

TANIA FRANCO CARVALHAL: LUCIDITY,  
MEMORY AND CONTINUITY

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Blessed be the threads at the margin of memory that leave scope for reweaving ... I seek solace in these and in the fruition of an eternal relationship, when confronted with the irreparable loss of Tania Franco Carvalhal. I rely on such threads to assuage the pain of mourning, restoring Tania as I saw her, exuding joy on other occasions, when we paid homage to such departed friends as Caio Fernando Abreu and Guilhermino César. She would reflect upon their most recondite subjectivities while, at the same time, celebrating their wanderings and detachment, unconcerned that such reflections touched upon death, woe, or loss. Like an invincible warrior, she could wield the softness of her voice, revealing her Art, and irradiating Life. Tania's incessant quest to bring 'the other' into clear focus endowed her with insights that imbued such landscapes with life, even when tinged with sorrow. Indeed, through a symbolic reading of a literary text, she could shed light upon 'veiled evidence', thereby transfiguring and endowing it with vitality, as she would skillfully reweave and reveal significances.

Such prowess is in evidence in the 15 books by Mário Quintana which Tania, with her customary critical élan, recently edited and published (Rio de Janeiro: Aguilar, 2006). Her preface and notes to this work reveal her appreciation for the poet of Porto Alegre, and justify her projection of his work to the world. In Quintana's works we perceive the design of a subjectivity, molded by a desire to ponder the full scope of human existence, ranging beyond and aside from territories, nationalities and literatures. This is the "grain of voice" that Tania Carvalhal breathed upon the poet, upon making him accessible internationally and, through diffraction of his poetic physiognomy. Masterly syntheses, such as her identification of a "double enigmatic and artisanal character"; "construction resultant from simultaneous action on the part of memory and imagination"; and such priceless statements as "the poet is given to closing his eyes to conjure images kept within himself that he then reconstructs as poetry" (*Poesia Completa*, 2006, p.25) underpin her effort to convey Quintana's "geographies of the imagination" and endow them with linkages of continuity through "wind-carried seeds of poetry" (to use a phrase from my friend Augusto Meyer, whose earliest works Tania also helped project internationally). She always managed to bestow upon her beloved poets the resonance of "world vastness, vastness of world" which, like "Pasargadae", embraces the universe. It was Tania's voice that brought us echoes of this melodious dialogue, blending the rigors of deciphering inter-related texts and the smoothness with which she expressed the apparently inexpressible, as she cast her eye upon totally unlike textual fragments, harmonizing them in an apparently seamless manner. In her preface, when she identifies the presence of other poets in Mário Quintana as "confluences" rather than as "traditional influences", she is aware that bowing to his condensations and

surprises implies acknowledgement of the poet's ability to traverse imaginary domains, while neither estranging nor detracting from his poetical quest. In her reading of the subjectivity of the 'Other' (and of other authors) Tania endows 'Us' (she and ourselves) with a rare shared sublimation. And thus, in a playful settling of accounts, she rehabilitates poet Quintana through an "artisanal awareness" or "reflexive characteristic", and affirms his ability "to be many, while being unceasingly himself" (*Poesia Completa*, 2006, p.27). These reflections on Quintana also reveal much about Tania herself. Indeed, the eternal singularity of her texts consists of their power to promote reconciliation with oneself through the enjoyment of literature, that revitalizes and recycles all that is within us. For the reader, the constant mobility to which we become accustomed, consists of deleting and reinstalling ideas, and the comfort and joy of hearing echoes of our own intimacy. Thus, it is the constant quest to bring together, to respect, and to secure respect for divergent ways of thinking and doing, that is the source of the emotion with which Tania's speeches and writings have been received throughout the world.

Aside from the illuminating preface dedicated to Quintana, two other recent works of Tania's merit special attention: the *Revue de Littérature Comparée* on Brazil, that she edited, reflects upon a diversity of themes and illustrates the prodigious intelligence that Brazil has produced, and the remarkable esthetic and cultural contributions of Brazilian Literature.

In her essay *Vingt-cinq ans de critique littéraire au Brésil* (*Revue Europe*, November-December 2005), her references to a constellation of critics, poets and writers are evidence for foreign readers of the wealth of theoretical and critical thought that Brazil produces. She traces our passage from mere anthropophagi, devourers and transcribers, to a true body of literature envisaged by Haroldo de Campos (the Teacher of our Teacher). It is, however, in her study entitled "Under the Aegis of the Knight Errant" (*Sob a égide do cavaleiro errante - Revista Brasileira de Literatura Comparada*, n.8, Rio de Janeiro) that Tania effects her most exemplary synthesis. She ponders the symbolism of the knight errant, by making comparisons of the character of Ramboldo, of *Il Cavaliere inesistente* by Ítalo Calvino (1599) with that of Riobaldo of *Grande Sertão: Veredas* by João Guimarães Rosa. She illustrates how such continuity is inextinguishable, when she says: "... comparativism contrasts texts and characters through a reflection that opens to reinterpretation myths and legends, genders, and ideas of romance. We may even question what really happened in the world and in human relations to make the knight pass from a domineering figure to one that imposes his own invisibility" (p.17). The transparency of this "*présence sans personne*" (most certainly a reference to Maurice Blanchot, 1971) elicits another knight, to join those cited by Tania, and underscores the urgency of such reencounters and

questionings. “*Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort*”, says the voice of Jacques Derrida (1997) in a text that, in another context, could serve as a summons to our colleagues of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, of other southern Brazilian and Latin-American universities, and those of other continents, swiftly and without delay to found a real (not a symbolic) community, within which the encompassing of differences could correspond to Tania’s concern, expressed thus: “Under the aegis of the knight errant, in multiple variations, comparative literature experiences the adventure of our times and, through formulation of questions, moves toward its permanent validation”. This blessed thread, the thread of memory and continuity, never fails to inspire even the most far-flung readers. It is, however, far too early to speak of a definitive celebration of the works of our Great Dame of Comparative Literature for, I dare predict, examination of her files will reveal more verses, fragments, and entire poems, bursting with vivacity.

Returning to the preface on Mário Quintana, I borrow a verse that reveals the magic force of ashes: “Life is a bomb fire: in which / we dance, magic salamanders. / what does it matter if all that remains is ash / so long as the flames are beautiful and high? / Amidst crumbling timbers / we gather the song of the flames! / We sing the song of life, the light that consumes us...” (*Esconderijos do Tempo*).

Joyous song, blessed thread, comforting image of an inextinguishable memory.