

## REFERENCE AND CHANGE IN TRADITIONAL CULTURAL FORMS

RONALD W. SOUSA

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Some time ago I published a short review article in which I discussed possible modes of reevaluating certain Luso-American cultural practices<sup>1</sup> A small portion of that article was devoted to one version of "O Cego," a blindman ballad recited by Josefine Vieira in Oakland, California in the late 1960's.<sup>2</sup> My treatment of the ballad at that time was advanced to further the point of the article rather than to investigate other problems that might be associated with the text.

There is, however, a problem prominently raised by "O Cego" that bedevils scholarship on such traditional forms as ballads, especially forms that are "oral" in presentation/propagation and therefore present manifold difficulties for the concepts of language and critical practice that are paramount in our "literate" culture ("oral" and "literate" being here conceived as radically different modes of language organization). That problem involves change within such a tradition and one sub-category of that problem, namely the nature of the relationship of change to changed sociocultural circumstances in which given "traditional" practices recur. Specifically, if we note that Vieira's blindman ballad is similar to other known renditions of that ballad motif, in what ways can we understand the similarities and the differences? How, if at all, can we think about the relationship between those similarities and differences and Vieira's move from the culture of Madeira, where she "learned" "the" ballad, to that of Oakland where she produced the version in question? These matters have to do with the relationship between the ballad as verbal sequence and what we can call, in rough terms, "external factors": the historical workings of tradition and the force of context. It is, structurally speaking, a problem of reference, but one of a very particular sort. In what terms can we pose and discuss such questions as it suggests?<sup>3</sup>

In the aforementioned article, I simply presumed a contextual pressure, coming from the Oakland of the 1960's, upon the verbal sequence that Vieira produced and a confirming inverse reference running from features of that text to that "external"

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<sup>1</sup> "Reevaluation of Luso-American Popular Literature," *New Canadian Review*, 2, No. 1 (Winter 1989/1990), 47-63.

<sup>2</sup> Joanne Burlingame Purcell, "Portuguese Traditional Ballads from California," M. A. Thesis, University of California at Los Angeles, 1968, 137.

<sup>3</sup> I certainly do not wish to be understood as arguing that only "traditional practices" are subject to this problem. I do think, however, that such specifics as I tackle here are peculiar to such practices.

context. I did, in a footnote, endeavor to construe that referentiality as as wide and indirect as possible:

*The notion I employ here should be explicated further lest misunderstanding arise. I am not claiming that popular tradition works in a way different from how it has heretofore been conceived--that Josefina Vieira, responding to features of her environment, , creates" a corresponding revision of "O Cego." I am claiming that this version, however it came into being with relation to her--via any process from expectable transmission of its basic lineaments to random chance combination, and all possibilities between--, was accepted by her as viable because it made sense in the circumstances in which she found herself. There is no need to presume that other, differing renditions of "O Cego" by her would not also be viable as they related to her circumstances, only that some, for those same reasons, would not.*  
(*"Reevaluation," 60-61*)

While that note is, to my mind, perfectly proper, it is in fact designed to cut off,, within an article otherwise directed, the sort of question I raise above: one involving problems in conceptualizing variation over time in traditional forms. In the ensuing pages I wish to go back over my own tracks by posing a small set of precisely such problems for investigation. My goals are in one sense simple: I wish to see how such issues might be approached without the foregrounding of any presumptions about theses to be argued or anything of the like. I shall here concentrate on the referential aspect of the problem; that is, I wish to see how we can understand reference, as I characterize it above, in traditional cultural practices. By "reference," as is clear from the foregoing, I do not mean to invoke semantic referentiality--i. e., the way(s) lexical items achieve sense (another huge problem area, of course). I mean, rather, .. reference" in the sense that the language of a given text is in some way determinable as "referring" to [the language of interpretation of] the "reality" (ontological status, for present purposes, irrelevant) in [some] relationship(s) to which it was produced. My meditation on that issue in the ensuing pages will be a roundabout and somewhat associative one, finding its starting point in anthropological hermeneutics. I shall seek in that associative procedure to create useful, albeit ad-hoc terminology as I go. Indeed, I shall begin with an initial excursus, which will then be followed by a first return to the problem posed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Several issues should be clarified here.

First, those readers who have already seen a logical fallacy at the root of my project are correct: it makes no logical sense to speak of developing terminology to deal with a problem that exists in the same realm but in a different "grammar" (i. e., precisely that of "orality") from that from which the terminology emerges. I am quite conscious of the necessary fact that such terminology has about it a metaphoricity--i.e., it uses literate discourse, with all the fixities, inapposite to oral tradition, that one would expect of that code. I maintain, however, that literate culture can do no more than recognize the presence of that asymmetry.

In Eisie Clews Parson's Folk-lore from the Cape Verde Islands<sup>5</sup> there appears a story entitled "Os Tres Cedros," related by one Jon Silva Pina. From that title, which was presumably a part of the informant's presentation of the story, and as well from the general content of the tale, it can be seen as related to--in folklorist terminology, it is a "variant of"--the story motif that folklorists in Portugal have labelled "As Três Cidras do Amor." Popular tales containing language related to--i.e., tales standing as "variants" of--that designated motif have been collected from throughout Portugal as well as beyond.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, "variant" is in itself a misleading term, for it calls up notions of an original somewhere from which given versions diverge. By contrast, we can really speak only of similarities propagated in diverse realizations possibly related as much to locale of production and manifold factors at the moment of that production as to any force attributable to the textual similarities and differences themselves. Let us look briefly at this interplay between "motif" and "localism" (even setting the two words out as discrete terminological entities greatly reduces complexity) by considering Silva Pina's "Os Três Cedros" along with two versions of "As Três Cidras do Amor" collected in the Portuguese Algarve.<sup>7</sup> The latter represent a choice all but at random and could be replaced by several quite different "variant" versions. Moreover, they are not invoked to posit original versions or thematic constants but rather merely to provide a view of other options taken with some commonality observable. There can be no normalizing power ascribed to their presence.

To begin with, all three tales have about them an Arabian Nights air, for they involve a beautiful woman emerging from a magical cedrat and, after treachery is overcome, her happy marriage to the young man who originally liberates her. Silva Pina's tale, however, begins quite differently from its Algarvean counterparts:

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Moreover, I maintain that to expect any more--i.e., to require some "true" "representation" of oral culture--is in fact merely to make another set of "literate" demands.

Second, I use the term "meditation" above quite precisely. This essay was written, in its basics, as an extemporaneous investigation--a kind of thinking in print--about a set of issues. The traces of that original form have intentionally been left and drawn upon in subsequent revision--which has primarily involved cutting and shaping with little addition or reelaboration. What has been produced as a result contains a number of contradictions, primarily ones having to do with the conflicts among the various analyses that I draw on for quotation in the text, conflicts that go unacknowledged as I move from one allusion or quotation to the next in narrative fashion. I in fact take from those various sources only what I need at the moment and do not see any of the conflicts as damaging to my goals.

<sup>5</sup> **Folk-Lore from the Cape Verde Islands**, 2 vols. (Cambridge: American Folk-Lore Society, 1923). Volume I presents 133 folktales collected from Cape Verdeans translated into English, while volume II both reproduces Cape Verde Crioulo versions for many of those tales and also includes other Crioulo material, primarily riddles and proverbs, along with their translations into English. Unfortunately, the story that interests us here, which appears in English on pp. 350-351 of vol. I, does not figure in vol. II. Presumably, it was one of those stories that, inexplicably, were "translated at the time of recording" (I, xiii) and therefore has no Crioulo version to which we can have access. There does exist a translation of Parsons' entire study into standard Portuguese: **Folclore do Arquipélago de Cabo Verde**, tr. Jorge Sampaio, intro. Fernando de Castro Pires de Lima (Lisboa: Agência-Geral do Ultramar, 1968). In that volume, our story appears on pp. 703-705. The original collector/translator was Gregório Teixeira da Silva.

<sup>6</sup> Parsons herself (350, n. 1.) notes thematically similar tales from Spain (both central-peninsular and Catalan areas), and from Italy and Mexico.

<sup>7</sup> **Contos Tradicionaes do Algarve**, col. F. Xavier D'Athaide Oliveira, II (Porto: Typografia Universal, 1905), 18-24, 200-204.

*There was a man had a son named Mané. He was rich. One day a Negress passed by with an egg-shell, picking up popped beans (gueren. The boy said, "You should not do that." She answered, "The curse (praga) I ask from Jesus Christ is that you fall asleep and dream of three cedrats in mid-ocean. One you will enjoy, two you will not enjoy." That night he dreamed of three cedrats. In the morning he asked his father for a full-rigged ship. He sailed three months before he found the cedrats ..*

*(Parsons, 350; emphases and glosses are original)*

Silva Pina's story, then, has a frame to it, one in which the central character, Mané, son of a wealthy man and the young man who eventually marries the beautiful woman, is cursed by a "negra." The story of the three cedrats and the beautiful woman who comes out of the third of them is, at least at first blush, the result of that curse. This framing varies from the Algarvean tellings, in which the young princes involved may be beset by problems that the events of the cedrats bear upon, but the narrative of which they are a part is not set up as the vehicle of resolution for a conflict introduced in a framing narrative; indeed, none of the Algarvean tellings contains a frame at all--at least not one of the sort involving narrative shifts, as in Silva Pina's story. Nor do the Algarvean versions have an ending such as his does:

*San Anton does not give corn. He does not give beans. They plant corn, up comes balou (a rank grass). They plant beans, up comes figon (a poor variety of bean).*

*(ibid., 351)*

Thus the framing present in Silva Pina's tale becomes more complex: it both, in its first instantiation, introduces the central tale of the three cedrats in relation to what appear to be problems of daily life--social propriety and/or trespass, as betokened by the "negra"'s activity at the story's outset--and then at the end takes a step further back, seemingly to comment aphoristically on that initial problematization and the central tale linked to it. Moreover, the form of that finale characterizes the entire development as a wisdom piece": it is summarizable in a final statement cast in universal terms that apparently pretends to propagate values.

It should be noted, however, that in this tradition both beginnings and especially endings can be formulaic--and the ending to this tale is clearly so. Moreover, the formulaic endings are, in Parsons' terms, "comparatively detachable" (1, xv). They are expected to close the tale, and, according to Parsons' informant, their appropriateness in so doing bespeaks the storyteller's skill. But, at the same time, they function in their own right, as a kind of envoi not only to cap the tale but also to turn the storytelling process back to recognition of the specific interactive situation of the telling and reception of the

story. Thus the ending closes the tale, sets itself out in comparison to other endings, and probably has about it a radically occasional nature. While the ending sequence reproduced above is thematically unique in the 133-tale collection, there are other endings that recur, in "variant" forms, multiple times. We may therefore suppose that Silva Pina's ending is itself a "variant" of other similar sequences ending other tales not recorded in the Parsons collection--or, likely, anywhere else.

There are many other differences between the Silva Pina tale and the Algarvean versions of "As Três Cidras do Amor," but only one of them needs comment here for us to get into some of the questions that motivate the choice of this tale for analysis: the Algarvean versions are more or less consistent throughout as regards characterization--and other matters as well--while the tale that interests us here decidedly is not. While Mané is never called the "prince," the analogous royal figure involved in the Algarvean tales, part way through the central portion of the tale "the father," also called "the man," suddenly becomes "the king" and his wife, earlier "the mother" becomes "the queen."<sup>8</sup> The text, then, is inconsistent, seeming to betray the lateral presence of versions that use "king," "queen," etc., such as the Algarvean tales. And that laterally-present material breaks into the tale in mid-telling to produce an inconsistency that is of extreme interest here.

This profile of a tale that apparently contains an imbedded tale that is inapposite to it in observable ways, thereby coming to cause disruptions within it, is profitably considered in connection with Claude Lévi-Strauss' concept of "bricolage":

*In its old sense the verb 'bricoler' applied to ball games and billiards, to hunting, shooting and riding. It was, however, always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle. And in our own time the 'bricoleur' is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared with those of a craftsman. The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual 'bricolage'—which explains the relation which can be perceived between the two ....*

*The analogy is worth pursuing since it helps us to see the real relations between the two types of scientific knowledge we have distinguished. The 'bricoleur' is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw*

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<sup>8</sup> I owe this observation to my student Annie Ching-Sing-Wah.

*materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed, to any particular project but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions...*<sup>9</sup>

It is clear from the above that for Lévi-Strauss "bricolage" is primarily a physical metaphor for what are mental/verbal "projects." That link has been made stronger by, among others, Jack Goody, who has argued that Lévi-Strauss' concept of "bricolage" can in fact serve as the basis of a theory of oral language use and oral culture:

*... in developing countries... the boy brought up as a bricoleur becomes an engineer. He has his difficulties, but they do not lie at the level of an overall opposition between wild and domesticated minds, thoughts or approaches, but on a more particularistic level.*

*In looking at the changes that have taken place in human thought, then, we must abandon the ethnocentric dichotomies that have characterized social thought in the period of European expansion. Instead we should look for more specific criteria for the differences . . .*

*I have tried to take certain of the characteristics that Lévi-Strauss and others have regarded as marking the distinction between primitive and advanced, between wild and domesticated thinking, and to suggest that many of the valid aspects of these somewhat vague dichotomies can be related to changes in the mode of communication, especially the introduction of various forms of writing.*<sup>10</sup>

If we use these postulations as a basis, we can look back on Silva Pina's "Os Três Cedros" and say that "whatever is at hand" in this case is something like the Algarvean versions of the tale of the three cedrats, with kings, queens, princes, and so on and that that part of the tale therefore comes thus semiotized: it is, in Lévi-Strauss' terms, a cultural oddment which is being placed in a new project but which also retains some

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<sup>9</sup> **The Savage Mind** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966). The essay in question is "The Science of the Concrete," pp. 1-33; the reproduced material is to be found on pp. 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> **The Domestication of the Savage Mind** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 8-9, 16.

“shape” of its own. In the current context it is neither completely subordinated to the current project’s logic nor functionally independent of it; it is rather both a part and also one that in some aspects does not wholly fit, as the inconsistency in the labelling of the characters conveniently signals in this case.

Roughly speaking, then, the Silva Pina text would seem to contain what might be called “local” elements and a “central,” or “non-local” element that is partly inapposite to the local ones (I would not be held to this formulation save as a handy mode of exposition, for matters are clearly much more complex). The local elements are, to be sure, many more than merely the framing devices. For example, the few instances in which Parsons glosses English with Crioulo suggest a localized lexicon. Also at variance with the Algarvean versions is the fact that Silva Pina’s Mané finds his cedrats on a sea voyage. That topographical categorization may be indicative of island culture, wherein the realm of the magical is to be found simply away from the island--in the most immediate way. It probably also establishes the reverse: the island as the “real.” The second of those implications doubtless reinforces the notion of a set of frames referring to matters of the here and now and leaving the central part of the story as the imaginative, mythical exemplification of problem-solving about those matters. Those references need not be direct, of course; the wisdom pattern itself propagates, and thereby legitimizes, a problem-solving process completely apart from specific references<sup>11</sup>--and apart as well from the fragmentary nature of the actual results. That is, if we use the terms established above, the tale would seem to “refer” to issues of social practice in ways that, while they do not involve one-to-one referential relationships, nonetheless constitute clear procedural correspondences in which the purport of the tale applies to specific social questions in the “real” world.

But is such really the case? There is, after all, a question about this logic that does not seem to bother either Claude Lévi-Strauss (or the Jack Goody of Domestication of the Savage Mind<sup>12</sup>) but should perhaps bother us. They--as we heretofore--have assumed that there is a “project” that we can understand as somehow either preceding the ensemble that Silva Pina puts together or at very least as revealed by the framing elements in his tale as they in turn articulate an overall structure. There is, by that logic, some form of “intention” (a term I use primarily to denote narrative cogency, not authorial intentionality) coming from the realm of the social presumed to principle the tale, and that intention reveals itself in the verbal sequence. The problems for that proposition are several. First, there seems to be no thematic carry-through in the story that would render that intention cogently expressed: the relationships between the initial portion of the framing narrative involving the negra’s “praga,” the story, and the finale are murky at best. And it should be noted that Parsons does allow that “there are closings [in this practice] which are entirely irrelevant to the tale” (1, xv). Indeed, what argument can be made out seems to rely on the implications of the sequences. e., it is a .’wisdom piece” because it “behaves” like one--rather than through argumentative

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<sup>11</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 24-25.

<sup>12</sup> It does, however, seem to bother the Jack Goody of The Interface Between the Written and the Oral (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), virtually throughout the book.

detail--i.e., not because it can be seen to move toward any propagatable solution textually presented that might in turn refer to any socio-symbolic problem-solving. Indeed, one could compose a veritable inventory of how it does not work in that way. When we add to that inventory our glimpse at the "lateral" process that is involved in the tale's ending and the radical occasionality that is probably programmed into it, even the hypothesis of "behavior" like a "wisdom piece" becomes debatable. Does this situation meet Lévi-Strauss' sense of "project," not to mention his sense of "meaning"? What do such questions say about the concept of "bricolage" itself?

With those questions in mind, let us now shift to a look at Josefine Vieira's blindman ballad. The text of "O Cego" to which I refer reads as follows:

*Mãe vem à janela, anda ver o cego cantar e pedire*  
*--Se ei'canta e ped', dá-lh'pão e vinho*  
*e tu diz'o ceg' qu'sig'o camenh'.*  
*--Ndo quero o teu pilo, não quero o teu vinh'.*  
*Só quer'que venhas guiar-m'o caminho.*  
*--Adeus, minhas casas, adeus, meu' paés.*  
*Vou guiar o ceg', vou ser feliz.*  
*Adeus, minhas casas, adeus, minhas torr's.*  
*Adeus minhas damas, adeus, meus amores.*  
*Adeus, minha terra, adeus, meu' paés.*  
*Vou guiar o ceg' qu'ê vou ser felez.*  
*(Purcell, 137)*

The most immediately puzzling question--and the only one with which we shall concern ourselves here, even though many other issues might equally well be chosen--is why the first line refers to "o cego," 'the blindman,' rather than to "a blindman."

The possible answers are many. Let us first remain within the realm of grammar/narration for our discussion. Within that realm, one logical explanation might be that the blindman's activity is familiar to the mother and daughter. Lines two and three would, by that logic, have to be read as emphasizing the habituality of the blindman's visit, or potential visit, to their door. That emphasis, however, would not find the rest of the ballad a likely continuation. Another possible reading would emphasize the demonstrative possibilities in the article--the daughter would be verbally "pointing to" the blindman on the street. While the "undemonstrative" nature of lines two and three make that reading a bit hard to accept, it is still a thinkable one. Indeed, some other collected versions of the ballad have a demonstrative gesture in roughly the same place (again, I shall be using them to suggest options rather than to create a universe of "blindman balladry" to be referred to for purposes of normalization). Those other versions, however, set a more elaborate scene in which the demonstrative sense possible in our line is better supported, and, in concert with that development, their continuations are much more dramatic. For example:

*--Sou um pobre cego*  
*Que ando sósinho,*



*Pedindo uma esmoia  
Sem errar o caminho:  
Aqui está um cego,  
Pedindo uma esmola,  
Devotos de Deus  
E de Nossa Senhora.*

*"Minha mãe, acorde  
Do seu bom dormir,  
Que aqui está um cego  
A cantar e a pedir.*

*--"Si elle canta e pede,  
Dá-lhe pão e vinho,  
Para o pobre cego  
Seguir seu caminho"<sup>13</sup>*

In this case a full eight lines develop the presence of the blindman before the exchange takes place between mother and daughter, and even so the daughter refers to him as "a blindman," with only that initial reference enabling the "the" of the next-to-last of the reproduced lines. Another instance, the one most nearly parallel to the Oakland text:

*--Acorda, ó mãe, do doce dormire;  
vem ouvir o cego cantar e pedire.  
--Se ele canta e pede, dá-lhe pão e vinho,  
e o pobre do cego que sig'ò caminho.<sup>14</sup>*

Even in this case, however, the pace is slower, the dramatic development, within the two contexts, quite different: this version develops the rudimentary dramatic scene and its accompanying argument in two complete lines, thus supporting more nearly fully the possibility of reading the article as demonstrative, while our version uses only one and thereby reads as summary and relatively undramatic.

None of our "narrative-grammatical" solutions is, then, particularly satisfying, at least in relation to commonly-held notions of textual coherence.

Perhaps we should approach Vieira's rendition in another way: are there factors of other orders that we should look to to try to evaluate that first line in its context? In the earlier article that I refer to above, I resolved that problem, without mentioning it directly, through allusion to context: I in fact proposed that the entire poem could be seen as an implicit response, from within the language of traditional balladry, to life in Oakland, California in the late 1960's. In effect, I attempted the reference-based answer

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<sup>13</sup> **Cantos Populares do Brazil**, colligidos pelo Dr. Syivio Romero, acompanhados de introducção e notas comparativas por Teophilo Braga, I (Lisboa: Nova Livraria Internacional, 1883), 31-32. This version (pp. 31-34) was collected from the state of Sergipe; another, from Ceará, follows (pp. 3436).

<sup>14</sup> **Romanceiro da Ilha de S. Jorge**, ed. Manuel da Costa Fontes ([Coimbra: Seminario Menendez Pidal, 1983), 114-115.

that I came to above regarding the Silva Pina piece before I raised the question about intention and reference. (That argument is not as vague as it might seem, for, as Professor Maria A. Duarte and I have shown--we think, convincingly--in another application, meaningful adaptation to a new dominant culture can take place wholly within the codes of the original culture.<sup>15</sup>) Nevertheless, I wonder--indeed, I wondered at the time I wrote the earlier article--if such reference really can be developed into an analytical ground for work on a piece such as "O Cego." It is for that reason that I have begun with the Silva Pina tale and the linking of it to Lévi-Strauss' concept of "bricolage": their linking enables one to ask in a principled way the questions posed above about the relationships between disparate elements in a text, the reuse of materials in changed circumstances, the potential involved in the occasionality of such cultural practices as are under scrutiny here, and the interrelations between such issues.

Let us, then, bring the concerns raised with regard to the Silva Pina text to our look at Vieira's "O Cego," with its very spare development and puzzling article/demonstrative. To do so, I shall begin by embarking on another excursus, via quotation from another anthropologist, one critical of such thinking as Lévi-Strauss' in ways that are interesting for our concerns. In his *The Unspeakable*, Stephen Tyler questions some of the key premises in which the Belgian anthropologist grounded his work. For instance, after transcribing and translating a peculiar text by an informant, Pusem Laksmayya, from near Dummadudem, India, Tyler remarks:

*Laksmayya makes no judgements about the narrative in part because that seems not to be his purpose--he intends to describe, but there are other reasons, the most important of which is that the "meaning" of the festival [the subject of his narrative] is not an object of discursive knowledge apart from contexts involving its proper execution and instrumental efficacy ...*

*Its meaning is in its usages and outcomes and not in its supposedly underlying symbols. Concrete instrumentality, not the abstract structure of concepts is the focus of commonsense interest here.*

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*By itself it [Laksmayya's text] neither contains nor implies exposition, dialectic, or explanation. It is merely itself, and we can infer a movement beyond the narrative only if we ground the text in a concrete dialogical context where it has purposes which express its author's intentions ...*

*We can now understand what is bothersome about Laksmayya's text as a description--it does not implicate an exposition that goes beyond the rhetorical circumstances of its performance. There*

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<sup>15</sup> Maria A. Duarte and Ronald W. Sousa, *Reading The Harper: On A Portuguese Immigrant Poem from California, 1901* (Providence: Gávea/Brown, 1996).

*is no movement from narration to exposition, from rhetoric to dialectic, or from description to explanation. At best it is a description in response to a commonplace problem like that of describing brown boots, except that we do not know what problematic circumstances evoked it.*<sup>16</sup>

A number of matters are at stake in this argument. For present purposes, one of its key gestures is the questioning of some of the notions that we have seen constitute the concept of “bricolage” that has both enabled our inquiry to this point and in turn been interrogated in that inquiry. Indeed, one of the sectors elided in the above passage specifically names Lévi-Strauss, and the rejection of the notion of “supposedly underlying symbols,” and therefore a totalizing explanation grounded in a “symbolic” narrative “intention,” is directed to him (though not to him alone). As is virtually stated in the passage from “The Science of the Concrete” reproduced above, for Lévi-Strauss “bricolage” involves the project of creating, via “mythical thought,” an understanding analogous to modern, literate “scientific knowledge.” Indeed, one reads only a few lines up from the start of the passage that the “demand for order” (*Savage Thought*, 10) is presumed to animate the “project,” just as it does scientific thought. Somewhere toward the start of this chain of activity, then, there is for Lévi-Strauss a necessary motivation coming from an imperative to order, and that motivation inscribes itself in symbolic activity--in, that is, textualized “intention”--on the part of the “bricoleur.” (That motivation is most assuredly not reducible to an authorial intentionality in the simple sense of the term.) At very least, however, the “bricoleur” is involved in activity related to a cultural-symbolic order, and that order is being worked with symbolically in the language of the tale. Moreover, that order so textualized is sufficiently recognizable in the text that the anthropologist can read the “project,” with all the hermeneutical inter-compatibilities that that fact presupposes.<sup>17</sup> Hence, there is a concept of what we have called “reference” within Lévi-Strauss’ “bricolage.” There therefore also is what is likely a conflict within the concept of “bricolage” itself: the unarticulated premise of an imperative to specific reference must be present to guarantee the cogency of the project and the equally unarticulated premise of a universalizing ground must be present to guarantee its trans-cultural receivability.

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<sup>16</sup> **The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue, and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World** (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press), 1987, 7780. I must remark here that this citation should not be construed as implying agreement on my part with the general directions of Tyler’s work in this title. Indeed, while he opens up issues of great importance, his posing of them relies on a reading of some current theorists (especially Jacques Derrida) that I do not share. Moreover, his analytical practice also takes refuge in a concept of language that borders on the essentialistic--a concept which I could not possibly share, as these very pages demonstrate. Indeed, this present essay could be read as an attempt precisely to explore some of the same issues from a non-essentialist viewpoint. Tyler, by contrast, seems to answer the challenge posed by the problem I mention in the first long paragraph of n. 4, above, by attempting “true” representation through recourse to a notion of language involving static signification.

<sup>17</sup> The hermeneutical issue, which could be much further elaborated, will not be developed in the ensuing pages.

What Tyler and others like him asking similar questions in fact suggest--presented here in reduced form directed to specific purposes--is that the position of such theoreticians as Lévi-Strauss is ethno- (and logo-)centric in the presumption that cultural activity necessarily incorporates a working with a symbolic order and that that working necessarily comes inscribed in a deployment of cultural materials that is universally grounded. How, Tyler asks, do we know that Laksmayya's narrative has an "interpretation" of any sort--even for Laksmayya himself, made transcendent with regard to his own culture? Is it not possible for a given piece of language, or, for that matter, the discourse of interpretation that might be attached to it within its culture, to remain "concrete"--for our purposes, for it to exist on some basis other than Lévi-Strauss' "mythical thought"?

If this question is entertained as it interrogates the Silva Pina text, "bricolage" may take on a very non-Lévi-Straussian profile. The bringing-together of oddments containing our putative local and non-local materials may not constitute symbolic problem-solving with referential implications. If, Tyler (as I paraphrase him) asks, we accept the psychologists' declaration, as articulated in Lévi-Strauss' anthropology, that humankind has basic drives for security and order, why do we therefore assume that that ordering necessarily articulates in determinate ways with a symbolic dimension, why do we necessarily assume that it bears a "meaning"? Cannot the ordering within a single performance, in the case of Silva Pina's "Os Tres Cedros," an ordering that takes what presumably are, in the cases of the initial frame and surely in the case of the central sector and the ending, pre-semiotized syntagms and puts them in a recognizable rhetorical pattern, itself suffice? If so, the verbal sequence does not have to "mean" in the Lévi-Straussian sense.

What does all this have to do with the "the" in our blindman ballad? In general terms, the ballad, within the set of Portuguese-language blindman ballads I have been able to consult, is extremely compact. Even in comparison with what is in many ways the version most nearly similar to it, the version from the island of S. Jorge partially reproduced above, it is much shorter--in terms of verses, containing eleven to the S. Jorge version's twenty-six. Vieira's version leaps from the blindman's request that the young woman come out at night to guide him directly to her "Adeus... /You guiar o ceg', vou ser feliz." That line, which recurs to close the ballad, is, according to Purcell (138-139) and in my own experience as well, unique to this version. Thus, however that line may be supposed to have been derived, Vieira's "O Cego" involves a comparatively brief development of the blindman's sequestering of the young woman and then an equally brief rendition of her glad leave-taking, culminating in what seems to be her resounding proclamation of happiness upcoming.

What can be said about this version is that it stands out not only for brevity but also for simplicity. The other versions involve many more issues than this one does; among them: the "falsity" of the parental home, the abandonment of distaff and spindle, the identity of the blindman (who may be a nobleman in disguise), the young lady's prior/current romantic involvements, and many more. Even if in a given version such issues are not developed, they are often suggested verbally. Moreover, the outcome varies wildly among versions, from what appears to be a consensual flight by the lovers

to virtual abduction; some versions end with parental commentary on mores. Here, as I observed in the review article that prompted this further investigation, we have only the young lady saying "a formulaic goodbye to her former life and leav[ing] with the blind man" ("Reevaluation," 49).

What can we say about the puzzling "the" of line one as a result of these observations heretofore developed? There is, as must now be clear, no definitive answer to that question; if there were, it would all but inevitably involve a thematization leading to "meaning"--probably, though not necessarily, "meaning" in the Lévi-Strausseean sense we have entertained to now. We can, however, tentatively approach the issue from the other extreme, grounding ourselves in our discussion up to now, as it has moved from Silva Pina's "Os Tres Cedros" to Lévi-Strauss to Tyler and Laksmayya's narrative: that the poem cannot not "make sense," but the "sense" may be determined by immediate circumstances, by Tyler's "concrete dialogical context," rather than by symbolic-argument-with-reference, that is, rather than by "meaning" as we have heretofore developed the term.

Let us now go back to our basic observations about the brevity and thematic nature of the ballad development and our unsatisfactory "the." If we think of "making sense" rather than "meaning," there are a number of further possible interpretations of the "the": ones involving prior knowledge of the "cego" not on the part of the textualized interlocutors but rather on the part of the audience and/or singer--i. e., on the part of one dimension of the "concrete dialogical context." Josefine Silva Vieira could be saying, implicitly, that she and perhaps her "collector" know about the blindman already; the "the" would thus register textually one effect of an attitude approaching observer's paradox. Or she could be stepping back and saying "I know this old rhyme; I have a specific attitude toward it; there is no need to get into it dramatically." Thus the "the" may be a signal of the singer's attitude toward her song, one that in effect proclaims a sort of objectification of that song, as though the singer were standing apart from it: the singer/informant would, in effect, herself be acting as observer as well, and observer's paradox would be involved as instigator of a prominent code in the production itself. She would thus occupy a position in some ways akin to Laksmayya's as Tyler thematizes it, and her performance would exist as a self-enclosing and self-producing dynamic.

Let us, in closing, explore some implications of this last possibility. And let us do so under the sign of hypothesis in order to attempt to create a corresponding zero-degree scenario for the issues we are discussing. It must be made clear that we shall now not be making any exegetic claims at all with regard to the ballad itself but rather, conversely, we shall be using it as a kind of check--that is, to be valid the conclusions we reach must only not be inapplicable to it. Our meditation here will quite literally be one carried out to see where negation of reference-based reading can lead us with respect to the questions we have been posing. That negation is, after all, derived from a wholly adequate explanation of the textual phenomena in "O Cego," while grammatical/narrative solutions and simple observer's paradox would not seem to explain the textual development satisfactorily. Moreover, it appears perfectly consonant with the matter of brevity and linearity: Vieira may be seen as presenting a version of an

old story that “makes” linear “sense,” though it is a story that she sees as a relic, as inapposite to her interests now, etc. (My own rhetoric makes this seem more consistent and decisive than it needs to be.)

This hypothesis of “objectification” suggests that the verbal sequence is not necessarily there to “have meaning”; rather, somewhat like Laksmayya’s narration, it can exist “concretely”—in this case, as a commentary, perhaps a one-time commentary, upon itself both as utterance and as cultural inheritance. It could literally be pointing to itself by posing itself as having lost [some of] its cultural functionality. The dynamic is ironic, but in this way the text can be ..read” (as opposed to “interpreted,” in a Ldvi-Strausseean or other like manner)—that is, the mode of its self-presentation can be spoken of. That existence, however, does not rely on an interpretation of the verbal sequence’s “meaning” as fixed and confirmed in its reference to “reality”: there is, precisely, no such ‘project.’

As a result of such zero-degree deliberation, we can say that reference—in any sense in which something in the text “means” through symbolization of something else and that something else is an element in a symbolic universe undergoing rehearsal/revision/repair through the discourse of the text—need not be posited as a determinant basis for a tradition such as the Portuguese popular ballad tradition. It would seem that instead we must contemplate the possibility that sense-making can take place wholly within language and can take multifarious relationships to “external” constructs, be those constructs conceived as material or linguistic. Reference between the text and those constructs can, in fact, be totally absent from how a text “makes sense,” and in “0 Cego” we have the example of a ballad that makes “sense” of a specific sort—precisely through inscription of the irrelevance of reference.

What, however, of that irrelevance? Should it not be objected that it in fact reinstantiates Lévi-Strauss’ notions of “project” and interpretation by adducing them in a mode of negation? No. For reference is not being rejected in our putative reading of “0 Cego,” it is being treated as irrelevant. There is no sense that a traditional piece is being looked upon in a way not integral to the tradition. There is no new “project” emerging in this rendition of “0 Cego.” It is simply repeated in a way that indicates its inapposition to determinant referential possibilities. It might well subsequently be repeated within a referential mode, be that mode one of actual reference or of rejection of reference, but this time it is uttered in a manner inapposite to reference.

In another sense, however, the above objection should be seriously taken into account, for what it brings back to the fore is the fact that the tradition from which “0 Cego” emerges—and to which it still belongs—itself rests on the presumption that some sort of referential gesture is in place: “oral” (indeed all) language derives a part of its force from the unstated premise that it is determinantly involved with “reality.” We have seen that premise at work in both of our texts. Indeed, it has been difficult in this analysis to carve out a place beyond (or, better, beneath) that presumption, to find a way of talking about the sort of language use that interests us that does not involve it. Perhaps it would be better to find another term, for example “reference effect,” to use in place of “reference.” For we have seen in our zero-degree example here that “sense” can be “made” within the language of the tradition alone and that, in any case, in traditional

forms the relationships between “sense-making” and external factors are many and various. “Reference effect” would involve the elements of presumed reference, in varying degrees according to specific circumstances, without the necessary presumption of referentiality itself. Cases would have to be examined to understand the ways in which the phenomenon might be seen to function.

If we look at the tradition not as a thoroughly referential system but as one that may merely promise reference, with actual function varying in relation to the benchmark that that promise establishes, then the attitude of irrelevance contained in “O Cego” or the performance core of “Os Tres Cedros” take on other dimensions: they in fact mark several of what are the presumably manifold attitudes that may be taken up within a tradition. Moreover, if we presume that other versions of, say, “O Cego” describe different positions with regard to the promise of reference (let us say, for example, that Vieira’s next recitation of “O Cego” involves rejection of reference), then the possibility of difference among versions with regard to reference effect and subsequent choices among the alternatives can, in functional terms, constitute a “mechanism” for change within a traditional medium.