

The Metamorphoses of Vinicius de Moraes' *Orfeu da Conceição*¹

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Talking about Vinicius de Moraes is something that can be described as an extremely difficult task, after all, Vinicius was an easy poet, writer, and composer. This well-known, popular, and appreciated artist, a *carioca* from Ilha do Governador, never fit into analytical hermetisms and even escaped complexity by adopting the nickname “poetinha”, with all the possible polysemy of the diminutive in Brazilian Portuguese. However, this same facility becomes a complication when one tries to find ways of analyzing the multiplicity of nuances of his artistic production. In this sense, I would like to warn readers that this will not take the form of a formal academic study, but that I will simply let one of Vinicius de Moraes' works guide me in a hermeneutical reflection.

What I intend with this text is to remark on one of the works of Vinicius de Moraes that I consider paradigmatic, *Orfeu da Conceição*. In my view, this work represents a change in his poetic direction, bringing him to a more popular universe and distancing him from the recurring symbolism of his initial works. In addition, *Orfeu da Conceição* opens a partnership between the poet and the composer Antonio Carlos Jobim, which was fruitful and unique for Brazilian arts and would be fundamental in the genesis of one of the most well-known musical movements in Brazil, the *Bossa Nova*. *Orfeu da Conceição* is still paradigmatic because it would be the first work to bring black actors to the stages of the Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro. Although Vinicius de Moraes' approach to the racial issues in his work can be criticized in many aspects, there is no doubt that the deliberate choice of bringing black actors to the fore represents an important step in the discussion of race in Brazil. *Orfeu da Conceição* is also the work that led to one of the films that most contributed, positively or negatively, to the international image of Brazil in the second half of the 20th century, the award-winning *Orpheus Negro*, by Marcel Camus.

There is also a sociological aspect that I will address marginally. This is what we call the paradigm of antithetical pairs in analyzing Brazil. I will briefly discuss this aspect and point out how it is present in the *Orfeu da Conceição*. I will also note how many of the ideas and representations of favelas present in the work of Vinicius de Moraes, including that of the antithetical pairs, were already visible in the Brazilian popular repertoire prior to the composition of the play. I will emphasize how *Orfeu da Conceição* is inserted, pays tribute, and develops a Brazilian poetic-musical tradition.

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The aim with all this is much more to pay homage to the poet than to produce a profound argument about his work, therefore, I apologize to readers expecting extreme academic rigor in this text. It is an essay and therefore open to debate. My idea, in general, is to observe how, in addition to its poetic-musical quality, *Orfeu da Conceição* can also serve as a reflection on how we represent and see favelas in the urban context, both in 1956 and today.

This text is also the result of reflections on the work following its 2016 assembly during the Arts & Humanities Festival at King's College London.

Orfeu da Conceição

Composed in 1942 and staged in 1956, *Orfeu da Conceição - Tragédia Negra Carioca* - is, as explained, a paradigmatic work in the poetic-musical repertoire of Vinicius de Moraes and constitutes a transition point in the artistic production of the poet.

From a formal point of view, it is a dramatic play, with three acts. The first and third acts take place in the favela, and the second in the city, more precisely in the carnival club "Maiores do Inferno". Acts one and three are in verse and act two in prose. The poetic language is still marked by a symbolism that is characteristic of the initial production by Vinicius de Moraes. The plot, fundamentally, is a transposition of the classic myth of Orpheus for a Rio de Janeiro favela.

The Brazilian Orpheus is a black man, composer, and guitarist, who lives in a favela on a hill and is loved and admired by everyone. He can have as many women as he likes and exercises a magical power over the entire favela. His music organizes, pacifies, and harmonizes the hill; it is *cosmos*, in the Greek sense of the term.

This is how Orpheus introduces himself in the first act:

(...)No morro manda Orfeu! Orfeu é a vida
No morro ninguém morre antes da hora!
Agora o morro é vida, o morro é Orfeu
É a música de Orfeu! Nada no morro
Existe sem Orfeu e a sua viola!
Cada homem no morro e sua mulher
Vivem só porque Orfeu os faz viver
Com sua música! Eu sou a harmonia
E a paz, e o castigo! Eu sou Orfeu
O músico!

Despite being loved by all, Orpheus has a special love for Eurydice, who, as in the Greek myth, dies and drives Orpheus into despair. In an anguished search for his beloved, he descends to the city, to the “Os Maiores do Inferno” club, where a carnival ball is taking place. This is the second act of the play.

Again, through a deeply symbolic poetic style, Vinicius de Moraes expresses Orpheus' despair not with the harmonious music of his guitar, but with *batucada* (drumming). The stylistic choice is important because the direct association that is made is that the *batucada* comes from the favela, and not from the city. Orpheus, playing his guitar, musically duels with Pluto, the president of the carnival club. The music of his guitar, however, is silenced by the drumming of the carnival party.

Orpheus speaks again of himself, but not with the same conviction as the first act, without poetry:

Não sou daqui, sou do morro. Sou o músico do morro. No morro sou conhecido - sou a vida do morro. Eurídice morreu. Desci à cidade para buscar Eurídice, a mulher do meu coração. Há muitos dias busco Eurídice. Todo o mundo canta, todo o mundo bebe: ninguém sabe onde Eurídice está. Eu quero Eurídice, a minha noiva morta, a que morreu por amor de mim. Sem Eurídice não posso viver. Sem Eurídice não há Orfeu, não há música, não há nada. O morro parou, tudo se esqueceu. O que resta de vida é a esperança de Orfeu ver Eurídice, de ver Eurídice nem que seja pela última vez!

Unable to find his beloved, Orpheus returns to the hill, but is no longer able to play or compose. His power, his music, his poetry, are gone with Eurydice. The third act, again in verse, is the narration of the decomposition and loss of order due to the silence of Orpheus' music and poetry. Orpheus sees his mother go crazy, the hill becomes violent, and eventually he is attacked and killed.

As stated earlier, the piece is paradigmatic in many ways. The first of them is perhaps due to the partnerships involved in the initial production of 1956. This was the first musical collaboration between Vinicius de Moraes and Tom Jobim, who wrote the compositions and song arrangements that make up the play. This is essentially a pre-inauguration of *Bossa Nova*, which will only be officially named after the recording of *Chega de Saudade*, by João Gilberto, in 1958. Musically, the play included Luiz Bonfá who played the guitar parts. In the cast of the Teatro Experimental do Negro, we find the likes of Abdias Nascimento, Ademar Ferreira da Silva, Ciro Monteiro, Lea Garcia, Glória Moreira and Adalberto Silva. The partnerships continue with Oscar Niemeyer drawing the sets, Lila Moraes the costumes

and Carlos Scliar and Dejanira preparing the posters. In sum, a synthesis of modern art in 1950s Brazil.

This is interesting in the sense that it is also the way in which Vinicius de Moraes of assimilated certain elements of modernist poetics into his work, which until then had not been so present. As argued, de Moraes' earlier poetry was essentially symbolist. The poet thus assimilated the use of a more popular language, as he warned in the introduction of the play's text: "Tratando-se de uma peça onde a gíria popular representa um papel muito importante, e como a linguagem do povo é extremamente mutável, em caso de representação deve ela ser adaptada às suas novas condições"². It immediately attracts attention that, rather than adopting the commonplace approach of representing the favela as a hellish space of chaos and criminality, Vinicius de Moraes places hell in the city and not on the hill. I will elaborate on this point next, in the context of antithetical pairs.

Returning to the paradigmatic elements of *Orfeu da Conceição*, perhaps what most stands out is the fact that it was the first play that took black actors to the stage of the Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro. The cast consisted of actors from Teatro Experimental do Negro and under the strict guidance of Vinicius himself, who also emphasizes in the play's introduction: "Todas as personagens da tragédia devem ser normalmente representadas por atores da raça negra."³

Vinicius' intention was not only to produce a work that gives a poetic dimension to the favela, even though this is the first impression left by the play. In *Orfeu da Conceição* he begins to reveal a certain social and critical dimension to his poetry, often obscured by poetry and loving songs, which were evident characteristics of the poet. This social and critical dimension will be more visible in some of his later poems, such as *Operário em Construção*. In the original program for the première of the play, the poet states:

O negro possui uma cultura própria e um temperamento *sui generis*, e embora integrado no complexo racial brasileiro, sempre manifestou a necessidade de seguir a trilha de sua própria cultura, prestando assim uma contribuição verdadeiramente pessoal à cultura brasileira em geral; aquela liberta dos preconceitos de cor, credo e classe. / Esta peça é, pois, uma homenagem do seu autor e empresário, e de cada um dos elementos que a montaram ao negro

² "As this is a play in which popular slang plays a very important role, and as popular slang is something that is constantly changing, representations should be adapted in line with new contexts." Author's translation.

³ "Every character in the tragedy should be played by black actors and actresses, only in special circumstances should the play be staged by a white company." Author's translation.

brasileiro, pelo muito que já deu ao Brasil mesmo nas condições mais precárias de existência (Moraes, 2003: 83).⁴

This quote would open an extremely profound discussion about the way Vinicius de Moraes saw the issue of race in Brazil. It should be noted, however, that for the historical context in which he wrote, the poet took significant steps to reflect carefully about racial issues by reinforcing that being black and living in a favela are synonymous in Brazil. Here, Vinicius de Moraes reveals how familiar he is with the Brazilian racial discourse of his time, claiming that to be black is to be “integrated in the racial complex” of the country. This sentence closely echoes the works of Gilberto Freyre, who, under the cover of integration, attenuates racial segregation, which continues to mark Brazilian society today.

A criticism, not without grounds, that is made of *Orfeu da Conceição* with regard to the racial issue, is that this piece is 'giving voice' to the black via a white, upper-middle class poet (even though in his 'Samba da Benção', de Moraes declares himself to be the “branco mais preto do Brasil”). In any case, more a concession than an acknowledgment of otherness, a simple repetition of subaltern structures that fit perfectly well with what I am calling antithetical pairs typical of Brazilian analyses. To follow the analysis I am proposing with this text, it is necessary to explain what I mean by antithetical pairs.

The paradigm of antithetical pairs in the analysis of Brazil

There seems to be a tendency in the social sciences and humanities in Brazil to build analytical structures based on the hermeneutical tool of antithetical pairs. My aim here is not to discuss this point in depth, but to simply signal to some of the specific antithetical pairs that have constituted a “school” and have been employed repeatedly in analytical procedures. Obviously, I am taking the risk of generalization, and the supercilious reader will probably ask the author of this text for better grounding. However, as I said, the point here is not to defend a theoretical thesis, but only to illuminate the reading that we propose of *Orfeu da Conceição*.

Returning to antithetical pairs, Gilberto Freyre serves as an important example. His studies, already known worldwide, make good use of this principle. Already in the titles of *Casa Grande e Senzala* and *Sobrados e Mocambos* we are presented with the paradigm of antithetical pairs. And it is based on these pairs that the sociologist will construct his

4 “The negro has a culture and a temperament all his own, and although he is integrated in the Brazilian racial complex, he has always manifested a need to follow the path of his own culture, in this way giving a truly personal contribution to Brazilian culture in general, which is free of racial, religious, or class-based prejudices. / This plays is a tribute, offered by the author and the producer, and by each person involved in its production, to Afro-Brazilian, for all they have given to Brazil even though they must face the most precarious conditions of existence.”

analysis of the formation of Brazilian society since colonial times. Another author, more contemporary, who uses this model of antithetical pairs is Roberto DaMatta, who articulates his analysis of Brazilian society based on the pair of *casa* and *rua*.

Along a similar vein, and perhaps more directly related to this text, we have the work of journalist Zuenir Ventura, who in 1994 published *Cidade Partida*, a book that has become a reference for studies on the urban space of Rio de Janeiro. In the book, Ventura explores a sociological concept that has been in vogue since the late 1950s, when it began to be used to analyze the socioeconomic structure of Rio de Janeiro as a place divided along two lines that would symbolically and factually separate not only neighborhoods, but social and cultural classes, with very limited dialogue and interaction. Thus, the antithetical pair of “*morro*” and “*asfalto*”, or “*favela*” and “*asfalto*” would emerge.

Although it has clear analytical potential, this paradigm carries a limitation, since it does not consider the dynamics of interactions in, urban spaces. In the specific case of the *favela-asfalto* pair, the limitation is more evident, considering the socioeconomic, cultural, and even geographical plurality of the city of Rio de Janeiro. However, for the historical context in which *Orfeu da Conceição*'s production and first presentation is located, this antithetical pair can be easily seen.

It does not seem that Vinicius de Moraes is the creator of the pair *favela-asfalto*, or *morro-cidade*, however the presence of this pair is what structures the play *Orfeu da Conceição* and, in a way, with the success of the play and its subsequent translation to cinema with the film by Camus, this representation was strengthened and solidified. Furthermore, it also seems that *Orfeu da Conceição* solidifies a certain mythogenesis of the favela as an idyllic hell, still so recurrent in the representation of favelas in Brazil.

Mitogenesis of the idyllic favela – the sources of *Orfeu da Conceição*

The fact that Vinicius de Moraes situated the favela as the space of Orpheus, of music and poetry, of harmony and love, in opposition to the city as a place of hell, sounds paradoxical, since it reverses the perverse representation of the favela as a hell. The favela scenario, described at the beginning of the play, is a good illustration:

O morro, a cavaleiro da cidade, cujas luzes brilham ao longe. Platô de terra com casario ao fundo, junto ao barranco, defendido, à esquerda, por pequena amurada de pedra, em semicírculo, da qual desce um lance de degraus. Noite de lua, estática, perfeita. No barranco de Orfeu, ao centro, bruxuleiam lamparinas. Ao levantar o pano, a cena é deserta. Depois de prolongado silêncio, começa-se a ouvir, distante, o som de um violão plangendo uma valsa que pouco a pouco se aproxima, num tocar divino, simples e direto como uma fala de amor.

The image is by no means critical or realistic. On the contrary, the romantic imagery employed do not describe a material poverty, but an almost bucolic picture. What can be verified, however, is that this idea of the idyllic favela is not originally from Vinicius de Moraes.

One of the most curious depictions of this idyllic favela can be found in the work of Stefan Zweig, *Brazil, land of the future*, published in 1942. In the chapter about Rio de Janeiro, and under the subheading of 'A few things which might be gone tomorrow', we find something which today might seem ironic:

Several of the unique things which make Rio so colourful and picturesque are actually in danger of passing, especially the favellas, the Negro villages, in the middle of the town. Will they still be there in a few years' time? (...) But there is no doubt that they are a specially bright spot of colour in the midst of this kaleidoscopic picture; and at least one of these bright spots should be preserved, if only because it represents a section of human nature surrounded by civilization (Zweig, 1941: 195).

And after describing the primitive life of favela residents, with all the hardships that poverty and segregation bequeath to them, Zweig concludes:

But, oddly enough, there is nothing depressing about this sight, nothing provocative, repulsive, or shameful-because these Negroes consider themselves a thousand times better off than does our proletariat in its tenement homes. Here, they live in their own houses, where they can do as they like; in the evenings one can hear them singing and laughing; they are their own masters. (...) Countless times I have climbed up those slippery clay steps into these Negro villages, and never once have I encountered an unfriendly or unhappy person (Zweig, 1941: 196-187).

In these representations there is a clear blindness to the real conditions of favela residents in the name of an idyllic image, of proximity to nature and harmony. On top of this, it presents an image of light, color, joy, music. It is interesting to note that one of the Portuguese translators of Stefan Zweig's work translated the original German "die Negerdörfer mitten in der Stadt" to "as zonas pobres em plena cidade" ("the poor areas in the middle of the city") which in the original in German is literally "the Negro villages, in the middle of the town", as the English translator put it. It seems that the translator simultaneously chose to mitigate the racial issue, as well as confirming what we call the synonym between racial and social issues in Brazil. Vinicius de Moraes' descriptions of the favelas are very close to Zweig's images, with clear optimism.

However, it is not only in literature that we see this idyllic representation of the favelas. Popular Brazilian music, too, is densely packed with such imagery. Without

exhaustive pretensions, I searched for recordings of sambas, marches, and other popular songs that preceded *Orfeu da Conceição* and I was surprised not only with the quantity, but with the variety of representations of the favela or the hill as a space of freedom, of joy, of love. Many of these representations do not hide poverty, misery, violence, or segregation, but instead insert it into this picture that I am calling an idyllic hell.

Let's start with *Favela*, from 1933, composed by Hekel Tavares and Joracy Camargo. In this song, the poverty of the favela, left behind, is lyrically sung and remains a place of longing.

No carnaval me lembro tanto da favela
Onde ela morava
Tudo o que eu tinha era
Uma esteira e uma panela
E ela gostava

Por isso eu ando pelas ruas da cidade
Vendo que a felicidade
Foi aquilo que passou
E a favela, que era minha e que era dela,
Só deixou muita saudade

Still under the name of *Favela*, the 1936 samba, composed by Roberto Martins and Waldemar Silva and immortalized through the voice of Sílvio Caldas, reproduces the same nostalgic image of life in the favela, as a place of happiness and music. The lyrics read as follows:

Favela oi, Favela,
Favela que trago
No meu coração .

Ao recordar com saudade,
A minha felicidade
Favela dos sonhos de amor
E do samba-canção.
(...)
Hoje tão longe de ti,
Se vejo a lua sorrir,
Eu relembro a batucada
E começo a chorar...

The theme of leaving the favela, the homesickness that this exodus causes, the association of this homesickness with the love and joy experienced there, are recurrent themes in the popular repertoires of the first half of the 20th century. There are practically no social criticisms and poverty is always portrayed as a possibility of happiness. The 1940 samba *Voltei pro morro*, composed by Vicente Paiva and Luiz Peixoto and recorded by Carmen Miranda is another example. In this samba, Carmen Miranda also refers to the favela as the birthplace of samba - another recurring theme -, the genre that made her famous around the world.

Voltei pro morro, onde está o meu moreno?
Chamem ele pro sereno,
porque se eu não me esbaldar eu morro!
Voltei pro morro, onde estão minhas chinelas?
Eu quero sambar com elas,
vendo as luzes da cidade!
Voltei, voltei, voltei!
Ai! Se eu não mato esta saudade eu morro
Voltei pro morro, voltei...!
Voltando ao berço do samba
que em outras terras cantei
pela luz que me alumia eu juro
que sem a nossa melodia e a cadência dos pandeiros
muitas vezes eu chorei, chorei
E eu também senti saudade quando este morro deixei
É por isso que eu voltei, voltei...!

Another classic of Brazilian popular music is *Ave Maria no Morro*, by Herivelto Martins, recorded in 1942. In this song one might find the genesis of *Orfeu da Conceição* because of the association between the height of the hill and its proximity to heaven. The song is bucolic. In its verses, nothing breaks the harmony of man with nature and this magical divine relationship.

Barracão de zinco
Sem telhado, sem pintura lá no morro
Barracão é bangalô
Lá não existe felicidade
De arranha-céu
Pois quem mora lá no morro
Já vive pertinho do céu

Tem alvorada, tem passarada ao alvorecer.
Sinfonia de pardais, anunciando o anoitecer.
E o morro inteiro no fim do dia
Reza uma prece
À Ave Maria

Pointing to the antithetical pair of city-favela, or *morro-asfalto*, is the samba *Saudosa Mangueira*, from 1942, by Herivelto Martins. Again, the theme of nostalgia for the favela is present. This time, what is longed for is the time before progress and development, which brings the notion of an age without evil, of balance and harmony. Again, this is a samba that closely echoes *Orfeu da Conceição*, both for its idyllic images and for the idea that a harmony was broken by the influence of the city. The samba says:

Tenho saudades da Mangueira
Daquele tempo em que eu batucava por lá
Tenho saudade do terreiro da escola
Eu sou do tempo do Cartola
Velha guarda o que é que há?
Eu sou do tempo em que malandro não descia
Mas a polícia no morro também não subia
Aí Mangueira, minha saudosa Mangueira
Depois que o progresso chegou
Tudo se transformou e a Mangueira mudou
Já não se samba mais a luz do lampião
E a cabrocha não vai pro terreiro de pé no chão

By Ari Barroso, the samba *Eu nasci no morro*, recorded in 1945, is another nostalgic lament for life in the favela. It is noted that the idea of leaving the favela, and living in the city, which could be a sign of economic improvement, of material progress, has always been associated with a fracture of order, of joy, of peace. Again, a reinforcement of the idyllic image.

Não tenho queixas da vida
Nem de ninguém que nasceu feliz
Pois cada um de nós, neste mundo,
Tem o destino que Deus lhe deu
Não adianta chorar, não adianta se revoltar
Eu nasci, no morro, num pobre barracão de caixão

Vida de cachorro, pé no chão, sem tostão
E depois, segui o meu caminho, eu sozinho.
Conheci o luxo, a vaidade, lá da cidade.
Meus amores não duravam mais que um dia.
Eu sofria, consolava o coração no meu violão.
Afinal, me convenci, lugar melhor, não encontrei.
No morro, eu nasci e no morro, eu morrerei.

Another classic in the popular Brazilian repertoire is the 1952 samba *Lata D'Água*, by Luiz Antônio and Jota Junior. In this samba, the social opposition between *morro* and *asfalto* is clear, as well as the symbolic delineation of the boundaries between these two universes.

Lata d'água na cabeça,
Lá vai Maria. Lá vai Maria:
Sobe o morro e não se cansa.
Pela mão leva a criança.
Lá vai Maria.
Maria, lava roupa lá no alto
Lutando pelo pão de cada dia,
Sonhando com a vida do asfalto
Que acaba onde o morro principia.

It is curious to compare this samba with the statement by Claude Lévi-Strauss, when he first visited Rio de Janeiro in 1935 and recorded his impressions in his 1955 book *Tristes tropiques*:

Peut-être l'urbanisme a-t-il maintenant résolu le problème, mais en 1935, à Rio, la place occupée par chacun dans la hiérarchie sociale se mesurait à l'altimètre: d'autant plus basse que le domicile était haut. Les miséreux vivaient perchés sur les mornes, dans les favellas où une population de noirs, vêtus de loques bien lessivées, inventaient sur la guitare ces mélodies alertes que, au temps du carnaval, descendraient des hauteurs et envahiraient la ville avec eux (Lévi-Strauss. 1955: p. 95).

Certainly by 1951, urbanism had not yet solved the social problem to which Lévi-Strauss referred, nor were Stefan Zweig's "*Negerdörfer*" disappearing: on the contrary, they were growing and increasing. This growth – which brought with it both racial and social segregation – created a *locus amoenus*, the kingdom of Orpheus, as it descended into chaos. The samba *Barracão* by Luiz Antonio and Oldemar Magalhães, originally recorded by

Heleninha Costa in 1953 but only achieving success with the voice of Elizeth Cardoso, sings of the poverty of the hill-dweller, personified by the *barracão*:

Vai, Barracão,
Pendurado no morro
E pedindo socorro
À cidade a teus pés.
Vai, Barracão,
Tua voz eu escuto,
Não te esqueço um minuto,
Porque sei que tu és
Barracão de zinco,
Tradição do meu país,
Barracão de zinco,
Pobretão infeliz.

A song that could easily figure in the imagery of the *Orfeu da Conceição* favela is the classic *Chão de Estrelas*, by Silvio Caldas and Orestes Barbosa, recorded in 1937. In this song we have all the arguments found in Vinicius de Moraes' play, obviously without reference to the classic myth. An atmosphere of harmony, music, love, even the poverty of the hill is undone by the disappearance of a beloved woman.

Minha vida era um palco iluminado
Eu vivia vestido de dourado
Palhaço das perdidas ilusões
Cheio dos guizos falsos da alegria
Andei cantando a minha fantasia
Entre as palmas febris dos corações
Meu barracão no morro do Salgueiro
Tinha o cantar alegre de um viveiro
Foste a sonoridade que acabou
E hoje, quando do sol, a claridade
Forra o meu barracão, sinto saudade
Da mulher pomba-rola que voou
Nossas roupas comuns dependuradas
Na corda, qual bandeiras agitadas
Pareciam estranho festival!
Festa dos nossos trapos coloridos
A mostrar que nos morros mal vestidos
É sempre feriado nacional

A porta do barraco era sem trinco
Mas a lua, furando o nosso zinco
Salpicava de estrelas nosso chão
Tu pisavas os astros, distraída,
Sem saber que a ventura desta vida
É a cabrocha, o luar e o violão

In the second act of *Orfeu da Conceição*, Orpheus is already mourning the loss of his beloved, and in the midst of his desperate search returns to the hill where his speech is almost a paraphrase of Silvio Caldas' song. The protagonist says:

É a madrugada, Eurídice. Lembra, querida, quantas madrugadas eu vi nascer no morro ao lado teu? Lembra, Eurídice, dos passarinhos que vinham aceitar o desafio do violão de Orfeu? Lembra do sol raiando sobre o nosso amor? (ergue os braços para a aurora) Eurídice, tu és a madrugada! A noite passou, a escuridão passou. Espera, minha Eurídice! Eu vou, me espera...

The last verses of *Chão de Estrelas* are in the core argument of *Orfeu da Conceição* and its lyrical tracks are visible throughout the piece. The idyllic hill is found in the balance of three mythical forces: women, moonlight, and music. In *Orfeu da Conceição* (the song) this is broken by the rupture of this triad with the disappearance of the woman and with her, the music. The order is broken, and this harmonic place becomes hellish.

Through this panoramic view of songs that predate the composition of *Orfeu da Conceição*, it has been possible to see that the theme of the antithetical pair of *favela-cidade* or *morro-asfalto* is not something unique or original of Vinicius de Moraes. What the poet does is to embody this vision in a dramatic organicity, thus contributing to what I call a mythogeny of an idyllic hell. After Orpheus' death, the hill that was once the space of purity and harmony arising from music and poetry, become chaotic, disordered, and infernal: an idyllic hell.

The last lines of the play, however, are not of conclusion, but of opening, and here emerges another paradigmatic aspect of *Orfeu da Conceição*. There is no acceptance of Orpheus' death as the victory of chaos over harmony, as an inevitable destination for the hill. This is how the play ends:

CORO
Juntaram-se a Mulher, a Morte a Lua
Para matar Orfeu, com tanta sorte
Que mataram Orfeu, a alma da rua
Orfeu, o generoso, Orfeu, o forte.

Porém as três não sabem de uma coisa:
Para matar Orfeu não basta a Morte.
Tudo morre que nasce e que viveu
Só não morre no mundo a voz de Orfeu.

Orpheus did not die

In fact, Orpheus' voice did not die. In 1959 the French director Marcel Camus, inspired by the play, and perhaps even more so by its music, launched the film *Orfeu Negro*, known in Brazil as *Orfeu no Carnaval*, in a co-production between Brazil, Italy, and France. The film was awarded at the Cannes Film Festival and also won the Oscar for best foreign film in 1960. With a plot quite different to that of the play on which it was based, the film was immediately a great success and its completely stylized vision solidifies the image of the idyllic hell.

Caetano Veloso, in his *Tropical Truth*, gives us a good perception of how the film was received in Brazil:

When *Orfeu do Carnaval* (known in English as *Black Orpheus*) opened, I was eighteen. I laughed along with the entire audience and together we were shamed by the shameless lack of authenticity the French film-maker had permitted himself for the sake of creating a fascinating piece of exoticism. [...] / Even today there is no end of narratives about foreigners (rock singers, first-rate novelist, French sociologists, budding actresses) discovering Brazil, all touched by Marcel Camus's unforgettable film (Veloso, 2003: 159).

Caetano synthesizes very well the perception generated by the film by Camus. A cinematographic masterpiece that will mark generations, but a distortion of a Brazilian socio-historical reality.

The final scene of the film is memorable. A child takes Orpheus' guitar after his death, and starts playing it, to make the sun rise. Accompanying the dawn, two other children begin to dance to the music of this new Orpheus.

In 1999, it is Carlos Diégues' turn to produce his film version of *Orfeu*, another descendant of Vinicius de Moraes and Camus. Again, the story is located in a Rio de Janeiro favela, but this time is no longer portrayed as an idyllic space. In the same frame of the antithetical pair, Diégues' favela is hellish and is in conflict with the asphalt. Violence, drug trafficking, deaths: this is the realm of *Orfeu* by Diégues, who tries with his music to reestablish some harmony, in a certain way contrary to Vinicius de Moraes' *Orfeu*. In Diégues' film, we do not have only black characters, as was the intention of Vinicius de

Moraes. This clearly demonstrates that Diégues' perception of the Brazilian racial and social framework is much more complex. The composer chosen by Diégues for the film's soundtrack was Caetano Veloso.

It is interesting to note Diégues' understanding of Vinicius de Moraes' work, so that one can also understand a little more about his choices for his Orpheus. The director says:

O paradoxo que Vinicius expõe e consolida em sua peça é que, sendo a favela uma vergonha social para o país, o resultado de um regime de exclusão que gera miséria, injustiça e violência, ela é também um tesouro cultural e de relações humanas que se renovam sempre, cada vez mais vivas. Esse tesouro precisa ser descoberto, estimulado e integrado ao conjunto da cultura brasileira (Diégues, 2003: 19).

Orpheus continues to die and be reborn in Brazilian favelas. Every day, many Orpheuses are victims the exclusionary regime that Diégues refers to. Perhaps if we start to see the Brazilian social context in a more dynamic way and not become so attached to reductionist dualisms, we will be able to notice that the favela is neither hell nor paradise. Imagining an idyllic hell through mythological paradoxes also leads us to reductionist perceptions. The circulation, the dialogue, the rupture with structures of subordination are the factors that will bring about the harmony of Orpheus' music.

In another partnership in 1963, Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes composed another treasure of Brazilian popular music, *O morro não tem vez*. Ten years after *Orfeu da Conceição*, the verses of this samba return to the motto of *Orfeu* and still resonate today, reminding us that it is not necessary to speak for the favela, nor to give a voice to it, but just to look at it as an agent and not a subordinate and subalternate. With that, perhaps Orpheus no longer has to die. The samba says:

O morro não tem vez
E o que ele fez já foi demais
Mas olhem bem vocês
Quando derem vez ao morro
Toda a cidade vai cantar
Morro pede passagem
O morro que se mostrar
Abram alas pro morro
Tamborim vai falar

Post Scriptum

On the 21st October 2016, during the Festival of Arts and Humanities at King's College London, I conducted a performance entitled '*Playing with Orpheus*' that sought to re-enact Vinicius de Moraes' *Orfeu da Conceição* in a cultural-anthropophagical way, including certain choruses from Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, capoeira and maracatu, and also involving the audience.

The main idea was to explore and articulate the dilemmas that the play raises, highlighted above. My concept was to avoid the framework of the antithetical pair of *morro-cidade*. There was no stage, properly speaking. Audience, musician,s and the singer were circularly distributed. The middle of the circle was the arena for the capoeira and the maracatu groups.

Playing with Orpheus did not follow the full libretto by Vinicius de Moraes, but was limited to the songs, a few monologues by Orpheus, and a Coryphaeus reciting some of her parts of the play, as well as a few choruses. Certain choruses from Monteverdi's opera were sung dramaturgically to connect acts and events that were presented by the songs. *Playing with Orpheus* was also the result of a great collaboration between many people that are passionate about Brazilian music and engaged in promoting the debate around racial and social issues in Brazil. The text was translated by Prof. David Treece, the role of Orpheus was performed by Dr. Felipe Botelho, and Coryphaeus by Prof. Ananya Kabir. The Leoa Rhythm Collective, directed by Alba Cabral and Tuca Milan, performed the Maracatu parts, while the Community of Practice and Studies of Capoeira Angola, led by Dr. Octavio Ferraz, performed the capoeira. The arrangements were by Stefan Metzger, for King's Brazil Ensemble, consisting of strings, guitar, percussion, trombone, flute and harp.⁵

Apparently, this was the first performance of *Orfeu da Conceição* in the UK. Possibly, it was not in the same way that Vinicius de Moraes conceived of his Orpheus, but it was definitely a proof of the vitality of the play and its relevance for Brazilian culture and music. It was also a proof that Vinicius de Moraes was right in the final verses of the play: "To kill Orpheus Death alone is not enough./ All that is born and has lived must die/ The voice of Orpheus alone will never leave this world."

⁵ More details about this production can be found at: <http://www.brazilinstitute.org/kbe/orpheus>

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