

A STUDY OF INTERTEXTUALITY AND MYTHOLOGY IN JORGE AMADO'S *MAR MORTO*

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INTRODUCTION

There are at last two ways in which intertextuality is widely used. The first deals with the presence of different (artistic) objects within another or “a mere assemblage of heterogenous objects”¹ in the words of Mário Chamie. He further comments on intertextuality in texts:

Se tais obras e fragmentos são de textos a rapsódia nada mais é que um texto-produto da confluência de outros textos, numa relação integrada de interdependência e complementariedade. Em outras palavras: ela é um intertexto.²

Bakhtin on the other hand stresses the ways language is used in social contexts. He writes:

No member of a verbal community can ever find words in the language that are neutral, exempt from the aspirations and evaluations of the other, uninhibited by the other's intentions. His own intention finds a world already lived in.³

He considers the dialogical relations between texts/utterances, contending that every utterance or text is related to the previous.

Mário Chamie's definition of intertextuality differs significantly from Bakhtin's. The former concentrates on the relationship between artistic forms within another, especially their dependence and complementarity. Bakhtin dwells on the dialogical relationships between texts and utterances in the social context. The two senses in which both define intertextuality will be employed to

¹ Mário Chamie, *Intertexto: A Escrita Rapsódica – Ensaio de Leitura Produtora*, São Paulo, Praxis, p. 9.

² Idém, p. 12.

³ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 6.

examine the literary text will be studied in this paper. It must however be stated that a good work of art is not a mere assemblage of texts, rather it is an artistic use/composition of such texts, often for specific purposes, which may be to entertain, educate or even reform.

John J. White claims that the “return to myth” is a particular feature of the Modernist movement in the early part of this century.⁴ He further comments on the role of myths in narratives:

... the role of mythological motifs is analogical, describing the modern world in the light of a readily available set of models, works that are mythical do not offer myths as analogies, but make them their principal subject-matter or structural principle.⁵

This study will show that in *Mar Morto*, the myth of Iemanjá, the water-goddess, principally plays the role of subject-matter; however its role as structural principle is also significant.

José Américo de Almeida's *A Bagaceira* (1928) launched the social novel of the Northeast, popularly called the “romance de 30”, which dominated the 1930s and 1940s in Brazil. This period is often viewed as the ‘golden age’ of Brazilian fiction. According to Alfredo Bosi, one of the major characteristics of these social and regionalist novels is their “brute realism”.⁶ Jorge Amado's *Mar Morto* which will be analysed in this paper also shares this characteristic and it is also remarkable for its ideological content. In addition, it shows Amado's mastery of novelistic techniques. It is at the same time a good model of intertextuality and mythological narrative.

Indeed, critics usually group Amado's narrative works into two. In the first category are his earlier works, namely *O País do Carnaval*, *Cacau*, *Suor*, *Jubiabá*, *Mar Morto*, *Capitães de Areia* and *Terras do Sem Fim*, which are inspired by socio-political issues. The texts are distinguished by the apparent lack of concern for stylistic finesse. In the second, he shows some interest in stylistic effects, a trait discernible in the works Amado published as from 1958, (*Gabriela*, *Cravo e Canela*, etc). His political concerns are less explicit. However, a close examination of *Mar Morto* which incidentally belongs to the first category and is acclaimed by critics as a classic, is distinguished by the artist's subtle socio-political criticism as well as his artistry.

In this paper I will analyse the various levels/aspects of intertextuality present in the work, such as the relationship between the various literary “objects”/texts (songs, story, mythology, etc.). I will also study the various influences and ideological discourses implicitly or explicitly alluded to in the

⁴J.J. White, *Mythology in the Modern Novel*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 5.

⁵J.J. White, p.7.

⁶Alfredo Bosi, *História Concisa de Literatura Brasileira*, São Paulo, 1980, p. 431.

text for I regard textuality in a more global perspective. As Julia Kristeva has contended: “For the knowing subject, intertextuality is a notion that indicates the way in which a text reads history and inserts itself into it”.⁷ Finally, I will study how Amado successfully used the mythological motif of the water goddess to express his socio-political views.

Mar Morto narrates the lives of the seamen and their lovers of the bay of Salvador, Bahia, especially their struggles to make a living in face of implacable enemies: the sea and its goddess, Iemanjá, and poverty. The story focuses on the love of Guma, a boatman, and Lívia, a landlubber. Their love is representative of the love relations of the sailors and their wives in the bay of Salvador. Guma and Lívia get married despite the stiff opposition of the girl’s relatives, because he is very poor.

Poverty is actually a major issue in the narrative. It is primarily caused by the payment of very low tariffs by the rich merchants to the seamen who transport their goods to different ports and commercial centres along the Bahian coast and by the scarcity of jobs.

The story ends with the triumph of predestination and popular heroism, important belief and custom of the Bahian coastal community in Brazil. This is seen in the death of Guma (while saving one of his passengers) in accordance with the destiny of the valiant men of his kind.

INTERTEXTUAL/DIALOGICAL DISCOURSE

Mar Morto inserts itself into history, especially precolonial and colonial history of Africa, as well as Brazilian imperial history respectively. The explanation for the presence of the cult of Iemanjá, the water goddess in accounted for by the slave trade, which saw the forced emigration of millions of Africans, along with their cultural heritage and artifacts to the New World, including Brazil. Initially forbidden in Brazil, Afro-Brazilian cults, especially the “Candomblé” (of which Iemanjá, the Yoruba goddess of the sea, is one of the principal divinities) has attained the status of official religion. It has come out of the “quilombos” and ghettos into the open and the votes of the adherents roughly estimated at twenty million (one sixth of Brazilian population) are now fervently courted by politicians.⁸ Amado’s account shows the greatness and popularity of the goddess Iemanjá among Brazilians. It also shows the changes that its cult has undergone in Brazil, especially the discontinuation of human sacrifice to appease the goddess.

⁷ Julia Kristeva, “Narration et transformation”, *Semiótica I*. (1969), p. 443.

⁸ See the entry on “Afro-Brazilian cults” in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987, p. 103.

African colonial history is also alluded to by the depiction of a character Chico Tristeza, who tells the story of african's oppression by the French and the beating of a Frenchman by a black named Bagé, who thus avenges the beating of na African by a French colonial official.

On the Brazilian side, Amado delves into the imperial history of Brazil, when he recounts the feats of Besouro, a revolutionary figure. This legendary character attacked barons and gave the spoils to the poor during the Imperial period in Brazil. This figure actually reesembles the legendary Robin Hood. In addition Besouro's presence reminds one of Amado's earlier work *Capitães de Areia*, which shows a gang of young children rebelling against the authority by stealing from the rich and dividing the epoile among undernourished children.

By depicting his characters as revolutionary figures, Amado registers his socio-political/ideological commitment and stresses his ardent desire for the emancipation of the poor socially and economically. He does not limit himself to simply retelling the story of the lives of Guma and Lívia, and those of other seamen of Bahia, but views it in a socio-political perspective. It should also be noted that socio-political criticism is a major feature of the Brazil's social novels of the 30s and 40s of which *Mar Morto* is a good illustration.

According to Genette, the "paratext" is the relationship between the text properly speaking and its title, sub-title, preface, epigraph, etc. The paratext provides and environment for the text – "the priviledged space of the work's pragmatic dimension, i.e. its impact upon the reader".⁹ It is appropriate to observe that the story narrated in *Mar Morto* originally belongs to the folklore of the Bahian ciastal community, a fact confirmed by the author in his foreword. It has apparently suffered some alteration/addition from one story teller to another (over many years) before it was finally put down in black and white. Susan Feldmann comments that his is a common feature of all folktales and each tale "seems to be the result of elaborations and losses and permutations of themes which it undergoes in the course of its journey."¹⁰ She however affirms that folklorists tend to concentrate on what remains or the permanent element of each tale, namely the story, or plot.

In *Mar Morto* the sea – the abode of the goddese – exerte tremendous influence over the human characters: they are conceived and born on the sea, where they also get their daily bread and finally, where they die. There is no obvious hypotext for *Mar Morto*. However, history records the plight of the Israelites and Egyptians at the Red Sea in biblical times, a situation comparable with that of the boatmen and their wives. One cannot press this point too hard, although it suffices to highlight the terrific nature of man's encounter with the

⁹ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au second degré*, Paris, Seuil. P. 9.

¹⁰ Susan Feldmann (ed.), *African Myths and Tales*, New York, Dell Publishing Co., 1975, p.

sea, especially the awe/helplessness of man. The role/intervention of the divine element is crucial in man's bid to surmount the obstacles posed by the sea. Iemanjá is however remarkable for her Manichean nature in dealing with the sailors and other human characters in the fiction.

That this text illustrates intertextuality well in the sense proposed by Mário Chamie is further seen in the use of songs and poetry, two literary forms prevalent in Amado's works. The two artistic forms feature prominently in the story/characterization of Rosa Palmeirão – a name with metaphorical connotations – which almost attains legendary dimensions. Her story represents a remarkable example of a story within a story. A living figure, Rosa Palmeirão already has a collection of songs celebrating her heroism. A piece sung by old Francisco eulogizes her bravery:

Rosa bateu em seis soldados
Na noite de São João
Chamaram seu delegado,
Ele disse – não vou lá não”.

“Veio toda a puliça
Ela puxou o punhal
Foi medonho o rebuliço
Foi uma noite fatal”.¹¹

Another piece of song praises her masculinity, which is tempered by her femininity. She is described as a beautiful woman and a passionate lover, although she loves with the same ardour as she fights:

“Rosa Palmeirão tem navalha na saia.
Tem brinco no ouvido e punhal no peito.
Não tem medo de rabo-de-arraia.
Rosa Palmeirão tem corpo bem feito”.¹²

Examined closely, the text reveals words which suggest the character's physical and moral qualities. These songs constitute simple and short narratives on episodes in the life of the character. This characteristic they share with other folksongs.¹³

The poetic quality of these songs is enhanced by their structure. They are all quatrains and two of them present a similar rhyme scheme of “abab”, examples of heroic stanza and vowel/feminine rhyme: soldados/delegado,

¹¹ Jorge Amado, *Mar Morto*, Rio de Janeiro, Record, 1977, p. 49.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Cecil J. Sharp comments on this feature in the introduction to *Folksongs of English Origin Collected in the Appalachian Mountains*, London, Novelle, 1965.

peito/feito. This adds to their musicality as it sustains the rhythm and facilitates memorization. The use of the anaphora is also visible in the last two lines of the second quatrain: “Foi medonho o rebuliço/Foi uma noite fatal”. The first sentence is in addition inverted. It can also be rendered: “O rebuliço foi medonho” (The disorder was horrible), viz:

Verb + adj. + Art. + Noun → Art. + Noun + Verb + Adj.

By inverting the lexical items, there is a stress put on their meaning. The whole text is indeed written in a poetic language.

Amado also uses songs to effect socio-political criticism in accordance with his ideological outlook, albeit in a subtle manner. For example, he raises the issue of racial prejudice in a way that apparently belies the seriousness of this issue in Brazilian society. This is visible in the song of a mulatto, dancing among a group of porters and sailors:

“Sou mulato e não nego
Ai, meu Deus, de mim tem pena!
Embora eu queria negá
Meu cabelo me condena”¹⁴

The mulatto singer laments his misfortune of belonging to the marginalized and discriminated segment of the population. In a similar vein, the artist uses music to communicate different notions (such as predestination) which depict aspects of the myth of the water goddess.

MYTHOLOGICAL MOTIF

The myth of Iemanjá, principally plays the role of subject-matter, pervading the whole text from beginning to the end. The kernel of the myth goes thus: Iemanjá is the central character of the narrative, around whom all the other characters radiate. The seamen depend on her good will for non-violent winds and safe trips between the various commercial centres. The goddess clearly destines a life of hardships and eventual death for the seamen, the valiant in particular. Such is the belief of the Bahian coastal folk.

John J. White has said that “The presence of mythological motifs adds a touch of fatalism to the plot of many a modern novel...”¹⁵ This is true of *Mar Morto*, which the myth of Iemanjá, the sea goddess, marks with a deep tone of

¹⁴ Amado, op. Cit., p. 78.

¹⁵ White, op. Cit., 150.

fatalism and predestination. This is perceived in the statement of the characters and in the course of narration. Francisco, the old seaman, voices kind of sentiment when he addresses Guma's mother, who wants to take him away from the sea:

Siá dona, destino é coisa feita lá em cima.
 Se ela tem de ser de Janaína, não há saber
 Livre dele.¹⁶

He points out to Guma's mother that all seamen do take pride in dying (by drowning) so as to see Iemanjá, whom they consider as their mother and lover.

The mythology is successfully intertwined with the story of the romance of the boatmen. The author often uses songs to depict various aspects the mythology, apart from buttressing the notions of fatalism and predestination, which convey man's attitude to the mythology. When direct allusion is not made to the myth, the reader is reminded by the use of songs, which occasionally stresses the eventual death of the seamen and a life of poverty for the wife and children left behind:

Ele ficou nas ondas
 Ele se foi a afogar
 Eu vou por outras terras
 que meu já se foi
 nas ondas verdes do mar.¹⁷

Ominously, the above is sung by a female character at the wedding ceremony of Livia and Guma. It serves to predict Guma's eventual death. The notion of fatalism or rather resignation to the tragic destiny of the sailors is impressively conveyed by the refrain – "É doce morrer no mar." It is repeated eight times at crucial moments in the narrative:

No. Of Occurrence	Page	Occasion	Effect
1.	20	Death of two sailors: father and son	Comfort/ Confirmation
2.	20	As above	As above
3.	22	Guma's reflection on the drowning of father and son	Invitation
4.	25	As above	Invitation and entertainment
5.	25	As above	As above plus emphasis

¹⁶ Amado, op. Cit., p. 30.

¹⁷ Amado, p. 17.

6.	35	Visit of Guma's mother	Guma has the urge to jump into the sea in order to see Iemanjá, the sea goddess
7.	48	Guma's recollection of childhood friends	Reminder/Predestination
8.	221	Guma's drowning	Fulfilment of predestination

(*Mar Morto* 42nd edition 1977)

This song is significant for the following reasons. As a declarative statement, it conveys a truth that is accepted by most of the characters. It also valorizes the stoic philosophy of the seamen and their wives.

The role of the myth of Iemanjá, mother and wife of the valiant sailors as structural principle is also significant. The myth indeed hangs like the sword of Damocles over the characters and controls the course of the narration. It certainly provides the novel's main structural feature, developing the action of the plot.¹⁸ Early in the narrative the omniscient narrator remarks on the preponderant role of Iemanjá on the sailors. A character, Lívia, wonders at how Iemanjá could be the mother and lover of the sailors at the same time and why men would willingly jump into the sea in order to see the goddess, who could only be seen at the moment of death (p. 20). To buttress this point, deaths of seamen (Raimundo, Jacques and Guma) appear at intervals in the narrative.

Amado unwittingly puts himself in a tight corner because he is forced to narrate the story in accordance with the norm set by the early introduction of the myth. The narrative's success hinges on this crucial point. Instead of static or horizontal development of plot, the writer opts for real artistic development, "... change of attitude, shift of emphasis and a focus on a different part of the prefiguration."¹⁹ The writer does not change attitude, but shifts emphasis. He goes on to depict the characters in revolutionary episodes and present the history of the goddess: its origin from Africa, the goddess's violation by her son, Orungã, god of clouds, etc. Examples of revolutionary activities abound in the narrative. I have earlier made mention of two revolutionary figures: Besouro and Chico Tristeza. The incestuous action of Orungã echoes that of Oedipus, who inadvertently married his mother. It is also possible to discern similar attitude in Guma; he has the urge to sleep with his mother. The recurrence of parallel figures or episodes is remarkable in the structure of this narrative. Apparently Amado opines that nothing is new and that the present is only a reflection, it not an echo of the past.

¹⁸ White, op. Cit., p. 150.

¹⁹ Ibidem., p. 112.

The myth in a way structurally links the past with the present. The present austere living condition of the sailors is partly explained by the notion of predestination, prefiguratively conveyed by the myth of Iemanjá, and partly by the scarcity of jobs and low wages.

IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Jorge Amado's ideological stance in *Mar Morto* is subtly depicted, unlike what obtains in his debut work, *Cacau*, which is explicitly political. It has been said in our discussion on songs that Amado's criticism of racialism in Brazil is attenuated, yet effective. The same subdued criticism of society is intertwined with the use of the mythological motif. This is seen when put in perspective. In *Mar Morto*, Guma's wife, Lívia (at the end of the story), reacts in an unusual manner following her husband's death. Accompanied by another figure, Rosa Palmeirão, she takes to the sea instead of prostituting her self in order to fend for herself and son. This dramatic and radical episode serves to justify Amado's notion that the masses should unite and defend their rights, especially that women should be independent and provide for themselves.

Lívia's action presented by the author as a miracle is only so in the metaphorical sense; it is a conscious effort made by Lívia to ameliorate her condition. The author reduces the impact of this ideologically important episode by regarding Lívia as Iemanjá, when she takes to the seas, thus explaining the incident as the intervention of the miraculous. In reality the incident is the logical development of the characters. The notion of the miraculous intervention in Lívia's behaviour is negative. However to Amado, this is a neat way of explaining Lívia's transformation. According to Georges Politzer, myth in this way serves to "prevent men from knowing in rational manner real events and their true driving causes."²⁰

Nevertheless, Jorge Amado seeks to show the characters in the struggle for the improvement of their lot as protagonists in revolutionary episodes (as we have earlier indicated). These characters, though apparently ordinary human beings, are transformed by their oppressive situation to heroes, such as Guma (who dies a hero while attempting to save a dying passenger in a very bad climatic condition against advice) or radical agitators and militants like Rosa Palmeirão (who single handedly fights off soldiers who want to molest her) and Chico Tristeza (who seeks to inspire others by telling them heroic incidents, which he has witnessed). The writer is obviously aware that to change situations, there is need for revolutionary action to take place instead of miracles.

²⁰ Cited by Dephne Patai, *Myth and Ideology in Contemporary Brazilian Fiction*, London & Toronto.

INTERDEPENDENCE/COMPLEMENTARITY

The beauty of *Mar Morto* lies in the fact that all the literary forms described above do not appear in isolation, but are successfully intertwined. One cannot but be impressed by the interdependence and complementarity of the different forms and elements which feature in *Mar Morto*. The success of this narrative rests on the artistic and skilful composition of these elements. The myth of Iemanjá underscores the story of *Mar Morto* with a heightened illusion of spirituality, of the surreal. The entire drama is coined in a lyrical and poetic language which features songs prominently as devices of narration and characterization. The aura of predestination, for instance, is conveyed by the songs which keep recurring like leitmotifs. Jorge Amado combines all these elements and devices to produce a work, written in an elevated style.

The narrative is noteworthy for its skilful blend of subtle socio-political criticism and novelistic techniques. Its impressive poetic qualities prettify grinding poverty, exploitation and mysterious deaths suffered by the masses from the hands of the rich, the Establishment and nature, without diverting the reader's attention from empathizing with the marginalized and the exploited Bahian folk.

CONCLUSION

Mar Morto inserts itself into a historical reality with which it cultivates an intertextual relationship. It is also an intertextual work in the sense that it creatively blends different artistic forms/genres and discourse, such as folklore, myth, songs, poetry and socio-political criticism. It is certainly a mature attempt by Jorge Amado to bridge the gap between art and propaganda. Indeed, his concerns as artist and partisan writer complement and balance one another.

The love story of the Bahian sailors, narrated with much enthusiasm and skill, clearly shows his love for Bahia, his native land. It is therefore not surprising to observe the growing popularity of *Mar Morto* internationally. It has been translated into many different languages: Hungarian, Swedish, Hebrew, German and Irish. It has also been adapted for the screen.²¹

²¹ This information is supplied on the cover of the text.