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Conscious Primitivism in the Poetics of Mário de Andrade

Myth provides the basis for a sharing of inner experience and makes possible the work of art that has as its objective to contain and cleanse terror from.

Jerome S. Bruner¹

Não sei por que espírito antigo Ficamos assim impossíveis . . .

Mário de Andrade²

Mário Raul de Moraes Andrade's place in literary history was assured long ago. He has been called "the vastest and most cultured mind in Brazilian modernism."³ "Andrade in Brazil, like Eliot in England and America, remained the masterly presence in Brazilian poetry until his death in 1945."⁴ However, there has been a continuing and unfortunate tendency of contemporary academic criticism to focus primarily upon his role as prose writer and "animador" of the futurist movement—a fact which diverts attention from a little-studied aspect of his art, that of primitivist poet and modern-day mythmaker.

No other Latin American writer has been so totally immersed in the research and teaching of popular culture, native ritual and folklore. Andrade wrote his famous *Macunaíma*, a "romance rapsódico" in 1928 and was the founder and driving force behind the Sociedade de Etnografia e Folclore.

The same reasons that led Mário de Andrade to become more interested than most writers in the problems of language also attracted him to folklore, that other form of expression of national culture . . . he wrote a considerable amount on popular traditional culture . . . he gathered together outstanding essays conceived and developed with a deep love for people and a very firm belief in the existence of Brazil as something alive (these being the gifts of the good folklorist).⁵

Given Andrade's background and interests, one would logically expect an outpouring of telluric and mythic elements in his poetry. However, this aspect of his poetics has never been the subject of a detailed literary analysis, and is, rarely if ever, brought into a general discussion of his writings. With the passage of time a certain singularity of focus is to be expected since Andrade's place in Brazilian literary history will

always be closely linked to his importance as the innovative "Pope of Futurism." However, other misguided observations and unfounded assumptions regarding the corpus of his writings should not go unchallenged. Witness:

Andrade was a writer who lacked a sense of cosmic drama and who did not feel, unless it was a landscape or picturesque point of view, any mystery of living as a man before the universe. The great archetypal themes of love, death, time, life and God . . . did not arouse his passions in any way.⁶

This study postulates that there, in fact, does exist a mythic body of Andradean poetry. While small in number, these poems deal with broad archetypal themes and possess a true mythic world-view. To disregard Andrade's role as mythmaker is to neglect an achievement perhaps equal to that of his contemporaries: García Lorca, Neruda, or Eliot himself. His use of the "mythical method" stands as a testament to the scope and beauty of modern Brazilian poetry. These little-analyzed verses express a fusion of two of Mário de Andrade's greatest passions: folklore and poetry.

Within this small body of compositions Mário de Andrade's lyrical vision evokes a level of feeling that recreates the basic aspects of a mythic world-view. These poems are accessible and interpretable through an analysis of his masterful use of conscious primitivism.

This seldom-analyzed mythic sensibility is best observed in the poem "A Serra do Rola-Moça," a work which exemplifies the consummate depth and brilliance that the modern folk ballad is capable of attaining. This work is perhaps his most widely disseminated mythic poem, appearing in many anthologies including the well known *Apresentação da poesia brasileira*. Other easily accessible poems that exhibit what T. S. Eliot understood to be "the mythical method" are "Tempo da Mária," "Toada do Pai-do-Mato," and "Poema da negra." In one of his earlier poems, "Improviso do rapaz morto" from *Remate de Males*, one can find traces or even the catalyst for this mythmaking process as Andrade's narrator-shaman apotheosizes the tragedy of the death of a young boy, bringing it to the attention of all men and giving it meaning. These poems serve as an explicit example of Andrade's re-creation of what anthropologists believe to be the essential qualities of pre-civilized thought. The primitivism in these works is an artful projection by a highly civilized modern sensibility. A detailed critical consideration of "A Serra do Rola-Moça" and its conscious use of primitivist impulses is to be the central focus of this study; a study which also becomes germane to an understanding of Wilson Martin's observation "That inextricable interpenetration of genres . . . cannot be torn apart if we wish to understand (Andrade) in his authenticity and in his true greatness."

A Serra do Rola-Moça
Não tinha esse nome não . . .

Eles eram do outro lado,
Vieram na vila casar.
E atravessaram a serra,
O noivo com a noiva dele
Cada qual no seu cavalo.⁸

Upon superficial analysis, "A Serra do Rola-Moça" appears to be nothing more than a simple folk narrative, but in essence it encompasses a contemporary vision of reality rooted in deep psychic and primal elements. In this work, Andrade creates a personal mythology, one which remains poignantly faithful to the common font of animistic primitivism found in all mythologies. Andrade succeeds in reviving the magical relationship between man and his surrounding universe. A primal anthropomorphic conception of life is at the basis of his art. Andrade, like many other writers of this century, employs mythic elements in his poetry to indicate the continuity of the human experience. One has only to consider the writings of Eliot, Lorca, and Neruda to attain a full awareness of the monumental extent that myth has influenced the poetics of the twentieth century. Richard Ellmann explains this pervasive influence thus: "The modern return to mythical forms is in part an attempt to reconstitute the value-laden natural environment that physical science has tended to discredit. Myths are public and communicable, but they express mental patterns that come close to the compulsive drives of the unconscious."⁹

Andrade's ballad is complex and multi-faceted in its conception, concomitantly existing on two interrelated levels. On the anecdotal level it seemingly presents the tragic story of the death of two lovers on their wedding day. However, on the second level of meaning, the deeper psychic level, one perceives the vision of an animistic clash between dark cosmic forces and the sexual instincts of the young couple. Coincidentally, Andrade also structures the poem on two polarities; a sound-silence polarity and a light-dark or night-day Manichaeian polarity, both of which parallel the more universal duality of the life-death polarity. Andrade seeks to obliterate the modern conception of death, submerging it in his anthropomorphic universe that is the narrative locus of the work.

As tribos rubras da tarde
Rapidamente fugiam
E apressadas se escondiam
Lá em baixo nos socavões
Temendo a noite que vinha.

Porém os dois continuavam
Cada qual no seu cavalo,
E riam. Como eles riam!
E os risos também casavam
Com as risadas dos cascalhos
Que pulando levianinhos
Da vereda se soltavam
Buscando o despenhadeiro.

The poem, like most ballads, contains a recurrent refrain, in this case "A Serra do Rola-Moça / Não tinha esse nome não." Andrade's narrator employs this refrain on the anecdotal level to create a type of verbal incantation that secures the reader's attention through the inherent internal rhyme of the vowels "o" and "a" which add to the symmetrical rhythm of the two lines.

From the onset of the work the omniscient focus of the narrator continually stresses verbally the physical separation of the couple. "O noivo com a noiva dele . . . Ele na frente, ela atrás." He then subjoins the phrase "Cada qual no seu cavalo," employing it twice to terminate the second and third stanzas. It is learned in the second stanza that the lovers have come to the village to marry "Vieram na vila casar," but the physical union that they both seek is to be delayed until they are able to cross the mountains again.

Antes que chegasse a noite
Se lembraram de voltar . . .
E se puseram de novo
Pelos atalhos de serra.

The choice of the noun "atalho" is significant for it simultaneously entails two conceptions: that of a cutoff or short cut and that of an obstacle or hindrance. There is a mythic analogy drawn between the primitive conception of the *locus amoenus* and the couple's entrance into the mountains. The poet utilizes the primal image of the passage into the mountains to symbolically portray a "descent-into-the-unknown" motif. This passage well exemplifies Philip Wheelwright's observation that: "The primordial awe and sometimes dread of nature in its guise of the wholly other, which in a highly intellectualized version of the world allows a majority of contemporary men to escape or ignore, is at the very heart of the primitive world view."¹⁰

The exuberant joy and the sexual excitement of the couple is presented by the artifice of focusing solely on their laughter.

E riam, Como eles riam!
Riam até sem razão.

Their uncontrollable laughter functions as a type of verbal incantation; a force dramatizing the tension between longing and innocence. The young couple is so totally absorbed in the sensual, ominous spell of their desires that they have lost contact with the cosmic reality that surrounds and menaces them.

In the fourth stanza, the narrator describes a cosmos that harmonizes with and reflects the happiness of the young couple. "Os dois estavam felizes, / Na altura tudo era paz." But in the sixth stanza he foreshadows and portends tragedy by metaphorically personifying the terror of the scarlet sunset as it attempts to flee the darkness of the night. Here the Manichaeian polarity is brought into play. It is at this point that the dark nocturnal cosmic forces begin to attain dominance.

As tribos rubras da tarde
Rapidamente fugiam
E apressadas se escondiam
Lá em baixo nos socavões
Temendo a noite que vinha.

The narrator disorders concrete reality to such an extent that it remains only as a resonant image of a totally new mythical configuration. The artistry of the passage resides in the fact that inexpressible fears are now given a sensorial form which is reflected in nature.

Andrade offers an animistic explanation for the accident that causes the death of the lovers just as primitives once attempted to decipher the inexplicable by means of stories which evolved into myths. The accident is mythologized as being brought about by a compenetration of the couple's laughter and the cosmic laughter of the pebbles. This personification is the second marriage named in the ballad.

E riam. Como êles riam!
E os risos também casavam
Com as risadas dos cascalhos.

To convey the idea of death the poet focuses not upon the physical death of the girl but rather opts to bring to the fore the concept of silence which far more effectively conveys the tragedy of the loss of life. The sound-silence polarity is artfully employed here.

Nem o baque se escutou.
Faz um silêncio de morte.

Again after the cosmic upheaval there is a return to the prior harmonious state "Na altura tudo era paz. . . ."

On the first level of meaning the young man unhesitatingly spurs his horse to join his lover if only in death.

Chicoteando o seu cavalo,
No vão do despenhadeiro
O noivo se despenhou.

It is generally accepted that there exists a strong interrelationship between the mythological and psychological approaches to literary study. To penetrate a deeper level of meaning in the poem, a Freudian approach can be utilized as a key for unlocking the archetypal essence of the work. The aesthetic theories of Freud, especially his work with dream analysis, will serve as a point of departure. The poem's abundance of symbology offers a possible solution to this tragic drama.

The application of Sigmund Freud's tenth lecture, "Symbolism in Dreams," from his twenty-eight lectures delivered at the University of Vienna, 1913-17, brings to bear a totally new perspective on Mário de Andrade's folk ballad. Freud held that the poet was essentially a day-dreamer who becomes socially validated. He explains that the creative processes reveal a subliminal inner state that through an analysis of literature yields a secondary meaning as faithfully as does psychoanalysis.

In "A Serra do Rola-Moça," the dominant motif emerges as the dynamism of the two lovers as they travel separately on horseback to reach a distant destination. Freud maintained that "an overwhelming majority of symbols in dreams are sexual symbols." More specifically he stated that "Wild animals denote human beings whose senses are excited." In this ballad the sexual symbol of the horses moving toward the mountain pass is readily interpretable in Freudian terms. "Special representations of sexual intercourse . . . are related to . . . rhythmical activities such as dancing, riding and climbing . . . steep places . . . are indubitably symbolic of sexual intercourse."¹¹ Andrade's utilization of the cumulative laughter of the lovers, "Riam até sem razão" and the descent into the void of silence all lend credence to a description on the psychological level of the climatic point of sexual union. That which was denied the lovers in life is accomplished through death. Therefore, only through death is there a union of the lovers, a union brought about by a fusion with an animistic cosmos.

The reality of the death of the lovers is tragic, but through mythic transformation their situation is given a poetic and cosmic explanation. The poet superimposes his personal myth upon the reality of the lovers' fate. The artistry of this ballad is powerful, for it fuses various elements of psychology, myth, conscious primitivism, and poetic genius. For

Susanne K. Langer, "Myth . . . is a recognition of natural conflicts, of human desire frustrated by non-human powers . . . it is the story of the birth, passion, and defeat by death which is man's common fate."¹² Andrade's exclamation "Ah, Fortuna inviolável!" synthesizes this observation. In this poem the narrator supplies his own mythic explanation of fate and death.

Much like his primitive counterpart, Andrade the modern-day myth-maker struggles to make experience intelligible. Here death is made tangible; it is equated with the primal fear of the unknown, the night, and with the physical barrier of the mountains. In this work the unknown, the inexplicable, is made comprehensible and explained through the anthropomorphic drama that Andrade, as poet and "shaman", creates. This lyrical interpretation of the terror and finality of death yields through myth a non-tragic vision of this all too real earthly occurrence.

It was Richard Chase who so accurately observed that ". . . myth performs the cathartic function dramatizing the clashes and harmonies of life in a social and natural environment . . . myth can be understood as the aesthetic leaven which heals or makes tolerable . . . deep neurotic disturbances. . . . Certain terms in which this 'cathartic function' of myth might be restated will doubtless occur to any student of Freud."¹³

"A Serra do Rola-Moça" attempts to explain the human and cosmic situation. In this work Andrade consciously sets out to mythologize, recreating a feeling of consanguinity and continuity between man and nature. This poem stresses man's total immersion in the working of the cosmos. Conscious primitivism is the unifying force in this work, as Andrade artfully interprets the non-historical dimension of man's timeless situation and struggle.

Through his use of the mythical method, Andrade has created one of the most complex and beautiful neo-primitivist poems of any language. "A Serra do Rola-Moça" stands as a testament to the artistry of Brazilian poetry, a poetry that increasingly "warrants serious consideration outside the Luso-Brazilian world."¹⁴

It is indeed ironic that the Andrade who is best remembered as the poet of the modern world created this work of art that is so timeless and past-oriented in its conception. Mário de Andrade's ballad well exemplifies Richard Chase's observation that "a certain control and direction given the poetical emotions, and poetry, as it always has, becomes mythical."¹⁵

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NOTES

1. Jerome S. Bruner, "Myth and Identity," *Myth and Mythmaking*, ed. Henry A. Murray (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 286.
2. Mário de Andrade, "Poemas da Negra," *Apresentação da poesia brasileira*, ed. Manuel Bandeira (Rio de Janeiro: Edições de Ouro, 1964), p. 323.
3. William L. Grossman, *Modern Brazilian Short Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 25.
4. Leland H. Chambers, *Modern Latin American Literature*, ed. David William Foster (New York: Ungar, 1975), p. 68.
5. Aires de Mata Machado Filho, *Mário de Andrade* (Belo Horizonte: Edições MP, 1965) pp. 13-14.
6. Lêdo Ivo, *Poesia observada* (Rio de Janeiro: Ofeu, 1967), pp. 224-26.
7. Wilson Martins, *The Modernist Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 245.
8. Bandeira, pp. 326-27. All subsequent verse quotes will refer to this edition. This poem first appeared in *Poesias* (São Paulo: Livraria Martins Editora, 1941).
9. Richard Ellmann, *The Modern Tradition* (New York: Oxford, 1965), p. 617.
10. Philip Wheelwright, "The Semantics of Poetry," *Sewanee Review*, LIX (1951), p. 585.
11. Sigmund Freud, *Psychoanalysis* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), pp. 157-77.
12. Susan Langer quoted in article by Juan López-Morilla, "Lyrical Primitivism: García Lorca's *Romancero Gitano*," *Lorca*, edited by Manuel Durán (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 133.
13. Richard Chase, "Notes on the Study of Myth," *Myth and Literature*, ed. John B. Vickery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 72.
14. Claude L. Hulet, *Brazilian Literature 3* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1975), p. xiii.
15. Richard Chase, "Notes on the Study of Myth," *Partisan Review*, Vol. XIII (Summer, 1946), p. 346.