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Archipelagic Rewriting and Postcolonial Reframing of the Epic in Jorge de Lima's *Invenção de Orfeu*

Carlos André Cordeiro de Oliveira

*Não há atividade mais fiel
Que a de pintar em cores a ilha.*
— Jorge de Lima, *Invenção de Orfeu*

One of the most ambitious and symbolic works of twentieth-century Brazilian modernism, Jorge de Lima's *Invenção de Orfeu* is a ten-canto epic poem that reimagines the Orpheus myth within the context of Brazilian cultural formation and (post)colonial identity. Released following Brazil's modernist movements and during widespread decolonization efforts throughout the Global South, the poem has yet to receive adequate scholarly attention concerning its intricate intertextuality and mythological depth.

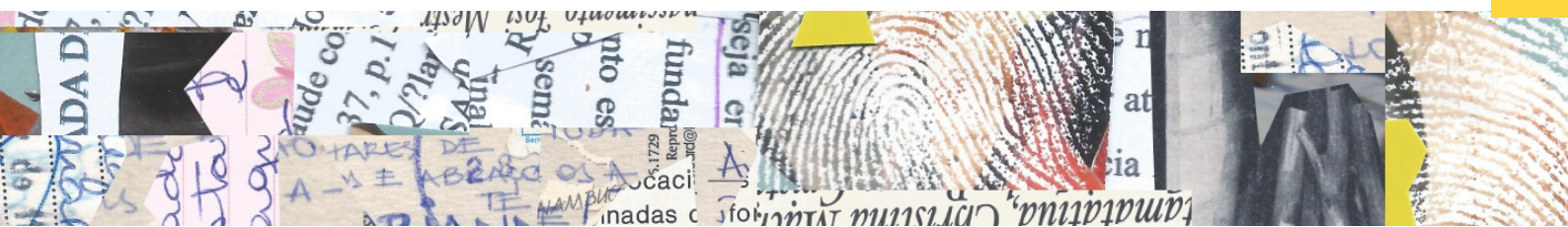
In ten thousand verses, Jorge de Lima (1893–1953) demonstrated with *Invenção de Orfeu* his aesthetic prospects of modernizing the epic. Although it clearly bears expressive freedom and nationwide themes (Bosi, *História*; "Jorge de Lima") as distinctive traces from the *Paulista* Modernism, it also embodies Lima's own symbolist, oneiric, and fragmentary style. As an early modern epic published in 1952 in Rio de Janeiro, it resonates with similar endeavors of (quasi-)epic poems in the first half of the 20th century, including Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Pablo Neruda's *Canto General*, Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, and Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*.

Invenção de Orfeu made a symbolic impact on Brazilian culture and artistic minds. It emerges as one of the earliest and most prominent examples of a Brazilian literary work engaging in a dialogue with the foundational literary traditions of Western culture. Published in 1956, Vinícius de Moraes' *Orfeu da Conceição* is another work that illustrates a mid-twentieth-century trend of revisiting the Orphic myth in Brazil. This

play later underwent two filmic adaptations by Marcel Camus' *Black Orpheus* in 1959, and Carlos Diegues' *Orfeu* in 1999 (Ribeiro; Rankine). This shared Brazilian aesthetic motif of Orphic texts in the 1950s produces, in metalinguistic terms, a reversal of acculturation, functioning as a transatlantic echo of the earlier Anthropophagic movement.

Born in Maceió, Alagoas, his literary work embraced the aesthetic achievements of Brazilian Modernism (Coelho) and infused them with the regional reality of Brazil, particularly after 1925. Consequently, Lima's poetry becomes marked by considerable formal and thematic heterogeneity. This hybrid mode of textual composition characterizes Lima's palimpsestic style. It synthesizes the transcultural effort of relating the colonial backdrop of Brazilian history to a mythic and symbolic reinterpretation of the *Brazilianness* through the medium of poetry. *Invenção de Orfeu* reveals Lima's distinctive aesthetic approach: it interweaves erudite vocabulary and classical allusions together with free verse, blank rhyme, and the musicality of Brazilian popular prosody:

Vinde ó alma das coisas, evidências,
cinzas, certezas, ventos, noites, dias,
rosas eternas, pedras resignadas,
que eu vos recebo à porta de meu limbo.
Vinde esquecidos seres e presenças
e coisas que eu não sei de tão dormidas.
Graças numes eternos: vai-se a tarde
e as corujas esvoaçam nas estradas.
Quero dizer-vos veras e constâncias
que não fujam ao ritmo soberano,
e depois e depois os dias móveis
sem meditar nas aves e nos voos
e nos termos parados sobre as ilhas,
sem saber se isso é meu sono ou se é de
outro,
que esse tempo passa, passa em muitos
e galopa um cavalo a eternidade! (Lima 154–
155, emphasis added)



All these *galloping* verses reflect the rhythmic dynamics of Lima's poetic syntax. The words join by the sonic explosion of meanings and symbols. Classical Greek epics originated through and for orality, body, and performance. In Greek myth, Orphic poetry is incantatory and lulls animals to sleep and makes forests reborn. In *Invenção*, the verses embody popular orality and Brazilian intonation. As Patrice Rankine suggests, "(f)or Lima the poem is the body ... Lima's Invention of Orpheus becomes the physical monument of absent bodies that can never be restored ... These absences become the stuff of Brazilian national identity" (392).

The repeated words "*e depois e depois*," "*que esse tempo passa, passa*," along with the predilection for diphthongs, open vowels, and the vibrant consonant /v/ reveal this literary weave. In these verses, as throughout the entire poem, the choice of nouns that reflect spatiality (*porta, limbo, estradas, ilhas*), temporality (*noites, dias, tempo, eternidade, eternos*), movement (*vento, voos*) and animals (*aves, corujas, cavalos*) compose the mythopoetic vocabulary. The verses of *Invenção de Orfeu* are not destined for rational and objective understanding. By combining influences from Camões and Dante's classical epic, Guillaume Apollinaire's French surrealism, Brazilian modernism of the 1930s, and subjective experiences interconnected with the collective experiences of Brazilian postcolonial society, Jorge de Lima writes back to the epic tradition within a postcolonial frame. The critical framework developed by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin theorizes how (post)colonial literary traditions respond to, subvert, and rewrite the canonical and imperial literary forms imposed by European colonialism. It therefore provides an interpretive lens for reading Lima's strategic engagement with the Western epic canon, particularly as represented by Camões' *Os Lusíadas* and Dante's *Divina Commedia*.

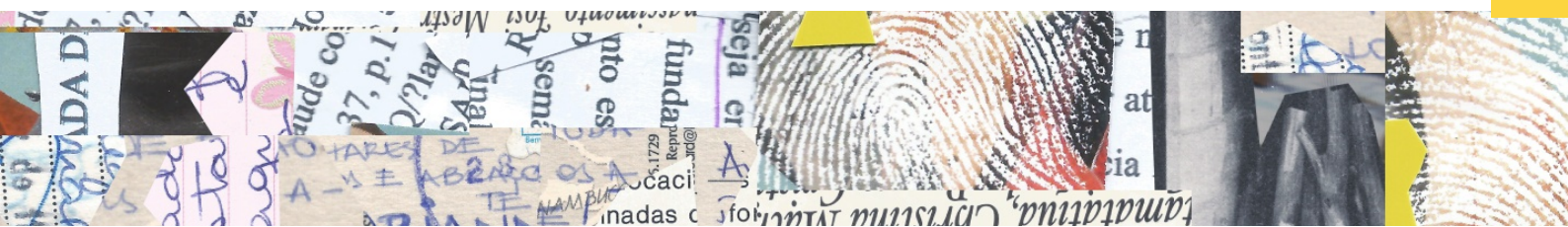
The poet unsettles the conventional unity of classical epic form by submitting its standard meter to a Brazilian melodic diction marked by a variable stress pattern and a rhythm that transforms itself over the course of the poem. In

its ten *Cantos*, Lima continually reconfigures *Invenção's* rhythmic architecture. He subverts the formal unity of the classical epic by recasting its inherited conventions through his own literary and cultural repertoire. In doing so, he grounds the poem in the specificity of his lived Brazilian experience, as Fabio de Souza Andrade discusses:

Para além da valorização temática de aspectos locais, ... [Lima] soube apanhar na sua liberdade de ritmos ... sua capacidade de criar imagens [sic] aspectos inéditos da realidade brasileira e popular. A poesia de Jorge de Lima perpassa pela religiosidade santeira, ora malandra e regateadora, ora assustada e supersticiosa, pela cultura das festas e folguedos de rua ... Não menos importante é a convivência com a cultura negra, presente desde a infância do poeta, nascido ao pé da Serra da Barriga, território mítico de Zumbi de Palmares ... a descoberta do verso livre, em certa medida análogo ao que praticava o poeta americano Walt Whitman (1819–1892), sua musicalidade guarda o trunfo da incorporação das sonoridades afro-brasileiras, do léxico e dos andamentos encantatórios, sem esconder o fascínio pela riqueza de sua singularidade simbólica. (Andrade 8–9)

This bold approach to poetry earned him the disdain of well-established Parnassian writers and the relative neglect of the contemporary critical establishment. Behind the apparent disregard for the established formal conventions of carefully sculpted verse, there was a poet rewriting the possibility of fusing popular imaginaries with classical erudition, European surrealist vanguard with Brazilian anthropophagic vanguard. Tellingly, the poem's title includes a versed subtitle:

Invenção de Orfeu
ou
Biografia Épica,
Biografia Total e Não
Uma Simples Descrição de Viagem
Ou de Aventuras.



Biografia com Sondagens;

Relativo, Absoluto e Uno

Mesmo o Maior Canto é

Denominado – Biografia³. (Lima 7, emphasis added)

This metapoetic subtitle already constitutes a modernist innovation. It addresses the reader directly, introducing what he will encounter and what he should not expect to find. It is a feature shared with early modernist fiction, insofar as it blurs the generic boundaries between classical epic and modernist fiction. The thematic shift from “a simple description of a journey or of adventures” toward “biography” is itself a twentieth-century literary device. The poem thereby distances itself from the epic narrations of Dante’s inner journey in the *Divina Commedia*, Odysseus’ homecoming to Ithaca, and Vasco da Gama’s eastward navigation in *Os Lusíadas*. It raises textual awareness of the epic tradition and anticipates its own interpretation through self-definition. It creates the framework for introducing the Brazilian images and prosody that embed biographical meaning within the poem’s own textuality.

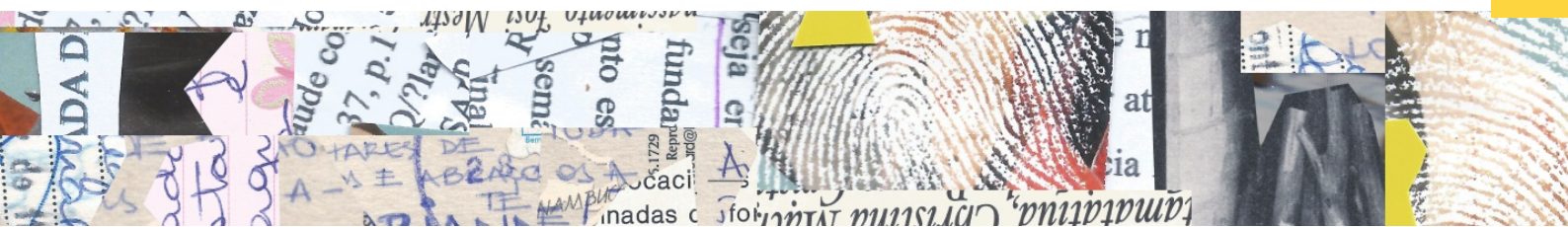
Antonio Cornejo-Polar reminds us that “el espacio donde se configuraría la síntesis es el de la cultura-literatura hegemónica; que a veces se obviaría la asimetría social de los contactos que le dan origen; y, finalmente, que dejaría al margen los discursos que no han incidido en el sistema de la literatura ‘ilustrada’”⁴ (369). *Invenção de Orfeu* foregrounds what pre-Modernist Brazilian poetry had relegated to the margins by following French models. Within this horizon, Symbolism and Surrealism strongly shaped dominant notions of literary value, often at the expense of a more acute social sensibility. Cornejo-Polar frames the concept of heterogeneity (*heterogeneidad*) against attempts to resolve cultural difference into synthesis. In contrast to the colonial mentality that long sought to produce Brazilian literature as a synthesis subordinated to European forms, poets such as Manuel Bandeira, Cecília Meireles, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, João Cabral de Melo Neto, and Jorge de Lima opened other possibilities for poetic expression. The stylistic

heterogeneity of *Invenção de Orfeu*, in this sense, constitutes Lima’s active intervention against the homogenizing impulse that structured the literary culture of his time.

Caribbean poet and essayist Édouard Glissant contributes through his notion of *pensée archipélifique*, or archipelagic thought. For him, language does not have to structure the world around a single center or within a unified system (*Le Discours*). Instead, the *mot archipélifique* (archipelagic word) proceeds by relation, dispersion, and contact among singular cultural elements undissolved into sameness. Archipelagic reasoning favors *opacité*, the metaphorical concept that complex cultural meanings flow through opacity (*Poetics*). Full transparency and legibility function as colonial means of voiding local cultures of their unique untranslatability. To honor *opacité* is to recognize the impossibility of being fully transparent to other cultures (*Traité*). A literary work without opacity would amount to the hegemonic cultural space of synthesis identified by Cornejo-Polar.

These paired concepts of *mot archipélifique* and *opacité* open a productive archipelagic and (post)colonial reading of Lima’s poetics, since *Invenção de Orfeu* unfolds through fragments, displacements, and proliferating intertexts rather than through linear, transparent epic continuity. *Invenção* renders the historical discontinuities of coloniality as formal discontinuities in the epic by challenging mentalities of dependence and colonial imaginaries. Read in this way, Lima’s engagement with the Western epic canon is relational, opaque, and archipelagic: the poem reworks canonical forms through a plural, decentered, and self-reflexive verbal space.

The literary heterogeneity of *Invenção* suggests that the transatlantic transmission of European language, literature, and canonical forms produces a contradictory reception: the poem inherits those forms even as it revises and reframes them from a postcolonial perspective (Marx; Gilroy). In Homeric, Virgilian, and Renaissance epic poetry alike, the unity of theme, cultural values, and the epic hero’s fulfillment



entails a forward, monologic voice oriented towards a settled horizon of action. Lima's dialectical struggle with dissonant voices and the uneven heritages of Indigenous, African, and European traditions weaves a singular and heterogeneous tapestry of textual (post)coloniality.

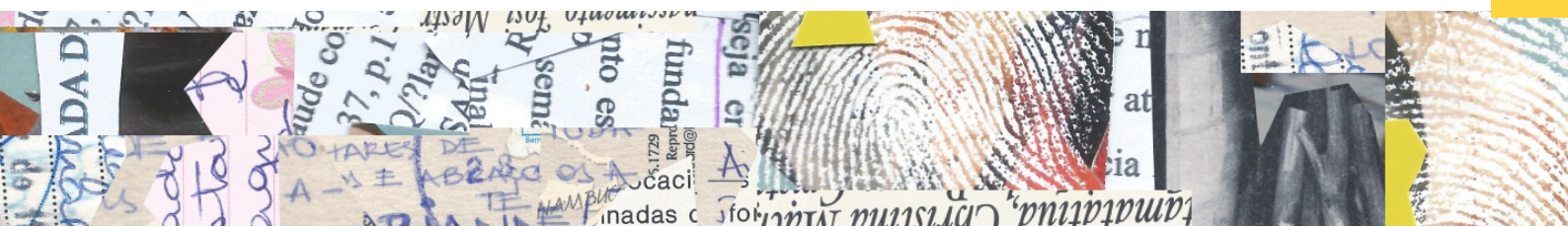
Considering these factors, I argue that one of the primary literary contributions of *Invenção de Orfeu*, as an archipelagic reimagining of the canon-standard epic, lies precisely in its poetic incorporation of heterogeneous cultural voices. These voices, with their unique aesthetic agency, produce a relational, polyphonic, and opaque epic poem and a landmark in the decolonization of the Brazilian literary tradition.

The first generations of critics, including Mário Faustino and later Haroldo de Campos, did not readily recognize the undertaking to compose an epic poem grounded in Brazilian literary and cultural forms. After Lima's death in 1952, Mario Faustino issues the first important set of literary assessments of *Invenção de Orfeu* in 1957 (Veríssimo). Faustino does not recognize *Invenção* as a genuine epic, contrasting it with the classical epics. For him, *Invenção* lacks unity of action, of theme and of proper form of epic. Despite this, Faustino regarded Lima as the greatest poet of his time (219). The Campos brothers intensified Faustino's line of criticism, despite their generous overall appraisal concerning Lima. For them, it was a "falso poema longo" (Campos, *Poesia*, 43, "fake long poem") or a poem with a "vácuo estrutural" (Campos, *Metalinguagem*, 205, "structural vacuum").

In contrast to earlier critics, Luiz Busatto takes a critical approach that grasps Lima's poetic project of modernizing the epic in a non-dependent relation with canonical models. Eduardo Sterzi, in turn, emphasizes that "Lima mesclou o lírico, o épico e também o dramático" (289, "Lima blended the lyric, the epic, and also the dramatic"), while nonetheless reaffirming that the epic prevails over any other genre.

By reassessing Lima's critical reception through an archipelagic and (post)(de)colonial perspective, I put forward *Invenção de Orfeu* as a reimagining and reframing of the epic: a transcultural and heterogeneous epic, to draw on Cornejo-Polar's terms, and, in Glissant's terms, an archipelagic epic. Lima's postcolonial poetics becomes legible within the hybrid aesthetic paradigms of Brazilian modernism. It interrogates colonial literariness rather than subordinating itself to canonical models. Critics misread a work's literary achievement when they dismiss it for failing to conform to canonical models. Such cases make clear the need for a transcultural lens through which to read post-independence Brazilian poetry. A hybridized form of epic explores the transcultural ambivalence of reinterpreting and rewriting established literary genres in colonized societies. Rather than reproducing a literary establishment, Jorge de Lima embarked on a search for his own poetic syntax to materialize in verse the need to create a literary nation of his own.

Since Ancient Greece, the myth of Orpheus has symbolized both the power of art and its limits in face of death. Mark Owen Lee brings forth the Orphic myth as "the real symbol of civilization" (74), as "a great civilizing force, with power to bend all the harsh, contradictory elements of the universe to the humanizing spell of his art" (107). A comparatist reading of the Orphic myth can lead us to interpret Lima's question of modernizing the epic as an Orphic problem, i.e., a problem of the boundaries of creation in a postcolonial civilization. Whether consciously or not, Lima mobilizes the Orphic theme as a generative myth to articulate a poetic foundation for Brazilian cultural identity. By deploying this extended allegory, he recreates a founding cultural myth that reimagines the epic in the aftermath of the first half-century of the independent Brazilian republic. By drawing on the Orphic legacy of music and poetry, *Invenção de Orfeu* metalinguistically endows itself with the enduring force of mythic tradition. In doing so, it establishes a tension and an ambivalence between European traditions and postcolonial literature. This is not a complete break from the Western



epic tradition but a relational and heterogeneous reworking of it. One that bears the mark of coloniality even as it interrogates its literary and cultural authority.

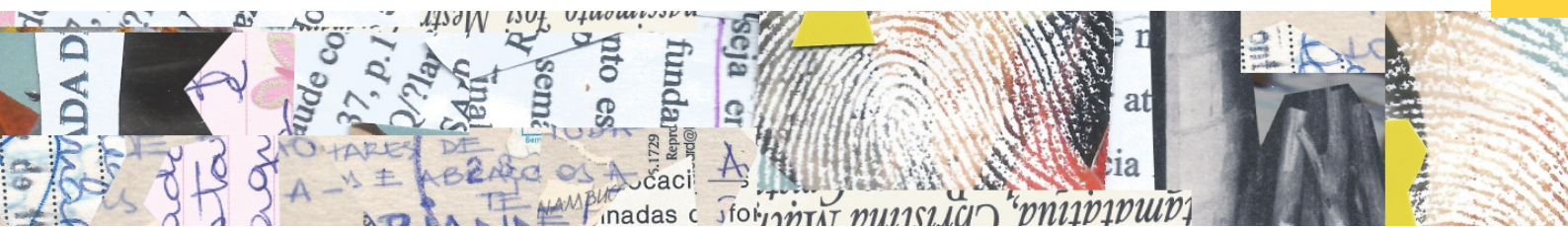
Lima's mobilization of the Orphic theme neither simply reproduces nor openly dismantles the Western canonical tradition. Rather, it operates through what Glissant (*Poetics*) terms *Relation*: the European mythological archive is inherited and transformed from within, producing an ambivalent poetics that is at once postcolonial in its symbolic debts and decolonial in its heterogeneity and opacity. The Orphic myth is relationally reframed, not blindly reproduced. Seen in this light, "*Canto I – Fundação da Ilha*" stands out as an exemplary *canto*, for it rewrites the intertextual relationships between different literary cultures, and it explores the (post)colonial motivations behind reimagining the canon, particularly in challenging an established literary tradition. The question of epic unity and structural coherence raised by the Campos brothers loses critical force when we read the poem through the lens of its intrinsic hybridism, which links lyrical content to epic form. Along these lines, *Invenção* has been variously described as a modern epic or a lyrical epic, to which I add, in the same vein, the notion of an archipelagic epic. Despite such terminological variation, all these labels point to the same underlying understanding: an epic reinvented by Orpheus/Lima in the tropics.

Luís de Camões' *Os Lusíadas* (1572), the canonical poem of Portuguese-language literature, serves as a productive point of comparison for understanding how Jorge de Lima reworks this tradition across the Atlantic in twentieth-century Brazilian poetry. Camões writes *Os Lusíadas* in invariable octaves, known as the *oitava camoniana*, whereas Lima does not follow a rigid stanza pattern in *Invenção*. In this respect, the "two fundamental aspects of the new creed were technical renovation of lyric, free verse above all, and attention to the national, in language itself (using the Brazilian vernacular) and themes (folklore, contemporary life)" (Perrone 63). Modernist authors, like Jorge de

Lima, did not intend to fall into strict categories of literary genres. Taking *Canto I*, for instance, the stanza structure ranges from couplets, tercets, quatrains up to strophes with multiple verses and varying meters and rhythms schemes. This fluidity in the poem's structure relates to the constant metaphors about the island, the sea, and the river that allegorize the poetic narrative.

The inherent sense to construct a literary Brazilianness by rewriting the Western canon through the aesthetics and subjective resources of Brazilian experience led *Invenção* to share features with classical epics, with contemporary long narrative poems of the twentieth century, and with Lima's personal need for lyricism, surrealism, and religious belief. The poem implodes the lyric boundaries of the epic in fluid verses, as in "A proa é que é ave, / peixe de velas, / velas e penas, / tudo o que é nave" (Lima 20). A maritime epic narrating feeling, subjectivity, and the inner world, with the flow of its verses mimicking the movement of the waters, or in Andrade's words: "relato épico/lírico da travessia do poeta-herói no mar da linguagem, revisita as formas e a história da poesia brasileira e universal" (9, "epic/lyrical account of the crossing of the poet-hero in the sea of language, revisits the forms and the history of Brazilian and universal poetry"). It shows the symbolic recounting of history and cartography of an imagined island: "desse mar que nos mapas não se vê ... / que as águas se enrugavam e a ave ia / ia perder-se nos confins do mundo" (Lima 153, "of that sea which on maps is not seen ... / that the waters wrinkled and the bird went / went to lose itself in the confines of the world").

While Camões opens with "As armas e os barões assinalados, ... / Mais do que prometia a força humana" (41, "The arms and the distinguished barons, ... / More than human strength had promised") in the sixteenth century, Lima begins intertextually with "Um barão assinalado / sem brasão, sem gume e fama / cumpre apenas o seu fado" (15, "A distinguished baron / without coat of arms, without edge and fame, / fulfills only his *fado*"). In this ironic parody, framed as an appraisal, Lima signals to his contemporary readers that they should not



expect heroic deeds in these pages. By foregrounding the canonical expectations of the genre from the outset, Jorge de Lima invites the reader to recognize that the very title, *Os Lusíadas*, evokes a specific epic tradition. If the reader takes into consideration the title *Os Lusíadas*,

[D]e origem erudita, fica claro o desejo de Camões de cantar um herói coletivo, a própria pátria portuguesa, da qual o Gama é apenas um momento de eleição e fio condutor. De todas as grandes epopeias, aliás, *Os Lusíadas* é a única que se calca num fato do passado recente, de acordo com o expresso objetivo do poeta de superar, apenas com verdades históricas, as fábulas dos antigos. (Bueno 20).

Os Lusíadas describes a noble quest for finding a passage to the Orient, for expanding their maritime world, and, for a cultural, linguistic, and symbolic crusade that confirms these people's journey is worthy of an epic in the best canonical tradition of *The Iliad*. And they succeeded. Conversely, *Invenção* offers no triumphant tale for the muses: "Contemos uma história. Mas que história? / A história maldormida de uma viagem" (18, "Let us tell a story. But what story? / The ill-slept history of a voyage"). This epic voice is different from any other magnificent voice found in Homer, Virgil, Dante, Camões, or Milton. Lima deliberately adopts an ironic epic voice to narrate what canonical form cannot convey. Virgil functioned as a true spiritual and poetic guide into the circles of the inner world for Dante, and the wise Odysseus accomplished his homecoming journey with a perfect wit, and the bold and virtuous Hector did not hesitate until he fulfilled his destiny against the invincible lion-spirited Achilles.

In contrastive and reinventive manner, *Invenção de Orfeu* is a drifting epic without the constitutive telos of classical epics. It is an epic without a heroic arc or teleological cycle, in which no predetermined destiny unfolds. This relates, to a certain extent, to the non-readability of the work for the Campos brothers: the lack of unity is not

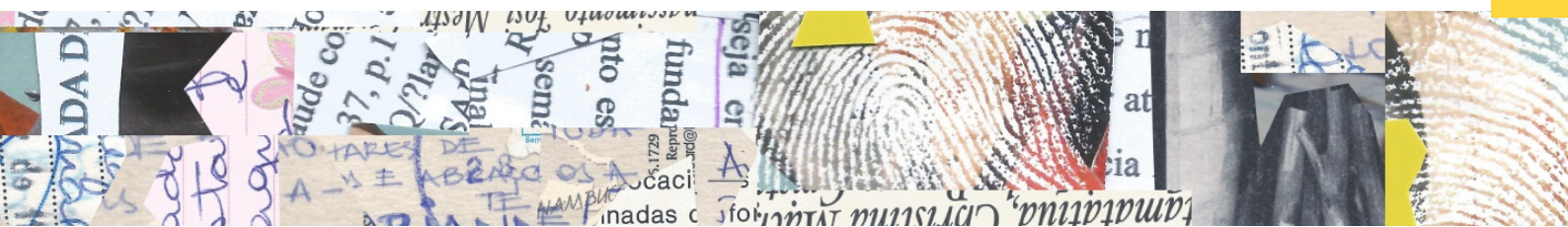
only an aesthetic flaw, but also an aesthetic decision. To read *Invenção de Orfeu* is to navigate the poem's maritime and island imagery as an "ébria embarcação" (15, "drunken vessel"). The image of the *ébria embarcação* is an intertext of Arthur Rimbaud's *Le Bateau Ivre* (Cavalcanti 199, 249, 260), one of the foundational texts of French Symbolism. In Rimbaud's poem, a drunken boat drifts across seas saturated with mystery. A vessel liberated from human control and surrendered to the forces of water and pure imagination. Jorge de Lima intertextually tropicalizes this image: the drunken vessel is no longer the disoriented speaker of avant-garde lyric, but a figure embedded within the oceanic and archipelagic geography of *Invenção de Orfeu*, where the sea becomes the medium of poetic language and the oneiric retelling of history. The dissolution of fixed referentiality, the privileging of image and musicality over discursive logic, and the transformation of the poetic subject into an oneiric consciousness all reveal the depth of Rimbaud's Symbolist influence on Lima's poetry. In a parodic gesture, one reads in *Canto I* the symbolic search for an elusive island:

A ilha ninguém achou
porque todos a sabíamos.

...
Nem achada e nem não vista
nem descrita nem viagem,
há aventuras de partidas
porém nunca acontecidas.

Chegados nunca chegamos
eu e a ilha movediça.
Móvel terra, céu incerto,
mundo jamais descoberto. (Lima 16)

The unknowability of this island stands as an allegorical platform of how Lima navigates the experience of coloniality. The verse "a ilha ninguém achou" reflects ambivalently the colonial disorientation of the diasporic identity from one side, but it also signals the drifting away from the imperial mapping. Where one cannot be located, one cannot be under colonial rules. Among the symbolic archipelago resides the maritime interstices to navigate oceanic identities and escape the cartography as the telluric power of colonization. The lines "reinventamos o mar para essa ilha / que possui 'cabos-não' a ser dobrados" deploy an



archipelagic thinking that challenges imperial cartographies. To imagine an island is creating an archipelagic oasis out of the colonial grounding of power:

[D]epois das infensas geografias ...
reinventamos o mar com seus colombos,
e columbas revoando sobre as ondas, ...
com linguagem dos livros ignorada;
reinventamos o mar para essa ilha
que possui 'cabos-não' a ser dobrados
e terras e brasis com boa aguada
para as naves que vão para o oriente.

E demos esse mar às travessias
e aos mapas-mundi sempre inacabados; ...

Empreendemos com a ajuda dos acasos
as travessias nunca projetadas,
sem roteiros, sem mapas e astrolábios
e sem carta a El-Rei contando a viagem⁸.

(17–18)

Edward Said contends that colonial geographies blur the boundary between the empirical and the imaginative. Building on this insight, such colonized geographies project imperial imaginaries onto deterritorialized and disembodied cultures across the Atlantic and the Pacific. As Said argues:

[A]ll such geographical designations are an odd combination of the empirical and imaginative ... Since the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning. The task for the critical scholar is not to separate one struggle from another, but to connect them, despite the contrast between the overpowering materiality of the former and the apparent other-worldly refinements of the latter. (Said 331–332)

Orpheus is an epic antihero without a map. The quest for an island collapses into the search for an unsearchable postcolonial identity. Lima's modernist sensibility becomes a means of

grappling with the fractured legacies of colonialism, offering a framework for understanding the persistent tensions between colonality and the imagined geographies. These tensions fragment the verses. Lima makes artful use of free verse as a literary tool to express the challenges of an era where classical canons and literary traditions often struggle to align with postcolonial ways of thinking. Thus, Orpheus' invention is the archipelagic remapping of the colonial world from a surrealist perspective:

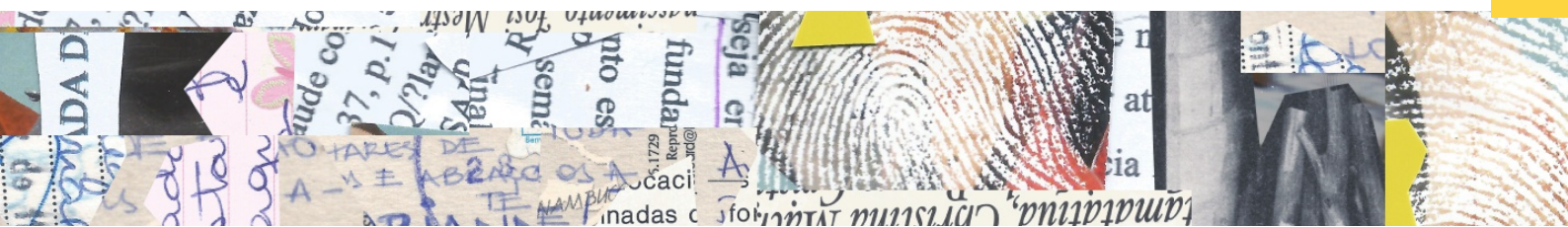
Não esqueçais escribas os somenos,
as geografias pobres, os nordestes
vagos, os setentriões desabitados
e essas flores pétreas antilhanas.

Há nesses mapas números pequenos,
uns tempos esbraseados para pestes
e muitos ossos tibios chamuscados,
faces perdidas, formas inumanas.

Não esqueçais, escribas, ir contando
nas cartas o que está aparente, ao lado
das invenções em seu fictício arranjo⁹. (Lima

20, emphasis added)

In certain fragments as above, the epic form overlaps with the modern fiction. There is a metalinguistic awareness reflected in "Não esqueçais *escribas*, ir contando / nas cartas o que está aparente, ao lado / das *invenções* em seu *fictício arranjo*" (20, emphasis added). In this frame of metalanguage, the archipelagic writing of the epic surface at the metafictional level, leading the reader to reflect more on the aesthetic status of the literary genre and the subtle oneiric colonial context than on the mythic feats of Orpheus. The reader may notice the "infensas geografias," the "geografias pobres," and the "mundo jamais descoberto" in the verses above. It engages with the sensibility of an audience at odds with historic memory and colonial identity: "A imaginação dói-me. Quem ma deu, / deu-ma para sofrer, para gastar-me / nessas reminiscências e visões, ... / pensamento contínuo circulando-me / nas águas do passado e do futuro¹⁰" (Lima 73). This surrealist epic voice



acknowledges the oneiric cartography of the island; and accordingly, Lima shares metafictionally the (re)imagining of this epic as an archipelago of literary tradition and colonial memory.

Invenção de Orfeu evokes a form of longing that resonates with *saudade*. It is a postcolonial *saudade* saturated with collective colonial trauma and the national quest for identity, memory, and land, expressed in the poem as an oneiric search for the island:

Não são paisagens lógicas nem minas
nem singularidades nem desígnios,
mas o dom da aventura desgraçada,
a lágrima, a saudade, o canto triste.
Porém a noite e o medo, porém tudo
porém a gente nova e o reino vão¹¹. (Lima
49, emphasis added)

Há piranhas aos cachos, hoje aéreas,
tingindo os arrebois, de sangue humano;
é bem melhor babar ternuras que
violências, escutar qualquer cantiga,
que aturar esses bichos, onças pardas,
onças pintadas, onças disfarçadas.

...
Que as *saudades* arrulhem. Nós de novo,
queremos secundá-las, nos flecharmos,
nos clarinarmos com cauí, dormindo.

...
*Recalcando saudades caducadas
pelo arrocho da vida malquerida,
calcanhares mordidos de saúva,
existimos, fugindo de boiunas.
Mas, esquecemos muitas dores, muitas.
Faz-de-conta, Timbiras que esquecemos.*

...
*Timbira ausente entrando pelas testas
como um remorso bom, saudade leve,
pranto constante, sempre nos poemas.
Podeis frechar-nos índios atuais,
e mesmo detestar-nos, devorar-nos.*

...
Moquéim ruim, de carnes embricadas,
corrompido de terra e morticínios,

de aguardente, varíolas, vícios brancos
nós nascidos libertos, nós cativos,
nós cedidos, cedidas nossas ocas,
dissolvidos nos sangues de outras gentes.

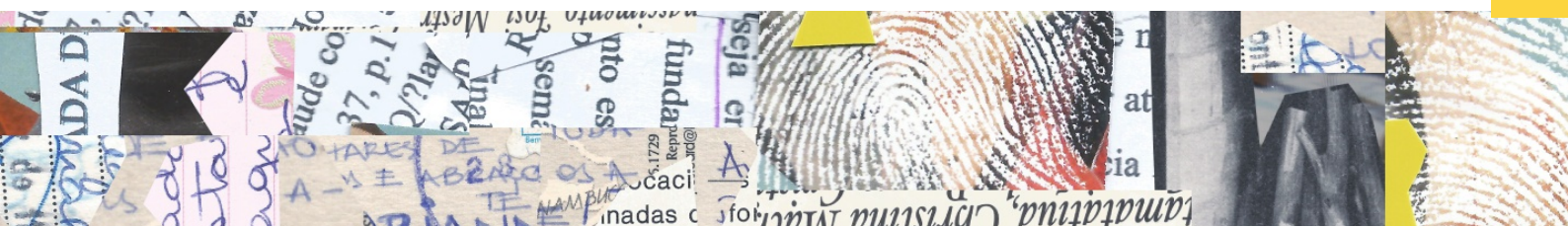
*Sim, guardamos memórias que se adensam,
lhes damos importâncias afetadas
pra que elas nos assombrem com fantasmas,
...
escorbuto de fomes escondidas,
todavia saudades e suspiros.*

*Perdemos nossos rastros pelos barros
encruzilhados, cheios de almas frias
abandonadas nessas solidões,
riscados de cometas; céus nos cobrem
com as mortilhas rasgadas por corujas.
Enfim, nos figuramos nessas nuvens.*

...
quase colinas, para os medos quase
sombra, para as memórias quase extintas.

*Agora finalmente somos listas,
registros e folclores, todo-o-mundo,
papagaios em círculos concêntricos
ou círculos de Dantes orientais,
fábulas criamos asas, somos poemas,
outra vez papagaios, papagaios¹². (Lima 62–
65, emphasis added)*

Along these verses, *saudade* emerges from a fractured historical condition shaped by colonial dispossession and diasporic displacement. In this sense, *saudade* may also indicate the Portuguese colonial desire of an intact origin, a delusive glorious past, or a transparent identity — a collective obsession with national culture that obscures the violence underlying that imperial past. On these grounds, the nameless longing for the past is also the forgetting of historical suffering, because it reduces *saudade* to an uncritical nostalgia that silences the suffering of colonized subjects. This unacknowledged trauma instigates a self-directed journey in which recovering one's identity proves structurally impossible without looking back to history. Yet Lima's writing reconfigures the impossibility of recovery by reworking Portuguese colonial *saudade* as a decolonial force:



the poem does not seek to restore a lost origin but to affirm the archipelagic subjectivity of Orpheus, who becomes a powerful figure for a postcolonial poetics of Relation and Opacity. The poem thus acknowledges the violent forgetting of colonial suffering and the potential counter-colonial social rage of those who suffered most from genocide: “Mas, esquecemos muitas dores, muitas. ... Podeis frechar-nos índios atuais, e mesmo detestar-nos, devorar-nos”¹².

Considering all this, I posit that *Invenção de Orfeu* falls within the postcolonial literary framework, as seen in “*Sim, guardamos memórias que se adensam ... pra que elas nos assombrem com fantasmas*”. It represents an outstanding emergence of (post)colonial poetic awareness in the Brazilian literary system, yet it remains imbued with certain preconceptions that decolonial and counter-colonial intellectuals from the second half of the twentieth century worked vigorously to dismantle. As an avid reader and *homme de lettres*, Jorge de Lima (1893–1953) might have encountered the first generation of the great *Intérpretes do Brasil*, with Gilberto Freyre’s *Casa-grande & Senzala* (1933), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda’s *Raízes do Brasil* (1936), and Caio Prado Júnior’s *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo* (1942). Nonetheless, Lima did not have the opportunity to read the theoretical breakthroughs accomplished by the pioneering Caribbean works *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) by Frantz Fanon and *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1955) by Aimé Césaire. Relevant and comprehensive investigations would appear only decades later, with Guerreiro Ramos’ *A Redução Sociológica* (1958), Florestan Fernandes’ *A Integração do Negro na Sociedade de Classes* (1964), and Abdias do Nascimento’s *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro* (1978).

Deploying archipelagic strategies, *Invenção* explores the cultural boundaries of writing within the postcolonial tradition of Brazilian poetry:

Nessa Geografia, eis o *pantomimo*.

Ah! O pantomimo! Múltiplo imitando mitos, seres e coisas ...

Mímico racional. Ah! O pantomimo

— esse intuitivo. Monstro e semideus.

Ele povoa a ilha, ele dança a ilha.

Ele heroíza a ilha, ele epopeíza ...

Ah! coribante ilógico, aliás lógico,
linguagem transparente, angústia — a face ...

Desarticulação, libertação.

Ó contingência: desarticular,

dançar, parecer ser livre, exteriormente;

e ser-se mundo, e ser-se bailarino,

nós bailarinos, todos uns funâmbulos,

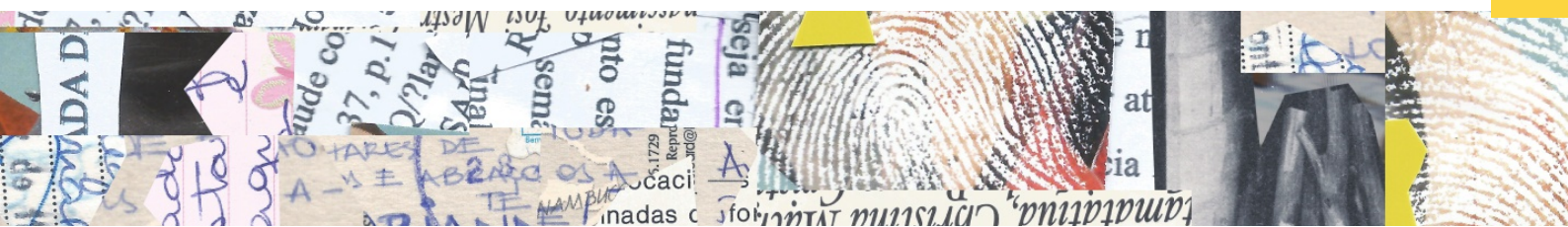
todos uns fulanos. Então, dancei-me.

Perpétuo Orfeu e tudo. Pulo e chão.

Polichinelo, polichão dessa ilha¹³. (Lima 80, emphasis added)

The words *Pantomimo* (pantomime), *mímico* (mimic), *coribante* (corybant), and the *Perpétuo Orfeu* (Perpetual Orpheus) work together as a chain of symbolic, mimetic transformation. They foreground the postcolonial tensions between the colonial legacies of imitation and the bodily enactment of self-liberation (“dançar, parecer ser livre, exteriormente; / e ser-se mundo, e ser-se bailarino”). The transparent language is a token of angst: “*linguagem transparente, angústia.*” Glissant’s *opacité* guides our reading of the juxtaposition of “*desarticulação, liberdade.*” Identity becomes *Relation* and is enacted as rhythm, stage, and dance. The poem converts the island into a theatrical and Orphic space where mimicry becomes a mode of epic world-making: “Ah! O pantomimo ... Monstro e semideus. / Ele povoa a ilha, ele dança a ilha. / Ele heroíza a ilha, ele epopeíza.” In Glissant’s archipelagic sense, the poem advances the idea of identity as a fragmentary language and postcolonial gesture of “*desarticulação, libertação.*” Therefore, Lima’s poetry elaborates the making of the postcolonial poetic subject as an archipelagic identity that resists both mimetic transparency and colonial modes of expression.

Lima’s epic poem departs from standard epic convention by eschewing heroic or historical deeds. Rather, it features a fragmented poetic flow, echoing French surrealist style, classical intertexts, American poetic vanguards, Brazilian Modernism, and free-verse poets such as Walt Whitman. This postcolonial archipelagic epic



constructs an interplay between mythic layering and archipelagic thinking by mobilizing the imagery of the island as a site of awareness and return. It stages Orpheus's oneiric journey toward a never-never island that functions simultaneously as refuge and wound. The poem layers classical motifs over local topographies, so that mythic memory collides with history. Island imagery here does not stabilize identity; it fragments and disperses it across languages. By doing so, Lima reinvents the epic for tropical space: he exposes the pressure of inherited Western forms while opening a poetics of opacity and heterogeneity. The result is an ambivalent epic that resists closure and insists on relational and heterogenous identity.

Invenção de Orfeu constitutes a foundational text for understanding how Jorge de Lima rewrites epic forms and negotiates colonial meanings through intertextual connections. By reframing the Orphic myth through metapoetic procedures that decenter Western canonical authority, the poem refigures Orpheus within the tropics by stripping him of his sacred aura; he is thus desacralized and subjected to colonial history. By exploring the poem through Glissant's concepts of *opacité* and *Relation* alongside Cornejo-Polar's *heterogeneidad*, I argue that Lima's formal fragmentation emerges not as a failure within the epic tradition but as a conscious, purposeful device that articulates a postcolonial-archipelagic rewriting of the epic within Brazilian culture. From the perspective of an archipelagic and postcolonial poetics, Lima's poetry reconceptualizes the epic form and actively subverts the notion of a unified literary tradition, foregrounding the tensions inherent in Brazil's colonial history.

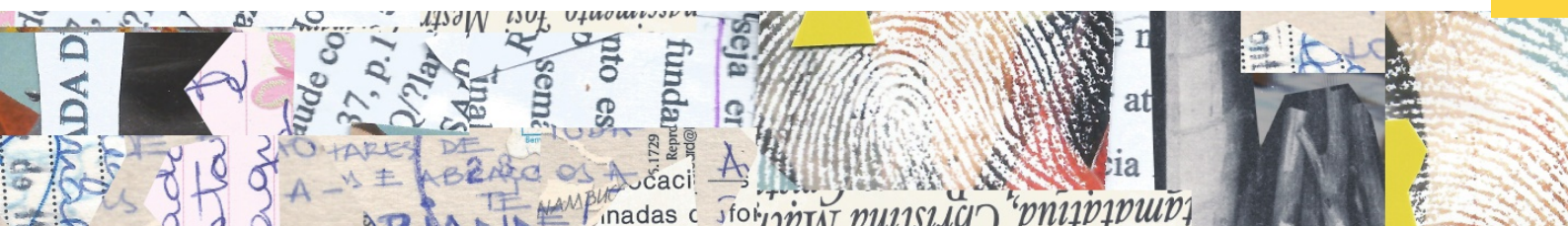
Notes

1. "Come, o soul of things, evidences, ashes, certainties, winds, nights, days, eternal roses, resigned stones, for I receive you at the door of my *limbo*. Come, forgotten beings and presences and things I know not of, so deeply slumbered.

Thanks be, eternal *numes*: the afternoon fades
and the owls flutter along the roads.
I wish to tell you truths and constancies that do not flee the sovereign rhythm, and then and then the shifting days without meditating on the birds and on the flights
and on the terms standing still upon the islands,
not knowing if this is my sleep or another's,
for that time passes, passes through many and eternity gallops a horse" (Lima 154–155).

2. "Beyond the thematic valorization of local aspects, ... [Lima] knew how to capture in his freedom of rhythms ... his capacity to create images [that render] unprecedented aspects of Brazilian and popular reality. The poetry of Jorge de Lima pervades the religiosity of the *santeiro*, now *malandro* and bargaining, now fearful and superstitious, the culture of street festivities and *folgado* celebrations ... No less important is his coexistence with Black culture, present since the poet's childhood, born at the foot of the *Serra da Barriga*, the mythic territory of *Zumbi de Palmares* ... the discovery of free verse, to a certain extent analogous to what the American poet Walt Whitman (1819–1892) practiced; his musicality holds the trump card of incorporating Afro-Brazilian sonorities, lexicon, and incantatory rhythms, without concealing the fascination with the richness of their symbolic singularity" (Andrade 8–9).

3. "Invenção de Orfeu
or
Epic Biography,
Total Biography and Not
A Simple Description of a Journey
Or of Adventures.
Biography with Soundings;
Relative, Absolute and One
Even the Greatest *Canto* is
Called — Biography" (Lima 7).



4. "The space in which this synthesis would be configured is that of hegemonic culture/literature; at times, the social asymmetry of the contacts that give rise to it would be overlooked; and, finally, it would leave at the margins those discourses that have not influenced the system of 'erudite' literature" (Cornejo-Polar 369).

5. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

6. "Of erudite origin, Camões' desire to sing of a collective hero, the Portuguese fatherland itself, becomes clear, of which Gama serves merely as a moment of election and a narrative thread. From all the great epics, *The Lusíads* is the only one grounded in recent past, in accordance with the poet's express objective to surpass the fables of the ancients only through historical truths" (Bueno 20).

7. "No one found the island
because we all knew it.
...
Neither found nor unseen
neither described nor voyage,
there are adventures of departures
yet never happened.
Arrived, we never arrived
I and the shifting island.
Movable earth, uncertain sky,
world never discovered." (Lima 16)

8. “After the hostile geographies ... we reinvented the sea with its *columbuses*, and *colombas* fluttering over the waves, ... with a language unknown to books; we reinvented the sea for this island that has “non-capes” yet to be rounded and lands and brazils with good waters for the ships that sail to the orient. And we gave this sea to the crossings and to the always unfinished world maps; ...

We undertook, with the help of chance, the crossings never before conceived, without routes, without maps or astrolabes, and without a letter to el-Rey telling of the voyage.” (Lima 17–18, emphasis added)

9. “Do not forget, scribes, the trifles,
the poor geographies, the vague
northeasts, the uninhabited northlands
and those Antillean stony flowers.

*There are in these maps small numbers,
some times all ablaze for plagues
and many singed, mild bones,
lost faces, inhuman forms.*

*Do not forget, scribes, to keep counting
in the charts what stands apparent, beside
the inventions in their fictive arrangement."*

(Lima 20, emphasis added)

10. "The imagination hurts me. Whoever gave it to me, / gave it to me to suffer, to wear myself out / in these reminiscences and visions, ... / a continuous thought circulating within me / in the waters of the past and the future." (Lima 73)

11. "They are not logical landscapes nor mines,
nor singularities nor designs,
but *the gift of the unhappy adventure*,
the tear, *saudade*, the sad song.
Yet the night and fear, yet everything
yet the new people and the vain
kingdom." (Lima 49, emphasis added)

12. "There are piranhas in bunches,
airborne today,
staining the sunsets with human blood;
it is far better to drool tendernesses than
violences, to listen to any little song,
than to endure those beasts, brown
jaguars,
spotted jaguars, disguised jaguars.
...
Let the regrets coo. We, once more,
wish to second them, to arrow ourselves,
to trumpet ourselves with *cauim*, sleeping.
...
Pressing down outworn regrets
by the grip of a life ill-loved,
heels bitten by *saúva* ants,
we exist, fleeing from *boiunas*.
But we forget many pains, many.
As if, Timbiras, we forgot.

...

Absent Timbira entering through the temples

like a good remorse, light *saudade*,
constant weeping, always in the poems.
You may arrow us, present-day Indians,
and even detest us, devour us.

...

Bad *moquém*, of interwoven flesh,
corrupted by earth and killings,
by *aguardente*, smallpox, white vices
we born free, we captives,
we surrendered, our *ocas* surrendered,
dissolved in the bloods of other peoples.

Yes, we keep memories that thicken,
we lend them affected importance
so that they may haunt us with ghosts,

...

scurvies of hidden famines,
yet still regrets and sighs.

We lose our tracks along the muddled paths

crossed with thresholds, full of cold souls
abandoned in these solitudes,
scratched by comets; heavens cover us
with shrouds torn by owls.

At last, we figure ourselves in these clouds.

...

almost hills, for fears almost
shadows, for memories almost extinct.

Now at last we are lists,
records and folklores, everyman,
parrots in concentric circles
or circles of eastern Dantes,
fables we create wings, we are poems,
once again parrots, parrots" (Lima 62–65).

13. "In this Geography, behold the pantomime.
Ah! The pantomime! Multiplying,

imitating

myths, beings, and things ...

Rational mimic. Ah! The pantomime

— that intuitive one. Monster and demigod.

He populates the island, he dances the island.

He makes the island heroic, *he epifies*.

...

Ah! illogical corybant, or rather logical,
transparent language, anguish — the face,

...

Disarticulation, liberation.

O contingency: to disarticulate,
to dance, to seem free, outwardly;
and to be-world, and to be-dancer,
we dancers, all of us tightrope walkers,
all of us nobodies. Then, I danced myself.
Perpetual Orpheus and all. Leap and ground.

Polichinelle, *polichão* of this island" (Lima 80).

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