

STUDY OF MYTHOPOETIC PRIMITIVISM IN A BRIEF POEM BY MARIO DE ANDRADE

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The weapon of poetry turns against natural things and wounds or murder them...to construct something that is not a copy of "nature" and yet possesses substance of its own is a feat which presupposes nothing less than genius.

José Ortega y Gasset

The literary ballad, an increasingly popular genre this century, consciously attempts to artistically emulate the mystic and primitive aspects of the orally transmitted folk ballad. "A serra do rola-môca" by Mario de Andrade masterfully exemplifies the consummate depth and brilliance that the modern folk ballad is capable of attaining.

This work, which upon superficial analysis appears to be nothing more than a simple folk narrative, in essence encompasses a contemporary mythopoetic vision of reality rooted in deep psychic and primal elements. This primal vision is subliminally accessible and interpretable only in terms of a psychological analysis of the subject matter. In the work at hand, Andrade creates a personal mythology, one which remains poignantly faithful to the common font of animistic primitivism common to all mythologies.

Ernst Cassirer, utilizing the writings of Frazer, Malinowski and Levy-Bruhl as a point of departure, strives to explain the close relationship between human and cosmic reality in primitive people. He concludes that cosmic elements like the sun, moon and stars all preside over and participate in man's destiny. Poetically contemporary poets through their works succeed in reviving the magical relationship between man and his surrounding universe. This primal anthropomorphic conception of life is at the basis of their art. Andrade, like many other

(1) José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings on Art and Culture*, (Garden City, 1956), p. 30 & p. 22.

writers of this century, employs mythic elements in his poetry to subconsciously indicate the continuity of the human experience. One has only to consider the writings of Eliot, Andrade, Cabral de Melo Neto, Lora, Neruda and Paz to attain a full awareness of the monumental extent that myth has influenced the poetics of the twentieth century. Richard Elimann explains this pervasive influence thusly: "The modern return to mytical 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 expressa mental patterns that come close to the compulsive drives of the unconscious."² Carl Gustav Jung echoes this same thought. "In the final count, every individual life is at the same time also the life of the eons of the species."³

Andrade's ballad is complexly multi-faceted in its conception, existing on two levels concomitantly. 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 envisagement of an animistic clash between dark cosmic forces and the sexual instincts of the young couple. Coincidentally, Andrade also formally structures the poem on two polarities; a sound silence polarity and a light-dark or night-day Mani haeen polarity, both of which paralled 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.

The poem, like all ballads, contains the traditional 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 encantation 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. Again on the first level of meaning the incremental repetition of the refrain artificially creates a reason for the telling of the ballad, concisely framing the thematic content of the work. However, the essence of the artistic ballad that Andrade composes is far more complex than a simplistically lyrical explanation of the nauring of a mountain rage.

(2) Richard Ellman, *The Modern Tadtion*, (New York, 1965), p. 817.

(3) Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, (New York, 1961), p. 41.

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
se puseram de novo
Pelos atalhos da serra.

I find the choice of the noun "atalho" significant for it simultaneously entails two conceptions: that of a cut-off or short cut and that of an obstacle or hinderance. 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" topos, a topos that forms the basis of Joseph Campbell's "threshold crossing" motif.

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 laughter is depicted by Andrade as an uncontrollable internal force that functions almost magically causing a type of malific incantation. The young couple is totally involved in the eerie sensual, ominous spell of their desires. They have lost contact with the cosmic reality that surrounds and menaces them.

In the fourth stanza Andrade presents a cosmos that harmonizes and reflects the happiness and joy of the young couple. "Os dois estavam felizes, /Na altura tudo era paz," but in the sixth stanza he foreshadows and portents 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.

In this work, Andrade offers a mythic 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 ironically is the second marriage named in the ballad.

E riam. Como eles 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 he 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 masterfully 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 avião do despenhadeiro
O noivo se despenhou.

To truly penetrate the deeper psychic level of the work one must utilize psychological approach as a key for unlocking the archetypal essence of the work, an essence replete with Freudian symbology.

The aesthetic theories of Sigmund Freud, especially his work with dream analysis, will be my point of departure. The poem's abundance of archetypal symbology, which is closely related to Freudian symbology, offers a possible solution to this seemingly 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 that the poet was essentially a day dreamer who becomes socially validated. He explains that the creative processes, as expressed in literature, reveals a subliminal inner state and that an analysis of literature yields as faithfully as does psychoanalysis the readily accessible deeper secondary meaning.

In "A serra do rola-moça" the dominante motif emerges as the dynamism of the two lovers as they travel separately em horseback to reach a distant destination. Freud maintained that "... an overwhelming meajority of symbols in dreams are sexual symbols." More specifically he enunciated that "Wild animals denots human beings whose senses are excited." In this bellad the vibrantly symbol of the horses moving toward the mountain pass are interpreted by Freud thusly. "Special representations of sexual intercourse ... are related to ... rythmical activities such as dancing, riding and climbing ... steep places or stairs is indubitably symbolic of sexual intercourse. On closer reflection we shall notice that the rhythmic character of this climbing is the point in common... the accompanying increase in excitation..."⁴ 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 possible description on the psychological level of the climatic point of sexual union. In is interesting to note that 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. This union is only accessible through the envisagement of the ballad from the stand point of Freudian dream symbology.

The artistry of the ballad is powerful, for it masterfully coalesces various elements of psychology, mythic 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."⁵ Andrade's exclamation "Ah, Fortnuna inviolável" synthesizes Miss Langer's observations. In this poem the narrator supplies his own mythic explanation of fate and death. The tragedy of the young lovers is explained in terms of an animistic clash between hu-

(4) Sigmund Freud, *Psychoanalysis*, (New York, 1968), pp. 157-77.

(5) Juan Lopez-Morella, "Lyrical Primitivism: García Lorca's *Romancero Gitano*," from *Lorca*, ed. Manuel Duran, (Englewood Cliffs, 1962), p. 133.

man desires and a personal projection of the concept of the unknowable upon natural phenomena.

Much like his primitive counterpart, the modern-day mythmaker, be he Lorca, Eliot, or Andrade, he struggles to make experience intelligible. Here death is made almost tangible, acquainting it with the primal fear of the unknown, the night and with the physical barrier of the mountains. In this work the unknown, the inexplicable "death" is made comprehensible and explained through the anthropomorphic drama that Andrade, as poet and "shaman" creates.

Mario de Andrade, the mimetic poet, through his narrator adopts a primitivistic vision of reality in his mythologization of the fusion of cosmic and human elements. His treatment of the theme of death is esthetically metaphysical. This lyrical and aesthetic reinterpretation of the terror and finality of death yields through myth and Freudian analysis a completely 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."⁶

(6) Richard Chase, "Notes on the Study of Myth," from *Myth and Literature*, ed. John B. Vickery, (Lincoln, 1966), p. 72.