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Patrice Rankine
University of Richmond, prankine@richmond.edu

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From Anthropophagy to Allegory and Back: A Study of Classical Myth and the Brazilian Novel

Patrice Rankine

Let it be remembered that events narrated in this chronicle – full of veracity, albeit lacking in brilliance – took place during the worst years of the military dictatorship and the most rigid censorship of the press. There was a hidden reality, a secret country that didn't get into the news. The newsrooms of newspapers and radio and television stations found themselves restricted to covering generally unexpected events. Their editorial pages were reduced to unconditional praise for the system of government and those who governed.

Jorge Amado¹

In the epigraph above, the narrator of *The War of the Saints*, written by Jorge Leal Amado de Faria (Jorge Amado) in 1988, sets his narrative – ‘lacking in brilliance’ but filled (ostensibly) with the stuff of social and cultural narrative – against a backdrop of the ‘hidden reality’, the ‘secret country that didn’t even get into the news’. In the passage that follows the epigraph, the narrator goes on to elaborate on the ‘total prohibition of any reportage that carried the slightest allusion to the daily imprisonments, torture, political murders, and violation of human rights.’² Historical events under the regime remained outside of the official accounts of newspapers. The narrator of *The War of the Saints* seems to implicitly criticize journalists for their reportage of ‘recipes’, ‘poems, ballads, odes, sonnets by classical poets, and stanzas from *The Lusiads*’ (that is, from Luís Vaz de Camões’ 1572 Homeric-Virgilian epic of the Portuguese colonial conquests), and yet the narrative is no weightier, politically potent or consequential than those topics. In fact, given the repeated – though subtle – references to classical stories such as Theseus, or to figures like Aphrodite and Menelaus, the novel might be read in

epic terms alongside the Portuguese *The Lusíads*, rather than as an insignificant, quotidian tale. Nevertheless, as is the case with literature under many repressive regimes throughout history,³ the façade of myth and fairytale – the allegory – to some extent conceals the potential subversiveness of the material.

The War of the Saints privileges cultural over political accounts. At the same time, the third-person omniscient narrator's complaint masks the extent to which the cultural practices reveal a great deal about the military dictatorship and its aftermath. Herein lies the paradox of Amado's story. *The War of the Saints*, set approximately ten years before its publication, seemingly does no more to reveal the mysteries of the 'hidden reality' or 'secret country' where 'strikes, demonstrations, picketing, protests, mass movements, and guerrilla attacks' occur than would other books and articles published during the period, texts for which the narrator hints his disapproval. The story of the clash between the folk cultures 'on the ground', as it were, and the Catholic, national narrative of *ordo e progresso* – 'order and progress' – the slogan emblazoned in the globe on Brazil's flag – holds a key to the hidden, secret truth. The 'war' between local and national culture, or between culture and politics, itself occurs in the aftermath of the military regime, although Amado – somewhat uniquely – succeeded in advancing culture over politics even before 1989. Indeed, the difficulty of foregrounding political themes under the regime is one reason why classical myth was a primary mode of expression in the Brazilian novel before 1989: as an allegorical cover for real events.

The status of Brazilian public discourse in 1989 is apparent in the clash in *The War of the Saints*: a clash between, on the one side, the Yoruba goddess Yansan and the practices that celebrate her and other *orixás*, the African 'saints' that came to Brazil along with the slaves;⁴ and, on the other side, accepted, state-sanctioned, Catholic practices embodied in saints like Paul, Lazarus and Barbara. *The War of the Saints* has many of the features of other Brazilian novels written after 1989, such as J. G. Noll's *Hotel Atlantico* (1989), as well as *The Discovery of America by the Turks* (1994), another novel by Amado with which I am concerned in this essay.

Even before the military dictatorship that began in 1964,⁵ these features included an essentially apolitical narrative focus because Brazilian authoritarian rule has not historically been confined to the dictatorship, but arrived as early as the birth of the Republic in 1890.⁶ After 1964, however, military tactics became professionalized, everyday instances rather than exceptional or temporary responses to crises.

The second feature of Brazilian fiction after 1989, along with the continued apolitical nature of commercially successful books, is the retreat of classical myth

from monumental to multivalent status. The longer arch of twentieth-century Brazilian fiction helps to contextualize this claim. In 1922, Brazilian modernists declared anthropophagy (*omophagia*) as a literary mode during the Week of Modern Art; Oswald de Andrade's *Anthropophagia Manifesto* (1928) was one of the key documents to emerge. Brazilian artists would come to see the country, which was founded in 1500 in competition with native inhabitants who were mythically purported to eat the human flesh of their defeated enemies, as having a native artistic mode of consuming material from outside. Brazilians would become themselves by consuming the forms, stories and styles of expression of others. The blending of these was to be Brazil's unique contribution to humanity. Classical myth would be only one of many outside influences to be symbolically eaten. Between 1964 and 1989, however, there are several examples of its centrality in providing a cover for political and cultural discussion, ranging from Chico Buarque's *Gota de Água* (1975) to Marcel Camus' 1959 film, *Orfeu Negro* (revisited in 1999 through Carlos Diegues' *Orfeu*). This monumental classicism allowed culture to rise to the level of national politics, and Amado was bolder in his use of local cultural practices, such as African religious retentions in Brazil, over classical myth, although remnants of the classics remain.⁷ It is worth noting that many of Amado's more socialist-leaning novels were published prior to 1964.⁸ For writers working under the regime, such as Moacyr Scliar, the consumption of the Greco-Roman classics would seem at times wholesale rather than involve taking the form of an integration into the whole being that comes with anthropophagy. After 1989, Brazilian novelists do not abandon a diet of classical vitals, but the novels with which I am concerned here do appear to return to a deployment of classical myth alongside other cultural influences more like the pre-1964 model of anthropophagy.

If an apolitical narrative and the role of the classics in it were two features of the Brazilian novel, a third aspect that continues after 1989 – perhaps in heightened fashion – would be the degree to which the stories upset the conventions of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. The protagonists of the novels discussed in this chapter might each be called anti-heroes, or at least picaresque. This description applies to the hero of Scliar's *The Centaur in the Garden* (1980), whose animalistic nature leads him to infidelity and other foibles. The heroes of Amado's novels might be called misogynistic, and they project troublesome Brazilian norms in terms of their treatment of women. In the eyes of Amado's narrator, however, these characters are part of a moral environment in which virtue and vice are not opposites but are on a continuum. Amado points to another set of metaphysical realities, embodied in the African *orixás* and their human

manifestations, in which ethics do not map onto behaviour in expected ways. These metaphysical realities give rise to the African practices – folk forms that overturn the norms of the Catholic Church – to prevail in *The War of the Saints*.

The hero of the Brazilian narrative is Odyssean in the sense that he is on a journey towards an existential home. In truly American or New World fashion, the Brazilian hero is constantly attempting to establish a new life in an unprecedented environment, but the pull of the past is the god that threatens to unravel things. In the case of the centaur in Scliar's novel, the hero is part of an immigrant Jewish family who escaped the pogroms in Russia only to face ghettoization in the New World because of their otherness. After 1989, the picaresque hero is still present: the protagonist of Noll's *Hotel Atlantico* wanders somewhat aimlessly throughout Brazil pursuing his career as an actor. In some regards, it might be argued that the hero of *The War of the Saints* is the African goddess Yansan, who arrives in Brazil in many forms as early as 1500. The narrator of *The Discovery of America by the Turks*, meanwhile, offers a story of exploration of America that is as yet untold: that of the arrival of 'Turks' in the early 1900s. There is a heightened sense of freedom in the post-1989 novels, but the question remains: freedom to do or to be what?

Historical Background: The Brazilian Military Dictatorship and 1989

Repressive political regimes in twentieth-century Brazil, both before the dictatorship and after, needed strong ideology to impose their rule. In *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won*, Kim Butler characterizes the rise of Brazilian modernity and its political ideology in the following way:

The choice of the word 'progress' in the Republican national motto reflects the roots of the Brazilian elite in the scientific ideology of the nineteenth century, steeped in the philosophical traditions of the Enlightenment, Darwinism, and Positivism. Darwinist science had also introduced the notions of biological and environmental determinism, both of which has serious negative implications for a tropical nation whose population was largely descended from what were believed to be lesser races.⁹

In place of indigenous and pre-modern cultures, Brazilian modernity would ostensibly offer the 'scientific ideology' generated by nineteenth-century industrialization and progressive thinking. Native Americans and slaves were

not modern selves, as the observations of such writers as Louis Agassiz made clear in his 1895 *Journey to Brazil*. Nevertheless, Agassiz and others would impose the Enlightenment thinking, Darwinism and Positivism of the time upon them. As the stereotype went, tropical peoples might be primitive, but their quaint cultural contributions – which early twentieth-century Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, educated in America at Columbia University under Franz Boas, celebrated – added to the national culture.¹⁰

Butler shows the ways that this discourse, present before and after the dictatorship, helped shape Brazilian culture for former slaves. As Butler puts it, ‘the poorer states and the military were not the only groups dissatisfied with the Republic. There was little opportunity for meaningful political involvement by the middle and lower classes, the illiterate, women, workers – in general, people without economic power.’¹¹ Various forms of repression emerged.¹² The regime repressed labour movements,¹³ and the repression of cultural, political and ideological difference can be felt in Butler’s poignant assertion that during the early Republic, ‘the mere fact of being Afro-Brazilian was, by extension, antipatriotic.’¹⁴ Ethnicity was accepted because it made Brazil unique, but only to the extent that the regime could tolerate it.¹⁵ The African retentions that, by the early twenty-first century, would draw tourists from all over the world to Brazil, were heavily repressed in the period leading into the military dictatorship and during its height. Names that would come to be known worldwide as Brazilian cultural icons – Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Chico Buarque – were inimical to the regime. As the narrator puts it in *The War of the Saints*, ‘they were the top names in *tropicalismo*, a musical movement to which seditious movements had been attributed by the dictatorship, stamped as degenerate, criminal, subversive art.’¹⁶ In the novel, a staged carnival celebration that a French director films in Pelourinho, a popular historic district in Salvador, clearly echoes Marcel Camus’ Oscar-winning film and the controversy surrounding it: the controversial idea of a foreigner trading on Brazilian culture; questions of what is Brazilian, given that *Orfeu Negro* might in some arguments be called a French film; and the role of artists and citizens of African descent in the movie, particularly since it was shot in the poor ghettos or *favelas* of Brazil and capitalizes on the poverty in those neighborhoods to point up a narrative of the ‘noble savage.’¹⁷ These markers of identity were prevalent before the rise of the military dictatorship; they were secondary to a national, political and economic identity during the regime, and after 1989, they reemerge.

It is worth noting, therefore, the extent to which aspects of the repressive framework of twentieth-century Brazilian politics shifted after 1989. The first, to

recapitulate, was the lack of opportunity for former slaves, for the lower classes, or even for labour, ironically, to make progress. The regime had celebrated the ‘integrated theory of natural sciences’,¹⁸ which set Europe in Hegelian dialectic against its primitive counterparts: indigenous Americans, Africans and other non-European groups. In contrast, sublimated phenomena return after 1989, as can be seen in the role of the supernatural. While ‘God played no role’ under the scientific enlightenment,¹⁹ gods certainly would proliferate not only in the pantheon of Yoruba culture, as in *The War of the Saints*, but also in practices that emerge from outside of Europe, such as Islam, evident in *The Discovery of America by the Turks*. The narrator of *The War of the Saints* invokes the violence, torture, and oppression of the military regime. Hundreds of people disappeared, and bodies were dismembered to hide the atrocities.²⁰

Classical Myth as Allegory for Cultural Expression in Brazilian Literature before 1989: *The Centaur in the Garden*

... in a new society there is room for everyone, even someone with horses’ hooves.

Moacyr Scliar, *The Centaur in the Garden*, 45

Moacyr Scliar’s *The Centaur in the Garden* is emblematic of the interaction between national identity – ‘order and progress’ – and its subcultures under the military dictatorship. Similar to the post-1989 works I have discussed, Scliar’s novel is, on the surface, apolitical. Nevertheless, Scliar recognizes that writing is in itself essentially a political act.²¹ Unlike Amado and Noll’s novels, however, classical myth in *The Centaur in the Garden* predominates over other cultural forms, just as we have seen in other literary genres of the period. The anti-hero in this case is a centaur, and his adventure is a quest for normalcy despite the pressures that difference causes. The protagonist Guedali’s optimism that ‘in a new society there is room for everyone’ is somewhat misplaced, notwithstanding what seems to be measured optimism regarding Brazil on the part of his creator.²²

Classical myth is an opaque rather than transparent way to deal with difference, which in this case is Jewish identity. It becomes evident early on in the novel that the classical, mythological character of the centaur is analogous to Jewish – and immigrant – identity.²³ The narrator’s father, Leon Tartakovsky, ‘saw the Russian Jews living happily in faraway regions in South America; he saw

cultivated fields, modest but comfortable homes, agricultural schools' (9). In other words, the hope of advancement in the New World, that the richness of the land sustains life, calls the family to Brazil, a place that promises a 'new society' of progress, opportunity and equal treatment under the law. Guedali's family is agricultural, but the city provides the greatest opportunities for assimilation. Differences remain, however, even in the urban centres of the New World. The myths that hound Jews in Russia follow them to Brazil:

During the Revolution of 1923 tales were told of a mysterious creature, half man and half horse, who would invade the Legalist camps at night, grab a poor young recruit, take him to the riverbank and cut off his head.

(26)

Guedali recognizes that he is implicated in all of these stories. He is a centaur, and as a Jew, he is seen as different, grotesque and other. Classical myth opaquely covers the difference and allows exploration of the implications of otherness. Guedali's Jewishness is aligned with guilt: of the stories he hears of Jews in Russia who are rumoured to be centaurs, he claims, 'It wasn't me. I wasn't born until later' (26). Yet, at the same time, his mother gave birth to him, 'an herbaceous creature' (11); at his birth, the midwife 'understands that I need green stuff, and mixes finely chopped lettuce leaves in with the milk' (11).²⁴

In place of the reality of cultural difference is the cover of myth on the one hand, and the positivism of science on the other. Enlightened thinking is ostensibly everywhere a factor in the translation of the Greek myths of centaurs into the modern frame. Genetics, for example, are a feature in the narrative. Guedali's sister does not show the signs of being a centaur (that is, a Jew) because of dominant and recessive genes. While Guedali spends his early years concealing his identity as a centaur, his sister marries a 'lawyer from Curitiba' (48).²⁵ Later in the narrative, Guedali's son is born. There is no indication of his being a centaur: 'Nature was unkind to you, but you have struggled and won' (122). In contrast to his sister, Guedali learns early on that difference is not rewarded in the Brazil of the early twentieth century because cultural difference is thought to stand in the way of national economic progress. The Brazilian nation competes on an international front, but innovation still seems to come from outside. Guedali travels to Spain, where surgical advancements enable the removal of visible signs of his difference (93). (Spain is a curious site of otherness, given its own dictatorship, but space here will not allow for speculation.) Within this framework, remnants of Brazilian cultural lore seem shameful and backwards. The farmer Zeca Fagundes' stories of the women on his ranch having sex with

sheep parallels Freyre's stories of the Portuguese and black Africans (69).²⁶ It is not accidental that during this period Guedali meets his first blacks, a *rara avis* in a city like Curitiba (58). These are the differences that at the beginning of the twentieth century are said to mark Brazilian identity; under the dictatorship, they will be carefully managed.

Given the apolitical nature of the narrative, the political backdrop of those years at times peeks out in curious ways.²⁷ How the narrator marks time is noteworthy, 'the Revolution of 1923' (above) being an example already present in the family's years in the Old World. In Brazil, Guedali uses the national narrative as a benchmark for his own experiences, but he goes no further in commenting on the political realities. Dating his time in the circus as a young man to the 1930s, he comments that 'I must have passed through São Borja about the time they were burying President Gertúlio Vargas. Of course at the time I knew nothing at all of these matters. I only galloped on' (67). This brings us to the 1950s. The narrative is told in retrospect, once the narrator has shed external signs of his difference. (Hooves remain, but special shoes that Guedali obtained in Spain allow him to 'pass' as fully human.) Thus the events told in it primarily precede the military dictatorship and take place during the period of the Republic. When the narrative does turn to the dictatorship, the incursion of politics into the cultural realm is evident: 'Everyone was discussing the political situation – it was 1964' (131). Politics intrude on the business plans of Guedali and his upwardly mobile friends, who are building a development: 'two days before the actual construction was to begin, President João Goulart was overthrown' (136). Despite the severance of culture from politics, something rings hollow with the assertion that 'in the new society there is room for everyone'. It is difficult to believe the narrator's retrospective assertion: 'Yes, I can tell everything' (5).

The mixed narrative resolution of *The Centaur in the Garden* hints at the dissatisfaction – the *saudade* or 'longing', accompanied by sadness, that becomes part of Brazilian cultural expression – with a culture primarily severed from the political realm. Guedali is able to assimilate, in the end: 'Our appearance is absolutely normal' (1). Nevertheless, psychological torment is at least in part the reason for Guedali's dalliance with the wife of one of his upwardly mobile friends, one of the young, urban leftists that they befriend (110).²⁸ Even though the surgery in Spain to hide his difference is successful, Guedali and his wife, Tita, cannot escape the memory of difference (107). Guedali's love for Tita cannot be normal, given that he is a centaur: 'Although she doesn't say anything, we know that deep down she considers our relationship something grotesque, even sinful' (78). Tita's pain remains: 'I'm dead, Guedali, dead' (125).²⁹

His 'Jewish paranoia' persists, despite the fact that he keeps telling himself that 'Everything is all right now' (4). The narrator ultimately juxtaposes the notion that in the new society there is room for everyone with the Marxism that fuels the neoliberal nation. Although Marx admired the Elgin Marbles and classical mythology (44), he recognized religion as the opiate of the people. The myth of the centaur reveals that *difference* (being visibly other), and not religion, is actually the opiate.

Brazilian Novels after 1989: *Hotel Atlantico* (1989)

One reviewer of J. G. Noll's *Hotel Atlantico*, Richard A. Preto-Rodas, writes of the novel that 'one can hardly imagine a less "Brazilian" work amid such alienation and solitude, where even the climate is generally presented as unbearably dank and gray'.³⁰ Indeed Preto-Rodas rightly juxtaposes perceptions of Brazilian culture – as full of life, joyous, hopeful – with the bleak, aimless environment of Noll's narrative. Notwithstanding the cultural repression of the military regime, Brazilians remained a hopeful and joyous people, and the image that the country projected internationally was one of joy, *alegria*. The message of the regime, moreover, was that of a racial paradise, a place of 'order and progress'. Accepted cultural forms closely monitored by the regime give a sense of pluralism, and classical myth provided an acceptable analogue for allegory and opposition, as we have seen in *The Centaur in the Garden*.

Even with the anti-hero as a persistent aspect of the Brazilian novel, Noll's protagonist is especially morbid. The nameless narrator, a washed-up actor from soap operas, whom people recognize from television but who has done nothing substantial since his younger years, meets one defeat after another. Even his unexpected trysts are horrifying and end sadly. Lisa Shaw links this narrative to the absurd reality projected in Brazil's *telenovelas*, the television serial dramas prevalent throughout Latin America.³¹ The protagonist faces defeat at every turn, despite his resilience.

The narrative opens with the character checking into a hotel where someone has just been murdered; at the end of the book he is in the hotel after which the novel is named. In between, he is on trains, cars, buses and in a hospital. The prevalence of public spaces in the narrative is ironic, given the apolitical nature of the novel.³² Whereas *The Centaur in the Garden* uses the military dictatorship as a backdrop against which the narrative takes place, time in *Hotel Atlantico* is disjointed and without contemporary markers. In one of the protagonist's

attempts to flee a foe, imagined or real, his means of escape also moves the imagination out of the present: 'I picked up a book to calm myself down. It was a bestseller set during the Second World War. I read the first page, and then looked around: the man with the dark glasses had left the bookshop. I went back to my book, relieved' (21). Although he is often confused about where his wanderings are taking him, in his book he reads about a British spy, who 'begins the story by going into a church in Paris, and in this church he thanks God for the grace of living in a time when it is clear who it is that one must fight against: the enemy' (22). In contrast to the Catholic British spy, the protagonist does not know against whom he is fighting. Prior to this, he has met an American woman who, leaving behind a broken marriage, has come to Brazil in search of pre-Columbian civilizations. Although the protagonist and his new travel companion clearly connect – they hold hands on the bus as night falls after a day of conversation – he discovers that she is numbing the pain of her life with barbiturates (20). The protagonist puts his book down to see that a crowd has gathered around the bus, as the woman has overdosed and is dead. Given that he was the last person seen with her, he runs from the scene, afraid he will be suspected of her murder.

These kinds of mishaps make up the entire novel. In the opening hotel scene, the protagonist draws the desk clerk into his room and has sex with her (10), but any fantasy of pursuing a fulfilling relationship falls flat because of the narrator's ongoing existential crisis (11–12). The reader later learns of the narrator's earlier marriage and his infertility, which led his wife to leave him (92–95). Some time after, he consummates a relationship with a traveling actress, Amanda ('lovable one'), a young mother whom he chooses exclusively over a potential *ménage à trois* (82–87). Amanda eventually leaves him to continue her travels. Later, Amanda's daughter Cris returns, now in her late teens (106). The potential of an inappropriate romantic relationship with Cris is a constant undercurrent (e.g. 114, 117, 132), but the narrator in fact poses as Cris' father and guides her toward a successful acting career.

If classical myth was the central trope in *The Centaur in the Garden*, classical analogues have retreated to the background in *Hotel Atlantico*. They are still present, but they are more of an integrated aspect of the environment than allegorical. It might be argued that the status of classical myth has returned to its early twentieth-century modernist form, that of organic consumption and anthropophagy. A few examples should suffice. Early in the novel, after the woman has died on the bus, the protagonist runs away from the scene and is able to hitch a ride to Santa Catarina with a man called Nelson, who is soon to marry

his fiancée there. Nelson is the protagonist's 'ferryman across one more river' (27), the novel's equivalent of classical mythology's ferryman, Charon, who guides the souls of the dead across the River Styx. The reference heightens the sense of danger for the knowing reader, but even without it the narrator's 'relief' is misplaced. Indeed, it soon becomes clear that something is amiss with Nelson and his friend, although it is never revealed exactly what. The protagonist believes he overhears the men insisting that he must be killed since he has witnessed (or suspects) some crime. Once again, he takes flight from the situation.

The reference to the ferryman is consistent with other classical fixtures in the novel. They are sparse and not necessarily fixed. In a later passage, the narrator's distress at his lover Amanda's departure leads to a description that calls to mind the plague from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. Giving himself over to emptiness, he does little but sunbathe, and he imagines himself as a sad child in a photo. The resultant sunburn brings on an existential sickness similar to the plague:

At first, when I came around, all burnt and cut, I had full view of a queue on a huge open stretch of ground, that's right, an enormous queue of people with a suppliant look in their eyes, in rags, some with wounds like me, wrecks of people, children were leaping about over imaginary obstacles, a shrill gibberish issuing from their mouths that none of the adults seemed to have any will to contemplate, for it was this children's activity that attracted my attention most strikingly.

(88)

The narrator's description of the plague-like scene sparks the nostalgic recollection of childhood, 'the little coloured kid in the print from my childhood' who smiled and made him smile: 'I decided to give that smiling a go too, a manic smile, smiling at everything and nothing' (87). In this case as in others, classical myth figures for cultural experiences that are at once collective and personal. Oedipus the child is exposed and thus might not have experienced the childhood bliss to which the depressed protagonist hearkens back. The child suppliants in the Oedipal vignette overwhelm the narrator's psyche: 'I don't know, that nonsensical activity of the children, that running about, that fitful shouting while this grave sometimes descends upon mankind, that was what attracted me, helped me come out of my stupor' (88). The children buoy him up. The narrative in some ways rights the wrong of the Oedipus story by introducing the *Sehnsucht nach Kindheit*, the pristine moment of childhood to which all can return but Oedipus. In a different way from *The Centaur in the Garden*, *Hotel Atlantico*

fragments the classical presence so that it is never whole, never overwhelms the timeless, placeless and aimless narrative.

The War of the Saints (1993)

The narrative of *Hotel Atlantico* is without many cultural markers. As Preto-Rodas indicates, the novel is not particularly ‘Brazilian’; in some regards, the existential narrative could have taken place at any place or at any time. This is not the case with *The War of the Saints*, however, a narrative that depends on cultural experiences repressed in the main prior to 1989. The novel is ostensibly about Adalgisa and Manela and ‘a few other descendants of the love between the Spaniard Francisco Romero Pérez y Pérez and Andreza da Anunciação’. These two characters are in fact part of a much larger ensemble of inhabitants of Salvador da Bahia, and the love between the Spaniard and the Brazilian unearths the deep cultural miscegenation – and the inherent conflicts in it – that the regime coopts under the guise of ‘order and progress’. The occasion that sets in motion the story of Adalgisa and Manela – and all of the other stories in the novel – is the arrival to Brazil of a statue of Santa Barbara Yansan, herself a melange of a Yoruba *orixá* (Yansan) and Catholic saint (Barbara). Because of Yansan’s link to erotic love, Amado also invokes Aphrodite as a mythic parallel. In the novel, a German monk, Dom Maximiliano, who serves as director of the Museum of Sacred Art in Salvador, has written an important book on the statue: ‘He’d developed a breathtakingly daring thesis concerning the origin and the artist of this famed piece of religious sculpture’ (3). Maximiliano and others await the arrival of the statue, but the plot shifts when the statue disappears right from the outset of the novel. Journalists, one of whom has a longstanding opposition to Maximiliano, feed on the fodder of the statue’s disappearance, a plotline that elicits the narrator’s lament about the emptiness of the news during the years of the dictatorship (already tackled in the epigraph). In truth, however, the statue is not missing; in an instance of magical realism, Santa Barbara Yansan has wandered off to spend time with her flock, the people of Salvador.

Although for Amado classical myth is a feature of the narrative, he is more interested in Yansan as a cultural artifact. The narrator weaves classical myth into his twisting tale that is ‘intricate and multiple, as are the places and times where the yarn of life unrolls’ (90). The yarn analogy is natural and does not have to immediately call to mind the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, where the

thread that Ariadne gives the hero enables him to escape the labyrinth after slaughtering the bull. The narrator picks up on the analogy, however, on 'the day before the scheduled opening of the exhibit of religious art', when 'events began to pile up, to bump into each other, apparently disconnected, rendering the existing entanglement all the more confusing, a veritable labyrinth' (112). The story is of a collective, not of one particular individual; of a culture that emerges 'from the depths of the slave quarters' (5).

Although there are many strands to the narrative, the main plots involve the repressed Adalgisa and her niece, Manela, whom she tries to raise with similar Catholic rigidity after the girl's parents die in an accident; Dom Maximiliano, the expert on the statue, whose already precarious reputation hinges on its return; and a priest who is in love with Paulina, one of the dancers involved in the staged carnival. Adalgisa believes that her Catholicism precludes the enjoyment of certain aspects of life, whereas the worship of Yansan calls for the incorporation of all fleshly and spiritual experiences. Adalgisa's unhappy marriage is figured in classical terms as the worship of Hymen (152). The painful and unpleasant loss of her virginity parallels the near crucifixion of Dom Maximiliano because of the disappearance of the statue of Yansan. Vulgate Latin marks his imminent demise: *consummatum est*, 'it is finished', the words of Christ on the cross, which Maximiliano now applies to himself. The hybridity, syncretism and miscegenation evident in the tales run counter to at least one character's beliefs, those of Dom Rudolph, who asserts that it was most urgent 'to separate the wheat from the chaff, good from evil, and white from black, to impose limits, to draw boundaries' (67). Rudolph advances a view of cultural purity that would mean the separation of Aphrodite from Yansan, but the narrator is well aware of the overlaps between the two and the reality of cultural syncretism. Yansan is so real and present that the statue in fact comes to life. Morphing from statue to spirit, she inhabits the body of Adalgisa, who has previously been sexually cold. Through Yansan, Adalgisa learns that the all things are good even though she previously scorned the Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé*.

Given the parallels between the personal repression of characters and the repressiveness of the regime under which they lived, it is no wonder that the climax of the novel is figured in military terms, as a battle. As the book builds up to the clash, we learn of an array of forces on the side of cultural hybridity, with not only Adalgisa but in all 'six Yansans had appeared at the *caruru* in the market in the lower city, all of them fatally beautiful' (314). On the side of Catholicism and the moral homogeneity and rectitude that it seems to promote in the novel, the narrator hints at the failure of the Church to address the needs of the poor,

the politically oppressed, and those who were emblematic of difference (blacks, women) in Brazil during the dictatorship.³³

In the end, all parties learn their lesson. Adalgisa embraces the nature of Yansan. Dom Maximiliano is absolved with the return of the statue. And the priest learns that renouncing marriage might not necessarily mean renouncing sex and physical love – such is the *jeito* or the ‘style’ of Brazilian anti-heroes and their narrative resolutions. Yansan returns to her form as a statue and relieves Dom Maximiliano of certain doom. Her triumph in the *Battle of the Saints* marks the victory of hybridity over cultural nationalism, and even to some extent the real over the symbolic. At the same time, the presence of the supernatural is ever a factor in Amado’s novels. Within this context, classical myth is still present, although it retreats from a dominant place to that of one of many possibilities.

The Discovery of America by the Turks (1994)

As its title makes clear, the book opens with the surprising revelation that America was discovered by the Turks. Previous accounts, it is suggested, are contentious: ‘The Spaniards parry with other papers, other testimonials, so who’ll ever know who’s right? Certificates have been falsified; testimonials have been bought with vile metal’ (18). Behind the facetious comments of the narrator is the reality that cultural narratives themselves are constructed, such that those who come after can seldom ‘know who’s right’. Dominant narratives of conquest, such as that of the Spanish and Portuguese, repress other stories. The tale of the Turks is one such narrative. The reader soon discovers that this is not a serious narrative of war and conquest. The pursuit of God, gold and glory, in this case, serves little national or collective function. The story is of Raduan Murad, ‘a fugitive from justice for vagrancy and gambling’, and Jamil Bichara, a Syrian merchant. Jamil seeks a sexual conquest, that of marrying Adma, the unattractive daughter of a successful storeowner, having been persuaded by Raduan that she will elevate his status and wealth.³⁴ While Jamil seeks to serve Allah and gain wealth, the Devil is at work to undo all good works:

None of the characters gathered at the bar, at the whorehouse on the upper floor of the living quarters could have guessed that all that talking and activity was part of the scheme put together by Shaitan, the Islamic devil.

(41–42)

Classical myth plays little active part in the narrative, although there are passing references throughout. Jamil, for example, knows that Allah watches over him when he 'met and gathered to his bosom the capricious Jove, a wild and lusty half-breed' (27). This woman is the lover of a colonel, Anuar Maron, who 'had set up a house for Jove'. When Jamil sleeps with the whore – who for all intents and purposes belongs to Anuar Maron – the colonel looks the other way, as it were. The analogy of a woman from the red-light district with the king of the gods conveys an irony characteristic of Brazilian literature, the profundity of which requires an astute reader. In another passage, Adma is referred to as a *virago*, which recalls the sanctified treatment of virginity in *The War of the Saints*. The Catholic Church preserves a reverence for the virgin that is paralleled in the classical context; names like Procópio recall the naming of slaves after the classical fashion. Outside of these passing references, however, there is not much that is recognizable from classical myth, yet Classics remains integrated into the narrative in the style of the modernist anthropophagy.

What is present is the sovereignty of the narrator, who like a bard is able to weave together a story from all the material available and choose its outcome. Since Raduan Murad had told the story of Adma's virginity and her wealth to both Jamil and a bartender, these men are, comically, in competition for an ugly woman, each unbeknownst to the other. As the narrator puts it, 'the rest fell to God to do, and he did it with magnificence, skill, and speed, as everyone can attest' (75). The bartender accidentally bumps into the girl and beats Jamil to the altar. Whenever Raduan Murad told the story, the 'real and the magical limits of the story of Adma's nuptials, called his listeners' attention to the well-known circumstance that God is a Brazilian' (84).

To conclude, 1989 is not an arbitrary date for a shift in the Brazilian novel, but it is also not conclusive. In some ways, Amado had been a cultural champion before 1989 and had even already gained notoriety at the margins of the Brazilian regime by 1964. Many features of his novels – the piecemeal consumption of many narrative influences, the adventure, the picaresque hero – are present in Noll's *Hotel Atlantico*. Yet these aspects were a factor even before 1989. For *The Centaur in the Garden*, culture – being a centaur – more than religion, was a counter to the regime. But for Amado, irrational aspects of culture, those seemingly running counter to positivism and progress, which he saw in Brazilian Afro-descendent practices, lessened his need for the allegories that classical myth provided Scliar. After 1989, at least in the novels surveyed here, the Classics retreat entirely to the background, consumed and incorporated along with other influences.

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