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

Patrice Rankine

Hope College, rankine@hope.edu

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**From Anthropophagy to Allegory and back: A Study of Classical Myth and the Brazilian Novel through J. G. Noll's *Hotel Atlantico*, and Jorge Amado's *The War of the Saints* and *The Discovery of America by the Turks***

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 Amado, *The War of the Saints*, 104 (1993).**

In the epigraph above, the narrator *The War of the Saints*, written by Jorge Leal Amado de Faria (Jorge Amado) in 1993, 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 what took the place of political coverage, namely 'a total prohibition of any reportage that carried the slightest allusion to

the daily imprisonments, torture, political murders, and violation of human rights'.<sup>1</sup> The historical events remained outside of the official accounts of newspapers and therefore did not happen – at least, not officially. 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 Lusíads*', and yet the narrative of *The War of the Saints* is no weightier, politically potent, or consequential than those topics. In fact, given the repeated – though subtle – references to classical narratives such as the story of Theseus, or to figures like Aphrodite and Menelaus, the novel might be read to a certain degree 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,<sup>2</sup> 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 ('relating to a particular group of people and their habits, beliefs, traditions, etc.')

and political ('of or relating to politics or government') accounts.<sup>3</sup> 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. That is, Amado's *The War of the Saints*, set approximately ten years before its publication, in 1980s, seemingly does no more to reveal the mysteries of the 'hidden reality' or 'secret

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<sup>1</sup> Cavalcanti (1992) recounts, between 1964 and 1974 'military justice arrested, tortured, and tried 7,367 Brazilians for subversive activities...To those numbers were added 10,034 individuals reported by civilians, 6,385 of whom went through preliminary military interrogation and trial' (107).

<sup>2</sup> See Bartsch 1998 and Rudich 2013.

<sup>3</sup> The definitions are from the *Merriam-Wester Dictionary*.

country' where 'strikes, demonstrations, picketing, protests, mass movements, and guerrilla attacks' occur than would other books and articles published during the period, texts that the narrator implicitly criticizes. The story in *The War of the Saints* of the cultural clash between the folk cultures "on the ground", as it were, and the catholic, national narrative of *ordo e progresso* – 'order and progress', Brazil's slogan emblazoned in the globe on the country'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.

The status of Brazilian public discourse in 1989 is apparent in the clash in *The War of the Saints*: 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;<sup>4</sup> 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. The characteristics are evident in J. G. Noll's *Hotel Atlantico* and in *The Discovery of America by the Turks*, the other novel by Amado with which I am concerned in this essay.

Even before the military dictatorship in 1964 these feature include a narrative focus essentially apolitical because Brazilian authoritarian rule is not confined to the dictatorship but comes as early as the birth of the Republic in 1890.<sup>5</sup> One difference after

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<sup>4</sup> For a general overview of this prevalent aspect of Amado's work, see Hamilton 1967 and Nunes 1973.

<sup>5</sup> As Smallman argues, 'the Brazilian military has long used terror during moments of crisis' (2000: 119). He points to the treatment of rebels in the navy in 1910 (suffocation, summary assassination).

1964 was that military tactics became professionalized, quotidian rather than an exceptional or temporary responses during crisis. Especially under the regime, successful Brazilian fiction as a whole – which is to say readable and not subject to censorship – does not *directly* take on political themes. In part because of this, classical myth is one of the primary mode of expression in the Brazilian novel before 1989, as an allegorical cover for real events.

The second feature of Brazilian fiction after 1989, along with the continued apolitical nature of 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) being one of the key documents to emerge. Brazilian artists would come to see the country, 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 mode of consuming material from the outside. Brazilians would become themselves by consuming the forms, stories, and the styles of expression of others. The blending of these would be the unique Brazilian 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 the centrality of classical myth in providing a cover for political and cultural discussion, ranging from Chico Buarque's *A Gota de Agua* to *Orfeu Negro*. This monumental classicism in some cases allowed culture to rise to the level of national politics, and Amado is one who was able to remove the classical cover and simply speak in terms of local cultures – such as

African religious practices – in national terms (Vieira 1989). It is worth noting that many of Amado's more socialist leaning novels were published prior to 1964 (Hamilton 1967). For writers under the regime, such as Scliar, the consumption of the Greco-Roman classics would seem at times wholesale rather than 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 seem 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 traditional Bildungsroman. The protagonists of the novels with which I am concerned here might each be called antiheroes, or at least piquaresque, and this description applies even to the hero of Moacyr Scliar's *The Centaur in the Garden*, 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 on any continuum (with good on one pole and evil at the other extreme). Amado points to another set of metaphysical realities to some extent embodied in the African *orixás* and their human manifestations, in which ethics do not map onto behavior in expected ways. These metaphysical realities cause the African practices, folk forms that overturn 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 an adventure toward 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 constant pull of the past is the god – the natural reality – that threatens to unravel things. In the case of the centaur, the hero is part of an immigrant, Jewish family to Brazil, having escaped the pogroms in Russia only to face ghettoization in the New World because of their otherness (Centaur=stereotypes against Jews). The unconventional adventure is still present after 1989. The hero of Noll's *Hotel Atlantico* wanders somewhat aimlessly throughout Brazil supporting his career as an actor. In some regards, it might be argued that African goddess Yansan is the hero of *The War of the Saints*, and she arrives in Brazil in many forms as early as 1500. The narrator of *The Discovery of America by the Turks* 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 these novels after 1989, but the question remains: freedom to do or to be what?

### **Historical Background: The Brazilian Military Dictatorship and 1989**

Brazil's military dictatorship began in 1964 under the rule of Huberto de Alencar, and it ended in 1985, though the first post-dictatorship president would not be firmly installed until 1989. The date 1989 is not incidental. The threat of communism fueled the military takeover in Brazil, and 1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall. Communism was in fact the central issue for many governments and the governed leading into 1989. The role of Communism in the American novel is well documented, and in Brazil it is easy to

imagine the extent to which the success of Fidel Castro in Cuba, for some, made revolution an attractive option for securing a strong central government. Four years before the Brazilian military takeover, the United States president John F. Kennedy would authorize the invasion of the Bay of Pigs, an event that marks the instability of the region and role of Communism in national and international discourses.

That Brazil had been an authoritarian state even before 1964 premises the response of local leaders to the geopolitical realities of the early twentieth century (Smallman). For Youssef Cohen, ‘exuberant growth’ and the ‘limits of such industrialization’ are usually considered the characteristics that lead to militarization, but in Brazil militarism precedes these shifts.<sup>6</sup> The period from 1930-1964 was one in which Brazil formed its national and international identities. The analog to strong military rule during this period of apparent democratization would be the uniform, political and economic culture that the political regime sought to impose, in the name of *ordo e progresso*, ‘order and progress’.

Repressive political regimes in twentieth-century Brazil, both before the dictatorship and after, needed strong ideology to impose its 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

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<sup>6</sup> See Cohen 1987. The Old Republic had only been established in 1889 and would last until 1930, when Getúlio Vargas led a populist Revolution, marked by nationalism and modernization.

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 (24).

In place of indigenous and pre-modern cultures Brazilian modernity would ostensibly offer ‘scientific ideology’ born in 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.

Butler shows the ways that this discourse helped to shape Brazilian culture for former slaves. The discourse was present before the dictatorship and would remain after it. 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' (31-2). Various forms of repression emerged.<sup>7</sup> The regime repressed labor movements (Smallman 2000). 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' (Butler 1998: 33). Ethnicity was accepted because it made Brazil unique, but only to the extent that the regime could tolerate it.<sup>8</sup> 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 – would be 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' (225). In the novel, a staged carnival celebration that a French director films in Pelourinho, the popular, historic district in Salvador, clearly echoes Marcel Camus' Oscar-winning film and the controversy surrounding it: that 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

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<sup>7</sup> Cavalcanti calls this 'the sort of intolerance [that] could rarely be comfortable with a pluralistic, democratic form of government' but that is 'more compatible with an authoritarian model of political regime' (1992: 103).

<sup>8</sup> See Vieira 1989.

neighborhoods to point up a stayed narrative of the “noble savage”.<sup>9</sup> These markers of identity were certainly prevalent before the rise of the military dictatorship. They are secondary to a national, political and economic identity during the dictatorship, and they reemerge after 1989.

It is worth noting, therefore, the extent to which aspects of the repressive framework of twentieth century Brazilian politics would shift after 1989. The first, to recapitulate, was the lack of opportunity for former slaves, for the lower classes, or even for labor to, ironically, make progress. The regime celebrated the ‘integrated theory of natural sciences’ (Butler 1998: 34), which set Europe in Hegelian dialectic against its primitive counterparts: indigenous Americans, Africans, and other non-European groups. In contrast to this, sublimated phenomena return in the main after 1989. The role of the supernatural is the chief example. If ‘God played no role’ under the scientific enlightenment (Butler 34), 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 twentieth century, therefore, saw many cultural shifts in Brazil. By 1964, the military dictatorship would seize control of natural resources in order to move the country forward, oil in particular. Grave consequences to persons ensued in terms of the hundreds killed and thousands imprisoned during the period. The military dictatorship would declare the success of their program in terms of the Brazilian Miracle, an economic boom that would be proof of the success of progress and industrialization.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Stam 1997.

<sup>10</sup> For the contrast of this success with the country’s dire poverty, see Eakin 1998.

Nevertheless, the narrator of *The War of the Saints* invokes the violence, torture, and oppression of the military regime. From all accounts, the dictatorship was among the cruelest in modern history. Hundreds of people disappeared, and bodies were dismembered to hide the atrocities. There were a number of stages of the dictatorship: a domestically focused one which had a strong resistance that took a radical turn in 1969 with the kidnapping the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil, Charles Burke Elbrick; increased violence, which leads to the rise of Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969-74); and a final stage, which begins after the passage of an amnesty law of 1979 rendering the perpetrators of violence immune to punishment.<sup>11</sup> By 1985, Brazil would see the end of the dictatorship, and the first president after the regime was elected in 1989.

**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* (1980) is emblematic of the interaction between national identity – 'order and progress' – and its subcultures under the military dictatorship. Similar to the novels discussed which were published after 1989, the Scliar's novel is, on the surface, apolitical. Nevertheless, even Scliar recognizes that writing is in

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<sup>11</sup> See Flynn 1991 for an overview of a rich study of this period.

itself essentially a political act (Namorato 2006). Unlike those novels, however, classical myth in *The Centaur in the Garden* dominates all other cultural forms, a mode evident in other literary genres of the period, as we have seen. The antihero in this case is a centaur, and his adventure is that of a quest for normalcy despite of the pressures that difference causes. Guedali's optimism that 'in a new society there is room for everyone' is somewhat misplaced, notwithstanding what seems to be measured optimism on his creator's part (Namorato 2006). The novel's central figure and narrator, a character born 'with horses' hooves', demonstrates the way that classical myth in the novel stands in for culture.

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 (Namorato 2006). The narrator's family leaves Russia in 1923 because of the pogroms that expelled Jewish families (8). 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 centers of the New World. The myths that hound Jews in Russia follow them to Brazil. As rumor had it in Russia, Jews are centaurs:

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, as a Jew, he is implicated in all of these stories about Jews; he is a centaur. As a Jew, he is different, grotesque and other. Classical myth opaquely covers the difference and allows exploration of the implications of otherness. Guedali's Jewishness corresponds to guilt: Of the stories he hears of Jews in Russia who are rumored 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 Guedali's birth, the midwife 'understands that I need green stuff, and mixes finely chopped lettuce leaves in with the milk' (11).<sup>12</sup>

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 factor 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).<sup>13</sup> Later in the narrative, Guedali's son is born. He shows no

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<sup>12</sup> There are several references to Judaism throughout, often coupled with the shame of being a centaur. The references culminate in the assertion that 'the Jews killed Christ, the Jews are avaricious' (76).

<sup>13</sup> The role of cities in progress is central to the narrative but a topic I cannot cover here. His father decides to leave the countryside, where he has been employed as a farmer, and make his way to the city, Porto

signs of 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. Cultural difference stands in the way of national, economic progress. The Brazilian nation competes on an international front. Nevertheless, innovation still seems to come from outside, and Guedali travels to Spain, where surgical advancements enable the removal of visible signs of his difference (93). 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).<sup>14</sup> 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 are carefully managed.

Given the apolitical nature of the narrative, the political backdrop of those years at times peek out from the background in curious ways.<sup>15</sup> 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

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Alegre: ‘Nobody will stare at you. City people don’t care about anything’ (37). The city is a space of heightened modernization and open-minded advancement, or so it would seem.

<sup>14</sup> Some passages are reminiscent of Freyre’s *Masters and Slaves*, where sexual miscegenation between slaves and their masters are the everyday taboo.

<sup>15</sup> For Pirott-Quintero, the narrator ‘shuns chronological time’ (768), but I find this strong, given the temporal markers throughout that are indicative of the regime – and hint chronologically.

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). The narrative is told in retrospect, once the narrator has been shed of external signs of his difference. (Hooves remain, but special shoes that Guedali received in Spain allow him to pass as fully human.) Thus the events told in it primarily precede the military dictatorship and happen during the period of the Republic. When the narrative turns to the dictatorship, at the end of which period the narrator writes his story, evidence of 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).<sup>16</sup> Even though the surgery in Spain to hide his difference is

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<sup>16</sup> Lindstrom 1984 talks about this in terms of ‘the unexpected persistence’ of such remnants left behind as Jewishness.

successful, Guedali and his wife 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).<sup>17</sup> 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 recognizes 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: the cultural remnants that mollify groups of people, that renders them opposite to the national project.

### **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' (285). 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

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<sup>17</sup> She also has an affair, and Pirott-Quintero characterizes these affairs as 'bourgeois restlessness' (769).

Pirott-Quintero characterizes the dissenting narrative viewpoints between Tita and Guedali as *themselves* a centaur (the narrative itself as centaur).

internationally was one of joy, 'alegria.' The message of the regime, moreover, was that of a racial paradise, a place of order and progress. As we have seen, accepted cultural forms closely monitored by the regime give a sense of pluralism, and classical myth provided an acceptable analog for allegory and opposition from the evidence of *The Centaur in the Garden* and other cultural production from the period.

Even with the antihero 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 (1998) links this narrative to the absurd reality projected in Brazil's telenovelas, the television soap operas prevalent throughout Latin America. For this antihero, there is little hope outside of the inner buoyance that itself seems tiring.

The narrative opens with the character checking into a hotel where someone has just been murdered, and 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.<sup>18</sup> Whereas *The Centaur in the Garden* uses the military dictatorship as a backdrop against which the narrative takes place, the 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

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<sup>18</sup> Shaw 1998 sees this as Noll's 'implicit denunciation of the country's social problems' (294).

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. In the scenes leading up to this, he has met an American woman who has come to Brazil in search of pre-Columbian civilizations. She is in fact a woman leaving behind a broken marriage. Although the protagonist and his new travel companion clearly connect – they hold hands as night falls on the bus after a day of conversation – he discovers that she is numbing the pain of her life with barbiturates (20). The protagonist leaves his WWII narrative to see that a crowd has gathered around the bus, as the woman has overdosed on drugs and is dead. Given that he would have been the last person seen with her, he runs away from the scene because he fears that he will be suspected for her murder.

These mishaps make up the entire novel. In the hotel scene with which the novel opens, 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, his infertility leading to his wife's abandonment of him (92-95). Some time after, he consummates a relationship with a traveling actress, Amanda ('loved one'), a young mother whom he chooses exclusively over a potential ménage à trois (82-87). Amanda eventually leaves him to continue her travels. Much later in the narrative, the 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. He earns enough money managing her to put himself together, but the narrative nevertheless ends with him and the black male nurse with whom he leaves the hospital.

If classical myth was the central trope in *The Centaur in the Garden*, classical analogues have retreated to the background in *Hotel Atlantico*. Classical allusions are still present, but they are more of an integrated aspect of the environment than allegorical. It might be argued that status of classical myth return to its early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism, that of organic consumption, anthropophagy. A few examples should suffice. Early in the novel, after the woman on the bus has died, 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 finance there. Nelson is the protagonist's 'ferryman across one more river' (27). In classical myth, the ferryman is Chiron, who guides souls of the dead across the River Styx. The reference might heighten 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, though 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 this 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 a lover's departure leads to a description that calls to mind the plague from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. In a malaise in the aftermath of the loss of Amanda, the protagonist gives himself over to emptiness. He spends time doing little but sunbathing, and he

imagines himself as a sad child in a photo. The 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 experience 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 child buoys him. 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*, a narrative that depends on cultural experiences repressed from 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 *mélange* of a Yoruba *orixá* (Yansan) and Catholic Saint (Barbara). 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 dismissed in the epigraph). In truth, however, the statue is not missing. In a narrative instance of magical realism, or the marvelous real, 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 is aware of classical myth and weaves it into his twisting tale, one that is 'intricate and multiple, as are the places and times where the yarn of life unrolls' (90). The analogy of the tale to yarn is natural and does not have to immediately call to mind the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, where the yarn 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 narrator as Ariadne makes the reader the hero, especially given the fortitude required to get through almost four hundred pages of the numerous tales that intertwine. The story is of a collective, a group, not of one particular individual but rather of a culture, one 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 girls 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 one of the dancers involved in the staged carnival, Paulina. 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 in the mode of magical realism. 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 *candomblé*. The mingling of black and white signals that previously held moral distinctions must be abandoned.

Given the parallels between the personal repression of characters in the novel 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. At the buildup to battle we learn of an array of forces on the side of cultural hybridity not only with 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, politically oppressed, and those who were emblematic of difference (blacks, women) in Brazil during the dictatorship (Serbin 2001).

In the end, all parties have learned their lesson. Adalgisa is 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 fleshly love – such is the *jeito* or the 'style' of Brazilian antiheroes 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, though it retreats from a dominant place to that of one of many possibilities.

***The Discovery of America by the Turks (1994)***. The last novel to be discussed within the context of classical myth in the novel after 1989 in Brazil is Jorge Amado's *The Discovery of America by the Turks*. The novel opens with the surprising revelation that an alternative discovery of America, one that the predominant narrative of previous discoveries by the Spanish and Portuguese obscures, is that of the arrival of the Turks. Even those discoveries, the narrator argues, were 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, serve to 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 narrative tells the story 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, whom Raduan persuades Jamil would elevate his status and wealth (God, gold, and glory).<sup>19</sup> 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-  
2).

The narrator weaves the tale that ends in Jamil's failure but someone else's success.

Classical myth plays little active part in the narrative, although there are passing familiar references throughout. Jamil, for example, knows that Allah watches over him

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<sup>19</sup> Vieira 1996 questions the effectiveness of the satire, which has the effect of misogyny and a deep sexism.

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 to Jove conveys a characteristic irony 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 certain 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, there is not much that is recognizable from classical myth in the story of *The Discovery of America by the Turks*. Nevertheless, the classics remain as material integrated into the narrative in the style of the anthropophagy of the early twentieth century.

What is present is the sovereignty of the narrator, who is godlike in his ability to take all of the material present to weave together a story with whatever outcome he chooses. Since Raduan Murad had told the story of Adma’s virginity and her wealth to both Jamil and to 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 nuptials. 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).

1989 is not an arbitrary date for a shift in the Brazilian novel, but it is also not conclusive. In some ways, Amado had always been a cultural champion before 1989 and had 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 piquaresque hero – are present in Noll's 1989 *Hotel Atlantico*. These aspects were a factor even before 1989. They include the role of the irrational for the people in the novels. For *The Centaur in the Garden*, culture – being a centaur – more than religion was a counter to the regime. During this period, Amado was able to advance irrational aspects of culture, those seemingly running counter to positivism and progress. Afro-descendent practices in Brazil are Amado's stock in trade. He did not need the allegories that classical myth provided Scliar. After 1989, at least in the novels surveyed here, the classics retreat entirely to the background, consumed along with other influences.