of his life and burn, in a minute, the vain riches thus far amassed. I spurred my horse, rode ahead of him, and he shouted my name: "Do you know what you're doing?" "Ask no more questions. From this moment on, I want everything to be answers." ⊗ We went onward, one on the heels of the other. We flew through fields, gaining distance, trusting in the old man's sleep, but knowing that at any moment they might wake him and that he would come after us with his gunmen, guided by the reports of all who saw us racing away like fugitives from justice. Before long they came dutifully to the plantation house to make him aware of what had happened. It was six o'clock before they got him to open his eyes, and because it was mid-year and cloudy, darkness already hung heavy. He thought he was dreaming, was it a nightmare? He washed his face with cold water, and asked them to repeat the story. "Burn his ranch and saddle me six horses." He named the gunmen who would accompany him on our trail, men who could see a footprint on the wind, follow an animal by its smell, men who had never lost the track of a steer, however faint, and whom not even horse thieves could elude. How could we flee from them? He was already mounted, when he decided. "I'm not going. It's not right for a father to go all over creation after his daughter. She has to come to me." "What about the man?" "You know what to do with him." At that moment, from Igarapu to Afogados da Ingazeira, and from Coruripe to Flores, in a hammock-curve extending as far as Santana do Ipanema, rain fell like the end of the world, wiping out the traces of our flight. We came to a ghost town, with trees growing in the middle of the streets, branches pushing through windows and doors. It was a windy place and nearly all

the roofs had caved in. There was dry rot in the beams, and the remaining roof ridges were sagging under the weight of their tiles. Toads, scorpions and perhaps snakes lay hidden in the houses which were already beginning to take on the color of earth and foliage. We shouted, and when we saw that we were the only people alive in the midst of all that ruination, continuing (among twisted windows, ruined walls, and battered doors) on the exhausted horses, there rose from our souls a greater joy than the ranch and the three sugar mills combined, greater than the states of Pernambuco and Alagoas, greater than Bahia. Still in the saddles, we kissed, so burning with love that our bodies, like the horses', turned the rain to steam. We dismounted still embracing, leading our mounts by their reins, not knowing what to do with ourselves or our good fortune. We came to a square where a church stood. The doorway yielded, and we went in with the horses, their shoes echoing on the tiles. We shouted, but no one answered. We took off our clothes and then we knew each other on a pine chest, while the famished horses, standing before the open door, watched the fall of night. If we brought them inside, it was not from disrespect or sacrilege. We feared that through them our pursuers would discover us. But we made no gesture, said not a word to hold them when—after the rain—they left to look for grass. We gladly saw them go. Were we to interrupt our caresses, go after them and thus deny the hard assurance born in us that nothing in the world could disrupt the delight of our embrace? Though we were hungry, having used up our provisions on the long journey, we remained on the trunk, sleeping and making love, our bodies bruised by the travels, aching if we turned, if we separated. When night had fallen and we heard the sound of horseshoes on the pavement outside the church, we thought it was our pursuers and that our time had come. The moon shone through the open door, a few holes, and several skylights. We opened the trunk to hide ourselves inside; it was filled with human bones. Then the horses appeared. They were ours, and we decided to continue the journey. Still kissing each other we put on our wet clothing. Before leaving we knelt holding hands before the altar of Sts. Cosmas and Damian. Δ I raised my head and exclaimed: "I take this man as my husband, before you and God, not for a part of forever, but for all of forever. His name is Miguel." ○ I also raised my voice in the silence, taking the

mounts as our witnesses and trembling from head to foot, since I had the impression that hundreds of ancient souls were in attendance at the marriage: "I take this woman named Ana Cristina, with none of her worldly goods, as my wife, for all the forevers of life." ⊗ Each made the gesture of placing a ring on the other's finger. We set out crazily, the rings on our left hands as visible and real as the love that guided us, or bewildered us. We crossed rivers, fell into hollows, exchanged horses with a band of gypsies, bought new clothes at a market, thrice recognized places we had been before, slept in the saddle, in the woods, beneath a bridge, wept in each other's arms. Neither of us knew where we were headed. Our destiny at that moment was not a route, a place, a city, a house; our destiny was to go. At least that is what we thought until we arrived more dead than alive at Queimadas plantation and knocked on Joana Carolina's door, by then already entering the winter of her life. As soon as she saw us, she fathomed us, so there was no need to tell her our story. Austere, she smiled at us from within her eyes, welcomed us, offered us hospitality. When she asked questions, it was as if she already knew almost everything: when we expected the pursuers, whether they would come on good terms or with weapons in hand. "We don't know." "The owner of the sugar mill here has the bad habit of wanting everyone to visit her at night, supposedly to chat. The real reason is to husk her corn and beans. That aside, she's a good person. But don't count on her; she never gets involved in other people's affairs." "What about you?" We asked because we saw in her the sign of help. To us she was someone who had been waiting for us, our effigies in her hand, carved by one who knew us so there could be no mistake. Her answer was the one we dreamed of: "I'll do what I can; I once loved too." We slept apart in adjoining rooms, sipping even with our mouths a comforting odor of smooth cloth. The pillowcases smelled of oranges. We awoke surrounded by children, eager to see the fugitives, the bride and groom, the arrivals. The day was cloudy, with fine rain. We spoke little. We entrusted ourselves without resistance to Joana's wise and experienced look. Her entrance into our souls, our walls, seemed not an intrusion, but like the disciplined arrival of well armed, friendly and serious men come to defend them. As the hours passed we became more mindful of ourselves, stronger. At ten

that night the anticipated clatter of hooves surrounded the house. We were in Joana's own room, locked in with the little girl and the boy, over whose heads we looked at each other, silently accusing ourselves of involving that poor family in our folly and at the same time believing that we had been blindly guided to the only person in the world with the worthiness to save us. Joana had the leader dismount, come in, argued forcefully: "Those two children have been roaming the land for almost a week, living on nothing but their love. That is worth a great deal. I have been working for years, without the help of anyone, so that my children may succeed. Can I stand by and see that girl, led by passion, forced to run away, of all she possesses not taking enough goods to fill the palm of her hand, just because her father will not listen to her? Is that a father? Of course I know that money has value. But greater still is mercy. Of what value for a man to own cattle and plantations, if he is incapable of finding some greatness in his own heart?" They argued for over two hours, until the leader gave his pledge to protect us and to hand us over only if we were permitted to marry. We left that very hour. Those who had been our pursuers were now our friends, our guardians, and they repeated Joana's words among themselves, their amazement enhanced by the night. Δ The brilliance of certain human works is lasting, enduring like a halo, even when no one in the world can reestablish them. What Joana had said, although badly restated, penetrated into my father. He had finally found someone who spoke to him with authority and with justice, as my mother had always done. ☉ He set the wedding date right then, and three days later he sent a letter asking for Joana's hand. He sent it with four messengers, to emphasize his intent. The brief response: "Even if I had my whole life to do so, I could not make you or anyone else understand how much my days are brightened, as dark as they may be, by the now distant time of my marriage. In truth, having consecrated myself to my husband *for all my life*, I remain faithful to him. I am greatly honored by your generous and friendly offer. Were I to accept, it would mean protection and stability for the rest of my days. But then what would become of my soul?"

THE TENTH MYSTERY

The polar icecaps, the temperate areas and the equatorial band, still exhaling the breath of anvils. Continents and islands, steely peaks, prairies, mountain chains, valleys, dunes, sea cliffs, promontories. That which reposes, invisible, under our footsteps: columns, forgotten gods, porticoes, ancestral tibias, ores, fossils, silenced empires. Earthquakes, volcanoes. Mud, grass, flowers, bushes, secular trees, wood and fruit, the shade of boughs. The animals of the ground. The turning of the seasons within a larger season, entire civilizations flourishing and dying in a single gigantic Autumn, a millennia-long Winter.

(Joana, saw in hand, shortens the legs of the bench where the boy sleeps with a boat made of blue paper on his chest. Seated, his face in shadow, he thanks Joana by offering her the boat.) Δ “What was the boy’s name?” ◊ “Maximino, I think. Or Raimundo. But some say it Glaura, or Glória, how can you tell?” ◊ “With all those names he must’ve been a horse thief.” ⊕ “He was a child, and he couldn’t walk. There was something wrong with his legs.” ◊ “When a guy is born crippled, it’s God doing it to hinder his badness. I never saw a blind man worth anything.” ◊ “You say those things but you’re not a bad person. What spills from the mouth overflows from the heart.” (He could walk with help. He spent his days in a chair by the window, watching the passersby. He made paper boats and his name was Jonas. He was fourteen and looked eleven.) Δ “Did Joana always go there?” ⊕ “Now and then. She never always went anywhere. That day she went just to saw the bench.” ◊ “There couldn’t have been anything special about that cripple, to merit somebody having a vision and going to save him. He wasn’t a saint or even head of a family. He was useless.” ≡ “Maybe it wasn’t him God sent Joana to save but the criminal, by preventing him from killing an innocent.” ◊ “The criminal came to kill someone, sent by someone, nobody knows. He’d already killed I don’t know how many.” ⊕ “It’s possible it was him that Our Lord meant to save.” (It was in St. Anne’s month and it rained a lot that afternoon. So it seems really odd that Joana Carolina, although she lived

nearby, should go to Floripes's house. She visited her often, ever since she learned of her misfortunes: her mother's mill sold at public auction, her unhappy marriage after a fourteen-year engagement, her handicapped child. But she didn't go out when the weather was bad. Since she was once again living in the city, thanks to Nô and Álvaro, she enjoyed sitting on the sofa and listening to the rain. Knowing what had happened to Jonas, she was happy and gave no sign of believing in visions or warnings: "I cut the legs off the bench because I was afraid Jonas might fall and hurt himself. The bench is too narrow for a sick person's bed.") ("His stepmother or aunt, the woman who lived with the child, went to live with a cousin or to an asylum. Or else a nephew came to live with her." ⊕ "That story about an aunt or stepmother is made up. The boy lived with his mother." ◇ "Just imagine what kind of mother she was! Making her son sleep on a bench." ≡ "Maybe she slept on the floor." ⊕ "She slept on a mat." Δ "Who was she?" ◡ "She came from I don't know what family and somehow or other she found herself in poverty." ◇ "She did no good, ending up like that. She must have been wild as a young woman. No doubt the boy was the son of Joana's brother, the one who disappeared. He must have gone to jail." ◡ "I heard tell that João had got married somewhere or other with somebody's widow, whose name I don't recall. A foreign name. And that the widow inherited I don't know how much money. I'm not sure if it was the same João or somebody else." ◇ "Some Polish woman." ⊕ "He didn't get married, and the boy wasn't his. The woman's name was Floripes and she was the daughter of the former owner of Queimadas sugar mill. In those days she already had the voice and the stoop of an old woman. But her face was still young, and pretty." ≡ "Old age is like a crab. We don't all age the same. It stretches out its claws inside us. Sometimes it starts with the spine, sometimes the legs, sometimes the head. In me it started with my dreams: I began dreaming, almost every night, of people from the past." (In Joana that crab stretched its claws everywhere at once. It attacked her kidneys and her face, her joints, her teeth and her memory, her digestion, her hearing, her sleep, and wrenched from her almost all her few friendships. It took Nô and Álvaro, who died before their mother, and carried off Suzana, Filomena, Lucina. It touched her in almost every way possible. But Laura and Teófanés, married and

living nearby, looked after her. She had bread, meat, milk, a pair of shoes at year's end. She had her belongings. She no longer needed to work. Unlike those who see only the evil that befalls them, growing insensitive to any kind of good, Joana was content with what she still had. She admitted to having suffered greatly, adding resignedly that long life always corresponds to much grief. It would be disrespectful to weep over what we have lost, in view of the good we have.) ◇ "There are people who die with illusions of greatness. I hear that Floripes, just because her mother was who she was, used to walk around with her nose in the air toward all the others who lived with her in the tenement." ⊕ "It was a big old house, not a tenement. In the room where she slept with the child there was a door nailed shut, facing a kind of large hall that lodged all sorts of people. The boy would sleep leaning against that door. You know it is. A child fidgets a lot." ◇ "Only if he has worms." ⊕ "The boy would bang his elbows against the door all night." △ "And is it true that when that Floripes died they discovered that she had gold diadems, platinum brooches, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, locket, and other things of value, stored in a crate?" △ "Some people say so." (At first she had kept those things with her, out of insecurity. She wanted to be sure of having somewhere to turn in case of extreme necessity. But while she talked incessantly of her years of plenty, she felt she could bear the many privations a while longer. Until the day she decided to sell one of the pieces and lacked the courage to do so, fearing people might guess the existence of the other. Joana suspected that there were such jewels. And all her conversations with Floripes centered on the idea that if we do not make use of our present riches they become even more distant than any goods and advantages of the past.) ◇ "Poor little boy. He lived like a prisoner, sleeping on a bench. I'll bet without a pillow, all because of his mother. That creature should have sold that gold and gotten treatment for her son. Greed is a scourge." ⊖ "Each one knows himself and God knows us all. No one is alone. Just look at the example of the bench. To the boy it was more important than having his health." △ "But could it be true? How could Joana have known? How did she guess?" (When it rained Jonas would suffer from aching joints. That is why Joana Carolina went there that winter day, taking the saw with her. She wanted, once and for all, to clear up the question of the crate that

Floripes never opened by sawing it in half if need be. But when the time came she did not have the courage to face the argument and that is why she shortened the legs of the bench.) ◇ “A person shooting, just because the boy ganged against the door. Of all things! Firing without knowing who’s on the other side.” ☐ “It would be no less a crime even if he had known.” (There were four shots, less than a hand’s width apart, exactly at the height where the boy would have been, but for Joana’s intervention.) A “And what happened to that cruel man?” △ “At that time he had killed I don’t know how many people. When he found out what happened, the miracle, he put away his weapons. He left and became I don’t know what. I don’t remember where.”

THE ELEVENTH MYSTERY

What is it, what is it? A lion of invisible teeth, of teeth is it made, and it bites with its mane, with its tail, with its entire body. It casts no shadow on the ground. Shadows flee from its presence, though of all that exists, only they are spared its wrath and hunger. Its skin, hotter than that of bears and camels, and even of other lions, warms us from afar. Unlike other animals, it can be born without father or mother. At times it is son of two flints. Even though it devours everything, its molars, canines and incisors refusing nothing, it symbolizes life. Capable of domestication in captivity, it is irresistible undribled and in groups. Nothing enrages it more than the wind.

+ She confesses her sins to me on the old iron bed. The flame of her years is ready to extinguish itself. On her right is a handful of feathers and on her left a dry tree branch. Two angels stand watch, one serious the other smiling. Horses gallop across the roof. The winds of August. Horses were galloping across the roof. At my side the oil, the crucifix, a cut lemon, a plate with six tufts of raw cotton. Seeing me, she took my arm. “I remember when you came here the last time. It was almost supper time. I was putting water on to boil, I was going to make coffee.” I cultivate the habit of forgetting. It behooves a prist to protect

himself from the impregnation of things. And what human good exists more insidious than remembrances, with their two-faced character, bringing us at the same time the happiness of possession and the defraudation of loss, the latter being a reflection of the former? Note the admonition of St. John of the Cross, for whom memory fixes on God to the extent that the soul disengages itself from things, that, though important, are not God. But how, in this sense does one arrive at perfection? On hearing Joana's words that afternoon, there rose in my throat a kind of nitrous gushing, a salty vomit. The afternoon of which she spoke was an experienced peace unattainable in any of its essential aspects. I saw the past as in a mirror, Joana moving beyond the sheet of glass, with her fire and her melody, but not on this side. She was behind me, absent. There would never again be an afternoon like that. The Angel of Death was reaching out his hand to Joana. "Father, my whole life I tried to live in justice. Have I succeeded?" "Beyond any doubt." "Who speaks often, errs often. You can stop yourself from talking, but not from living. I lived eighty-six years. I must have made so many mistakes!" "That is part of our condition." "I know." In the prolonged silence, during which her hand continued tense on my arm, she reviewed her acts, all those she remembered. She was trying to discover among those she had planned or carried out in her long life a blemish, an essential oversight, to confess to me and thus not appear proud. "Father, many times I wanted to kill." She gave the impression of aggrandizing herself, as if her absolution depended on that lie, expressed with effort and timidity. "I must also have committed injustices. I must have. I barely remember anything any more. Neither the evil I did nor that was done to me. Everything now is almost the same color. Doesn't the world look like that, at. . ." She released my arm, made a gesture with her hand, a gesture of erasing, which surely meant ". . . at nightfall?" "I'm afraid, father." Her voice, its last inflection gone, was an ancient corroded instrument, a clarinet covered with mold and cobwebs. It was an effort for her to put together the few words, as if she were writing them. She turned her eyes from me and lay motionless looking at the tiles, distant. Her copious white hair was spread out on both sides of her face over the pillow. I thought that Joana Carolina was finally going to sleep in God and I prayed aloud, with more fervor. Then,

through the wrinkles, in her uncombed hair, I saw her in her youth. Can it be that our soul has the opportunity to choose, from among the innumerable appearances that we have lost, the one least contrary to our nature, or the one that witnessed our richest days, those in which we came closest to the harmony we always longed for in the midst of our power and our works? Was that the privileged face reemerging from some distant plenitude that I contemplated with religious conviction and grave terror? Her old woman's features remained intact, with her dulled eyes and her countless wrinkles. Yet within that face, which suddenly an inexplicable transparency, as if in truth it had ceased to exist, as if it were a false crust over the reality denied to mundane contemplation, shone the countenance of Joana Carolina at the age of twenty or so. Her face shone with an ardor, a rapture, and a nobility which seemed to challenge life and its claws. I could see that secret beauty, now forgotten by all who had looked upon it in times past. It now swam to the surface on the eve of death, and through grace presented itself before my eyes, freed for a second of the scales with which we cross the earth. The day before she had divided among her nearest descendants what she in her modest way judged to be her goods, her legacy: a blanket with brown and white designs, some knives and forks with carved handles, two still unused bath towels, a small plaster statue. Having always lived in penury, these were her luxuries. It did not occur to her to give the dresser to anyone, or the china closet, the tables, the chairs, pieces of furniture with which she had always lived and which, incorporated into her daily existence, seemed to her without value, or at least a value inseparable from herself. They were belongings of her own being, on its same level and equally insignificant; but the knives and forks of unusual appearance, or the blanket with its foliage and lions, which she had not imagined to exist in the winters when her children would bring sheep to bed, must have seemed luxurious to her, coveted by all to the extent that she had gone without such frugal splendors in her poverty. I saw her (or should I say *saw them*, since I had two different persons before my eyes, both real, united only by my amazement?). I saw her absorbed in the inner radiance of the image, a mystery of the spirit or the flesh, that appeared before me from a past none would dare imagine as tangible. I thought that she had saved for me, unknowingly, a

legacy of a different kind. It was the privilege of witnessing that fleeting deathbed resurrection, more disturbing than that of the dead, of the return of a countenance to the countenance into which it transformed itself. It was the return of a youth swallowed up by time and yet overcoming it, free for a second from its saturnine bowels. When I anointed her with the holy oil that bygone face had already faded; only its residue remained behind, its dust. I invoked the mercy of God on the eyes, the ears, the arched nose of an old woman. Even so, when I left that house I did not feel the weight of old age and death on my soul. (This was a weight that so often, before and even afterwards, affected my priestly silences.). In the marrow of those phenomena there shone a phrase, a word, a visage, something complete yet veiled, as the form must be for an artist, something foretold, foreseen, as yet unrevealed, as yet unconquered. Within me, as I left with head held high, Joana was a flame. *Populus, qui ambulabat in tenebris, vidit lucem magnam.*

THE FINAL MYSTERY

The row of houses, the crosses, birds and trees, cows and horses, the road, the windmills, and we, taking Joana to the cemetery. We—Montes-Arcos, Agostinhos, Ambrósios, Lucases, Atanásios, Ciprianos, Mesateuses, Jerônimos, Joãoes Crisóstimos, Joãoes Orestes, we. We are the nobodies of the city. The others, the people of money and power, always ignored her. We men of uncertain means and no future conduct Joana to the cemetery, with our hats in hand, our faces hardened, our hands rough, in our heavy cotton clothes and leather sandals. We are gardeners, vendors in the market, butchers, carpenters, cattle agents, saddlers, sellers of fruits and of birds. Joana in her best dress (white honeysuckles and leaves on a gray background); her shoes are old but still new (they walked so little); her stockings are loose on her legs; in her hands is the rosary with which she prayed throughout her life for those she loved and those who persecuted her. Streets and rooftops, walls, crosses, trees, hedges of euphorbia, red clay. This world which was hers and to which we return, from which some among us never left, the land where we eat, fornicate, curse, sweat, and are destroyed. We think about

going away and never go, who knows why. Women at the window, old men on the sidewalk, young girls walking arm in arm, boys on the corners, children in the square (Áureos and Marias, Beneditos and Neusas, Chicos and Ofélias, Dalvas and Pedros, Elzas and Quintinos) see the funeral pass before the houses with their blue, green, red, and yellow doorways. It is a morning at the beginning of September, the end winter. The trees are at the height of leafing; the sky is divided into halves, white clouds to one side, storm clouds to the other, and between these banks is a blue and gentle river. At the end of her days for her as for us almost everything was meager. It became difficult for Joana Carolina to drink anything, no matter what. She dreamed of fountains and faucets, and all her ambition in those last days shrank to being able to drink a pitcher of water, sipping each swallow. She resigned herself to wetting her lips and gums with pieces of cotton soaked in milk. Now we are taking her to the cemetery in her Sunday afternoon white, green, and gray dress. She is enveloped in the silence with which she was alone; we are taking her to the cemetery. Here is not the first coffin to go with us nor will it be the last. We have already fripped the coffin handles of many, the important dead or poor people like ourselves, from Lakes to Rivers, from Stones to Quarries, from Hills to Peaks, from Clays to Silvers, but never before have we had such a vivid and unsettling impression that this is the ark of the next deluge. It seems that new waters of vengeance will fall upon us for forty days and forty nights, drowning even snakes and lungfish, and that only Joana will survive, later to engender with a gesture beings pleasing to her: plants, animals, Javás, Magogs, Togarmas, Asquenazes. How often was the world sterile and blinding, for her a city of salt, with houses of salt, salty fountains, avenues of salt? How often was taking another step, living another year, another day, an instant, like treading the sharpened blade of a knife? How often did her life seem like a storm-swollen river, filled with uprooted trees, and hyacinths from ponds and backwaters, tying hands and feet and entering her mouth? Yet she was always able to see through the mesh of blindness, plant her feet above the cotting steel, untangle herself from the waters, the perplexities. We are taking her to the cemetery amid the quacking of ducks and the barking of dogs, the crowing of cocks and the grunting of pigs, mooing, neighing, the

wind in the mango trees, children's chants, shouts, washerwomen's songs. She asked her daughter: "What month is it?" Her fear of death had disappeared. This meant that death was readying its pounce. "September? Then it's not far off." She spoke of two very similar young women. Dressed in white, barefoot, suspended in the air, each with her right foot forward, they had called her. From their right feet emerged a long stem with an enormous lily at its end floating at the height of their faces. They handed her an olive branch and a large lead fishhook. "Come, we shall be three." They put an ermine cloak over her shoulders. She rent the cloak, planted the branch, did not know what she had done with the fishhook. The three ran off through rocky tunnels. The young women were light, Joana heavier. They suddenly found themselves before a stove. Looking at it silently, her arms at her sides, stood Totônia, appearing to be meditating. Two handspans from her aged head, a little to the left and as if suspended by threads, hung a disk of iron. Yes, iron. Joana prayed, and took it between her fingers. But everything on the earth had lost its weight. Everything except her body. Terrified she screamed for her mother, who did not hear the cry. Her mother did not turn around. Then Joana ran outside and saw the moon, in broad daylight, cleaved by a dark band, rapidly traversing space. An insane moon. The illuminated parts, where they crossed with clouds, became brighter, a blazing, dazzling radiance. The earth was white. The ground and plants, the shadows on the ground, all was white immaculate earth. The moon disappeared on the horizon. And they all saw that the whiteness of the world was merely a crust, a skin that was breaking, that broke, dissolved, to reveal the splendor and the squalor of trees, of the ground, the color of the world. Rose-apples, mangoes, cashews, guavas, pomegranates, everything hung from the branches. There was great abundance. It was a generous orchard heavy with scent. Joana and the two young women now began to run in the meadow, holding hands. It was green pasture full of young sows and shade trees. Suddenly her invisible dead began to call. Álvaro shouted for Nô, Nô for Maria do Carmo, she for her sister, the sister for Totônia, Totônia for Jerônimo, Jerônimo for Nô, Nô for Filomena, Filomena for Lucina, Lucina for Floripes, Floripes for Jerônimo, Jerônimo for Suzana, Suzana for Totônia, Totônia called Ogano. "I don't

know who Ogano was, but I felt proud of being the mother of the dead and a widow, of not dying a virgin, of having given birth to all of you. Is this September?" "Yes." "The times is near. I smell the odor of lime, of cement, of moss. September, did you say?" "Yes." We are carrying Joana to the cemetery, crossing the city with its smell of stables, of virgin wax, of spilled milk, of sweat, of fruits, of felled trees, of humid walls. We pass among Floras and Ruis, Glórias and Sálvios, Hélios and Teresas, Isabels and Ulisses, Josés and Veras, Lufzas and Xerxes, Zebinas and Áureos. She lived out her years in gentleness and justice, humility and firmness, love and commiseration. She died with a minimum of goods and few friends. Never once did the pillage of others give rise to ambitions in her own spirit. Never did the evil she suffered generate in her soul other evils. She died at winter's end. Will another like her be born in the next season? The white, the green, the gray. Snow-white walls, cypresses, shadowy gravestones. Beneath the earth, beneath the plaster, beneath the lizards, beneath the forest, the wordless banquet guests line up. Birches and Alders, Ashes and Pines, Lindens and Oaks. They clothed them—through what futile generosity? — in their party suits, their finest dresses, their best ties, their newest shoes. It is a strange assembly: they all have their lips sealed, their hands crossed, their heads uncovered. All are rigid, their eyelids closed. All are turned in the same direction, like those who in solitude wait with anticipation before a large door through which someone is to come. Is he a judge, an admiral, a harpist, a waiter with trays? Bringing what? Salt, ashes, absinthe? Teeth, mold, slime? The Awaited One tarries, and the pieces of those mute, wordless, immobile banquet guests are being devoured. Humbly, silently, Joana Carolina takes her place, her hands clasped, among Meadows, Tigers, and Branches, among Lillies, Palms, and Hyacinths, among Lambs, Quincys, and Dahlias, among Roses, Lions and Daisies, among anguses, birds, and Veronicas, among Martins, Hortenses, Hollies, Camellias, Bushes, Violets, Does, among Galloways, Fishes, and Irises, among Laurels, Hawks, and Fields. She wears the dress she wore on Sunday afternoons and is enveloped by the silence with which she was alone.

Translated by Clifford E. Landers

Piñon, Nélida. *A Doce Canção de Caetana*. Rio de Janeiro, Guanabara, 1987. 353 páginas.

Let us not burden Piñon's ineffable new novel with the fact that it is her eleventh nor with a reaffirmation of her absolute unique place among Brazilian contemporary writers. Throughout her career, from the earlier mystical and philosophical tendencies (e. g. *Guia-Mapa de Gabriel Arcanjo, Madeira Feita Cruz*) to the epic (e. g. *O Fundador*) to the lyrical eroticism of which *A Casa da Paixão* is the best example, her work reveals a coherent and original vision: the role of the writer in society and the role of literature as it tries to break away from its canons. In the family saga of the semi-autobiographical novel *A República dos Sonhos* (1984), the author maintains her themes but moves away from what was characteristically her innovative style to a more "traditional" form of writing like social realism.

It is most appropriate that her last novel, *A Doce Canção de Caetana* should follow the same style, since it is set in the 70s, the period of military dictatorship in Brazil, of which Piñon was an outspoken critic. This is a rare case of a novel that echoes the political and social events without being journalistic, and that explores deeply the national character, while avoiding parochialism. Furthermore, it details the fragility of modern human relationships with a comic touch that nears the hilarious.

The novel tells the pathetic love story between two aging people set in a typical small town in Brazil, Trindade. Polidoro is an old man, a scion of the wealthiest landowners in the region, who had a great, unforgettable love affair with Caetana, an aspiring circus artist. She leaves the town to fulfill her dreams of becoming a great artist and singing in the great house of art in Brazil—the Teatro Municipal in Rio de Janeiro. Twenty years later, frustrated in her aspirations and devoid of any illusions after "eating the gust of the road," Caetana announces her return

to Trindade in order to realize her dream of “singing” an opera at the local theater. Her return stirs pent-up emotions in everybody in town: first and foremost, Polidoro, who has remained loyal, if not faithful, to Caetana and offers her his love, nourished by twenty years of devotion; second, two women, whose lives were affected by Caetana and who do not receive this news so gladly. Polidoro’s wife, still jealous and fearful of her husband’s folly prepares to engage the bourgeoisie to oppose Caetana’s presence in the town; Polidoro’s present lover and an old friend (a possible lover) of Caetana feels ambivalent about her return but eventually joins in the festive mood that takes over the town.

The central plot of this novel is the geriatric courtship of this aging and stubborn “artista manqué” obsessed by a final opera performance, by an elderly suitor persistent in his romantic commitment, and impatient and clumsy in his sexual longings. The love story is told amidst the gossip, the buzz of community judgment, and the dreams, hopes and fears raised by the galvanizing presence of this picaresque circus performer. The major themes that permeate the narrative are awareness of death, the torments of memory and the inexorability of old age. The issues of the military dictatorship like repression and torture, and Brazilian hopes in World Cup Soccer, play in the background, but nobody seems to care about politics. However, Piñon surrounds her characters’ indifference with her own observations of class prejudices, corruption of official, and the decline of an old rusting traditional society. There is a flaubertian touch in the irony, in the unsparing detail of a certain mediocrity of mind and soul – in the pathetic description of Polidoro who becomes a male version of Mme. Bovary. *A Doce Canção de Caetana* aims to deal with desire and mortality and fortunately doesn’t fall into libido and self-deceit. Nélida Piñon is a writer with the knowledge and skill of her craft—the Word. She certainly knows how to envision this craft beyond the purely verbal perspective in order to reach poetic heights in momentous passages of her novel.

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NOLL, João Gilberto. *Hotel Atlântico*. Rio de Janeiro, Rocco, 1989. 98 páginas.

Hotel Atlântico, de João Gilberto Noll, é um livro que nos faz viajar. Embora não seja propriamente uma viagem de turismo leve e despretensiosa, a maestria do autor na criação das imagens – com descrições tão vivas que nos fazem “ver” em vez de “ler” – força-nos a acompanhar, passo a passo, o anônimo narrador em seu sofrido percurso do centro ao sul do Brasil.

O romance narra sua trajetória em busca, ou fugindo, não se sabe do quê. Este homem percorre seus caminhos sem bagagem e não guarda nada com ele, talvez para evitar as lembranças do passado ou, quem sabe, para não criar incômodas raízes. Mal chegando a algum lugar, sufoca-o uma premente necessidade de partir pois “uma contagem regressiva estava em curso”. Ator desempregado, logra dar prosseguimento ao seu viajar sem rumo, através da venda de um carro. De um hotel no Rio de Janeiro, no início da obra, até o “Atlântico”, fictício hotel localizado na praia de Pinhal (Rio Grande do Sul), onde culmina a narrativa, ocorrem situações inusitadas, mas sempre surpreendentemente trágicas. Já nas primeiras páginas, o narrador observa o desenlace de um crime, quando a polícia retira o cadáver de um uruguaio morto no hotel.

Pouco depois, no ônibus rumo a Florianópolis, a americana sentada a seu lado, e com quem compartilhara momentos de risos, piadas e até abraços, o surpreende com um inesperado suicídio. E, no roteiro final para o Rio Grande do Sul, ocorre mais um assassinato inexplicado. O autor ou os autores do crime são conhecidos, mas a vítima resume-se a um mero rastro de sangue. O narrador sente-se então ameaçado de morte e foge de carona numa lenta carroça até Viçoso, povoado perdido na fronteira de Santa Catarina e Rio Grande do Sul.

Tais episódios, insólitos, mesclam-se às vezes com a beleza da paisagem, que serve para encobrir cenas brutais. À paradisfaca

imagem de um rio “que valia a pena”, “tão clarinho que nele dava para ver refletido o azul do céu” e observar “um cardume de peixes pequeninos”, o autor opõe a imagem de forte violência contida no sangue espalhado pela areia.

O leitor acompanha a narrativa como se estivesse participando das cenas, ou talvez assistindo a um filme. A descrição minuciosa das paisagens variadas e dos inúmeros personagens (cerca de duas dúzias), que se sucedem durante o percurso do narrador, permitem a crescente aproximação do leitor, que começa a questionar os mistérios, o porquê da inserção de determinado personagem ou ocorrência. Noll, uma vez mais, utiliza uma linguagem clara e concisa, sem elementos supérfluos ou decorativos, para narrar fatos não tão rotineiros, mas que representam o dia-a-dia de um viajante, de um ser cujo permanente trânsito nos surpreende a cada página. Tantos enigmas são “atirados” ao leitor, sujeito assim à decisão de decifrá-los ou esquecê-los, como parece preferir o narrador. Num momento, já no final da narrativa, este diz ao enfermeiro Sebastião que “espera saber algum dia por que foi que tudo aconteceu”. Mesmo este absoluto “tudo” a que se refere o narrador surge também enigmático, encobrendo talvez uma conotação existencial muito mais ampla. Mas para o leitor poderá ser a referência ao fato mais chocante da narrativa, principalmente por seu significado como cerceamento da caminhada em curso: a amputação da perna do ex-ator. Um caminhante, um andarilho, sem sua perna?

Durante a narrativa o leitor acompanha o narrador na tentativa de descobrir as razões da perda do membro. Teria sido o ambicioso Dr. Carlos, envolvido em alguma experiência, ou um simples engano? Ou provavelmente algum tiro proveniente do carro da polícia, que se aproximava pouco antes de seu desmaio? Ou, quem sabe, a perna teria sido esmagada com a queda? E por que caíra na noite chuvosa ao chegar a Arraiol? Devido à fraqueza? Ou a alguma doença incurável?

Os sentidos do leitor acendem-se atentos para o desenlace de tantas surpresas, que se sucedem de forma cada vez mais intensa, mais enigmática. Duas vezes o homem sonha que é mulher, mas não há indícios de homo ou transexualismo. Por que estes sonhos? Contudo, as explicações são sempre acessórias na obra de Noll. Assim como nos seus romances anteriores, principalmente em *Bandoleiros* e *Rastros do Verão*, o autor abandona

amplo espaço à interpretação, que se apresenta ao leitor como fios emaranhados que devem ser desenredados – ou não – na sua imaginação.

O protagonista apresenta uma insuperável incapacidade de amar, que faz com que o único personagem que lhe inspire uma espécie de afeto seja o forte enfermeiro negro, talvez até por sua situação de dependência física. O relacionamento com mulheres é fortuito, serve muito mais como uma tentativa catártica de aliviar as tensões acumuladas em fugas, crimes e tropelias. O sexo é algo rápido e fugaz, seja com a recepcionista do hotel carioca, seja com Marisa, empregada da casa paroquial, de pé, entre os lençóis pendurados no varal.

A narrativa prossegue sempre num tom agônico, derramando uma imensa angústia sem explicação, pois nunca tenta mostrar o porquê de tanta amargura. É através deste retrato seco e cortante que o autor despe o personagem perante o leitor, que consegue vê-lo sem máscaras, autêntico, único. A simbiose é completa. Neste momento, quando já estamos penetrando na sua pele, ocorre a mais terrível experiência: seu corpo vai perdendo – lentamente – a capacidade de ouvir, caminhar, ver, falar, respirar. É como a implosão de um prédio vista em câmara lenta, que o leitor compartilha com o narrador.

Chega-se ao fim da viagem. Viajamos para dentro de nós mesmos, buscando o sentido filosófico de nossa existência ou, pelo menos, de alguma coisa na qual possamos nos agarrar para permanecermos vivos, e não desmoronarmos como o protagonista do livro. A leitura/viagem não deixa ninguém imune. Voltamos dela bem diferentes, a experiência deixa marcas.

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Telles, Lygia Fagundes. *As Horas Nuas*. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Fronteira, 1989. 224 páginas.

O que sempre surpreende na ficção de Lygia Fagundes Telles é a naturalidade com que a linguagem narrativa costura e justapõe episódios. Preferindo o ponto de vista móvel, mas narrando em primeira pessoa, o narrador refuta o tom confessional, optando pela riqueza de estímulos que chegam às raias de um estilo caleidoscópico.

Isso caracteriza *As Horas Nuas*, o romance mais recente da escritora. Afirmado sua condição de primeira dama da literatura brasileira contemporânea, Lygia acentua e amplia seu domínio ficcional, criando um texto em que o enredo se urde, cada vez mais, pela linguagem associativa de personagens simultâneas.

Rico em metáforas, o romance não representa ruptura com a obra anterior, como tem parecido a parte da crítica. Nele o leitor reencontra as mesmas preocupações presentes em outros textos, sobretudo em *As meninas* e em alguns contos de *Antes do Baile Verde*. A competência de Lygia e sua habilidade em lidar com o psicológico dispensam-na de contar histórias, oferecendo a seus leitores uma composição densa em que a inquietação, as perplexidades e os desencontros individuais – temas quase obsessivos em sua obra – chegam a situações-limites.

Rosa Ambrósio, atriz bêbada e decadente, será o primeiro elo de uma cadeia de reminiscências que, num ritmo enlouquecido e ágil, irá compor todo um quadro “Fin-du-Siècle”: mas de um Século Vinte brasileiro, em que os problemas sociais se alojam nas consciências e não precisam mais de serem denunciados. Toda a ação – e existe um predomínio comportamental, quase behaviorista, no modo como Lygia cria e apresenta personagens – reflete essa era de “décadence”, da qual a própria Rosa seria uma metáfora. Vidas poluídas, praças poluídas, lembranças poluídas, a própria dignidade das pessoas sendo aos poucos aviltada por sua

impotência. Rosa Ambrósio bêbada, caída em meio à roupa suja, no carpete do quarto, procura conviver com suas perdas: a juventude e a beleza, os afetos, as pessoas, a própria memória que se esvai e se fragmenta. Reparte com ela a narrativa Rahul, um gato com sentimentos humanos, que vivera como homem em outras vidas e que também esgravata esse passado, teme a morte e o futuro numa inquieta metafísica felina.

As diferentes leituras que *As horas nuas* suscita, desde o primeiro e lúdico momento de encanto com a linguagem sedutora da romancista até o encontro emocionado com o texto, deixam sempre claro que sua natureza é questionadora e instigante. Personagens variadas – como Gregório, o marido intelectual e sensível, que perscruta a vida através de um telescópio, Cordélia, a filha frívola e desencontrada, e Diogo, o jovem secretário e atlético amante – têm em comum tenderem ora para um, ora para outro pólo: o claro e o escuro, a vida e a morte. E entre esses desaba Rosa em sua decadência, tentando compreender o tecido com que se engendram essas passagens.

Dentro do estilo caleidoscópico de representação da vida, o corpo alcança plenitude como símbolo. Todas as personagens, de algum modo, vivem-no como invólucro de outro “corpo sutil”, transitório e perene, símbolo da própria dicotomia humana. Rahul, o gato, testemunha as presenças corpóreas, transgredindo os limites da morte. Rosa é atriz, aprendeu com as primeiras perdas – a morte de Miguel, o primo amado, o desaparecimento do pai – que a vida é farsa e representação. O apego ao corpo, que a trai e agride porque se transforma com a idade, é quase uma tentativa narcisística de sobrevivência. E a visão ambivalente que subjaz ao corpo corroído pela velhice e pelo álcool encontra correspondência no gato cético e agnóstico que desfolha suas vidas passadas como se fossem camadas superpostas. Já Ananta Medrado, a psicanalista de Rosa – personagem estranha, aparentemente desconectada do texto – asséptica no seu uniforme branco –, representa, ao final, a ruptura. Vivendo os limites entre a realidade e a fantasia, Ananta descobre que o Vizinho do andar de cima, à noite, transmuta-se em Cavalo, numa longa e dolorosa metamorfose. Habituada a conviver com o medo, cria um código amoroso próprio e descobre-se aguardando, ansiosa, aqueles momentos de alucinação e encanto.

Lidando mais uma vez com emoções insólitas, a temática de Lygia se aprofunda para a análise das metamorfoses, das transformações que marcam a trajetória do homem da vida para a morte. Gregório suicida-se porque não suporta conviver com a doença que poderá deformá-lo; Cordélia namora os velhos e realiza-se na sua impotência. O trabalho de Ananta consiste em auxiliar as pessoas a conviver melhor com suas realidades, conhecer-se sob as diversas camadas com que cada ser se recobre. Quando Ananta desaparece, a fantasia afirma-se sobre a realidade. O moinho interior de cada um, encarregado de produzir a carga diária de energia, nunca se revela claramente. A morte a extingue. Rahul, o gato, testemunha a morte, ambiciona conhecê-la, mas permanece incomunicável na sua lucidez de bicho:

“Fiquei pensando que entendimento podia haver entre pessoas e bichos, se entre pessoas da mesma fala era só desencontro.”

Impotente ante o suicídio de Gregório, a quem amava, Rahul busca transpor o limite entre a vida e a morte:

“Subi na cadeira de Gregório, recolhi as patas e fiquei. Teria que descobrir a morte enquanto vivo, antes de entrar no labirinto de onde só poderia sair morrendo de novo. Para retornar – quem sabe, na poeira de outras vidas. (. . .)”

Se à primeira vista os episódios do romance parecem justapostos num clima turvo, fruto dos desvarios, da embriaguês e da loucura, a reflexão a que forçosamente obrigam impõe a unidade da obra: perdas, decadência, velhice são situações que ameaçam as personagens. Abandono, tortura, doenças, a miséria humana encaminham a narrativa para o *medo*, mais uma vez a grande personagem de Lygia Fagundes Telles. Em Rosinha, Rosona, Rosa, Rosae o medo afogado no úsque é daquilo que não conhece e não controla, dos seus aspectos mais sombrios, da solidão, da própria coragem – ou falta desta – de enfrentar a vida e a morte.

As Horas Nuas é uma obra que despreza a lógica; capaz, portanto, de repelir críticas ou leituras conclusivas. Realismo fantástico em versão inovadora, ao mesmo tempo que permite indagar do mundo, amplia a investigação individual sobre o amor e o medo. Mas a inquietação, no romance, vai além: será a morte o

limite da vida ou uma imposição de nossa consciência sensível? O medo, que faz parte da natureza humana, é paradoxalmente sua contingência. A contradição reside na capacidade de enfrentamento e resistência de cada um.

Quando Ananta se surpreende mulher, pela alusão à sua bela cabeça, examina-se e descobre que possui um corpo:

“Deslizou as pontas dos dedos pelos botões do avental, e foi até a cozinha, onde estaria o mel?”

Numa linguagem solta, em que a delicadeza do detalhe gratifica o leitor, sem jamais torná-la artificiosa, Lygia preenche espaços com símbolos e metáforas: o mel e as orquídeas.

“Quando voltou à sala, inclinou-se para os potes de orquídeas. Mais um botão abria suas pétalas acetinadas que destilavam um perfume roxo-úmido. Recolheu uma folha murcha que pendia do caule como uma língua queimada. Fechou a folha na mão. Inútil (e tola) a tentativa de transformar a realidade em fantasia (. . .)”

Metáfora ou representação da sexualidade feminina, a orquídea é o inverso de Ananta que passa a vida fechada, a ouvir, solitária, Bach e Chopin. Até que se descobre e desaparece.

Escritora sutil, que constrói personagens desde a primeira linha, Lygia é dona de um estilo encantatório. Desprezando, desta vez, a estrutura tradicional com que acostumara seus leitores, permite-se escrever mais solta, descontraída e corajosa.

Lea Masina
Instituto Estadual do Livro

CONGRESSOS E SIMPÓSIOS

Os congressos e simpósios relacionados abaixo, realizados em 1989 e a serem realizados em 1990, devotam a totalidade ou significativa parte de suas atividades à literatura brasileira e portuguesa.

ESTADOS UNIDOS

● *1990 Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association* – March 29-31, 1990 at The Pennsylvania State University, in College Park, Pennsylvania. The conference theme is "Literature in Global Perspective: Interactions and Refractions." The conference will address the following six areas: 1. the writer in a strange land (exile and travel literature, women's voices, marginality, bi-culturalism); 2. translation, adaptation, imitation, or juxtaposition of texts; 3. rethinking reception and reception theory; 4. literature in the oral tradition; 5. representations of the past and future (romantics reading the Middle Ages, utopian literature, science fiction, etc.); 6. professional concerns (strategies for the teaching of literature, the traditional vs. the non-traditional curriculum, the status of the profession, the job market for Comparative Literature graduates, etc.). One-page abstracts of proposed papers should be sent no later than October 1, 1989 to Professor Gerhard F. Strasser, Department of Comparative Literature, The Pennsylvania State University, N434 Burrowes Building, University Park, Pa. 16802, tel. (814) 865-5481 or (814) 863-0589. Membership in the American Comparative Literature Association is required for participation.

● *Annual Meeting of the Northeast Modern Language Association* – April 6-8, 1990 in Toronto, Canada. The University of Toronto will serve as host. The following sections have an exclusive Luso-Brazilian focus: 1. Luso-Brazilian Literature (Open Topic), Chair: Professor Ana Paula Ferreira, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, University of California at Irvine, Irvine, CA 92717; 2. Luso-Brazilian Literature and Theory (Topic: Luso-Brazilian Writers and Literary Theory), Chair: Professor Catarina Edinger, 60 Old Crown Road, Old Tappan, N. J. 07675; 3. Women Writers of Brazil and Portugal (Open Topic), Chair: Renata M. Wasserman, 2264 Manchester, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. There are further opportunities for papers focusing on Brazilian literature to be included in sections on Latin American literature and in Comparative Literature. Membership in NEMLA is required for participation.

● *Mid-America Conference on Hispanic Literature: An International Symposium* – November 9-11, 1989, at the University of Kansas, in Lawrence, Kansas. Papers on all periods and genres of Spanish, Spanish-American, Portuguese and Brazilian literature will be presented. For more information, please contact MACHL, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, 3062 Wescoe Hall, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045.

● *Fourth Biennial Northeast Regional Meeting of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese* – September 21-22, 1990, in Providence, Rhode Island. The University of Rhode Island and Providence College will serve as co-hosts. The organizer of the Luso-Brazilian literature sections is Professor Gregory McNab, Department of Languages, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island 02881.

● *Translating Latin America* – April 19-21, 1990, at the State University of New York at Binghamton. Sessions on interpreting culture, interpreting literature, and translating literature to interpret culture. Topics: gender, identity, ethnicity, politics, literary theory, translating imported and indigenous cultures, biculturalism, communication and imperialism, and *écriture* stabilization. For more information, please contact William Luis, LACAS; Julio Rodríguez-Luis, Comparative Literature; or Marilyn Gaddis Rose, Center of Research in Translation; all at SUNY-Binghamton, Binghamton, N. Y. 13901.

OUTROS

● *Reunião da "Fédération Internationale des Langues et Littératures Modernes" (FILLM)* – De 21 a 29 de agosto de 1990 in Novi Sad, Iugoslávia. O tópico desta reunião é "O Impacto das Línguas e da Literatura nos Contactos entre Povos." Para maiores informações contactar Miodrag Radovic, Univerzitet Novi Sad, Filozofski Fakultet, stevana Musica bb/III, 21000 Novi Sad, Iugoslávia.

EVENTOS REALIZADOS RECENTEMENTE / EVENTS RECENTLY HELD

ESTADOS UNIDOS

● *15º Congresso de "Latin American Studies Association" (LASA)* – De 21 a 23 de setembro em San Juan, Porto Rico. Embora a LASA seja uma associação multidisciplinar, foram apresentadas várias comunicações sobre a literatura brasileira. As reuniões da LASA são realizadas de dois em dois anos.

PUBLICAÇÕES/PUBLICATIONS

● *La Historia en la Literatura Iberoamericana* – Editado pelas Professoras Raquel Chang-Rodríguez e Gabriella de Beer, do City College of New York, este volume contém uma seleção das comunicações

apresentadas no 26º Congresso do Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana. O volume inclui o discurso de abertura, proferido por Elena Poniatowska, e reflexões sobre a situação do escritor latinoamericano, por Luis Rafael Sánchez. Publicado pela editora norte-americana "Ediciones del Norte", de Hanover, N. H., o volume faz parte da série "Inca Garcilaso Symposia Series."

● *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* – To be published three times a year by Oxford University Press, *Diaspora* is a new journal which aims to explore the ways in which the political and cultural allegiance of diasporas has made them forerunners of the "transnational condition" in the pre-modern world (Jews, the "merchant diasporas" of Africa) and a paradigm of it more recently. *Diaspora* welcomes work that emerges from and cuts across the disciplines of cultural studies, history, literature, sociology, religious studies, political science, art history, anthropology, economics, musicology and linguistics. Essays exploring the conceptual foundations of "diaspora", "nation", "exile", "ethnicity" and "transnational" are solicited. Contributions of no more than forty typewritten pages should include both endnotes (in the social science style) and bibliographies. For more information, please contact Professor Kaching Tölölyan, Executive Editor, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Ct. 06457.

● *Essays in Literature* – Manuscripts are solicited for an Essays in Literature book entitled *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory*, co-edited by Ronald G. Walker and June M. Frazer, both of Western Illinois University, and David R. Anderson, on Texas A & M University. The volume's general focus will be on the paradigmatic function of detective fiction for literary theorists during the last 25 years. The editors seek two

kinds of essays: 1. those that may account for the ongoing fascination with the genre by way of an overview of contemporary criticism or by explorations of individual theorists who have used the genre to illustrate their ideas; and 2. those that apply recent critical theory (e. g. narratology, new historicism, gynocriticism and other feminist approaches, canon and genre study, reader response, etc.) to such issues as 1. recent permutations of recognized detective "formulas"; 2. relationships to other popular genres; 3. relationships to the changing canon; 4. relationships to modernism and post-modernism; 5. relationships between the fiction and its cultural milieu; 6. problems of time and narrativity in detective fiction, etc. Articles of between 12-30 typewritten pages should be submitted in duplicate to *Essays in Literature-Book Series*, Western Illinois University, 114 Simpkins Hall, Macomb, Illinois 61455 by March, 1990, and conform to the endnote style of the *MLA Style Manual*, 1985 edition.

LEIA NO PRÓXIMO NÚMERO DE BRASIL/BRAZIL

ESSAYS

- **“Shoes for little Peter: Narrative Technique In Trevisan’s not at all exemplary novella, “Pedrinho.”**
Linda Ledford-Miller
- **“Além do real, aquém do imaginário: D. F. Sarmiento e E. da Cunha”**
Leopoldo M. Bernucci
- **“Anatomia da musa concreta”**
Marta Peixoto
- **“The Institutionalization of Brazilian Modernism”**
Randal Johnson
- **“Hawthorne and Alencar Romancing the Marble”**
Catarina Edinger

LITERATURE

- ***The Yellow Dress***
Dinorath do Valle
 - ***Wee Circus***
João Guimarães Rosa
-

ENSAIOS

- **Mito e realidade política em *Sempreviva* de Antônio Callado**
Cristina Ferreira Pinto
- **Brazilian women and social reform in Nísia Floresta's *Opúsculo Humanitário***
Peggy Sharpe Valadares
- **A auto-referência e o paradoxo em *Dom Casmurro***
Paul B. Dixon
- **Abordando a história em *A República dos Sonhos***
Gregory McNab
- **Uma reavaliação crítica do cânon poético: por uma nova história literária**
Beth Miller

LITERATURA

- **Lonelyhearts** – Rubem Fonseca
- **Queen of the carnival** – Edilberto Coutinho
- **Renascimento** – Hermilo Borba Filho

ENSAIOS

- **Narratives by and about women in the third world**
Maria Luisa Nunes
- **Onisciência e controle em *O nome do Bispo***
Luiz Fernando Valente
- **A woman's place: Rachel de Queiroz's *Dôra, Doralina***
Renata R. Mautner Wasserman
- **A modernidade e o feminino na pulsação do discurso**
Rita Terezinha Schmidt

LITERATURA

- **Fatback** – Tânia Jamardo Faillace
- **Habacuc e o Homúnculo** – Moacyr Scliar
- **Poems** – José Paulo Paes