

THE FABRICATION OF NEW “CULTURAL HEROES”: THE CASE OF GREGÓRIO DE MATOS

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In its broadest scope, this essay is about the make-up of cultural contemporaneity. Since this is too vast an issue for an article in a learned journal, I shall limit myself to just one specific aspect of the fabric of contemporary culture: the fabrication of new cultural heroes. Cultural heroes are what Baudelaire calls “les phares” in one of the poems of *Les Fleurs du mal*. They are constitutive of community identity, capable of crystallizing in an anthropomorphic figure major forces, new trends, and of offering models of behavior in contemporary cultural life. The question “how do communities give themselves cultural identities?” has as a partial answer: through cultural heroes. Interestingly, quite a few cultural heroes of our cultural contemporaneity are fabricated from the mold of historical Baroque figures. Why is this the case, and how does this function?—these are the more specific questions I would like to answer in this essay.

Cultural contemporaneity

Let us remain for a moment on the more general level of cultural contemporaneity, both in its theoretical and historical dimensions. First of all, its content is highly complex, because it is made of thick and multiple layers of cultural materials. In terms of temporality, to be contemporaneous seldom means to locate oneself in pure presentness, but rather to construct a cultural present out of historically heterogeneous material.

The gesture of creating a pure present, of marking a new beginning, does exist in artistic life. It is part of the historical avant-gardes of the first half of the 20th century. Yet even the most modern avant-gardists who start out with the ostentatious gesture of the *tabula rasa*—sweeping

clean the cultural space—are openly future-oriented on the one hand and on the other, often less openly, rely on past cultural figures whom they identify as their predecessors *avant la lettre*.

Besides those rare moments of absolute newness, we can observe that cultural contemporaneity usually consists to a large extent of pre-given materials, of pre-existing cultural elements that are available in a historically deep repertoire. They are being reactivated, re-actualized and re-contextualized while being transformed in various processes. Critics and art historians referred to these processes variously as a reusing and recycling of old materials, or as the return and the resurgence of older paradigms or models.

Yet in the logic and complexity of cultural history, not all pre-existing materials are always available. There are materials that are taboo, untouchable for a certain period of time for various reasons: ideological, political and cultural.¹ Also, in the progressive logic of modernity, it is usually the immediate past that has to be overcome. It therefore becomes axiologically negative and must be rejected, while other layers of the cultural past (ideas, materials, forms, objects, paradigms, productive matrixes, etc.) become interesting for re-use and re-cycling. In Raymond Williams' terminology, the emergent, in its elaboration, often reaches back to residual materials, to overcome the reign of the dominant.

These processes can be observed in paradigmatic repetition in cultural history. Thus, the Romantics re-actualized medieval materials and, more recently, in the Spain of the early 20th century, and more specifically on the occasion of the tercentenary of his death in 1927, the national poet Góngora became a new cultural hero. This last case is part of a national cultural history, but it coincides with a widely international resurgence of the Baroque. It can even be said that the Baroque, as a concept to be used in art history and aesthetics, was invented at the 1900 turn of the century.

At the 2000 turn of the century, we are at it again! We are witnessing another "return of the Baroque."² A new theoretical re-appropriation of the Baroque is underway as the Neobaroque.³ Contemporary artists take interest and pleasure—sometimes with provocation—in identifying themselves and their work as (Neo)baroque.⁴ And some of them positively select cultural materials from the historical Baroque to "work with."⁵ Something called the power, or the potential, of the Baroque is being reactivated (Bukdahl). The Baroque phantom is alive

again (Ortega). There is enough evidence to affirm that the Baroque as a cultural paradigm is undergoing a major re-evaluation, from negative to positive. The Baroque, once again, comes to the cultural foreground and becomes an important ingredient in our cultural contemporaneity.

The use of Baroque artistic figures for the fabrication of contemporary cultural heroes can be inserted into this general context. We are indeed witnessing the conferring of contemporary meaning upon Baroque figures, their recycling and actualization. This process can take place on an international, if not globalized, level or on a national level. Examples of internationally relevant Baroque figures who have recently taken on a contemporary meaning are Gracián and Caravaggio. This can be observed in various operations: new scholarly work bringing about a reappraisal, translations, exhibitions, fictional reinterpretations, etc. An excellent example for the fabrication of a national Baroque hero is the Brazilian case of Gregório de Matos e Guerra (1636?-1696).

Gregório de Matos, a contemporary Brazilian Baroque poet

In recent years, the Luso-Brazilian poet Gregório de Matos has indeed grown into a major figure in contemporary Brazilian culture. He has been used for questions of national, and even regional (Bahia), cultural identity. He has become a test case for important cultural debates. He has been elevated to the status of a cultural predecessor and model. In this loaded atmosphere he has, of course, also aroused the interest of biographers, critics, and historians. And most significantly, his biography as well as his work has been used as material for new cultural productions on the level of mass culture. I am less interested here in the usual process of the long-lasting and renewed reception process of a national Baroque artist⁶ than in analyzing the fabrication of a new cultural Brazilian hero at the 2000 turn of the century, although this "fabrication" can be considered as a particularly intense phase of an ongoing reception process.

Hispano-American and Brazilian Baroque

The debate on the Baroque in Brazil is, of course, part of the larger question of the Latin American Baroque and it has to be incorporated

into this larger context. In historical terms, research on the Latin American Baroque faces a major challenge: to describe and to explain how a cultural paradigm, initially brought to America in the belly of the conqueror's ships and imposed in a process of colonization, has served, after independence, to define various sub-continental as well as national cultural identities. Thus, the Baroque, in the quest for and construction of Latin American identities has played, and is still playing, a major role. On this level of generality, the cases of Hispanophone culture in America and of Brazil are no different. All the more so since Brazil has its own regionally different cultural heritage in Bahia, Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul (with the ruins of the *Sete Povos* that were part of the Jesuit Missions).

The modalities, the historical sequence and the intensities, though, of the reception of, and the debate on the Baroque, have their peculiarities in Brazil. While in Hispano-American countries, the Baroque was positively reactivated, beginning as early as the first half of the 20th century and continuing well into its second half and integrated into the "americanismo" discourse (by Lezama Lima⁷ and Carpentier, among others), in Brazil, it was "sequestered," set apart, from the history of national literature,⁸ after having aroused, already in the twenties, the interest of the modernists as part of the national heritage. Only more recently, and therefore with a certain belatedness in relation to Hispano-America, was the figure of Gregório de Matos resuscitated, intensely crystallizing the debate on the Baroque in Brazil. And this to the extent that Nelson Ascher, in the major Brazilian newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, made the following remark summarizing to a certain extent the question:

Ser hoje contra ou a favor de Gregório de Matos implica principalmente tomar partido num debate sobre o barroco, seu significado e sua relevância para a literatura moderna. (Ascher 4)

Summarizing the particularities of the Brazilian reception of the Baroque, we can capture them in three aspects: its relative belatedness, its crystallization in the figure of Matos, and the fact that it reached polemical intensities.

Gregório de Matos, a cultural hero in the making: the external view

Let us first evoke the external profile of Matos as a new cultural hero in the making, by enumerating a few of the objective and quantitative indicators of the phenomenon observed, both from the perspective of the systems of literature and literary criticism and within a broader spectrum of cultural production.

There is a long history of the reception of Matos in Brazil. It has its ups and downs, going through moments of rejection (mostly for moral reasons) and apotheosis (mainly for biographical, formal as well as political reasons, when Matos was celebrated, mostly on the basis of his satires, as an early critic of the colonial regime). I am not going to repeat the narrative of this history here; it can be easily found in the two monographs by João Carlos Teixeira and João Adolfo Hansen, which will be more extensively discussed later on. Nonetheless, I would like to highlight one important detail in this history: both authors start off with the question of attribution of apocryphal texts to the name of the author Matos.⁹ Since no critical edition of Matos' works yet exists, this basic question of textual definition remains to a certain extent open.¹⁰

The recent reception of Matos in Brazil, especially, and in particular in its active modality of a re-use of his texts and biography as materials, can be dated from James Amado's edition of his works in seven volumes. As Nelson Ascher puts it in the above quoted newspaper article, with this edition, Matos comes out not only of his limbo but also from his purgatorial existence. Henceforth, the figure-and-work called Matos is destined for an accelerated and intensified reception. This edition also gave the Bahian poet an immediate political reputation, when the military regime made an auto-da-fé of 1,000 of its copies; with this gesture, he could now be considered as a subversive underground author. His work also appeared more frequently in anthologies of Brazilian poetry. In 1990, Emanuel Araújo published a two-volume edition of his works, based on the one by James Amado, that became very popular and had a vast circulation.¹¹

The 1980s brought Matos to the foreground in academic scholarship. There was an intense focus on the Bahian poet, leading to a series of important book publications both on his life and on his work.

Based on serious archival research, the work on Matos' biography made good progress and was able to dispel some of the myths about

his life,¹² as well as resulting in a much more accurate insight into the author. The year 1983 saw the publication of two important biographies, one by Fernando da Rocha Peres and the other by his teacher Pedro Calmon.

These two biographies contributed to a better knowledge of Matos' life, beyond legends and myths, particularly the one of the *poète maudit*, that had taken hold in relation to the Baroque poet, as Fernando da Rocha Peres writes in 1996 in the *Folha de São Paulo*:

os clichés de nativista, mulato, místico, capadócio, orixá et toda uma lavra de adjetivos e apelidos que distorcem a figura de um homem barroco, que viveu as contradições do seu tempo. (“Para historiador” 4)

Only a few years later, in 1989, the fictionalized biography by Ana Miranda appeared. This extensively contextualizes the life of “the devil’s mouth,”¹³ as he was nicknamed, in the conflicts of Bahian colonial life in the 17th century. This book was so successful that, by 1996, it had already gone into a second edition, which is an indication of the fascination exercised by the Baroque poet.

In critical scholarship also, the 1980s was a very productive decade. Three major monographs about Matos appeared.

With Ana Miranda’s fictionalized biography and the two monographs by Haroldo de Campos and João Adolfo Hansen, 1989 was indeed the *annus mirabilis* that brought the figure of Matos to the foreground of public interest. All the more so since the two monographs fueled the potential for polemics about Matos.

“Public interest” here means more than the area of scholarly publications. The figure of Matos indeed reached a broader public space, beyond the circles of academic life, in the second half of the 20th century. This can be seen in a debate on his importance to contemporary cultural life held in the cultural supplements of the major *paulista* newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*.¹⁴

Even before these debates were being held in a newspaper, the diffusion of Matos as a Brazilian cultural figure from the past, but recycled in the present, had reached yet another audience—the theater—and penetrated yet another public sphere: the mass media of entertainment. In these cases, we are dealing less with the production

of knowledge about a historical figure and his work, and more with a literal recycling of materials taken from his work and given new meaning in contemporary cultural productions. Here are just a few examples:

- When the Bahian singer Caetano Veloso, in 1972, came home from his exile imposed by the military regime, he released his famous album *Transa*. This collection of songs included “Triste Bahia,” which starts off with a lengthy quote—precisely two quatrains—from Matos’ satirical sonnet “Triste Bahia.” This detour via the satirical Baroque poet was a way of being critical about the contemporary political situation in Brazil, while avoiding the censorship of the regime.
- In 1986-87 a play was staged in Salvador under the title *Gregório de Matos de Guerras* featuring the poet and using fragments of his own texts. The script was published by Márcio Mireilles in 1986.
- In 2001, the Brazilian filmmaker Ana Carolina released her movie entitled *Gregório de Mattos*. Among others, it features the actor Waly Salomão, in the role of Gregório, reciting many of Matos’ texts in a historically reconstructed Bahian context. Generically, this movie could be categorized as a docu-fiction, as it remains entirely faithful to the 17th century texts, while using a fictional dramaturgy that gives the characters from Matos’ work a full presence as *dramatis personae*.
- In 2009-2010, in a German-Brazilian collective theater initiative under the general heading of “Among Cannibals: Postcolonial perspectives in Brazilian and German contemporary theater,” one of the four plays was *Boca do inferno*. It was performed by Bahian actors in Salvador, Hamburg and Berlin. As the internet presentation says, this play “confronts the Baroque poet Gregório de Matos (...) with 21st century reality in Bahia.”¹⁵

What I am summarizing here with the phrase “the making of a new cultural hero,” then, is a complex phenomenon that consists of the convergence of many forms and modes of activity, on many different levels of cultural life and in quite different public spheres. Yet, generally speaking, it consists not of a return to the Baroque as a historical cultural paradigm, but rather, to use Guy Scarpetta’s formulation, of a

“return of the Baroque” (*L'impureté*). The Baroque poet comes back into contemporary cultural life, because he or she is selected—for reasons still to be identified—from the 20th century situation and reinserted into intellectual and cultural processes. Working on and with the Baroque material of this specific figure contributes to the production of meaning in the contemporary situation.

Gregório de Matos, a cultural hero in the making: the internal view

After this “external view” of the cultural hero, largely made up of quantitative and qualitative indicators and references, let us now try to construct what could be called its “internal view.” Such a portrait takes into much greater consideration the content of the process under scrutiny. What are the contemporary cultural issues channeled through this 17th century figure? What are the collectively identitarian questions and the general hermeneutic processes that found their battleground in Matos?

As we have already seen, in Brazil, the increased interest in Matos in the second half of the 20th century cannot be dissociated from the debate on the Baroque. And this debate shows a strong tendency towards polarization, and even a polemical potential that, evidently, affected the public perception of its object and pretext. Thus, Matos became a highly controversial figure. This does not, however, diminish his status as a cultural hero—quite the contrary; the fact that he was claimed, for different reasons, by opposite sides, quoted for adverse causes and claimed by contradictory theses, had the effect of enhancing even further his profile as a cultural hero.

It was without any doubt the simultaneous and parallel publication of the monographs by Haroldo de Campos and João Adolfo Hansen that set the stage for the polemical *agon* in the debate. De Campos was already well known for his polemical vein; as for Hansen, it was only in his 1994 article “Pós-moderno e barroco” that his polemical style came to the fore. It had been subordinated before that to the scientific ethos that dominated the discursive posture of his monograph. Although I have no knowledge of a face-to-face debate between the two, it is also important to acknowledge that they found themselves on the opposite sides into which the São Paulo scene of Brazilian literary criticism was by then divided. On the one side was the Universidade de São Paulo

with Antônio Cândido, the founding father of the historical critical school; on the other side was the Pontifícia Universidade Católica that regrouped what was loosely called the formalist school, with Haroldo de Campos as an illustrious member, also well known as a practitioner of “concrete poetry.”¹⁶

The main issue that caused them to cross swords was, indeed, the question of the Baroque and of its historical or contemporaneous value. In this, they merely echo in Brazil a debate that had already been underway internationally for quite some time. But what exacerbates this debate and gives it a specifically Brazilian flavor is the figure of Matos, the Luso-Brazilian poet considered by many as the most important Brazilian poet of the colonial period. That the polemic about Matos takes place on the battleground of the Baroque, but also that the question of the Baroque and of its contemporary value finds its national key figure in Matos—constitute the Brazilian particularity of the debate.

What was at stake in this battle is the history of national literature, and more precisely a work that has become a Brazilian authority in this field: *A formação da literatura brasileira*. Its author, Antônio Cândido, is said to have “sequestered” (de Campos) or “sacrificed” (Hansen, “Pós-moderno” 29) the Baroque—and with it Matos—in the modern narrative of the formation of national literature. Surprisingly, up to this point the two Gregorianists seem to agree with each other in their critique of Antônio Cândido.

In his seminal text from the 1950s,¹⁷ Antônio Cândido, indeed, has what he calls the national literary system, and therefore the history of Brazilian literature, only beginning around 1750. He barely mentions Matos whose poetic activity precedes this *terminus post quem* and is therefore relegated to the pre-historical limbo of Brazilian literature:

Com efeito, embora [Matos] tenha permanecido na tradição local da Bahia, ele não existiu literariamente (em perspectiva histórica) até o Romantismo, quand foi redescoberto. (*A formação* I, 24)

In a text written in 1966 and published in 1987, however, he corrects somewhat this opinion about Matos:

o estilo clássico se prestava bem para exprimir um mundo novo, enorme e desconhecido....

Para mostrar a plasticidade de formas reputadas tão rígidas e constringedoras, lembremos como Gregório de Matos pôs nos rigorosos limites convencionais do soneto não apenas a expressão dos padecimentos do amor e toda a inquietação do pecado (isto é, algo normal dentro da tradição), mas os costumes da sociedade em formação, com os seus preconceitos, as suas querelas, a sonoridade dos seus nobres indígenas. (“Literatura” 178)

The least that can be affirmed is that the Baroque—and with it our poet—is made to disappear and is relegated to a pre-history without historical significance to the extent that it is absorbed into the qualifier “clássico.”

Up to the point of their assessment of this disappearance of the Baroque in Antônio Cândido’s literary history, the two Gregorianists are in agreement. It is after this that they follow different paths. And these paths depend on epistemic interests that are divergent, if not diametrically opposed. While one side favors a rigorous reestablishment of the historical truth about the Baroque that would entail a critical attitude towards any contemporaneous appropriation or use of it (Hansen), the other favors a use of the historical case and material to operationalize it aesthetically in the debates on contemporary culture as well as in cultural production (de Campos).

Haroldo de Campos’s argument is imbued with a critique of ideology inasmuch as he criticizes in Cândido’s book a meta-narrative of modernity to which the Baroque paradigm falls prey. And he identifies the operative concept of this meta-narrative in the notion of “formação,” “formation” or *Bildung*. This operative concept functions in both modern meta-narratives that Lyotard has identified: that of the formation of the individual subject whose symbolic form is the *Bildungsroman*, and that of the formation of the collective subject, as in the case of the nation. Antônio Cândido gives literature a specific task in this second variant: it must contribute to the formation and expression of a national character or spirit. Thus, a national literature is supposed, in its symbolic manifestation, to form and bring to a full incarnation the spirit of a nation. In 1966 Cândido summarizes this in the concise expression “o processo de amadurecimento do país” and he rephrases it various times:

A função da literatura no processo de formação do Brasil.

A literatura [é] profundamente empenhada na construção e na aquisição de uma consciência nacional. ("Literatura" 179-180)

De Campos identifies this ideologeme of "formation" and, in his critical reading of *Cândido*, analyzes some aspects of its manifestations. He singles out two of them in particular and shows how they discursively function in two series of metaphors:

Uma "animista," outra "organicista." A primeira, decididamente ontológica (auscultação da "voz do Ser," tema caro à "metafísica da presença"). A outra, ligada ao pressuposto evolutivo-biológico daquela historiografia tradicional que vê reproduzir-se na literatura um processo de floração gradativa, de crescimento orgânico, seja regido por uma "teleologia naturalista," seja pela "idéia condutora" de "individualidade" ou "espírito nacional," a operar, sempre com dinamismo teleológico, no encadeamento de uma sequência acabada de eventos (e a culminar necessariamente num "classicismo nacional," correspondente, no plano político, a outro "instante de plenitude, a conquista da "unidade da nação"). (13)

It becomes quite clear, then, why the Baroque has no place in such a modern narrative scheme. It does not fit into a linear evolution that progresses from simplicity to complexity, since its constitutive complexity would coincide with the moment of origin, which is an ideological impossibility in the "formation" scheme. Neither does it fit into the teleological vision of a Parousia of the national spirit, because, in de Campos' view, Baroque literary practice is subversive in relation to logocentrism and the metaphysics of plenitude.

This is why, to liberate Baroque literature from negative appropriation (sequestration, exclusion) by national modernity, Haroldo de Campos rejects the historiographic frame of "national formation." He does this on various levels and in various fields of application, giving his critique a very broad scope, especially in view also of his own practice as a poet:

- He dehistoricizes Baroque cultural materials by reactivating them in his present historical situation, thus making Matos his contemporary.

- He de-nationalizes Baroque materials by linking Matos' poetry up with contemporary paradigms that are circulating internationally, such as "cultural devoration" and "deconstruction."
- He performs a de-ideologization of Baroque materials by asserting the power of Baroque literature to undo ideologies through a semiotic practice characterized by critical insight, experimentation and the sensual pleasure of the signifying body.

The global effect of such treatment of the Baroque is one of an axiological rehabilitation of the Baroque paradigm in general and of Matos in particular. And this rehabilitation is on the one hand profoundly national because it engages with a national Baroque poet and against a national founding figure in literary history. On the other hand, and at the same time, it partakes in an international debate on the reactivation of the Baroque in a contemporary theoretical framework. On this more general level, the return of the Baroque can be linked up with certain positions of post-modernity.

More precisely, De Campo's intervention in Brazil on Matos adopts a certain critique of modernity that has been identified particularly by French specialists of the Baroque as the ideological inversion of the Baroque today.¹⁸ The argument of this position is as follows: if, by an emerging modernity, the Baroque paradigm was deemed aristocratic and retrograde, today, in late modernity, its return takes on a subversive value in the face of ideological blindnesses and shortcomings of modernity. Should we conclude from this that Baroque material, like Matos' poetry, has no intrinsic ideological identity and that it is only its use and re-use within a concrete historical situation that can take on such a specific, while differing, value?

Such a general question arises from the particular Brazilian case we are dealing with here, but it goes beyond any national culture. It sets the more-than-national horizon within which the Brazilian contemporary reception of the Baroque takes place. What is specifically Brazilian is the radicalness with which Haroldo de Campos uses the 17th century figure of Matos to criticize the modern ideologeme of the formation of national literature. In the Brazilian context this critique of the historiographic school of literature through the revival of a Baroque poet has an almost iconoclastic effect, especially in its treatment of the school's leading representative, Antônio Cândido.

Similar to de Campos' position, the North-American Baroque scholar John Beverley is critical of what he calls a historicist appropriation of the Baroque in the postcolonial condition of Spanish America. He uses the term "historicist" to refer to the recuperation and reinsertion of the cultural past into a secularized eschatological projection towards a future that would bring about some kind of Parousia of a deep continental or national Being. This historicism is not to be confused with Hansen's more rigorous, albeit narrower, historicist position. Beverley shows that the historicist-eschatological use of the Baroque is mostly implicit in its discursive manifestations. His analysis of it has the merit to make it explicit and to sharply criticize it when it comes down to an essentializing celebration of the Baroque for the construction of collective identities (14-19; 136-148).

Hansen's important monograph *A Sátira e o engenho: Gregório de Matos e a Bahia do século XVII* can, to a certain extent, be seen as the response to de Campos' provocation. Although it is not an explicit reaction to it, it certainly comes out of the historiographic school of the Universidade de São Paulo and, therefore, presents Matos and the question of the Baroque from a completely different perspective. First of all, it is one of the most elaborate monographs on Matos, certainly the most solid one within the paradigm of historico-philological criticism, of which it offers a brilliant defense and illustration.

For Hansen, to elevate Matos to the status of a contemporary cultural hero, to construct him as an author of exceptional, original, genius¹⁹ is profoundly wrong. He vehemently criticizes this process and rejects its results.

In his opinion, the whole debate about and around the reinvention of Matos as an iconic figure is marred by a sort of capital sin in its anachronism, ahistoricity and in the dehistoricization of an author belonging to the 17th century. Consequently, to rectify this error, he proposes a rigorously historical approach that would take into consideration and respect the "order of discourse" of the 17th century both in Portugal and in its Brazilian colony. In this sense, he sides epistemologically with José Antonio Maravall in his dealings with the Baroque. They both criticize and reject a treatment that would be too imprecise and too free, and would amount to a deforming appropriation of the Baroque as an object of knowledge.²⁰ However, whereas Maravall engages in a cultural history that is close to the history of mentalities,

Hansen opts for the narrower and more technical approach of historical discourse analysis, which he practices in its more traditional version as philological and rhetorical analysis. His scientific endeavor then evolves around key terms such as “literary conventions,” “generic regularities,” “rhetorical instruments,” “perceptive topics,” “discursive codification” and “circulation of topics.”²¹ That is to say, he focuses on transindividual regularities that rule literary discourse production and reception in the 17th century and that have, necessarily, the effect of effacing the individual performance of a specific author. This is what he explicitly claims and promotes as the only valid approach to Matos. Thus, more implicitly, he adopts the pre-Gadamerian hermeneutic tradition that asks the interpreter to understand a text exclusively in its historical context, as, supposedly, contemporary readers would have understood it.

His task consists of reconstructing and reestablishing “the historical reality” of the Baroque. This formulation is Benito Pelegrin’s, who, as a specialist and translator of Gracián, leads a parallel struggle to Hansen’s.²² He, too, engages in an all-out fight against the critics and interpreters who would have gone off course by burying the work of the poet under thick layers of errors. The watchword would then be: go back to the text and read it in its historical truth.

The first consequence of such an approach, defended militantly, is the fact that certain terms and concepts, as they are used in Gregorianist criticism, become suspect, and even obsolete: “authorship” in the strong sense of individual performance, “innovation,” “originality,” “authenticity,”²³ “subversive value of satire.” Hansen insists on the fact that these terms are external to the historical object:

evidencia-se que “originalidade,” nos dois significados principais do termo, “autoria” et “novidade,” é critério duplamente exterior à poesia barroca: nela a figura individualizada do Autor não tem importância. Rigorosamente falando, a não ser como elemento posterior ao poema, efetuado pela sua leitura. Nela, ainda, lembrando-se mais uma vez a combinatória de tópicos retóricas coletivizadas que a compõem, a “novidade” não tem lugar. (*A sátira* 17)

Hansen’s conclusion is clear-cut: the operative concepts used by the Gregorianists “são evidentemente a-históricos, não podendo

ter a mínima pretensão analítica" (17). Their works would be in conflict with the very first principle of literary criticism: "adequação histórica ao objeto estudado" (35) and they therefore fall into the sin of anachronism.

The historiographic paradigm Hansen is thus developing and asserting allows him to work in a detailed and rigorous way with Matos' texts, elucidating the discursive regularities at work in them. Yet, inasmuch as he erects this paradigm into an absolute norm, nearly a way to scientific salvation, he glides into the well known shortcomings of historicism. That is to say, he posits a clear-cut separation between the object and the subject of historiography, ignoring the historicity of the subject or considering it only as a factor of deformation in historical knowledge. Obeying this logic, my object of interest, i.e. the reception process of Matos in general and the process of transforming him into a cultural hero, would only be thinkable under a negative sign, because this specific object could only be made up of anachronisms and historical distortions.

Yet what if we considered the proposition that anachronism and distortion are part of the very processes of cultural change and therefore of cultural history? Let us take, as an example, the question of author and authorship which, quite evidently in the case of Matos, plays an important role, since most of his texts were transmitted as "apógrafos" (second-hand manuscripts) and the question of their attribution still remains open to a certain extent. In other words, the corpus of his work—the correlative term to author—is yet to be determined in its details. It is certainly true that the 17th century did not use the concomitant concepts of author and work in the same way as subsequent epochs did. But the way in which Matos criticism used them to restrict the dispersal of discursive events and to ward off the aleatory nature of text circulation is itself a process that would be a worthwhile object of historical analysis. The Foucauldian allusions in my formulations are deliberate, because Matos would be an interesting case for analysis in the wake of Foucault's "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" and Roland Barthes' "La mort de l'auteur."

For Hansen, the concepts of author and work, and also originality and plagiarism, which are activated in the debate on Matos, are simply anachronistic. Their use, therefore, is reprehensible. From the point of view of my own research interests, such a verdict is insufficient,

or uninteresting. This is because it only criticizes, and stops short of rejecting, the object under study here—the fabrication of a new cultural hero—, but without explaining how such an object comes into being and functions. And yet, it is interesting to observe how precisely the recourse to the strong and unifying concept of the author can make us forget the precariousness of Matos' corpus. As a positive assessment, it can even be said that resorting to the concept of the author is conditional and constitutive of the fabrication of a cultural hero. A hero, precisely, is an exceptional individual capable of assuming the “author function” by constituting himself as the subject of an action, of a quest for meaning or of a creative act. The issue is, again, to concretize and crystallize in an anthropomorphic figure the cultural complexities of contemporaneity. Many things that are being said about the author Matos and published as his work might, in Hansen's terms, not be historically accurate in relation to the 17th century, but they gain cultural efficiency in the contemporary historical situation. And that, too, is historical reality.

Despite, on the one hand, the historically accurate caveat not to project anachronistically a later concept onto an earlier period, and despite, on the other hand, the post-structuralist theoretical critique of the configuration of the author as an individual subject, in cultural practices the anthropomorphic figure of the “cultural hero” still has a strong potential to capture the imagination by tying together in its figurative power various threads of dynamic complexities. And here the contemporary value of the Baroque is at stake again, because we can observe that today it is mainly—albeit not exclusively—Baroque figures, such as Gracián and Caravaggio, who provide the preferred materials for fabricating new cultural heroes.

And yet, Hansen's position, by virtue of his historicism, amounts to an impossibility of recognizing any contemporary significance or value in the Baroque. Thus, he criticizes any appropriation of the Baroque today, any contemporary cultural value granted to it, be it as a style, a cultural type or as an aesthetic taste. As an example, this is an extract from his article “Pós-moderno e barroco” that is more polemical than his book on Matos:

Assim, muito kitsch e sensual, muito liberado e liberador, esvaziado de toda negação heurística, de toda determinação histórica, “barroco” torna-se uma alegoria da forma sem a função. Como ornamento

puro, alegoriza o gozo imediato do espetáculo performático, como um simulacro, ou um signo, enfim, da absoluta estetização da inatualidade do atual. Em outras palavras, o uso do termo referido às artes contemporâneas parece ser sintomático de que as práticas artísticas se liberam dos imperativos ilustrados a que estiveram subordinadas desde o século XVIII. O uso é sintomático, por isso, também da desistoricização em curso em que anything goes. (30)

In these lines one can recognize a mockery of the ideological inversion of the Baroque discussed previously. This inversion is being rejected in defense of a modern position and against a certain idea of postmodernism that Hansen sees manifested in the return of the Baroque.

Yet Hansen carries his critique one step further when he questions the historical periodization according to which it has become common to talk about a Baroque era, a Baroque style, a Baroque culture. He insists on the fact that the concept of “Baroque” is a historical construction altogether *a posteriori* (“uma época que o século XX constitui como ‘barroca,’” *A sátira* 16²⁴) and seems to be willing to eliminate the irritating concept altogether. Later on he mitigates his position somewhat when he proposes that “Baroque” should only be used in the plural.

Objections can be raised against such a radically historicist position. Two in particular are relevant to Hansen’s treatment of Matos and his ostensible “Baroqueness:”

1. Hansen’s argument is too general

Although the periodization of the Baroque, including what I would call the exogenous fabrication of the very concept, is an extreme case, one can argue that each periodization is to a certain extent a retrospective construction. In even more general terms, any production of historical knowledge is guided by interests that are contemporaneous to the historian. Hansen sees and criticizes the interests of the Gregorianists, but he remains blind to his own. Thus the problems he raises in relation to contemporary scholarship on the Baroque are more general problems in terms of historiography—of an epistemological as well as hermeneutic nature—and therefore catch up with Hansen’s own historical approach to Matos.

2. Hansen runs into his own criticism

It is difficult to maintain the epistemological purity of a historicist approach without, sooner or later, finding oneself in the position of impurity. This is what happens in Hansen's text with his own use of the historical concept of "Romanticism." He develops a tendency to identify Romanticism as the origin of most of the problems that have marred the field of research on Matos. He summarizes this critique by the term "anacronismo romântico" ("Pós-moderno" 29, 32), meaning that the historical distortions in Matos scholarship go back to Romantic projections onto the 17th century—as manifested among others in the concepts of author, originality, personal expression—and are today reproduced as being Baroque properties. Romanticism becomes the "bad guy" in his critical narrative. The problem is that, in this case, he uses the period term Romanticism with as much imprecision and lack of critical analysis as he accuses the Gregorianists of doing with the term Baroque.

In the tail of the Baroque comet: the effectiveness of the figure of the cultural hero

In this last part I shall try to outline an argument aimed at developing a cultural history that would integrate the phenomenon of the long-term historical workings of a specific cultural paradigm, such as the Baroque. I offer this in response to the incapacity of Hansen's approach to explain cultural changes as historical processes, especially changes taking place under our own historical eyes.

In spite of the imprecisions of, and the ongoing debates about, the term, the category or the concept of "Baroque," I am convinced that the repeated resurgences of the Baroque deserve the interest of the researcher. This is because these returns attest to the phenomenon of the historical effectiveness of the Baroque. To take up an image I have been using elsewhere; in the Baroque comet, the tail in the sky of cultural history is as interesting, and certainly more impressive to observe, than its historical nucleus. It is therefore worthwhile to focus our research not only on the nucleus, but also on the tail of the Baroque comet, i.e. on its ongoing historical effectiveness. And in the comet's tail we find the figure of Matos who, unlike Padre Anchieta or Padre Vieira for instance,

has attained over the last, say, thirty years in Brazil the importance of a cultural hero with a strong profile and a vast circulation.

It is possible, from a historian perspective, to criticize this intense reception of a specific Baroque artist, as an unwarranted appropriation, as an anachronistic error that partakes in a more general trend of dehistoricization in contemporary culture. We are all familiar with the complaints about a culture that would be amnesiac, cannibalistic and bereft of historicity, subsumed under the heading of postmodernism.

As a researcher, I would like to contribute towards overcoming this negative perception of our "culturescape." The change in cultural paradigm we are witnessing relies heavily on processes of remaking, resurgence and recycling. We would misread these processes if we were to simply take them as anachronisms. It is through them that cultural change is being articulated; contemporaneous culture is being constructed with materials coming from elsewhere and from erstwhile, from another place and another time.

The process of cultural revival and recycling always has two sides to it: it unfolds in two times, but the two sides or times are constitutive of, and inseparable from the whole process. One could consider it a dialectic between a negative and a positive side.

The negative side or moment is one of a violence upon the material coming from the past. This can take place, more concretely, in terms of a fragmentation, of an orchestrated forgetting, of an aggressive decontextualization, of a devaluation. The material, thus, is removed from its historical basis, or liberated from some of its historical ties that identified it and gave it meaning. Without this negative moment in relation to a first historical context, there would be no history. It makes the material available for its reinsertion into new contexts. It destines it for future new uses.

The positive side or moment sees the material displaced, transferred and reinserted into a new context where it becomes the object of unseen appropriations. This moment is articulated in terms of a transvaluation, a recontextualization, a creation of new relations, an insertion into a new memory, a production of meaning. The material, thus, is taken over by new logic and willpower, and falls into the force lines of new desires and energies.

This second moment of the process is no less historical than the first, although it diverts the material from what seemed to be its only

function and meaning in its original context. This is an important assessment that we should be able to dissociate from whether or not we like the forces and vectors that determine the process of reappropriation.

This sketchy schema allows us to understand how an author far removed in time can acquire contemporary value, even if this value is in conflict with the historical “realities” and “truths” that have governed the moment of production of his/her work. It allows us to retrace the process that can culminate in his/her establishment as a cultural hero today. In this process there is a “truth” about our contemporaneity to be unfolded that is no less historical. If we apply this schema to the case of Matos, or to the texts attributed to him, we have a chance of understanding his present cultural relevance without being obliged to reject it.

The various biographical elements from the life of Matos, his historical figure, the perception of his function as an author and, most importantly, the texts published under, and attributed to, his authorship; all these are materials one might want to determine in their original historical context. But they are also available for ulterior appropriations. All the more so as they had been subject to a long period of oblivion (what Ascher calls Matos’ limbo) and devaluation (what Ascher calls Matos’ purgatory). Starting in 1850 with Varnhagen’s inclusion of some 39 of his poems into his *Florilégio da poesia brasileira* (1850), his texts were slowly put into circulation in published form.

It is only with James Amado’s seven-volume publication in 1969 that the resurgence of the poet, qualified as Baroque, started snowballing. The materials related to his name were reactivated, resuscitated and put into circulation in a much more intense and extensive way; admittedly, often with little respect for their objective historical truths. Quite to the contrary, in this intense appropriative manipulation new interests, desires and visions were projected onto them. Various such programs of appropriations can be identified:

- the construction of a regional Bahian cultural identity
- a new interest in the early history of Brazil’s colonization and its dialectics²⁵
- a radical revision of a version (which had reached the status of being official) of the history of national literature

- on the political scene: the interest in propagating a message of revolt and resistance (mainly in the context of the military regime in Brazil)
- on the aesthetic scene: the linking up of what is seen as Baroque within contemporary tendencies, such as concrete poetry, postmodernism
- an ideological critique of the shortcomings of the modern meta-narratives

These diverse programs—some of them with a clearly national scope, others going beyond national issues—are not in harmonious interaction with each other. They show areas of tension, even of contradictions, and might be articulated in a conflictual way. Yet the way these materials in the case of Matos circulate and are reappropriated little by little creates densities through repetition; some paths are traced and retraced as if controlled by unknown forces. From this complex process there emerges a strong profile of the cultural hero, less and less fuzzy, even if the plurality of perspectives and projections does not diminish.

NOTES

¹ An obvious and extreme case would be the heritage of Nazi culture in a period of denazification.

² Not to be taken for a “return to the Baroque,” as Guy Scarpetta warns us, both in *L'impureté* and in *L'artifice*.

³ Severo Sarduy being one of the leading figures, if not the founding father, of this development.

⁴ Just to mention two of many such artists: in film Peter Greenaway and in theater Robert Lepage.

⁵ As could be seen in the 2000 exhibition *Ultra-Baroque* (Armstrong).

⁶ The figure of Padre Antônio Vieira (1608-1697), another Brazilian Baroque author, is quite present in literary scholarship, but he has not grown into the status of a “cultural hero” on an equal footing with Matos, despite the profile given to him by Mario de Andrade in his *Macunaíma* (1928), and by Manoel de Oliveira in his movie *Palavra e utopia* (2000). The dates for Matos are approximate (Costigan, “Colonial Literature” 87). The author’s name also exists in the spelling variant “Mattos” and some scholars use the complete name Matos Guerra.

⁷ In his essay of 1957 “La curiosidad barroca,” he includes the Brazilian sculptor Antônio Francisco Lisboa, known as O Aleijadinho, as part of “lo hispano,” in his triad of major Latin American Baroque figures who, together, represent the mestizo nature of Latin American society: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (criolla), Kondori (criollo and Indian) and O Aleijadinho (criollo and African).

⁸ According to a verdict by Haroldo de Campos which I will discuss later on.

⁹ Gomes titles his introduction “Um autor emerge dos apógrafos” (13-49) and Hansen has as his first chapter “Um nome para fazer” (*A sátira* 13-69).

¹⁰ In his 2010 edition of Matos’ *Poemas escolhidos*, José Miguel Wisnik still observes that “continua irrealizada a necessária edição crítica da obra de Gregório de Matos” although, in 1999, Francisco Topa presented at the University of Porto the following doctoral thesis: *Edição crítica da obra poética de Gregório de Matos*.

¹¹ Matos’ *Obra poética* is already in its third edition in 1992.

¹² The most famous one dates back to the middle of the 18th century (Licenciado Manuel Pereira Rabelo, *Vida do excelente poeta lírico, o doutor Gregório de Matos e Guerra*) and was re-published in the 7th volume of (Matos, *Obras completas* 1969).

¹³ “O boca do inferno” (the devil’s mouth; literally, “the mouth of hell”) and «o boca de brasa» (mouth of live embers) were the most common nicknames given to Matos.

¹⁴ See, for example, Massi and “Neo-barroco” and “O purgatorio do boca do inferno.”

¹⁵ Cf. http://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/cms/en/sparten/buehne_und_bewegung/among_cannibals_4184_5.html accessed December 3, 2012.

¹⁶ It must be mentioned here that, nearly simultaneously, the North-American scholar of Brazilian origin, Lúcia Costigan, published on Gregório de Matos (*A*

sátira, “Colonial Literature”). She proposes basically a socio-historical analysis and comparison of two “intelectuais criollos” of the colonial period and of their satirical work: Matos and Juan del Valle y Caviedes. Her rigorously comparatist approach erases to a certain extent the particularity of the Brazilian case, because its basis of comparison is the common ambivalent colonial condition of the two satirical poets. However, she opens a window on the question of their contemporary appropriation when she projects into the future reception process the hypothesis that this reappropriation will intensify in moments of national crisis. She articulates this process in three steps: “resgate, avaliação e reavaliação” (*A sátira* 14).

¹⁷ “Este livro foi preparado e redigido entre 1945 e 1941.... posto de lado alguns anos e retomado em 1955, para uma revisão terminada em 1956, quanto ao primeiro volume, e 1957, quanto ao segundo” (Cândido, *A formação* I, 10).

¹⁸ The phrase is Jeanyves Guérin’s, but the idea has been adopted by Benito Pelegrin (Pelegrin, *Éthique*) as well as Guy Scarpetta (*L’impureté*).

¹⁹ He denounces the fact that this is a pure fabrication in formulations like these: “a constituição de Gregório de Matos,” “atribuindo outras virtudes a Gregório,” “erigir Gregório de Matos como homem libertario” (*A sátira* 19-21).

²⁰ In his article “Pós-moderno e barroco,” Hansen radicalizes his position beyond that of Maravall, rejecting even the historical denomination “Baroque” (which, in any case, would be a historical fabrication *a posteriori*), especially in the singular, which he caricatures as “O Barroco.”

²¹ All these expressions are present in the programmatic part of his first chapter. In this statement, he summarizes his approach: “monta-se aqui uma encenação ... sobre modos históricos de ver e de dizer, conforme repertórios de lugares-comuns, argumentos e formas da tradição retórico-poética e suas transformações locais” (*A sátira* 29)

²² I am referring here to his book quoted above (*Éthique*) and also to the introduction to his French translation of *Agudeza y arte del ingenio* that was published under the title *Art et figures de l’esprit* (1983).

²³ On the opposite side of these terms one finds “plagiarism” which, together with intertextuality, is the key concept in João Carlos Teixeira Gomes’ approach to Matos in his excellent monograph which, unfortunately, I will not be able to discuss in detail in this essay.

²⁴ If we consider the works by Burckhardt, Gurlitt and Wölfflin, this “fabrication” of the Baroque should date back to the 19th century.

²⁵ See, for instance, Bosi’s chapter “Do antigo estado à máquina mercante” (94-118).

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