

## ***Primeval Rhapsody* and Dionysus: An Interface between the Narrative and the Myth**

Brunilda T. REICHMANN\*, Paulo Roberto PELLISSARI\*\*

\*Graduate School at Uniandrade, PR, Brazil

E-mail: brunilda9977@gmail.com

\*\* Universidade Positivo and Universidade Tuiuti, PR, Brazil

E-mail: ppellissari@positivo.com.br

### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the Dionysian energy unleashed in the novel *Primeval Rhapsody* (*Lavoura Arcaica*, 1975), written by the Brazilian author Raduan Nassar. It also makes reference to the homonymous film by Luiz Fernando Carvalho (2001), a creative adaptation of the novel. The novel and the film establish a dialogical relationship with *The Birth of Tragedy*, by Friedrich Nietzsche and the myth of Dionysus, which are used as critical perspectives for the discussion of the Dionysian energy present in the works, focusing mainly on Ana's two dances during the family celebrations of a Lebanese community in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, occasions when the members of the community tend to exceed limits. The protagonist-narrator André and his silent sister Ana, a sensuous dancer, both display frenzied, orgiastic traits. In some passages, the novel also foregrounds the mother's excess of affection and unequivocal preference for her son André. In others, André's father, the patriarch with his rigid personality "befuddled with wine" – the Dionysian drink – becomes the target of the unbridled fluency and chaotic verbosity of the protagonist-narrator.

**Keywords:** *Brazilian novel. Dionysian energy. Friedrich Nietzsche*

*It was against morality that my instinct turned with this questionable book, long ago; it was an instinct that aligned itself with life and discovered for itself a fundamentally opposite doctrine and valuation of life – purely artistic and anti-Christian. What to call it? [...] In the name of a Greek god: I call it Dionysian.*

(Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*)

In *The Birth of Tragedy* ([1872] 2007), Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, suggests that in the dance

[...] something never before experienced struggles for utterance [...] we need a new world of symbols and the entire symbolism of the body is called into play, not the mere symbolism of the lips, face, and speech, but the whole pantomime of dance, forcing every member into rhythmic movement" (2000:40).

This passage reverberates through time and space as one reads about Ana's dances in Raduan Nassar's novel *Primeval Rhapsody* (*Lavoura arcaica*, [1975] 2006.) Both are recounted by the character André: the first, describe to his brother Pedro in a run-down boarding house; and the second, after the narrator returns home, as he observes the

impetuosity of his sister moving in the center of a dancing circle at a party in his honor. Ana is silent throughout the narrative, thereby circumscribing the silence that governs women in a profoundly patriarchal society. But Ana is granted sensual movements in the dance, a thrill which makes speaking, in a final analysis, completely unnecessary.

Continuing the passage quoted above, Nietzsche argues:

Then the other symbolic powers suddenly press forward, particularly those of music, in rhythmic, dynamics, and harmony. To grasp this collective release of all the symbolic powers, man must have already attained that height of self-abnegation which seeks to express itself symbolically through all these powers... (2000, 40-41).

Ana expresses herself symbolically in those forces; she releases her soul from herself and all that surrounds her, except for André, achieving her full force. It is through the dance – the gestures – that Ana externalizes her sensuality, her sexuality, her rebellion against the family's values and her audacity of being.

### **Raduan Nassar's novel and Dionysian drunkenness**

*Primeval Rhapsody* is a fictional hybrid text that mixes prose and poetry offering the reader a dense poetic narrative. It also undermines the traditional narrative as well as the expectations of the conventional reader by creating a narrative with vestiges of sacred, archaic, and secular texts. It is a writing that is juxtaposed to other writings or superposed by them. *Primeval Rhapsody* is really a palimpsest – having its 'eyes and ears' directed towards the Bible, towards the *Talmud*, towards the Arabic tales, and to mythology, offering the reader a woven text or a dense, wordy texture. Some of these traces are easily recognizable. Others become objects of research as they might not be a part of the reader's repertoire or of his or her culture. Amongst these one can find Dionysian power, a reference that is ultimately realized in the narrative.

Echoes from the *Bible* and from the "Parable of the Prodigal Son," from the *Talmud*, and from Greco-Roman mythology enable Nassar to undo fundamental elements of Judeo-Christian culture, such as the dimension and the power of the patriarch, the prohibition of incest, and the imperative of work. For this purpose, the author mainly uses the tense, transgressive narrative 'created' by André, the second male child and fifth child in the family, whose fragmented, convulsive, and apparently chaotic character is extended throughout the text, and whose narrative lays bare, in an instinctive manner, the story of his family who live in a small country town in the state of São Paulo.

The novel is divided into 30 chapters that make up two parts, entitled "A Partida" ("The Departure") and "O Retorno" ("The Return") respectively. The first part, which takes up almost three quarters of the novel and covers André's childhood and youth, consists of his exacerbated, subversive, transgressing oral narrative, 'the departure' being simply one of a series of memories evoked. The second part is an account of two days that begin with André's return trip and end with the party in his honor held the next day.

Until the end of the first part, André finds himself in a room in a run-down boarding house in São Paulo. He begins his narrative steeped in wine, describing the moments before and after the arrival of his elder brother, Pedro, the family messenger. The narrative is woven with daydreaming, recollections – amongst them Ana's dance – silence, the father's ostentatious sermons, the mother's excessive affection – in short, fragments of the past. It is in this first part that André struggles with his past history:

possessed by the need to talk, to tell, to rid himself of his painful memories. André tries to convince his brother that:

[...] "**it doesn't matter if we drink**", I yelled, transfigured, a transfiguration which should have taken place long before at home "I'm an epileptic" I burst out, convulsed more than ever by the violent flow coursing through my veins "an epileptic" I screamed and sobbed inside myself, knowing that I was casting a supreme adventure on the ground, scraping the flesh from my palms, smashing the jug of my old identity [...] (Nassar, 2006, 39, our translation and emphasis)

André's frenzied narrative in the boarding house room, sometimes restrained and sometimes uncontrolled and full of paroxysms, occurs under the tremor of drunkenness by wine, an essentially Dionysian element. But before moving on to the universe of Dionysian drunkenness present in *Primeval Rhapsody*, let us take a look at the essence of the myth of Dionysus.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche returns to his interest in Dionysus, a mythological Greek god who breaks the barriers of repression and preaches liberation through any means of drunkenness, even a drunkenness of insanity. In his book, the philosopher examines the Apollinian and its opposite or counterpart, the Dionysian, as artistic powers. These manifestations, without the artists' mediation, burst forth from nature itself, and its

nature's art impulses are satisfied in the most immediate and direct way – first in the **image world of dreams**, whose completeness is not dependent upon the intellectual attitude or the artistic culture of any single being; and then as **intoxicated reality** which likewise does not heed the single unit, but even seeks to destroy the individual and redeem him by a mystic feeling of oneness. (Nietzsche, 2000, 38, our emphasis)

Dionysus, in Greek mythology, or Bacchus, his correlative in Roman mythology, represents the divinity related to fertility, nature, the forces of the earth; he is the god of the vineyards, of wine, and mystical delirium. Dionysus is the son of the union of Zeus and Semele, the personification of the Earth in all its springtime magnificence.

From a symbolic point of view, the god of *mania* and orgies represents the breaking of inhibitions and repressions. Dionysus symbolizes the dark forces that emerge from the unconscious, being a divinity who presides over the liberation brought about by **drunkenness**, by all forms of drunkenness, who possesses those who drink, which takes hold of the multitudes who are dragged along by their **fascination for dancing and music** and even the **drunkenness of insanity** with which the god punishes those who disrespect his worship. In this way, Dionysus portrays the forces of dissolution of the personality: the primordial, chaotic forces of life, brought on by orgy and the submersion of consciousness in the magma of the unconscious. (Oliveira, C., 2007, our translation and emphasis)

This Dionysian essence is brought as close to us as possible, as can be seen in the passage above, by the analogy with drunkenness. The atmosphere of narcotic drunkenness, which all past peoples tell of in their hymns, and the powerful approximation to springtime, to impregnate all of nature with happiness, are also the substratum that 'disturbs' the universe that governs the family in *Primeval Rhapsody*. In the ancient world of Rome and even in Babylon, the cult of the god Dionysus encouraged feasts with dissolute drunkenness, orgiastic dances, and unrestrained sexual license, which outweighed the family life of the local inhabitants. In *Primeval Rhapsody*, André is a narrator who finds the ideal elixir for his delirium in wine: "and there, by the table, all I was sure of was having my enraged eyes fixed on the rosé wine

that I was pouring into the glasses [...] occurring to me that it would be good to take advantage of the rest of my drunkenness” (Nassar, 2006, 14-16, our translation).

André’s narrative, with his brother as the listener and reticent interlocutor, is impelled by an unbridled fluency, an apparently chaotic verbosity, an uncontrollable impetus to talk as if he had to ‘burst’, as if some barrier had been broken and the explosion of the words were to flood an area otherwise subject to contention. While his brother is the expression of restraint, André is the expression of excess. In his compulsion to express himself, he reveals to Pedro the incestuous relationship he has had with his youngest sister, Ana:

"It was Ana, it was Ana, Pedro, my hunger was Ana", I suddenly blurted out in a moment of exaltation, ejecting my ripe, pestilent pus in a single violent gush, "Ana was my sickness, my madness, my breath, my blade, my shiver, the torment of my testicles" I shouted with my mouth wide open, exposing the texture of my uncontrolled tongue, indifferent to the guard hidden between my teeth, sprinkling clots of blood [...] (Nassar, 2006, 107-108, our translation)

Just as André’s words are unleashed by drunkenness, Iohána, André’s father, apparently restrained, seems to show sentiments that are not part of his day-to-day personality at these wine-soaked parties. In *Primeval Rhapsody*’s accounts of daily life, the authoritarian, suppressed character of the father is clearly seen. However, while he is established as a preacher of sermons by delivering a Biblical discourse at the table, the father seems to preach more to himself and to drown his own nature than do anything to the contrary. André reveals in his torrential discourse that “**the wine had moistened his solemnity** [the father’s], the joy in my father’s eyes, surer than that **not everything in the ship rots in the hold**” (Nassar 2006, 30, our translation and emphasis). One might possibly find the seed of André’s Dionysian ferocity in the father.

André’s mother, considered by the narrator to be the origin of the family’s destruction, has her place to the left of the father at the family table, followed by André, Ana and Lula, the characters who “carry the stigma of a scar” (Nassar 2006, 154, our translation). The narrator considers the mother an anomaly, a morbid protuberance just like all those to the left, “a maybe fatal grafting on the trunk, with its overload of affection” (Nassar 2006, 155, our translation). According to André, the mother plays a major role in the fall of the family because of her excessive affection. Perhaps this is because she raised her children, especially André, with intense love in an environment where male authority and order ruled. The mother also, like André, shows that she bears the stigma of having a “drunken sensitivity.” Ana and Lula are no different, and are also the *gauches* of the family, but the nature of the younger brothers and sisters is only evident at the end of the narrative. With regard to being a *gauche*, Sabrina Sedlmeyer (1997) writes:

This *gauche* that haunts contemporary Brazilian literature assumes another profile in *Primeval Rhapsody*. It is no longer a question of modernist ideology – the revolutionary son who goes against the dogmas set by tradition – but rather the son who, besides taking hold of the whole grains of the foundation, grinds them, swallows them, then spits them out, in an enraged utterance, on the venerable wood, the material that time cannot corrode, but which the son’s words are capable of defiling. (89, our translation)

Pedro, André’s elder brother, who takes the first seat at the table on the right side of the father, is the beginning of the branch that naturally develops from the patriarch. On entering the boarding-house room and hugging André, he feels the weight of the family in his brother’s arms, the full grains of the paternal foundation. Pedro arrives as a

somber herald, verbalizing the drenched load of maternal love, but representing the father and the grandfather's strength: "in order to fulfill the sublime mission, Pedro already rehearses the first steps towards taking the patriarch's place. There are no longer big differences between them: they both represent power within the family, power that aims to ensure cleanliness, decency, order and luminosity / or clarification" (Rodrigues, 2006, 29, our translation).

Pedro, the firstborn son, being the bearer of the family's affection and zeal, attempts to convince André to return home, declaring "we love you very much, – what do you think? we love you very much", only to immediately afterwards resume his role as representing patriarchal order by demanding "[...] Why are the blinds open?", [...] and ordering his brother: "Button your shirt, André" (Nassar, 2006, 10, our translation). He behaves as a repressive double when confirming his father's words that the family's decency and modesty do not tolerate nudity.

Through André's recollection, his father's discourse is present once again in words in the boarding-house room

[...] The unity of the family is what puts the finish on our principles; and, from time to time, between more urgent activities, each should sit down on a bench, set one foot firmly on the ground, bend his back, place his elbow on his knee and then, resting his chin on the back of his hand, with calm eyes watch the movement of the sun and the rain and the winds, and with those same calm eyes follow the mysterious handling of other tools which time skillfully uses in its transformations, never questioning its impenetrable, tortuous designs, just as one never questions the twisting paths that cross the flat plains, worn by hooves: for the cattle always go to the trough [...] (Nassar, 2006, 60, our translation)

The older brother's words reveal what the firstborn has come for: to rule over the unruled, providing an antidote for the 'epileptic'. But André wishes to transform Pedro into a messenger of his truth, in his delirious narratives to his family.

[...] "**it doesn't matter if we drink**", I yelled, transfigured, a transfiguration which should have taken place long before at home "I'm an epileptic" [...] "**go back home now** and make that revelation, **go back now** and you will see that the doors and the windows of the home will slam shut with the force of the wind and that you, the men of the family, carrying our father's heavy tool box, will go around the outside of the house wearing hoods, violently hammering and nailing boards in the form of a cross over the windows, and that our sisters, with their Mediterranean temperaments and dressed in black, will run fluttering around the house in mourning in a chorus of howls, sobs and sighs in that familiar penitential dance and a flock of handkerchiefs covering their faces, and weeping and exhausted they will fall down in a heap in a corner and you **shout** even louder '**our brother is an epileptic, he's possessed**' [...]" (Nassar, 2006, 39-40, our translation and emphasis)

In the film *Lavoura arcaica* (Luis Fernando Carvalho, 2001), the *voice-over* narrative at this moment is combined with composite images, creating one of the most complex sequences of the production. While André narrates the above text we see a projection in which the fragmented images are superimposed over the character's intense movements. While the women inside the house repeatedly chant "He carries the demon in his body," the men on the outside rapidly nail panels over the windows and doors to prevent evil from coming in. The oblique angles, the multi-faceted encasements, the fogginess of the images, and the endless repetition of the same lines destabilize the viewer's perception of 'reality' and cause him to enter an insecure and chaotic universe, to be possessed by a fear of imminent evil.

## Ana's First Dance

This last quotation from the novel shows how André, already Dionysian by his own drunken sensitivity, must have wine in order to give vent to the instinctive forces that have come to govern his very existence, getting rid of the last ties that bind him to conventions and the patriarchal values governing his home. The recollection of Ana's dance is motivated by Pedro's comment about André's departure: "the more structured it is [the family], the more violent its fall, the strength and happiness of a family can disappear with a single blow" (Nassar, 2006, 26, our translation). Suddenly André's mind is overwhelmed by memories of the preparations for the dance, the laughter of the group of girls and boys:

[...] I went back in my imagination to those fine Sundays when our relations from town would go to the country taking more friends, and it was in the woods behind the house, under the tallest trees that made a gentle, joyful play of light and shade with the sun, after the smell of roast meat had faded away amidst the leaves of the densest treetops, that was when the tablecloth was gathered up from the soft grass and I could watch from a distance, half-concealed against the trunk of a tree, the bustle of preparations **for the dance**, the excited movements of that group **of boys and girls** (Nassar, 2006, 28-29, our translation)

And his sisters become part of the group preparing for the dance, the men arm in arm closing the circle as if intending to restrain the joy and sensuousness of the girls who will dance within.

[...] among them my sisters with their rustic ways and their thin light dresses, full of promises of love suspended in the purity of a greater love, running gracefully, **filling the woods with laughter**, taking baskets of fruit to where the tablecloth had been laid out, melons and watermelons cut up with **joyful cries**, grapes and oranges picked from the orchard, all lush in baskets arranged in the middle of the space to suggest the motif for the dance, and that happiness was sublime with the sunlight squeezing down between the leaves and branches, sometimes pouring into the calm shade through a porous beam of divine light that reverberated intensely on those damp faces, **and the circle of men forming first**, my father with his sleeves rolled up rounding up the younger ones, flexing their sturdy arms, locking their fingers firmly together, creating a solid circle around the fruit, as clearly outlined as if they were the rim of an oxcart wheel [...] (Nassar, 2006, 29, our translation and emphasis)

The music that leads the movements of the dance comes from a flute that is played by an immigrant uncle, his cheeks swelling from blowing and red from the wine. The sound begins slowly as if the musician is practicing playing the melody, then becomes faster, wilder, more vibrant, taking over and enchanting the woods and inviting Ana to go into the center of the circle:

[...] then **my old uncle**, an old immigrant but a shepherd in his childhood, would take out his **flute**, a delicate stalk in his heavy hands, and begin to blow it **like a bird**, his cheeks swelling like a child's, and they swelled so much, so much, and his face was so red that you had the impression all the wine would come gushing out of his ears [...] **until the flute was suddenly flying, enchanted, cutting through the trees, skipping through the flowers in the meadows, and the circle, now vibrant, would be going round faster**, no longer the wheel of an oxcart but the great wheel of a mill, turning swiftly in one direction, and at the sound of the flute as it picked up again turning on its axis, and the older ones watching and the girls waiting for their turn all clapping their hands, reinforcing the new rhythm [...] (Nassar, 2006, 28, our translation and emphasis)

The flute plays a magical role in the literature and culture of many peoples. In Indian literature, it is used in reference to Krishna who, according to the Bhagavata –

Purana, is a flautist god and “When he plays the flute the whole world brightens up in sympathy: rivers stop, rocks shine, lotuses tremble, gazelles, cows and birds go into ecstasy: demons and ascetics are fascinated” (Porto, 2007, our translation). In ancient Greek culture, when the god Pan, in love with the Syrinx, returned to the bottom of the river, he made a bamboo flute to express his sadness (Porto, 2007, our translation). In the Dionysian rites, “the god [Dionysus] transformed the oars of the vessel into a serpent, filled the boat with ivy and caused countless invisible flutes to play” (Kury, 2003, 110, our translation). In *Primeval Rhapsody*, the flute also carries suggestions of being an enchanted instrument. The Lebanese dancers flow with the melody that moves them and, in turn, drive the flute’s fast rhythm with their movements and the strong stamping of their feet on the ground.

Ana, stirred into impetuous action by the sound of the flute that sweeps through the woods, enters the circle – a mythical figure of completeness, of the infinite: God’s closed eye. In going to the center, Ana becomes the center of the circle – God’s open eye, or his opposite: the symbol of Satan. In dealing with symbols and their meanings, Oliveira, E. (2007) says: “The circle represents the planet Earth as Satan’s realm. The dots are the men, instruments at the service of the realm” (our translation). André, some way off, leans against a tree, intoxicated by Ana’s movements, and surrenders to the inevitable telluric pleasure – which is nothing more than the return to the maternal womb and the anticipation of the pleasure of knowing Ana, in the Biblical sense of the word. Hence Nassar creates André’s narrative of his encounter with the feminine principle represented by Ana:

[...] and before long, **Ana, impatient, impetuous, with her** country girl’s body and a red flower like a clot of blood holding her loose black hair to one side, that sister of mine who, like me, more than anyone else in the house, **carried the plague in her body, would break from** the circle that was dancing and soon I could guess her precise gypsy steps moving in the middle of the wheel, skillfully making curving movements amongst the fruit and flowers in the baskets, barely touching the ground with her bare feet, her arms raised above her head snaking **to the thrill of the flute**, slower, more undulating, her graceful hands turning in the air above her, her whole being full of a wild elegance, her melodious fingers snapping as though they were the original castanets (Nassar, 2006, 30-31, our translation and emphasis)

After Ana enters the circle, repressed energy seems to get loose when people start clapping more wildly and moving faster, encouraging the young girl to dance:

and the circle swinging around her faster and faster, more frenzied, the clapping of those outside the circle becoming hotter and stronger, and she growing wilder now, magnetizing everyone, **would suddenly snatch the white handkerchief from the pocket of one of the boys**, waving it high over her head as she swayed like a serpent, she knew how to do things, that sister of mine, at first keeping her venom out of sight under her tongue and then biting the grapes that hung in clusters swollen with saliva while she danced in the middle of everybody, making life more turbulent, stirring up pains, drawing forth cries of exaltation, then in a strange language the simple verses would start to be intoned, almost like a chant, by the rising voices of the oldest ones, while a lively younger cousin, carried along by the excitement, would get two saucepan lids and bang them together [...] (Nassar, 2006, 31-32, our translation and emphasis)

In this apparently family celebration, festivity is permitted in the patriarch’s realm, and the narrator, outside of the circle, observes as his father is carried away in excess, his sobriety and austerity softened by wine. But André is mainly observing Ana.

Overcome with desire, hungering to get close to his sister, André yearns to possess the earth and be possessed by it:

[...] and at this contagious sound it seemed that the geese and ducks had flown from the lake to join them all there in the woods, **and I could imagine, after the wine had moistened his solemnity, the happiness in my father's eyes more certain than that not everything on a ship rots in the hold**, and sitting on a tree root in a shadier corner of the wood I let the breeze that drifted through the trees penetrate my shirt and swell my chest, and on my brow I could feel the free caress of my hair, **and in that apparently relaxed posture I could imagine from afar the fresh skin of her face with the scent of lavender, her mouth a sweet orange segment, full of affection, with mystery and venom in her date-like eyes**, and my gaze could not control itself, I would untie my shoes, take off my socks, and with my clean white feet move aside the dry leaves to get at the layer of thick soil beneath, and **my uncontrolled desire was to dig into the ground with my toenails, lie in that grave and cover myself completely with the wet earth [...]** (Nassar, 2006, 28-31, our translation and emphasis)

## Becoming Man and Woman

André, with his excessive, manic narrative, is relating to the breaking down of the discursive contention of his father's sermons, the majority of which consist of bits of sacred texts, transforming them into transgressive discourses, acts of rebellion against the values of a patriarchal society marked by austerity, impositions, and prohibitions. Following André along the path of rebellion are Ana and Lula, the younger brother who has decided to leave home, just as André did.

We come back to the moment when André feels as if he were the 'prophet' of his own story. Undermining the narrative of the building of the temple by Jesus, André recalls the moment when he feels the flow of life for the first time.

[...] for the first time I felt the **flow of life**, with its strong smell of fish, and the bird flying overhead drew a bold white line in my thought, from inertia to eternal movement; and scarcely out of the water of my sleep but already feeling the hooves of a strong galloping animal, blinded by so much light I am seventeen years of age my health is perfect and **on this rock I will build my private church**, the church for my use, the church that I will attend barefoot and naked, unclothed as I came into the world, and a lot was happening to me because **at one moment I felt as if I were the prophet of my own history [...]** (Nassar, 2006, 87, our translation and emphasis)

It is on this occasion that André finds the courage to rebel against the repetitive authoritarian discourse of his father on patience being the greatest of all virtues "[...] I simply clenched my fist, raised my hand and decreed: impatience also has its rights" (Nassar, 2006, 88, our translation). We don't know if this sentence is actually spoken by André in the novel. It probably is not. In the film, however, this is the moment when André shows that he is sick to death of his father's words, that he has reached his limit, rebelling against them and abandoning his place at the family table. Ana shows her rebellion and audacity in her movements and actions: when she dances and when she surrenders to André. As we said earlier, she does not utter a single word in the novel, but we can see it in her through the way André, as the narrator, sees her.

In the film, Carvalho uses a passage from "Menina a caminho" ("Girl on her Way"), a short story by Nassar, to suggest a parallel scene for the moment when André feels the flow of life for the first time. In the scene in the film, Ana observes her body in great shock at the moment she becomes a woman. In the bathroom, she gets a small mirror, hanging high above the washbasin, and puts it on the floor; touching her genitals



she squats over the mirror, bringing up the palm of her hand covered with vaginal blood. The character in the short story suggests the following ritual:

In the bathroom the girl gets up from the toilet, her eyes fixed on her father's shaving mirror, with a cheap frame like one of those pictures of saints. She pulls the box, climbs up on it, unhooks the mirror from the wall and places it on the cement floor. She squats over the mirror as if she was on a potty, with her panties in one hands, and looks uncomprehendingly at her framed vagina. She slowly caresses it with the tip of her finger, her eyes filled with astonishment [...] (Nassar, 2002, 49, our translation and emphasis)

This discovery that she is a woman, which is not included in the novel, becomes in the film a mirror image of the flow of life that André feels at the age of seventeen, once again bringing to the fore the color red, an emblem of Ana's passionate nature. The color red is connected to Ana in other forms both in the book and the film: by the red flower that holds her loose black hair and is described as a "clot of blood" in the narrative of the two dances, by her mouth splotched with red lipstick and by the red wine that she spills all over her body in the last dance. These red images emerge as apocalyptic symbols of the narrative as well.

### Ana's Last Dance

In the second part, following up on the narrative that begins with the arrival of Pedro, André agrees to be taken back home by his brother. The narrative includes a brief recollection of one of his father's sermons, the reunion with the family, a conversation with his father, hugging his mother, talking with Lula and touching him, a party in honor of the return of the 'prodigal son', and Ana's last dance, with its Dionysian excitement, followed by her death. A large part of the description of events that precede the dance is identical to the earlier passage with the exception of the verb tense. In the first passage, the narrator uses the imperfect tense, and in so doing suggests the 'eternal return'; in the description of the second, final dance, almost identical to the first (long passages that we will not repeat in the quotation below), he uses the past simple, a time which has already been, is finished. The narrator will no longer see Ana entering a circle of dancers moving her feet frenetically, tossing the white handkerchief snatched from one of the boys, and spilling red wine all over her body. In the last dance, Ana resembles the 'bacchantes', followers of the god Dionysus. Just like them, Ana is covered with adornments, in this case the 'trinkets' that André kept in a box, and that had belonged to prostitutes. "The bacchantes formed a group of followers of Dionysus (Bacchus), with spotted deer hides thrown over their shoulders and their waists girded with serpents, reaching the highest level of Bacchic perfection, while ignoring any type of moral repression" (*The bacchantes*, 2007, our translation).

The description of Ana's last dance suggests the same frenetic delirium as the Bacchantes' and the repudiation of any type of repression. It also marks the moments that precede the tragedy:

[...] it was then that the tablecloth was gathered up from the soft grass and I could watch from afar, half-concealed against the trunk of a tree, the bustle of preparations for the dance [...] and when I least expected it, **Ana** (who everyone thought was still in the chapel) **appeared impatiently like a gust of wind**, her loose hair sprinkling lava, lightly held to one side by a clot of blood (what provocative asymmetry!) her whole being flaunting an exuberant brooch, a greasy smudge for a mouth, a beauty mark of charcoal above her chin, a purple velvet choker tight around her neck, a limp cloth falling like a flower from her

gaping bosom, bracelets on her arms, rings on her fingers, and more rings around her ankles, **that was how Ana, covered with worldly trinkets from my box, took my party by storm, cutting through the circle of dancers with the plague in her body, flaunting her insolent decadence, with great self-confidence** (Nassar, 2006, 186-188, our translation and emphasis)

This is Ana's *grand finale*, the last scene of her tragedy. This second and last dance gathers the moments in her process of becoming a woman, a woman determined to show, as she dances, the bolder and overpowering energy of her being.

there in the middle of everyone, quelling the looks of shock, suspending their gasps, paralyzing their gestures for an instant, but dominating everyone **with her violent impetus of life**, and I could guess, in spite of the grease that suddenly darkened my eyes, her precise gypsy steps in the middle of the circle [...] **Ana, ever bolder, more daring, invented a new refinement by stretching out her arm and, with calculated grace (what a versatile demon!), snatched the glass from someone in the circle, slowly spilling the wine over her bare shoulders, forcing the flute to suddenly slow down**, drawing an ovation from those around her, the dull voice of a chorus that was both sacred and profane as it arose, the confused communion of happiness, desire and torment; she knew how to shock, **that sister of mine, she knew how to moisten her dance, to soak her flesh** [...] (Nassar, 2006, 188-189, our translation and emphasis)

The descriptions of Ana's first and last dances are mirror images. There are no limits in her last dance, however. The circle breaks up – as if God were looking on or Satan breaking the contention delimited by the line of the circle – before Ana's impetuosity and the women's attempt to restrain her frenzy. In ignoring any attempt to control her, Ana reveals the impetuousness of her desire for André. He feels as if his arms and legs were amputated and separate from his body, in search of a possible union that he will find when he once again becomes one with Ana. Heedless of everything and everyone, with the exception of André, Ana scarcely imagines the destiny that awaits her:

[...] **that sister of mine, she knew how to moisten her dance wet, to soak her flesh**, to chastise my tongue in the liturgical honey of that comb, mercilessly casting me into a strange **drunkenness**, leaving me convulsive and expectant, making me see with shocking lucidity **my legs to one side, my arms to another, all my amputated limbs searching for themselves in the former unity of my body** (I put myself back together in that search! What sourness in my wounds, what healthful burning in my transports!), **I was more certain than ever that it was for me, and me alone that she was dancing** (how time can turn things around! What a bone, what a poisonous spine, what glory for my body [...]) (Nassar, 2006, 188-189, our translation and emphasis)

This reference on André's part to the dismembering of his body refers to the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, and corroborates the idea that André carries within him the heart of another Dionysus, in other words that he is the 'heir' and not the origin of the Dionysian traces in the family:

Dionysus Zagreus, called the "first Dionysus" in the Orphic mysteries, was the son of Zeus, who, in the form of a serpent, had intercourse with Persephone, with the intention of leaving their son as the ruler of the world. In fear of Hera's jealousy, Zeus delivered the newborn Zagreus to Apollo and to the Curetes, who raised him on Mount Parnassus. In the meantime, Hera discovered the hiding-place and authorized the Titans to go and find him. Zagreus tried to escape by transforming himself into a bull and other creatures, but the Titans cut him to pieces and devoured him; only his heart was saved, taken out by the Titan Pallas, and some insignificant pieces collected and buried by Apollo close to the tripod of the temple of Delphos. Persevering in his intention, Zeus ordered Semele to swallow the

boy's heart, causing her to conceive the "second Dionysus". (Tales and legend, our translation and emphasis)

André's dismemberment before the audacious dancer has an imagistic parallel in the first scenes of the film, when in a *close-up* take, at an oblique angle, and with a *plongée* camera – focusing on part of his face, his eyes, unkempt beard, beaked nose, the pores of his skin, his protruding ribs, his mouth open to free the air passages for his panting and his orgasmic moan – André is introduced to the viewer who, on the one hand, is unable to identify him or his solitary act, but enters into a state of dramatic anticipation, due to the intensity of imagistic and sonar 'invasions' until the climax and resolution of the scene.

In the film, feeding sheep in the field, Ana is the daughter who is the most distant from the father's house. This distance from the house, in a way, justifies the fact that the family does not notice her absence when she goes to meet André. The other daughters, Rosa, Zuleika and Huda, help their mother in household chores. By going to meet André at the old house, Ana takes the first steps towards the great Judeo-Christian transgression. In the first dance, Ana targets André and seems to dance for him, but she approaches the old house where André is waiting for her very cautiously and with great reticence. Lying on the bed of hay that André made, Ana looks unconscious. The scene seems to indicate that Ana will remain passive, as if indifferent to her brother's caresses. But this is not what ensues. Ana is suggestive: she begins to move her hand after being caressed by André's, suggesting that her movement expresses her desire. After having sexual intercourse with André, Ana, contrite of heart, runs to the chapel and ends up repudiating him when he tries to convince her to live out their forbidden love.

From the night of André's return to the time of the party, he does not see Ana. The other sisters say she is in the chapel. Seeking refuge in the chapel seems to indicate that there, where she had once rejected her brother in the past, she begins to not only accept being her brother's 'woman' but takes into her own hands the destiny that unites them. André only sees Ana next day, when she enters the circle of dancers, adorned with the trinkets taken from the prostitutes. As André says, she knows about things and her behavior leaves it quite clear that she has not only accepted the proposal André had made in the chapel, but also that nothing will stop her from carrying out her dream. Ana, unlike André, does not tear down the paternal discourse through apparently disjointed speech, but she tears it down throughout the narrative by her absolute silence and, during the dance, by the audacity of her movements. No one and nothing will stop her from being her brother's woman. Her declaration of surrender is engraved in every one of her wine soaked pores, a prime element of Bacchus (Dionysus) and the Bacchantes.

As mentioned above, at parties the paternal austerity and abstinence imposed by the family is set aside. During the last dance, observing Ana's audacity and unable to control his pain, Pedro runs to his father, who is already "befuddled with wine", and quickly tells him what is going on between her and André:

[...] and I, on that hidden path, hardly noticed at first what was happening, **I vaguely saw Pedro**, who up till then had seemed withdrawn, searching wild-eyed in all directions, stepping blindly through the magnetized people in that market – **the flute raving frantically**, the serpent raving in her very belly, **and standing up I saw my brother almost go out of his mind when he found my father, dashing towards him, grasping his arm, yanking it, shaking him by the shoulders, bellowing forth a somber revelation, sewing an insane seed in his ears, it was such a painful wound, it was the cry, it was his pain that festered (poor brother!),** and so that fate could run its course,

time, playing with refinement, dug in its heels: corrupt breezes drifted comfortably hither and thither, drying the atmosphere as they went, stripping our trees, leaving parched traces in the green fields, staining our bulging rocks with rust, prematurely reserving places for towers of cacti to rise up in majestic solitude [...], (Nassar, 2006, 189-190, our translation and emphasis)

In Euripides' *The Bacchantes*, Agave, Pentheus' mother, disturbed by the Bacchian essence and by the clamor of Dionysus, cries: "Youths, I bring you he who hurled mockery at us and at me and my rituals. Punish him!" (Euripides, 1998, 90, our translation). It is suggested that the branch of the tree that Pentheus climbed to have a better look be broken and the 'savage' destroyed, in order to preserve the secret of the dances dedicated to the god. The first one to start the ritual of quartering is the mother, who falls on her son in frenetic delirium. He strips off the garments concealing him and screams in an attempt to say that he is the son she gave birth to in Equion palace. Foaming at the mouth and rolling her eyes in all directions, unable to think clearly, Agave grabs her son's left forearm and dislocates the shoulder, not by her own force, but by the adroitness that the god has infused in her hands, and tears it into pieces, screaming, seeing in him a young lion in disgrace (Euripides, 1998, 91-92).

Just as in *The Bacchantes*, the patriarch in *Primeval Rhapsody*, possessed by wrath, loosened by the wine, and moved by the inner voices of tradition, 'slaughters the beast', who is also the fruit of his loins.

[...] my father's noble brow, he **himself still damp with wine**, shone for an instant in the warm light of the sun while his whole face suddenly turned a dreadful white, and from that point on, all the reins broke, the lightning was unleashed with a deadly speed: **the saber was within reach of his hand and, cleaving through the group with the gust of his rage, with a single blow my father struck down the oriental dancer** (what ominous red, what hollow silence, what vile coldness in my eyes!), it would not have had the same gravity if a sheep had caught fire, or if any other member of the flock had become enraged, but it was the patriarch himself, wounded in his precepts, who had been possessed by divine fury (poor father!), it was the guide, the solemn tablet, the law that was aflame, that fibrous material, tangible, so concrete, it was not just bare bones as I had thought, but had substance, wine ran through it, it was bloody, resinous, reigning drastically over our pains (poor family of ours, prisoners of such consistent ghosts!), and from the mournful silence that fell after that gesture there emerged first, as with a birth, a primitive moan. (Nassar, 2006, 190-191, our translation and emphasis)

*Primeval Rhapsody* presents in an emphatic way, through André and Ana, what Nietzsche affirms in *The Birth of Tragedy*: "It was against morality that my instinct turned with this questionable book, long ago; it was an instinct that aligned itself with life and discovered for itself a fundamentally opposite doctrine and valuation of life – purely artistic and *anti-Christian*. What to call it? [...] In the name of a Greek god: I call it Dionysian" (Nietzsche, 2000, 24). This is André's and Ana's philosophy of life in *Primeval Rhapsody*. But, contrary to the pro-life instinct, the patriarch of the family arises and immobilizes Ana, who has chosen movement as her only form of expression – the "oriental dancer", the bacchant, who with her dance and drunkenness worships her god. It is as if Agave – the leader of the Bacchantes, worshipper of Dionysus and slayer of her son – hands the lethal blade to Ana's father in an emblematic paradoxical gesture of destruction of Dionysus. André-Dionysus, to whom Ana's dance is dedicated, paralyzed by the tragedy, witnesses, at that moment, the scene of Ana's slaying with "vile coldness" in his eyes.

## References

1. Carvalho, Luis Fernando. *Lavoura arcaica*. LFC Produções e VideoFilmes, 2001.
2. Carvalho, Luis Fernando. *Sobre o filme Lavoura arcaica*. Cotia: Ateliê Editorial, 2002.
3. *Contos e lendas*. downloaded from the site: <http://contoselendas.blogspot.com/2005/01/dionisio.html>, consulted on November 9 2007.
4. Euripides. *As bacantes*. downloaded from the site: <http://educaterra.terra.com.br/Voltaire/cultura/bacantes.htm>, consulted on September 14 2007.
5. Eurípides. *As bacantes*. Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira (trans.). Lisboa: Edições 70, 1998.
6. Kury, Mário da Gama. *Dicionário de mitologia grega e romana*. 7th ed. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2003.
7. Nassar, Raduan. *Lavoura arcaica*. 3rd ed. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2006.
8. Nassar, Raduan. *Menina a caminho e outros textos*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2002.
9. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Peter Gay (trans. and ed.). New York: The Modern Library, 2000.
10. Oliveira, Cristina G. Machado. *A relação entre Apolíneo e Dionísio em Nietzsche*. <http://www.filosofiavirtual.pro.br/apolineonietzsche.htm>, consulted 14 September 2007.
11. Oliveira, Elias R. *Symbols and Their Meanings*. downloaded from the site: <http://www.vivos.com.Br/60.htm>, consulted on September 14 2007.
12. Porto, Heriberto. *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Flute*. downloaded from the site: <http://www.m-musica.com.br/m-m/?q=node/25>, consulted on September 27 2007.

## ***Lavoura Arcaica* și Dionis: Interfața dintre narativitate și mit**

Articolul discută debordanta energie dionisiacă în romanul *Lavoura Arcaica* (1975), scris de autorul brazilian Raduan Nassar și totodată face referiri la filmul omonim al lui Luiz Fernando Carvalho (2001), o adaptare creativă a romanului. Atât romanul, cât și filmul stabilesc o relație dialogică cu *Nașterea Tragediei*, de Friedrich Nietzsche și cu mitul lui Dionis, care sunt folosite ca perspective critice pentru discuția energiei dionisiace, centrându-se asupra celor două dansuri ale Anei în timpul sărbătorilor dintr-o familie libaneză din statul São Paulo, Brazilia, ocazii în care membrii comunității încearcă să depășească anumite limite. Naratorul-protagonist André și sora lui tăcută Ana, o dansatoare senzuală, recurg la depășirea limitelor în manifestarea sa de tip orgiac, frenetic. În câteva pasaje, romanul aduce în prim-plan excesul de afectivitate maternă și preferința fără echivoc a mamei pentru un singur fiu, André. În alte pasaje, tatăl lui André, patriarhul „îmbătat cu vin” – băutura dionisiacă – devine ținta fluentei neînfrânate și a verbozității haotice a protagonistului-narator.