



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

ORPHEUS IN THE NEW WORLD: CONTINUITIES OF  
COCTEAU'S ORPHEUS IN WILLIAMS' *ORPHEUS DESCENDING*,  
MORAES' *ORFEU DA CONCEIÇÃO*, CAMUS' BLACK ORPHEUS  
AND DIEGUES' *ORFEU*

by  
BAUDOIN PAUL CHAAR

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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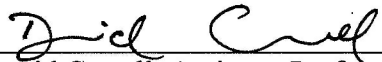
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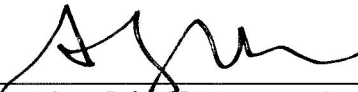
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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Baudouin Paul Chaar for Master of Arts  
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Title: Orpheus in the New World: Continuities of Cocteau's *Orpheus* in Williams' *Orpheus Descending*, Moraes' *Orfeu da Conceição*, Camus' *Black Orpheus* and Diegues' *Orfeu*

This thesis examines the different adaptations of the classical myth of Orpheus as told by Ovid in the Americas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the following texts: the play *Orpheus Descending* (1957) by the American playwright Tennessee Williams, the film *Orfeu Negro* (1959) by the French director Marcel Camus and, the film *Orfeu* (1999) by the Brazilian director Carlos Diegues with the music of Caetano Veloso.

This thesis traces the genealogy of the adaptations of the myth of Orpheus in Europe since the middle ages until the modernist era, to explain the inspiration behind these American authors' perceptions of the myth of Orpheus and its adaptation into their own cultures.

The aim of this thesis is to try to demonstrate how each one of these adaptations in the Americas created a version of the new world Orphic into a distinct cultural product of their particular societies (the U.S and Brazil) to reflect on important problems and concerns which were prevalent in their time. Some Important elements concerning the manifestations of these new world Orphic figures are: the sources of inspiration for the protagonist, the music that is found in the adaptations and the meaning behind it, and also, the racial element that is an important factor in these American societies. In so doing, I aim to prove that these adaptations of the myth succeed one another in creating each time a more accurate manifestation of the new world Orphic that represents the modern American continent and its complex cultures.

Significantly, I aim to prove in this thesis that the artist Caetano Veloso and his oeuvre are the final version of the new world Orphic in the Americas as he manifests a certain spirit that represents the evolution and change in Brazil's outlook on the world and on itself through his persona and music.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **A. Orpheus in Europe**

This thesis is a study of the adaptations of the myth of Orpheus in the American continent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through different texts. Two of the most significant aspects of these adaptations that will be analysed in these various modern texts are music and race, and the ways in which the emphasis and introduction of these elements in these texts transforms the forms and themes of these re-tellings in profound ways, which I describe as a particularly American aesthetic approach referred to as “the new world Orphic.” The reason why these two elements are emphasized in this thesis is because of their importance as cultural agents in these different American societies. In the course of this study, I will attempt to explain why these two elements became such prominent aspects in the adaptations of the myth of Orpheus that were produced in both North and South America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

On the one hand, music is the expression of a group and a vector of social change. Since music is present in real life and is continually changing and transforming into new forms according to the different cultures that receive, integrate and change it, music is expressive in that it distinguishes different cultures from one another. Although in this thesis, I do not engage in an extensive analysis of the Orphic form of music—i.e. the fusion of poetry and music, which is commonly known as lyrical music—I do point to manifestations of it in the texts discussed, most notably in the case of the Brazilian singer-songwriter Caetano Veloso, whose songs have

often been studied as lyrical poetry and who, I ultimately claim, in his music and persona constitutes a paradigm of the new world Orphic.

On the other hand, race is a vital element in these texts because most of the musical genres which are studied are musical expressions that come from black cultures and black people on the American continent. Since black people were brought to the American continent from Africa as slaves and lived as slaves until the abolition of slavery in 1888 in Brazil, and in 1865 in the U.S, they inevitably became an essential part of these American societies politically and culturally. Although that legacy inevitably entails cultural, political, legal and historical aspects informed by profoundly unequal power relations, race, as a category, necessarily continues to be a charged subject. Discussions of texts, especially musical texts and those in which African-Americans are represented, and the cultural sphere in the Americas are often understandably seen primarily through the prism of racial oppression, and cultural production is studied in terms of categories such as cultural appropriation and jarringly unequal legal treatment. While acknowledging the power and significance of those arguments, this thesis focuses primarily on the racial component in the texts studied as manifestations of aesthetic sensibilities coming out of various cultures in the Americas (as manifested, for example, in music) and the way in which these sensibilities blend with other cultural expressions from other racial and cultural groups to create radically new forms of cultural expression. I suggest that this process which is musical and racial, or cultural mixing in the Americas produces a range of aesthetic strategies, and texts that redefine artistic modernism and, more specifically, aesthetics in the Orphic tradition that comes out of Europe.

Since the question of race plays a very important role in debates about contemporary culture, there is now a recognition of the extent to which race as a social and legal category has

historically helped to define a whole range of spheres of life, including the cultural. It is important to acknowledge in any cultural study that the introduction of race, African-American characters, African-American music, etc. cannot be understood strictly in terms of aesthetics. Moreover, with the benefit of hindsight critics and scholars who are able to perceive, or at least believe they can perceive, racial dynamics operating in the cultural sphere in much more profound, and some would suggest, pernicious ways that seemed evident at the times these texts were produced. Although these contemporary perspectives about race will not be addressed in depth in the analysis of the texts studied, such an approach would likely produce equally fruitful studies of these adaptations of Orpheus in the new world. Nevertheless, a principal component of the argument presented here will be that the Americas produced a proliferation of radically innovative re-tellings of the Orpheus myth in the 20<sup>th</sup> century precisely because it constituted a space—in its societies, streets, favelas, carnivals and, above all, in its music—that allowed for the creation of new and complex cultural texts.

Since this study is an analysis of new world adaptations of the Orpheus myth as manifested in European modernism, especially as represented by Jean Cocteau's three films that utilize the Orpheus myth, I will offer a brief overview of European iterations of the myth, beginning with the version as told by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. Since the myth itself is, above all, about transformation—both literal and artistic. Moreover, it is instructive to identify paradigmatic forms in earlier eras in Europe to have a fuller understanding of the kinds of transformations that the introduction of race, a range of musical styles and artistic hybridity entailed in the Americas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The myth of Orpheus from Ancient Greece has unknown origins and over time has acquired many different variations in its storyline. During the Roman era, different poets, like

Virgil (70–19 BC) and Ovid (43 BC–AD 17/18), composed poems to tell this story. Although differing in some minor aspects (such as the identity of the father of Orpheus), the storyline of Orpheus as told by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* is used for this research. Comprised of 15 books, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a collection of many popular Greek and Roman myths and the real histories of emperors and generals from the beginning of recorded history until the time of Ovid.

In Book 10 of *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the story of Orpheus, the legendary musician of Thrace. Orpheus was the son of Apollo and the muse of Calliope. He was such a gifted musician that he was able to enchant trees, rocks, and animals simply by playing his lyre and singing to them with his magical voice. On the day of his marriage to the beautiful Eurydice, whom he loves dearly, she is bitten by a snake and dies. After this tragic event, Orpheus laments her death so inconsolably that he decides he must go to Hades - the god of the dead in the underworld - to bring her back to earth. The journey is arduous but after passing the River Styx and the monster Cerberus, he finally arrives in the presence of Hades and his wife Proserpina. To plead his case to the two gods, he plays his lyre and sings his request. As he successfully charms the gods of the underworld, they grant him his request but only on the condition that while Eurydice follows him on his way back to the world of the living, he must not look back at her; if he does, he will lose her forever. Orpheus accepts the condition and makes the journey back to the world of the living with Eurydice following him. However, as he walks, he cannot hear her footsteps - because she is a spirit - and so in a moment of weakness, he ignores the condition that the gods have given him. He turns to look back at Eurydice and, in so doing, loses her forever. After this traumatic experience, Orpheus goes back to the world of the living and is so grieved that he swears never to talk to women again; instead, he decides that he will only sing songs of lament to his long lost Eurydice, while also turning his attention to young men and discarding women for the rest of his

life. At this point, Ovid interrupts the story to recount different mythological stories that address the subject of loss and grief, such as the story of Cyparissus. Eventually, Ovid returns to the original story: one day, as Orpheus is sitting beside a river playing his lyre, the nymphs of Dionysus come to him from the forest and make advances to him. After he rejects them, they become furious and decide to take their revenge. Attacking him with stones, they kill him violently and, in the end, decapitate him. Orpheus' head falls into the river but continues singing his lament while being carried away by the water. After his death, Orpheus' spirit goes to the world of the dead and is reunited with his love Eurydice forever.

Since Orpheus is a bard who charms any living and non-living creature with his music, the myth is clearly about art, the creation of art, and how art influences nature and culture. Since the motifs of the myth are important in terms of the relationship man has established between himself, art, and nature, the myth seems to possess a universal quality, which has caused it to be used and adapted into European literature since the middle ages.

What follows is a very brief review of what the myth of Orpheus meant for each of these European cultural eras, so as to understand how high modernism adapted the myth and how the myth was transformed by the French artist and filmmaker Jean Cocteau in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. I will then turn to the focus of this thesis, which is how this European high modernist Orpheus was transformed into what I will call a new world Orphic aesthetic in five iterations: in Tennessee Williams' play *Orpheus Descending*; in the Brazilian composer and poet Vinicius de Moraes' stage play *Orfeu da Conceicao* [*Orpheus of the Conception*]; in the film *Black Orpheus*, by the French filmmaker Marcel Camus; in *Orfeu*, a radical adaptation of Vinicius' play and Camus's film by Brazilian filmmaker Carlos Diegues; and on the album *O Estrangeiro* [*The Stranger*], by the Brazilian singer-songwriter Caetano Veloso.

At the end of classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, or the 'dark ages' (400-1400 A.D), various myths and stories from antiquity were used for religious and artistic purposes. One poem that is an adaptation of the myth of Orpheus in this era is *Sir Orfeo* (ca. 1300). The author of the poem is unknown, but, judging from the style of the poem, it is a minstrel or a poem for troubadours. The poem is in verse form and was meant to be sung as a tale for entertainment. Adapting the myth to what was then Brittany (Bretagne in modern north-eastern France) and Britain (modern England), Orfeo is the king of Winchester (then believed to be Thrace) and a great player of the harp. He is the descendant of King Pluto and his wife Queen Juno. His wife, Dame Heurodis, is Eurydice. The importance of this poem is that it is grounded in the folkloric medieval tales of the time. For example, Dame Heurodis, instead of dying, is taken by a fairy to an alien country. Afflicted by her loss, Orfeo goes into the wilderness for ten years and laments her death. At the end of these ten years, Orfeo starts to play his harp again and enchants nature, which forces various animals to come from the wild and listen to him. Once, after being visited by a group of women who Orfeo thinks to be his wife and her servants, he follows them by going through a cave and after coming out of it, Orfeo arrives at a king's palace where he sees Dame Heurodice held captive. Orfeo then asks for the king to liberate her. When the king asks Orfeo to prove himself, he starts to play his harp and through the beauty of his music succeeds, in persuading the king to release his wife and takes her back to his kingdom.

King Orfeo's generosity is demonstrated as he later gives his crown to his faithful servant after returning to his kingdom with Dame Heurodice. In a way, Orpheus in the middle ages represents the good king, the beauty and power of music through playing the harp in courts, and the magical forests and prairies that were then seen as teeming with magical creatures.

The adaptation of the myth in this era attests to the power of the feudal system and that of music as a folkloric element, which was a then powerful cultural entity, and served to entertain the folk and gather people of various ranks and statuses. This folkloric power of the myth of Orpheus will be analysed in the second chapter of this study, which focuses when, for example, the carnivalesque is manifested as a more powerful entity in the new world Orpheus.

During the renaissance (1400-1600 A.D), texts of classical antiquity were re-explored to fit the different reality of Europe at the time. Being an era in which art was given importance and elevated and transcended through religion and Christianity in particular, the myth of Orpheus was mixed with Christianity to fit these new ideals. Lane (1987), who traced the evolution of the myth of Orpheus through the ages, notes that:

...the predominant sense given to the myth by the renaissance: an exemplary history of love, loss and grief where love-conjugal fidelity, the theme adopted from Ovid-is seen to triumph, if tragically and transcendently. The myth assumes an idealizing and religious meaning and power: Orpheus is seen as the harmonizer of the world and nature, as a Christ-like diving and redemptive principle, overcoming, in and through his death, the forces of darkness, sin and destruction (4).

Here, love is emphasised to connect the myth to the love of God in Christianity. The redemptive power of Orpheus is emphasised since, in Ovid's tale, music grants Orpheus the power to save himself from death. This connection between Orpheus' myth and religion was established during this era and will be manifested in the second and third chapter where religion plays an important role in that it mixes various cultures together and creates newness.

Aspects of the romantic era (1789 – 1820 A.D) that converge with themes in the myth of Orpheus include: loneliness, the wandering poet, the poet in rebellion against the machine, the love of nature and nature as solace from society and its corruption. Interests in tragedy and an

admiration of the past were also emphasised. These romantic aspects of the Orphic aesthetics will be manifested in the first chapter with the character of Val Xavier and, in the third chapter with the character of Caetano Veloso since they both represent these ideals. Moreover, the myth of Orpheus represents these ideas in a distinct way:

The Romantic generally tends to conceive Orpheus, often allusively, as the expressive power of poetry, subjectively and ‘tragically’ realized. It is a power which triumphs over all limitations and restrictions and this attains infinitude, but only by virtue of the assumption of its antithesis—the Orphic song, an expression of an infinite desire for union and harmony, is achieved in death, the swansong of Orpheus’ floating, singing head and sounding lyre (Lane 1987, 4).

During this era, the emphasis was on the music of Orpheus and its power which transcends death. This power that music possesses will be explored in the second chapter with regards to the treatment of music in Camus’ film.

After the romantic age came the modern era, with all its complexities and different cultural movements which obviously profoundly affected modernist interpretations of the myth of Orpheus. Of greatest significance for this thesis is modernism in France and how various poets and artists influenced Jean Cocteau (1889–1963), the artist responsible for creating a modernist European Orpheus which in turn served as a highly influential model for artists from the new world in the creation of their adaptations of the Orpheus myth in the Americas.

In the modern era, artists saw in the orphic myth a new way of creating art as a different form of expression. Lane (1987) defines this means of expression as ‘orphic’ or non-linear. By this, he means that the artist focuses on lyricism or the burst of feelings and expressing emotions spontaneously as opposed to a structured linear narrative in which expression is brought forth through the unfolding of the events in a structured way:



The post-Romantic, modern Orphic artist seeks an intensification and objectification of feeling, in rendering the Orphic process as the impulse and experience of himself *as artist*, of his art. [...] In other words, the Orpheus myth – or rather myths - cannot be adopted or assumed as a given, totality, a subject, a full story, but must be recreated in just those terms—terms, that is, of the paradoxical, the fragmentary, the inner, the negative (5).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the myth of Orpheus was used in this way (non-linearly and lyrically) by the French painter Odilon Redon (1840 – 1916), the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842 – 1898), and also the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), who all used the orphic myth as a subject for their paintings and poems (Lane, 1987).

Furthermore, during the same modern era when religion gave way to the advances in technology and science, new philosophical ideas emerged and changed the way culture was created, interpreted, and demonstrated. One of the most significant modern philosophies that impacted culture is psychology through the writings of Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939). After Freud’s theories and writings about the psychology of dreams, the unconscious, and the psyche, French poet André Breton (1896 – 1966) created the artistic and philosophical movement called *Le Surréalisme* (The Surrealism). As Breton explains in his *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924) (Manifesto of surrealism), surrealism is a means to counter the ‘realist’ trend in culture and literature more specifically the means by which the poet would create art strictly by relating his past experiences and the elements learned from his own life. Seeing this element of creation as limiting, Breton thought that this method was too reductionist for the power of the poet, art, and creation. What he explains instead is that the artist’s imagination possesses incredible power of representation that needs to be accessed to create meaningful art. To exploit the resources of the imagination, the artist must delve deep in his dreams and then mix the material of his dreams with reality to create a new reality: “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, so

contradictory in appearance, which are the dream and reality, in a sort of absolute reality, a *surreality...*” (Breton 1924, 6; translation by author). This resolution through mixing is what he calls surrealism. Moreover, through the liberation of the psyche, whether in writing or any other form, the artist expresses himself in a surrealist fashion as he associates seemingly contrary elements in his creation by blending and creating newness.

It is important to consider how surrealism changed cultural notions to understand how Jean Cocteau drew inspiration from this movement, which helped him create his own adaptation of the myth of Orpheus.

Since gender is an important element of the orphic myth, which one sees repeatedly in manifestations of the new world Orphic, it is important to consider how the surrealists changed the notions of gender. Bridet (2012) argues that female writers were rare during the surrealist period (1924–1933). As a result of Breton’s latent homophobia and misogyny, the movement categorised women only as embodying specific ideals about love and sexuality. Notably, by liberating the unconscious, the surrealist movement disturbed the traditional roles that men and women played in the world of art and representation. Masculine characters became more feminine and feminine characters became more masculine. For certain surrealists, some types of women represented a connection with the fundamental forces of life and nature. They believed that some of them held the secret to the world of tomorrow and so they became the marginalised force from which the poets took inspiration because they represented a challenge to the established order and an opportunity for the new. Bridet (2012) asserts that by rejecting the war culture that was inherited from World War I and the model of bourgeois love, artists of the surrealist movement pursued an ideal love that could save the world. They also wished to be free from all repression and therefore focused on the unconscious as a means of liberating

themselves. Furthermore, the surrealists emphasised the spirit and idea of the word rather than the form of the word. What the surrealists meant by that is that content mattered more than form. So for example if a film's content were poetical and beautiful, it could be considered a poem.

Jean Cocteau (1899–1963), through his art and his Orphic persona, as portrayed in three of his films which are analysed here in this introduction, represents a paradigmatic case of high modernist Orphic aesthetics in Europe. As is discussed at length in subsequent chapters, Cocteau's persona and art served as a model for new world orphic aesthetics, especially in Williams' *Orpheus Descending*, but also in the adaptations of the Orpheus myths in the Americas produced by Marcel Camus, Carlos Diegues, and Caetano Veloso.

According to Héring (2015), who asserts that the 20th century was very rich in terms of movements and who utilizes a preface Cocteau wrote for his earliest collection of poems called *Le Secret Professionnel* (1922) (*The Professional Secret*), the elements that Cocteau used in his early works and throughout his career are largely drawn from the French symbolist movement. One good example of that would be the presence of mythology, as it will be evident in his Orphic films:

One should not look very far to find affinities between the symbolists and Cocteau. We notice first of all the importance of mythological themes. A great number of Cocteau's works attest to his attraction for the histories and the mythological characters... (Héring 2015, 49; translation by author).

Cocteau's engagement with Orphic myth is evident even in his early artistic practice. For example, Cocteau used elements from surrealism as well such as the concept of automatic writing. He differed from the Surrealists in that he let his ideas flow without control, which is what the surrealists had tried hard to achieve but could not. Cocteau may be seen to have

succeeded in his experiments in his attempts at unimpeded, free-flowing creativity, and the surrealists clearly begrudged him his success:

His ideas, his aspirations and his way of seeing brought Cocteau closer to the Surrealists, while at the same time expressing himself in a particular style. It is true that Cocteau used the writing technique of the Surrealists, automatic writing. But as the Surrealists had to force themselves to eliminate as much as they could all control on the flux of their writing, we could say that curiously, the absence of the form of control was a natural fact, almost spontaneous for Cocteau: his oeuvre would come out in him from itself, so to speak – which is what the Surrealists wanted to attain, in a certain way, though a direct act, semi-consciously. His different attitude towards creation, his way of seeing things and his style estranged him from the surrealists, who also, didn't recognize any talent in him (Héring 2015, 50; translation by author).

The complexity of Cocteau's work was the result of having taken inspiration from many different art forms and having used a variety of art forms to express himself. In that sense, Cocteau is an exemplar of the modernist idea of "making it new," to use the phrase Ezra Pound created to describe the modernist project. Moreover, Héring (2015) suggests that Cocteau's creative process, regardless of the medium in which he was working, was intimately connected to the creation of poetry, which has been a central component of orphic aesthetics through the centuries. Paradoxically, while a key aspect of Cocteau's orphic aesthetics was poetic creation, he manifested this poetic sensibility in forms in a range of genres and that within existing forms were novel precisely because they were multi-generic. The new world Orphic aesthetic drew inspiration from this ideal: that of the work of art as multi-generic. This feature of the Orphic is prominent in all of the new world adaptations analysed in this study, including *Orpheus Descending*, the various versions of *Orfeu Negro* and Caetano Veloso's aesthetic project, which is based in large part on the Brazilian modernist poetic project of "cannibalism," assimilation, adaptation and radical reimagining using local elements, which is manifested most clearly in his album *O Estrangeiro*.

The three films Cocteau wrote and directed, which constitute the orphic trilogy, are: *Le Sang d'un Poète* (The Blood of a Poet) (1932), *Orphée* (1950), and *Le Testament d'Orphée* (The Testament of Orpheus) (1960). As the titles suggest, each of these three films is based on the myth of Orpheus, which Cocteau adapted to his philosophy of art and poetry, using the cinematic medium and other genres to create his own personal and very idiosyncratic interpretation of the myth.

In *Le Sang d'un poète*, which could be described as an absurdist film, there are four parts which are not connected, and every part represents a different story. In the first scene, poetry is allegorised as a hand that is drawn by an unnamed man on a canvas and then spreads from the white canvas to his body. It later finds itself on a white statue in the room and gives life to it, which becomes a lady who shines very brightly. According to Andréo (2012), in Cocteau's film, cinematography is used alongside poetry to create a break or a separation from all the preconceived notions of poetry and creation. By making a film that does not follow a linear narrative, Cocteau plays with established notions of order, beauty, and harmony to create a new perspective on poetry, using the themes to which he was always drawn to such as mythology and painting. For Cocteau, cinematography is an explosive genre that is very powerful in simultaneously destroying and creating at the same time. In this film, which is the first of the trilogy, the most important themes in Cocteau's work are present: childhood, mythology, and sacrifice. Another significant element is the importance of the machine and the relationship of it and the cinema to poetry. As in many other scenes in the film, Cocteau comments on poetry. In the first scene, one such comment is on the contagiousness of poetry. For example, the hand on the canvas at the beginning of the film which runs through the body of the protagonist suggests that poetry corrupts the body, the soul, and the world. Another aspect of Cocteau's orphic

aesthetic is its clear assertion that poetry has the ability to surprise, to change established values and to create the new. This component of Cocteau's version of the orphic aesthetic is especially significant in providing a poetic template for new world practitioners of orphic aesthetics in that it provides a model for radical experimentation that valorises forms that are not only multigeneric but radically new.

In terms of structure and themes, Siambani and Thivat (2010) argue that Cocteau did not want to make a film using normal narrative structures and therefore decided to create a film in his own way. Although he was accused by the critics of having plagiarised Luis Buñuel's surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), Cocteau was fascinated by the idea of the state of somnolence - neither awake nor asleep - and the internal world. Cocteau asserted that he wished to make a film that would be like a poem, one which would reveal the internal world of the self; since the self is not structured by linearity, the structure of the film had to be like a dream, non-linear and free, following the logic of the unconscious, i.e. the internal world of the artist:

With *Le Sang d'un Poète*, Cocteau does not wish to create a conventional film, "but a poem" and wishes to use the machine, not to tell a story, but to express himself, to tell through images these things which inhabit our deep nights and which we would only formulate at the end of a dream (Siambani and Thivat 2010, 3; translation by author).

By mixing cinematography and painting, Cocteau was able to innovate and add new ideas to the world of cinema, by, for example, incorporating a statue, which is a very important element in the film. Siambani and Thivat (2010) argue that 30 years after having made *Le Sang d'un Poète*, Cocteau made the film *Le Testament d'Orphée*, which constituted a form of self-reflection about his own creative life and work, as well as an adaptation or reworking of *Le Sang*, in which Cocteau self-reflexively ruminates on the fact that Orpheus and Oedipus characters

incessantly appear in his works. One such example of this self-reflexivity is the use of his other artworks to comment on himself. In *Le Testament d'Orphée*, Cocteau and Cégèste (who is the same Cégèste in *Orphée*) arrive at the port of a small town called Villefranche-sur-Mer close to Nice, where Cocteau reflects on the church that he painted and decorated in 1957 and what it meant for him. Many of Cocteau's other paintings and symbols appear in the film as well. Later in the film, we see Cocteau resurrected from death (after dying by being pierced by a spear which has been thrown at him by an Egyptian mythological god in a cave). He has sketched eyes and we see a blind Oedipus (acted by Jean Marais) and his daughter walking in front of him. Cocteau includes the appearance of a number his famous friends and influences, such as the actor Yul Brynner, the artist Pablo Picasso, and the singer Charles Aznavour. Using both his own artworks, multiple genres and different myths and artists who were close to him, Cocteau creates an orphic aesthetic that constitutes a kind of collage of different themes and subjects inside one main story frame. There is the inclusion of autobiographical elements from the artist's life in the artwork. This inclusion of material from the artist's own life serves to blur the lines between fiction and reality to create a new reality that is the mix of the two. We will see a similar approach utilized in the creation of a new world aesthetics by both Tennessee Williams in *Orpheus Descending*, who draws on a variety of biographical, cultural and aesthetic components from a range of genre, such as music, poetry, the visual arts and drama, and Caetano Veloso, who also utilizes aspects of poetry, music, cinema, painting and anthropology in his album *O Estrangeiro*. As this study will make clear, the radical new world re-imaginings of the Orpheus myth depends upon a variety of cultural dynamics that, while drawing on Cocteau and his precursors, are specific to the new world milieu in which they are produced.

The elements of the surreal and dream are obviously significant in Cocteau's orphic films. One especially important component is made manifest when Orpheus passes from the world of the living to the world of the dead. This transition always takes place through a mirror, which Orphée enters to pass to the other world, where he encounters another reality. The other world is not hell, but a strange and dark place where people represent abstract concepts such as death, such as a lady dressed in black, who avows her love to Orphée but agrees to return his wife Eurydice to him because she will never be able to possess him since she is dead and he is alive. According to Dulong (2018):

...the motif of the mirror is the process of individuation. Vision distinguishes itself through being split by a look which, retroactively, creates a screen to the vision by an axiological discrimination which accuses a double, a reflection, real or antagonist, to maintain its identity distinct. So, doubling the mirrors, a cryptic orphic technique disrupts the equilibrium of the gaze and permits the access to the infinity of vision (113).

We see how this mirror and the other world in Cocteau's interpretation of the surreal are shown in the new world orphic and its effects. A good example would be the mirror that reflects Eurydice and breaks in Diegues film, which we will see in the third chapter and the implications behind it.

One element of Cocteau's orphic aesthetics that is especially significant is the representation of gender roles. In part because of the influence of the surrealists and in part because of his own sexuality, he represents the male protagonist in his three films in a novel and unusual way: the hero is eroticised and sexualised. In *Le Sang d'un Poète*, the actor in the first scene's upper body is naked and his muscular body is suggestive. In *Orphée*, Jean Marais (as we will understand later) is worshipped by young people and the young girls. His posture and manners throughout the film emphasise and delineate the physical power of the strong male. In



*Le Testament d'Orphée*, at various moments during the film, a male figure who is lying naked inside a frame with Cocteau's drawings around it appears and while there are no explanations for it in the film, it seems obvious that Cocteau is playing with gender norms. This foregrounding of Orpheus, or male Orphic figures more generally, as objects of sexual desire becomes an important component of the construction of Orpheuses in the new world.

I am proposing in this study that Cocteau's orphic aesthetics, which constitute one of the most significant sources for new world adaptations of the myth of Orpheus, are multi-generic, self-reflexive and autobiographical, they very consciously blur aspects of the fictional and real life and they contain a number of other myths and stories inside the main story, the reversal of gender roles, and the eroticisation of the male protagonist.

## **B. Appropriations and Adaptations of Orphic Aesthetics**

Having provided a sense of the evolution of the orphic myth in Europe and its appropriation and adaptation by European artists from the Middle Ages to the modern period, this study will provide in chapter one a more in-depth examination of the orphic aesthetics in France in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as manifested in the films of Jean Cocteau. This European high modernist version of orphic aesthetics clearly provides a template for artists in the Americas later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as they assimilate and revise the myth, figure and story of Orpheus, employing and revising many of the creative strategies developed and employed by Cocteau. Of particular interest in this study are questions such as how and why the mythological character of Orpheus was adapted in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States and Brazil, is

there a definable new world orphic poetics, and, if so, which are the works that most clearly and successfully exemplify these aesthetics in the Americas?

To answer these questions, I will analyse Williams' play *Orpheus Descending* (1958), Vinicius de Moraes' play *Orfeu da Conceição* (Orpheus of the Conception) (1956), the film *Orfeu Negro* (Black Orpheus) (1956), the film *Orfeu* (1999) and Caetano Veloso's album "O Estrangeiro" (The Stranger) (1989), especially the title song.

I begin by analysing how the myth of Orpheus was adapted in Tennessee Williams' play *Orpheus Descending* (1957). I first consider how Cocteau inspired Williams, in part through his open homosexuality, his ideas on poetry, and the manner in which he viewed himself as a particular kind of poet. I consider closely Williams' portrayal of homoeroticism in his play and the reversal of established gender roles in which the male protagonist becomes the sexually desirable character and the women, who are the inhabitants of the town he visits, are the active agents of change. I then examine the strong underlying African-American presence in the story and Williams' creation of a new embodiment of an American Orpheus, who may be seen as the basis for other African-American Orpheuses. Because the play is set in a milieu that is defined by a strict social system that is in turn governed by the Jim Crow laws Orpheus, manifested in the play by the figure of Val, who in various ways transgresses the established order, is a particularly potent means to dissect, disrupt and interrogate various aspects of white Southern society. Among the important elements that are explored is the music: the fact that Val sings the blues and the many references to blues singers in the play, which suggest both a potent African-American presence and an unconscious or latent cultural power. Equally important are other references to African-American culture in the play that are analysed, such as the black sorcerer, segregation, and white southern culture. Finally, I study Marlon Brando's performance in *The*

*Fugitive Kind*, which is indicative of Williams' interest in the representation of the sexualised male figure and this film's significance in terms of defining what I assert is a new world orphic.

In the second chapter, I review how, during the same period, Vinicius de Moraes was inspired by a similar sensibility (the adaptation of the classical myth of Orpheus to contemporary Brazil) and made his own adaptation of the myth in the play *Orfeu da Conceição* (Orpheus of the conception) (1956). His play was, he asserted, intended to speak for Brazil's black population and created in part as a result of a desire to acknowledge, valorise and integrate black Brazilian culture into the mainstream Brazilian culture. The characters and the setting help us understand how black Orpheus was created and how the characters and setting represent what he perceived to be the reality of the black population in Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s. I also look at the persona of Vinicius and some of his African-inspired songs – in addition to his bossa nova compositions - and how his ideas about poetry utilized this African-American Orpheus to express new ideas and hopes for Brazilian culture. Next I discuss Marcel Camus' adaptation of Vinicius' play to cinema in part in relation to France's quest for a natural or pre-industrial version of humans that led a number of French anthropologists and artists to identify Brazil as the site of this earlier iteration of humanity. I suggest that it is through the lens of Claude Lévi-Strauss, especially his landmark anthropological study of Brazil, *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), and the tradition that produced Lévi-Strauss, that one can most clearly understand Camus' interpretation of Brazil in his film. I also analyze Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Anthology of the New Negro and Madagascarian Poetry in the French Language) (1948), in which he uses the myth of Orpheus as an analogy for the need of the black people to look deeply into their souls to liberate themselves from colonial oppression, and suggest that Sartre's sensibility helps to explain Camus' portrayal of black

people in his film and the limitations of Camus' perspective in creating a genuinely new world orphic poetic. The religious elements of the film are analysed to give a sense of the profound aesthetic and cultural complexity of black culture in Brazil and to suggest that this indispensable component of Brazilian, and new world culture, is key in differentiating the new world orphic from the European versions. I then analyse the carnivalesque aspect of music by using Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of carnival as a folkloric element and Camus' use of this carnivalesque tradition in his film, which is an important feature of the Brazilian orphic, notwithstanding the fact that Brazilians asserted that Camus disfigured and misread Brazilian culture and carnival in his film. I then analyse the new musical genre that was born in this film (bossa nova) and how by adding this music as a soundtrack to an all-black cast, the film created a certain myth around the African-American Orpheus of Brazil by giving him a specific sound. Finally, I examine the success of this new African-American Orpheus in the world and how the success of this film had an impact on the world's interpretation of Brazil.

In the third chapter, I discuss Carlos Diegues and Caetano Veloso's negative view of Camus' film, which they believed did not authentically represent Brazil. Their dislike of the film was the motivation behind the creation of their own film *Orfeu* (1999) with an original soundtrack. This film gave birth to the most recent version of an African-American Orpheus, which is set in the violent *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. I assert that the protagonist in this film embodies for Brazil and the world a much more complex, and more authentically and specifically American Orpheus. Among the important features of this adaptation that are analysed is the music and the diverse genres of North American origin that are utilized to create the film's realistic milieu. I also examine the racial aspect of the film and the representation of violence in the *favelas*. However, because of certain elements in Diegues' film, which, I suggest,

limit the power of the cultural figure of this version of Orpheus, I examine in the final section of the thesis the androgynous and chameleon-like persona and aesthetic of Caetano Veloso as representing the epitome of the new world orphic. This very specifically American version of orphic poetics is, I suggest, most clearly manifested in *Tropicalia*, the cultural and musical movement he and others such as his collaborator Gilberto Gil helped to forge in the 1970s. The movement, which draws on Brazilian modernism's call in the 1920s for cultural cannibalism and radical reconfigurations of cultural forms, as well as the aesthetics of the largely black Brazilian city of Bahia and the mixing of cinema, music, dance and poetry in collage-like form reminiscent of Cocteau's aesthetic strategies, produced, among other films and albums, Caetano Veloso's innovative album *O Estrangeiro*. By placing these various texts from the Americas beside one another, one can begin to see how the artistic centre of gravity began to shift from Europe to the Americas in the second half of the twentieth century as artists in the U.S., Brazil and elsewhere appropriated figures such as the protean poet Orpheus as a means of making new and innovative artistic forms.

## CHAPTER II

### ORPHEUS IN SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

#### A. The Orphic elements

As we have seen in the Introduction, the Orphic myth has been used by European modernists such as Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) after having been influenced by the ideas of his times such as André Breton’s modernism, Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical theories and the nineteenth-century French poets. By the term “Orphic aesthetics” I am referring to a set of features that are apparent and very distinct to literary texts and stories. These features are: transgression, and breaking the boundaries of cultures, genres and sexualities—the creation of the “new” through a fusion of different elements that have not been put together before. It can be seen especially in texts that manifest and are preoccupied with the expression of the self in a lyrical fashion, that is, the expression of feelings directly as they come, not in a very strict classical fashion (as manifested in a logical narrative frame) but spontaneously as they are triggered by a certain set of events. Also, “Orphic aesthetics” as I am using the term refers to the use of multigeneric art, in which different forms of art such as music with poetry and film are mixed, a process that in turn creates new forms of art. Also, apart from mixing of different forms, there is the mix of different contents as well. For example, the use of autobiographical elements, or combining real-life events with fictional events, historical events with imaginary ones. Mixing reality and fiction also means that there is a creation of new reality, as what is true is no longer recognizable from what is not true, facilitating the fusion of the two into a new reality. From a gender perspective, there is the lack of traditional boundaries, which means that there is not a fixed binary gender expression concerning the characters; different genders change

and mutate as the story proceeds and they undergo a continual metamorphosis according to the evolution of the story.

## **B. How was Tennessee Williams influenced by Cocteau?**

As mentioned in the Introduction, Cocteau's theories on the nature of poetry, which are not traditional, have influenced Tennessee Williams (1911–1983) to a significant degree, as we see when comparing Williams' techniques with that of Cocteau.

Before exploring the nature of the similarities in texts produced by these two artists, it is important to look for the direct connections between Williams and Cocteau. These direct connections are important as they will help us understand how Williams used this European modernist's ideas in his representation of Orpheus in the New World to express important cultural transformations that were taking place in the American South during Williams' lifetime.

First, Cocteau was impressed by Marlon Brando's performance in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* staged in Paris in the late 1940s and decided to publish a translation of the play in French in 1949, which would be performed in Parisian theatres from then onwards. According to Jean Kontaxopoulos, Cocteau and Williams met in Paris: "Chance, however, brought them together in 1948 at the famous Paris bar "Le bœuf sur le toit" (The Nothing Doing Bar), as Williams mentions in his *Memoirs* (1975)." In Cocteau's translated version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as cited by Kontaxopoulos, Cocteau expresses his admiration for Williams:

The course of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is all the more interesting since I have followed it very closely, translating Tennessee Williams's work word for word. Contrary to what some critics imagine, Tennessee Williams is a writer searching

the depths of existence and he does not achieve this with undisciplined writing. Further, he is very well acquainted with the literary world and is not unaware of the treasure of our most famous melodramas, from *Courrier de Lyon* to *Deux Gosses*. He likes this naïve art, which nurtured a Rimbaud in the theatre of Charlesville. What they reproach him for is an impeccable presentation (Kontaxopoulos, 2001).

What Cocteau describes as Williams' naïve art is, not only analogous to his own, it is the French poetry that Cocteau was inspired from as well which suggests a continuation of the poetry of Rimbaud. Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891) both in his life and in his *oeuvre* displayed an artistic sensibility that is Orphic; one very good example is *Une Saison en Enfer (A Season in Hell)* (1873), which is a collection of poems written during a time in Rimbaud's life (September 1871–July 1873) when he was in a relationship with Paul Verlaine and living between Paris, Brussels and London. The ideas explored in these poems are the self and the expression of the self's pains and expectations about life, mystical perspectives and a cry of revolt against nineteenth-century society.

Again, we see here the connection between Orphic poetry, self-expression and homoeroticism. Although Williams did not like the adaptation of his play in French theaters, he still admired Cocteau's literary talents and took inspiration from him.

Second, homoeroticism is another significant link connecting Rimbaud, Cocteau and Williams. According to Gullentops and Van Sevenant, Williams and Cocteau's mutual influence includes many different motifs and one of them is their homosexuality: "There is also a sexual world, Cocteau's and Williams' presumed homosexuality providing an umpteenth echo of both playwrights' fascination with physicality" (as cited in Michiels and Collard, 2013: 509). This homoerotic link between them is manifested most clearly in the figure of Jean Marais. Cocteau was a well-established artist in France in the 1930s, he was homosexual, and had a publicly



acknowledged love affair with Jean Marais, who was his favorite actor as well. The two met when Marais was auditioning for Cocteau's theatre adaptation of the Greek myth Oedipus King in 1937. It is then that their love affair started and they remained lovers up until Cocteau's death in 1963. It is not a coincidence then that in Cocteau's last Orphic film *Le Testament d'Orphée*, when Cocteau the character is resurrected in front of a large cave, there passes in front of him Oedipus accompanied by his daughter, who is played by Jean Marais with bloodied eyes. This autobiographical element from Cocteau's life is very Orphic as it is about the poet's expression of the self and his own life, and is indicative of the introspection and internal metamorphosis of the author himself. According to Margaret Bradham Thornton (2006), Tennessee Williams "had seen or at least knew of Cocteau's film (*Orphée*). He described Jean Marais as "the beautiful youth of 'Orphée'" in 1953 (Thornton, as cited in Michiels and Collard [2013]: 514). Williams will use a similar approach in his New World Orpheus as he will use autobiographical elements of his life in the play *Orpheus Descending*. The reason for the use of autobiographical elements is that it makes his work more "real" and based in a specific reality. This reality or real element in turn will allow for the transformation of a new reality when it will be mixed with the Orphic myth.

Third, another element described by Michiels and Collard (2013) that is worth noting, is the way in which Williams and Cocteau both used different genres and a constellation of texts to create their texts. In effect, as I mentioned earlier, multigeneric art is central to the Orphic mode of expression.

Williams' incessant play with allusions and analogies dramatizes an aesthetic of elusiveness that finds its most appropriate platform in the theater stage but is essentially poetic in conception. The integration into a fictional context of many autobiographical

elements or characters, such as the notoriously mercurial actress Tallulah Bankhead so admired by both Williams and Cocteau, [Fisher 2011] resembles a poet's associative play with metaphor and metonym, as well as the constant creative tension between a recognizable format and formal experimentation. Similarly, Williams here relies on the poet's radical disrespect for rounded readings as we can only "live on half of something-some [even] on less" [Fisher, 2011: 52]. Typical for the poetic oeuvre of Jean Cocteau in particular is precisely the transposition of creative *techniques* and *motives* across media and genres [Gullentops, 2003: 128 and 147]. More concretely, then, this implies an artistic practice of analogy-based "bricolage" less interested in capturing "essences" of meaning than in the actual *transfer* of creative energies, "recurring allusions" and their "double exposure" of product and process at once. Above all, however, it provides an indication of an effectively *mutual* influence between Cocteau and Tennessee Williams (Michiels and Collard, 2013: 520).

We can see from this passage that the two authors have many aesthetic strategies in common. In Williams' article, which appeared in the *New York Times*, "The Past, The Present and The Perhaps" (1957), about his play *Battle of Angels* (which first appeared in 1940 and turned out to be a failure on stage), Williams explains the reason why he rewrote this play. Also, he explains why it took him 17 years to complete what would become *Orpheus Descending*. It is interesting that in his explanation we see both the autobiographical elements and the motive of the play:

Why have I stuck so stubbornly to this play? For seventeen years, in fact? Well, nothing is more precious to anybody than the emotional record of his youth, and you will find the trail of my sleeve-worn heart in this completed play that I now call *Orpheus Descending*. On the surface it was and still is the tale of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop (Williams, 1957: 220).

Williams' explanation suggests that the "bricolage" technique that Cocteau used for his works was a vital source of inspiration for Williams' play *Orpheus Descending*. This "bricolage" is one of the Orphic aesthetic strategies that Williams used and that other writers, musicians and film-makers examined in this study also employed.

### **C. Val's sexual nature and the contradiction**

Having seen how Williams was influenced by Cocteau to create his version of Orpheus, we will now look at how Williams' version adapted these Orphic poetics and what he created as a New World Orpheus.

In Ovid's tale, after having lost his wife Eurydice, Orpheus in the world of the living promises never to engage in any kind of romantic relationship with any woman, but to spend his days pursuing love with young men. Since sexual norms are transgressed when Orpheus engages in homoerotic activities, Orpheus goes against the gender construction of society (because of his unconscious desire to take revenge against life for the loss of his wife) and tries to disrupt the gender construction of society. It is this desire to change the order of things and to attract young men that makes the maenads want to take their revenge and kill him as a consequence of his transgression.

One could say that in Williams' play the mythical figure of Orpheus through Val's character is following a similar pattern, which is to try to transgress and disrupt the established order and societal norms in the puritanical South. This transgression is the reason behind his death at the end of the story by Jabe Torrance and his men. However, Val unconsciously transgresses and disrupts Two River County against his will; he had consciously wanted to arrive in this town, bury his old life of playing music and settle down. It is his physical nature, which is very sexual and highly libidinal, that causes him to disrupt the social equilibrium of the town unconsciously.

As I have said, Val's character is of a very sexual being whose bodily constitution is animalistic. In Act I, Scene II, Val meets Lady and this is where he is introduced as a character and, this is where we get to know who he really is as he offers to work for her:

LADY: Well, what in God's name are you lookin' for around here?

VAL: —Work.

LADY: Boys like you don't work.

VAL: What d'you mean boys like me?

LADY: One that play th'guitar and go around talkin' about how warm they are...

VAL: That happens t' be the truth. My temperature's always a couple degrees above normal the same as a dog's, it's normal for me the same as it is for a dog, that's the truth... (Williams, 1957: 259).

We can see that his body temperature is higher than normal, which means that his physical nature and libido is very strong. What is interesting after that scene is the different attitudes that Val has toward the system. Upon telling Lady what he apparently thinks about the world, he says:

VAL: You might think there's many and many kinds of people in this world but, Lady, there's just two kinds of people, the ones that are bought and the buyers! (Williams, 1957: 265).

Considering the fact that he is deciding to settle down at thirty years old—after leading a life of dissolute partying since the age of fourteen—there is the same resignation that Orpheus faces in the myth in that Val refuses to continue leading life as he has been meant to—to charm, to play music in bars and live a wandering existence—and attempts to change this way of life. Going against the current is essentially the transgressive element of Orpheus in Williams' play.

Val's sexual nature, as I mentioned earlier, which is highly libidinal, attracts the women of the town such as Vee, Carol Cutrere and Lady against his will as he seemingly refuses in response to their advances. According to Clum:

Ironically, Val, the reluctant stud, is a relatively passive character. He attracts women but tries to resist their attempts to take what they want from him. Freedom for him means freedom not only from the world of people being bought and sold, but freedom from women. He will not have sex in the graveyard with Carol Cutrere (another mix of death and desire), and he tries to leave when he realizes that Lady wants to set him up as live-in lover as well as employee: “A not so young and not so satisfied woman that hired a man off the highway to do double duty without paying overtime for it ... I mean a store clerk days and a stud nights, and—” (304). When Lady cries out her need for him, he walks into the alcove where he sleeps. Lady must be the aggressor and go in and take him. (Clum, 1997: 139).

This sexual passivity of Val is what makes the women of the play aggressive, and therefore, there is the inversion of the gender roles where, men are passive but women are the center of the story. And this reversal of gender roles is also part of the Orphic poetics.

#### **D. The reversed gender roles in *Orpheus Descending***

Considering Williams’ sexual orientation and the period in which he was writing, Williams could not openly portray homosexual characters who would engage in homoerotic relationships on stage: “Seeing a straight ‘stud’ as sexually attractive and available was a reality as well as a fantasy in the pre-Stonewall years in which Williams spent his young manhood” (Vidal [1995] as cited in Clum, 1997: 140). Williams had to resort to inverting the gender roles: the male characters would be the sexual objects, with very expressive sexuality but passive characters and in contrast, the women would be the dominant roles who would be the center of the story:

We are told by the women who form a kind of Greek chorus—while patriarchy may be conditionally restored, women have the dominant voices in this play—that Lady’s marriage is sexless and barren, that she and her husband live in separate rooms on opposite sides of the dark second floor of the general store, that her only previous passion was with David Cutrere (Clum, 1997: 137).

One could say that Lady Torrance is the main protagonist of the story and that everything revolves around her and her past, her desires and her story matters. According to Crandell:

Owing more allegiance to Nietzsche than Aristotle in his conception of the tragic, Williams repeats a now familiar pattern in *Orpheus Descending*: an individual man or woman endures suffering, creates illusions to endure the pain, and then has the dreams stripped away. And even though an individual is destroyed, there is still a reason to celebrate life. Of the three tragic protagonists who meet with destruction, Lady Torrance in *Orpheus Descending* suffers as much if not more than all of them. She endures the heartbreak of lost love, the painful torment of an abortion, and the indignity, unknown to her, of marriage to the man who murdered her father. Even so, briefly before death, she experiences joy (Crandell, 2011: 104).

Lady is the center of the story in that she suffers the most and she takes advantage of any opportunity to continue what the establishment stopped her from doing when she was young. Having suffered from the harsh system of the South, after Val's arrival in the shop, she is able to disrupt this order, even if she is to die at the end of the play. This chaos and disruptiveness is also part of the Orphic poetics i.e. "creative chaos," in which the new is created out of the destruction of the old system. Only Williams' use of female protagonists could disrupt this established order because it was triggered by Val's sexual force:

Val Xavier is mutilated and sanctified for his sexual potency, which is a threat to other men because the sexual free agent is a magnet, drawing women outside the boundaries of patriarchal authority and marriage. Val first appears as if summoned by the Conjure Man's wild Choctaw cry. The stage directions tell us that Val "*has the wild beauty about him that the cry would suggest*" (240) (Clum, 1997: 136).

Through Val's sexual force, we understand his "charming" capacities as Orpheus wherever he goes in the world of the living and the world of the dead. It is a disruptive force which transgresses:

The world of *Orpheus Descending*, like that of *Suddenly Last Summer*, is one of powerful women and sexually ambivalent men. The Patriarchs seem impotent, capable of killing but not of creating life. [...] In killing Val and Lady, the men kill part of the potential for a new, non-patriarchal gender order (Clum, 1997: 140).

This “new non-patriarchal order” has been broken out of the old order that was frigid and dead through the Orphic poetics of transgression and disruption. We will see how Williams also used other Orphic poetics to represent the underlying forces that this chaos created.

It is important to note that this chaos is significant for the New World Orpheus as it represents the breakdown of old values and order that will allow the creation of the new form of Orpheuses in the Americas.

### **E. The underlying force in the story of origin**

We have seen the way in which Williams represented the shattering of the establishment in Two River County through the Orphic poetics of transgression and disruptiveness. The sexual nature of Val and the reversal of gender roles proves to be disruptive and chaotic for the established order and the apparently dominating force in the play. But, as we look carefully at the play, we realize that there is an underlying potent force and we will see how this force –through the way the play evolves and concludes at the end- will be revealed as African American in nature.

At the beginning of the play, in Act I, Scene I, Beulah and Dolly who are middle aged “wives of small planters and tastelessly overdressed” (Williams, 1957: 227) preparing themselves to dine, start talking about the setting of the play. They are the chorus of the play: Beulah gives us background information concerning the story of Lady Torrance. We get to know about Jabe Torrance, and the way in which he bought Lady as a wife when she was eighteen years old, after she was abandoned by David Cutrere who went on to marry a girl of his social class. Beulah also tells the audience about Lady’s father and his story, which is the backdrop to

the play and a very revealing episode. We come to know firsthand how Lady's father received a piece of land after he led a life of playing the mandolin with a monkey in saloons, and what he did with it:

BEULAH: Oh, my law, well, that was Lady's daddy! Then come prohibition an' first thing ennyone knew, The Wop had took to bootleggin' like a duck to water! He picked up a piece of land cheap [...] He planted an orchard on it; he covered the whole no'th shore of the lake with grapevines and fruit trees, and then he built little arbors, little white woodern arbors with tables and benches to drink in and carry on in, ha ha! And in the spring and the summer, young couples would come out there, like me and Pee Wee, we used to go out there, an' court up a storm, ha ha, just court up a-storm! Ha ha!—... (Williams, 1957: 231).

Furthermore, we get to know how this Eden was destroyed and how it was burned down:

[...] Papa Romano made a bad mistake. He sold liquor to niggers. The Mystic Crew took action.—They rode out there, one night, with gallons of coal oil-it was real dry that summer-and set that place on fire!—They burned the whole thing up, vines, arbors, fruit trees.—Pee Wee and me, we stood on the dance pavilion across the lake and watched that fire spring up. Inside of tin minutes the whole nawth shore of the lake was a mass of flames, a regular sea of flames, and all the way over the lake we could hear Lady's papa shouting, "Fire, fire, fire!"—as if it was necessary to let people know, and the whole sky lit up with it, as red as Guinea red wine! (Williams, 1957: 232).

The Mystic Crew, it will turn out later in the play, was made up of Jabe Torrance and other men from the town who burned down the vineyard to ensure that the existing social order was kept and that anything transgressive such as love, race intermingling and intoxication was avoided.

What is worth noting from this passage is that there is a sense of an Eden, where during a very brief space and time, anything was possible such as love, the mixing between people of different cultures, wine and music. But, suddenly, everything disappeared violently. Significantly, we have very Dionysian elements such as a vineyard, wine, love and intoxication. The fact that the vineyard was burned because "The Wop" sold liquor to black people, provides



the connection between black people, wine, love between different classes and music -especially African-American music- that is established early on in the story.

To explain what these connections reveal to us, we have to understand the spirit of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). In his book, Nietzsche explains that art is divided into two spirits—The Apollonian and the Dionysian—which are in perpetual conflict with one another. The Apollonian spirit on the one hand, is the spirit of dream images in which everything plastic such as painting and visual arts are made of concrete images and forms. It is also the spirit of individuation and objectivity. On the other hand, the Dionysian spirit is the spirit of intoxication and music in which things are formless and flowing and in continuous motion. It is also an earthy spirit, which ties man to the origins of things. After using Schopenhauer's idea of the spirit of horror and fear which man feels when he loses sense of individuality, Nietzsche explains that:

Whenever this breakdown of the *principium individuationis* occurs, we catch a glimpse of the essence of the *Dionysiac*, which is best conveyed by the analogy of *intoxication*. These Dionysiac stirrings, which, as they grow in intensity, cause subjectivity to vanish to the point of complete self-forgetting, awaken either under the influence of narcotic drink, of which all human beings and peoples who are close to the origin of things speak in their hymns, or at the approach of spring when the whole of nature is pervaded by lust for life (Nietzsche, 1872: 17).

This hymn that Nietzsche talks about as a force of nature is more developed when he fully explains how this element of nature destroys the boundaries between humans, and in so doing creates a sort of unity among them:

Not only is the bond between human beings renewed by the magic of the Dionysiac, but nature, alienated, inimical, or subjugated, celebrates once more her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, humankind. Freely the earth offers up her gifts, and the beasts of prey from mountain and desert approach in peace. The chariot of Dionysos is laden with flowers and wreaths; beneath its yoke stride panther and tiger. [...] Now the slave is a freeman, now all the rigid, hostile

barriers, which necessity, caprice, or “impudent fashion” have established between human beings, break asunder. Now, hearing this gospel of universal harmony, each person feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour, but quite literally one with him, as if the veil of maya had been torn apart, so that mere shreds of it flutter before the mysterious primordial unity (das Ur-Eine). Singing and dancing, man expresses his sense of belonging to a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and talk and is on the brink of flying and dancing, up and away into the air above. His gestures speak of his enchantment. Just as the animals now talk and the earth gives milk and honey, there now sounds out from within man something supernatural: he feels himself to be a god, he himself now moves in such ecstasy and sublimity as once he saw the gods move in his dreams (Nietzsche, 1872: 18).

We see how this Dionysian spirit is present in the vineyard of Lady’s father. Young people would hide in the vineyard and make love after drinking wine. There is also the racial mixing which was present and is an important element. The Dionysian spirit of intoxication and brotherhood is present in Two River County through Lady’s past.

What Nietzsche expressed as the Dionysian spirit that destroys all divisions and separation between Man and Man, between Man and earth or nature, could seem as the same spirit of Carnival that Bakhtin expressed in *Rabelais and His World* (1984). In effect, after giving a historical explanation of the origins of Carnival that existed since antiquity (and even before that), Bakhtin explains that in the middle ages, when life was orchestrated by very strict rules dictated by the State, Feudalism, Religion and ecclesiastical authority, there was another sphere of life that negated the life system of castes and where in which another life was made possible. This other life was the life of the Carnival, where the high became low and the low became high. Men from different social strata would become equal and therefore freedom reigned:

“Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws,

that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants" (P. 7).

After explaining what the carnival is, Bakhtin argues that since the carnival was a movement made by the people, or, because it is a folkloric movement, it was closely linked to the earth and the movements of nature. Being of nature, it was a very fertile movement that, when it was constantly deriding high elements of life and praising low elements of life, new elements were created out of this grotesque way of life and life was constantly being re-created and new forces brought into existence:

"The principle of laughter and the carnival spirit on which grotesque is based destroys this limited seriousness and all pretense of an extratemporal meaning and unconditional value of necessity. It frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities" (P. 49).

We will also see how further in the argument, this Carnavalesque element will mix with the Orphic myth in the Americas and will have a much more potent force in the Americas as this fusion will be one of the main New World Orpheus traits that we will see in Brazil through De Moraes' play and, Camus and Diegues' films.

Nonetheless, this Dionysian spirit in the beginning of the play is destroyed by Jabe Torrance and his men who represent the established order of Jim Crow in the South. We can infer that there are two forces in the play at odds with each other. On the one hand, we have the Dionysian spirit or the still uncharacterized force which is in the background and lurking somewhere in the past. And, on the other hand, the force of the dominant white establishment, which is apparent in the play, tries to keep the order in check and to rule out any disruptive

elements in the town. It is the spirit of Orpheus and the forces he represents through Val that will help unleash this dormant force that is somewhere waiting to be manifested.

## **F. Val's character**

Before the appearance of Val, we have seen that there are underlying forces in the play that existed in the past and are now waiting to be revealed. Clearly, they will have an impact on the evolution of the play and of our understanding of the New World Orpheus and how these new notions of Orpheus engendered in the New World made manifest new forms of culture.

In Scene II of Act I, when Val is trying to convince Lady in order to work for the confectionary, he shows her both his jacket (by covering her with it when she tells him she is cold) and his guitar, after saying that it's his "life's companion!" (Williams, 1957: 261).

Val's portrayal does not so much suggest a person (his features and habits are out of the ordinary; for example, his temperature is two degrees above normal) as an underlying subversive force present in the play. This force is still unspecified because the meaning of his accouterments are diverse. His jacket, which is made of snakeskin, and his guitar which is covered with autographs, have been interpreted in many ways, most seeing them in terms of forces of nature that Val represents. According to Traubitz: "Val immediately gives Lady the snakeskin jacket, symbolic of regeneration, to wear and introduces the guitar, a phallic life-giver" (1976: 61). And, "while Val's jacket associates him with the ancient's snakeskin symbol of regeneration, it also carries overtones of both the serpent's bite which sent Eurydice to hades, and the snake disguise assumed by Satan in the Garden of Eden" (Traubitz, 1976: 64). Also, according to Clum:

He wears a snakeskin jacket, a kind of Dionysian remnant of his link with the wildness of nature and human desire, but also connoting the Judeo-Christian notion of temptation. He also carries with him a guitar, his version of Orpheus' lyre, but Val's guitar connects him to the blues, and through them to the racial other, the Black (Clum, 1997: 136).

This connection to nature through the jacket is made much more specific when it comes to the guitar. In effect, the guitar connects Val to the African American culture. When Lady asks Val who the autographs on the guitar belong to, he tells her the names of very famous Blues musicians such as Leadbelly, King Oliver, Bessie Smith and Fats Waller. What is important here is the story of Bessie Smith that Val counts:

VAL: Oh. That name? That name is also immortal. The name Bessie Smith is written in the stars!—Jim Crow killed her, John Barleycorn and Jim Crow killed Bessie Smith but that's another story .... See this name here? That's another immortal! (Williams, 1957: 261).

Telling the story of Bessie Smith and its connection to Jim Crow proves that Val is knowledgeable and connected to black culture and music. Indeed, since the Blues is historically the folkloric music of the Black people that originated in Southern United States, Val embodies African American culture by playing this genre of music. Because Val is playing his music in a white domain, he is introducing black music into this white culture and so becomes a threat to the Southern establishment.

Before explaining the way in which Val's playing the Blues carries a broader significance in terms of the fusion of cultures, it is important to see the importance of the Blues for the new world American spirit and what it means in terms of Orphic aesthetics.

The Blues is a modernist form of art that is essentially orphic i.e. it is an Orphic form of art. In effect, the Blues is about the expression of the self and an inward gaze where the artist -or singer- uses tragic events that have happened to him/her and meditates on these events through

putting them in a specific verse form and heals him/herself by singing them on a specific rhythmic pattern. This performance is cathartic and heals the artist.

Upon describing what the Blues is and what its function as an art form is, Ralph Ellison, in his essay *Richard Wright's Blues* (1945) delves on the cathartic element of the blues and we can clearly see here the way in which this type of art manifests orphic aesthetics since it is about the expression of the self:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged brain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically (P. 103).

Also, while developing this idea of the meaning of the Blues, Ellison explains how different this art form is to the classical tragedy, in that through the self's expression and externalization of the pain, the artist heals himself:

...the blues: their attraction lies in this, that they at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit. They fall short of tragedy only in that they provide no solution, offer no scapegoat but the self (P. 118).

We see here how this new art form differs from the Greek model of tragedy. It is also different than the subsequent tragic forms that prevailed in Europe following Antiquity such as in the middle ages, the Enlightenment, the Romantic era and even, the modern era. And the reason is, that in all these subsequent eras, tragedy was seen as being the predominantly effective cathartic art form that could express the self.

It is rather the integration of the African people into the Americas that have created this new art form that carries orphic aesthetics. In effect, this musical form is part of the New World

Orphic as it is a solely American experience that developed through the African slave's integration into the new American environment they were brought into during slavery. Upon researching the origins of the Blues as a musical style, Leroi Jones in *Blues People* (1963), came to the conclusion that:

African songs dealt, as did the songs of a great many of the preliterate or classical civilizations, with the exploits of the social unit, usually the tribe. There were songs about the gods, their works and lives, about nature and the elements, about the nature of a man's life on the earth and what he could expect after he died, but the insistence of blues verse on the life of the individual and his individual trials and successes on the earth is a manifestation of the whole western concepts of man's life, and it is a development that could only be found in an American black man's music. [...] The whole concept of the *solo*, of a man singing or playing by himself, was relatively unknown in West African music (Baraka P. 66).

So Blues music is the new world adaptation of a non-European civilization's music in the Americas. This artistic expression is the manifestation of black people's artistic expression in the Americas and more specifically in the United States:

... the term *blues* relates directly to the Negro, and his *personal* involvement in America. [...] *Blues* means a Negro experience, it is the one music the Negro made that could not be transferred into a more general significance than the one the Negro gave it initially (Baraka P. 92).

Having explained what the blues is, where it comes from and what its aesthetic purposes are, it is important to explain here in Williams' play once again the cultural fusion that is happening: Val who is white, plays black music in white territory and therefore creates a new type of culture by mixing two different cultures, mainly the white and black culture. This mixture is a clear example of what I am calling the new world Orpheus, since it is an obvious manifestation of the fusion of music, culture and race through a musical form that is the fusion of various cultures in itself.

More significantly, Val as a link to black culture is made apparent when in Act III, Scene II, Sheriff Talbott attacks Val with two of his men. In effect, after having walked in and surprised his wife talking to Val and thinking he was trying to seduce her, the Sheriff threatens Val and asks him to leave town by saying:

But I'm gonna tell you something. They's a certain county I know of which has a big sign at the county line that says, "Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you in this county." [...]

Well, son! You ain't a nigger and this is not a county, but, son, I want you to imagine that you seen a sign that said to you: "Boy don't let the sun rise on you in this county." I said "rise," not "go down" because it's too close to sunset for you to git packed an' move on before that. But I think if you value that instrument in your hands as much as you seem to, you'll simplify my job by not allowing the sun tomorrow to rise on you in this country. 'S that understood, now, boy?" (Williams, 1957: 321).

By being threatened with a "nigger" threat, Val may be seen as a foreigner on the same level as a black person in the socio-economic hierarchy of the South. By Val talking with the Sheriff's wife Vee, who tells him that she had a vision of Christ risen, he was perceived as a threat to the establishment. As Clum writes: "Val's perceived threat to a powerful man's property—his wife—turns him into a 'Nigger'" (1997: 138).

We can see now that Val is a being who is different things at once, he represents many different things to different characters. In other words, he is protean or, versatile, capable of changing shape and character at will. In terms of the New World Orphic, as manifested in Williams' play, Val represents the two different cultures: the black and the white one, because he lives in both of their worlds.

Consequently, by going from the black world to the white world, Val lives between two realms. This crossing between two worlds is similar to Orpheus in the myth, when he passes



from the world of the living to the world of the dead—“Hades”—where he goes to find his wife Eurydice and from which he returns. Orpheus’ capacity to transgress is meaningful in the sense that he is able to penetrate different realms and create change and newness through mixing the two when he takes elements from one realm and takes them to the other realm.

If we take this idea of the fusion and crossing between different realms further, one of the main changes that we witness in the play as a result of the myth being adapted to the Americas is that of the creation of a new spirit of music. In the European thought of the nineteenth century –as we see in Nietzsche’s theory, the Apollonian and the Dionysian are two different artistic impulses that are opposed to one another and they rigidly separated. In effect, according to Ovid’s interpretations of the ancient myths, Orpheus is the son of Apollo (Apollo also taught Orpheus how to play the lyre) and he was killed by the maenads who are worshipers of Dionysus. Also, Orpheus represents the spirit of music that charms animals, human beings and objects as well, whereas Dionysus is the spirit of music that intoxicates and destroys all boundaries and frontiers between classes and races. But, as a product of the New World orphic, Val, who represents the new Orpheus seems to be the fusion of these two spirits, the Orphic and the Dionysian so that his music enchants and charms, while at the same time breaking barriers.

### **G. Val as the creator of life**

Towards the end of the play, after the sun has risen over Two River County, and Jabe’s nurse has told Lady in front of Val that she is pregnant, Lady says to him: “I have life in my body, this dead tree, my body, has burst in flower! You’ve given me life, you can go!” (Williams, 1957: 337) She then talks about a barren fig tree that was in her father’s orchard and

the fact that when she was a child, she was sure that one day it would bear fruit. After repeating the fact that she is pregnant, she screams: “I’ve won, I’ve won, Mr. Death, I’m going to bear!” (Williams, 1957: 338) As soon as she says this, Jabe and his men come into the store from outside, shoot Lady, and kill Val by burning down the confectionary. Carol Cutrere—the vagrant lady—enters the shop followed by the conjure man and picks up Val’s Snakeskin and walks away with it saying:

Wild things leave skins behind them, they leave clean skins and teeth and white bones behind them, and these are tokens passed from one to another, so that the fugitive kind can always follow their kind... (Williams, 1957: 341).

She then gives a ring to the Conjure man and leaves the confectionary, not paying attention to the Sheriff. The Conjure Man is left on stage alone.

As I mentioned before, the life force that Val has unleashed in the town (after the chaos he caused), has created life again in the town. The Orphic power of creation was made manifest through Val impregnating Lady and through leaving his jacket with Carol as a symbol of free life.

According to Traubitz, “Williams comes to emphasize the responsibility which love places upon the poet/singer Orpheus and the pull towards life and fruitfulness that the Orpheus figure creates in those dead souls he meets in the hades of the Torrance Mercantile Store” (1976: 58). This life that is brought to a dead environment is the New World Orphic in its apparent manifestation.

It is through this fruitfulness of the Orphic figure that Val is able to create life. For Lady Torrance, Val helped her obtain her revenge over Jabe who murdered her father, who forced her to live all those years in a loveless marriage and for the child from David Cutrere that she

aborted because he had rejected her to marry a girl from his social standing. According to Crandell:

When Lady learns of Jabe's role in her father's death, the wine-garden becomes a symbol of her desired revenge. [...] Lady's greater joy, apart from her desire for revenge, comes from the knowledge that she is pregnant, not by her husband, but by Val Xavier (Crandell, 2011: 104).

This revenge is best expressed when, in her last moments, Lady compares herself to the fig tree. This moment—after being pregnant and with the new confectionary—she says as if this tree is bearing fruits and is able to give life again. The fig tree is often interpreted as the affirmation of life and power over death:

The fig tree brings together the pagan and Christian myths. The difficulty of fertilizing fig trees led to symbolic marriages between human representatives of male and female fig trees and human sacrifice among the ancient Greeks [as cited in Frazer G., 1913]. Adam and Eve used fig leaves to cover their nakedness after eating the fruit of the Forbidden Tree (Genesis 3:7) and Christ cursed the barren fig tree (Matthew 2: 19). The shape of the fig has lent itself to symbolic associations with both the testicles and the womb. By hanging Christmas decorations on the fig tree Lady celebrates not only her fertility, but foreshadows resurrection and eternal life. Among her decorations are the transparent "glass birds" but also "icicles and snow" of death (Traubitz, 1976: 61).

We can see the way in which this image of the fig tree is a manifestation of life and the power of Orpheus over death since in the myth, he was able to charm the god of death and triumph over him in order to attempt to rescue Eurydice.

Although the confectionary was burned to the ground, Lady obtains the vengeance she needed by recreating the vine garden and being pregnant by Val. The impact of this vengeance is that it showed that she was able to damage the establishment even if it was momentarily.

According to Crandell:

Lady's joy is short-lived. Acting as the Dionysian destroyer of Apollonian dreams and individuality, Jabe puts an end to her celebration and to her life—and the new life in her body—with a pair of bullets. For Williams, as for Nietzsche, even

momentary joy is cause for celebration. What brief joy Lady Torrance experiences in *Orpheus Descending* matches what Nietzsche describes as the “Dionysian” in *The Twilight of the idols*: Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problem, the will of life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, *that* is what I recognized as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet (121) (Crandell, 2011: 105).

Once again, the Dionysian spirit was made manifest through Lady’s revenge over her husband Jabe and all the people that hurt her before in her life. So it is this spirit which prevails in the play.

Furthermore, after the fire, the snakeskin jacket, which seems as an allusion to the Dionysian symbol of the energy of nature and the snake that bit Eurydice, is picked up by Carol Cutrere and “blessed” by her. This gesture suggests that this spirit, which has been present in the play since the beginning but hidden, is now a potent force that is now set free. This energy seems like a clear manifestation of the African American presence in the play that has been revealed through Orphic transgression, the mixing and creation of newness through the chaos and destruction of the old sterile order. Williams was able to reveal a new force and culture in this play:

While Williams does not complete the expected pattern in his hero’s quest, he does transfer the symbol of re-emergence and regeneration to Carol Cutrere, the embodiment of the transparent bird symbol, who knows love and life are “unbearably painful” and “dangerous.” Carol also knows dead people chatter like birds, “but all they say is one word and that one word is ‘live ...’ ” (28). Her exit from the hell of the store is perhaps as close as Williams can come to assent and affirmation” (117) (Traubitz, 1976: 63).

This “assent and affirmation” is the new potent force that prevails at the end of the play and succeeds. This African-American force that Carol Cutrere unleashed will be the one that will provide the basis for the other African-American Orpheuses in the New World and more specifically in Brazil as it is a new force that represents the fusion of different cultures and its product in the New World through the Orphic poetics.

It is this spirit that is manifested in Williams' drama. He does so by mixing the ancient myth of Orpheus with a modern narrative in a specific reality. According to Crandell,

In sharp contrast with the Aristotelian response to tragedy, audiences who view Williams' tragic plays do not experience catharsis but instead witness an affirmation of life's regenerative power, even as the "highest types," those held up as tragic heroes, are reduced to nothing by insanity or death. Nietzsche makes the contrast even more apparent: *Not* so as to get rid of pity and terror, not so as to purify oneself of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge—it was thus Aristotle understood it—: but, beyond pity and terror, *to realize in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming—that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction* (121) (Crandell, 2011: 105).

This "Realisation of the self" is the "native force that is present in the play that finally affirming itself. According to Clum, as this Conjure man appeared before in the play,

Carol, is often accompanied by an old Black Man whom she pays to give a wild Choctaw Indian cry from another place and time. The sexual energy, the wildness of the past, is heard in the cry of racial otherness, Native American and Black (Clum, 1997: 136).

Also,

Val, the disseminator of Black culture through his music, the rebel who will not conform to patriarchal order, threatens the social order by bringing life and a measure of autonomy to the women. The men do not win, however. At the end, [...] Carol refuses to obey the sheriff's order to stop and walks past him as if she hasn't seen him. The old Black Conjure Man is alone on stage as the curtain falls. The victory of the white patriarchy is temporary at best. The spirit embodied in Val still exists and prevails, but through the body and voice of a transgressive, isolated woman (Clum, 1997: 139).

According to A. Harris, Tennessee Williams "was concerned with was 'big' subject matter, the nature of good and evil and the meaning of life" (1993: 2). And also, "to express this larger-than-life aspect of his plays, Tennessee Williams liked to return to the old myths" (Harris, 1993: 2) Narrative linearity does not exist in *Orpheus Descending*, "Somehow the world does not come down to a duel between hero and villain, good and evil, predator and victim" (Harris, 1993: 3); it is more of a chaotic place where forces are unleashed:

Although there is a consistent moral element in his writing, Williams does not insist on a balancing of forces. And he apparently does not care about justice, the right or the good. The endings of Williams' plays do not give us solutions. The forces that are set in motion are out of control, and as a result the world is proved to be an unpredictable place (Harris, 1993: 3).

It is specifically this unleashing of forces that was the cause of the creation of this new African-American force at the end of the play since it was the Dionysian spirit that mixed the Native American, African and European cultures together and through Orphic fusion and mixing of genres created this new life force.

For the New World, this African American spirit that is Orphic, will provide the basis for the way the other African American Orpheuses will be created in Brazil through *Orfeu Negro*, and *Orfeu*. The destruction of the old system, the fusion of music and the mixing of peoples will be the common themes that we will look at in the other adaptations of the myth of Orpheus in Brazil.

## **H. Marlon Brando's adaptation of this new world Orphic**

In the fifties, as the American society was changing, due to on the one hand, the new post-World War II culture that –as in Europe- rejected the old ideas of war and bourgeois society inherited from the generation that fought the war. And on the other hand, because of the evolution of black people in terms of their position in the American society, there was a change in the perception of things such as the role these black people played in society. This change was also reflected in Cinema. In effect, the idea of the new world Orphic was also represented in Williams' adaptation of the play *Orpheus Descending* into the film *The Fugitive Kind* (1960) directed by Sidney Lumet with the screenplay written by Tennessee Williams himself. Having the main actor Marlon Brando who acted as Val, Anna Magnani who acted as Lady Torrance

and, Joanne Woodward as Carol Cutrere, important notions to the concept of what represents the new world Orphic where manifested.

Marlon Brando (1924 – 2004), who acted in this film, had previously acted in various other films that were as important, such as: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and *On the Waterfront* (1954). Brando represented a new kind of erotic male figure with a wild physical appearance and highly libidinal sexual energy. His personality and aura represent this new world Orphic on screen since he was a male figure that became eroticized –which is something that didn't happen before- and was put in center stage. In this film adaptation of *The Fugitive Kind*, Brando also represents the Orphic as he is the adaptation of the adaptation of the ancient Greek myth. This adaptation of an adaptation created a new form of hero who embodies the Orphic character in his ability to charm and seduce. A good example in the film would be Brando's way of wearing the snakeskin jacket which –considering his musculature- was very suggestive in terms of male eroticism and sexuality. We could also say that the scene where he sleeps with Lady which is very aggressive, and erotic, manifests this powerful orphic libidinal energy.

Other than that, it is important to note that Marlon Brando in his own life was a political activist who acted for the rights of the black people and the Native Americans in the fifties. He worked closely with Martin Luther King Jr. and James Baldwin in his social activism. Brando even refused his second Oscar for his interpretation of Don Corleone in *The Godfather I* (1972) as a symbol of protest against the cruelties committed on the Native Americans. These elements show that Brando not only portrayed Val – who represents the “Native American” character by being a mix of White, Indian and Black cultures- but was also in his real life an advocate for the spirit of racial mixity.

This interweaving between fictional representation and reality is also an important new world Orphic element that we will see in the other Orphic adaptations in Brazil and the way in which these manifestations represent the fusion and therefore creation of new cultures.



## CHAPTER III

### ORPHEUS IN CARNAVAL

#### **A. The new world Orphic traits**

In Chapter 1, we have discussed the adaptation of the mythical figure of Orpheus in the Southern states of the United States in the mid-1950s and the way in which this adaptation is the product of different currents and ideas of that period. This new world Orpheus created by Vinicius de Moraes and Marcel Camus, as we will see in this chapter, has different traits which were enhanced and made more revealing as the myth was adapted to Brazil. But before discussing the Brazilian version, we need to look once again at the traits of the New World Orphic in the United States.

As we have discussed, in Tennessee Williams' play *Orpheus Descending*, the traits that characterize the new world Orpheus in the USA are: hybridity, a mix of both European and African (and also Native American) traits; high libidinal energy that arouses female sexual desire through a pronounced erotic physical appearance; the capacity to transgress and cross into many different realms, and, more importantly, realms which are cultural and racial; the racial mixture that this new world Orpheus represents (the mixture of many different races such as white, black and Native American); and the mixture of the Apollonian, Dionysian and Carnavalesque expressions of art.

The new world Orpheus (as we will see in Brazil) has a musical and poetic element that enchants, transforms and, at the same time, intoxicates and changes the established order, in that it transposes the high to low and the low to high. This new world Orpheus also represents the American ideal of newness and the creation of something new following from the destruction of

the old, such as the old establishment. In Camus' film *Orfeu Negro* (Black Orpheus), Orpheus' nature is more clearly manifested in his role in Brazilian society and the narrative that his life follows. Moreover, Orpheus in the film is the fusion of different cultural impulses that derive from the historic relationship between France and Brazil—between the old world and the new.

What is noteworthy in Camus' film *Orfeu Negro* (1959) is that in his adaptation, Orpheus is a new mythological creation that is the product of a fusion of different cultures, with a focus on the meaning of music in a general mythological sense, as we will see when examining the ending of the film. In contrast, in Williams' play *Orpheus Descending* (1957), the new world Orpheus focuses on the idea of freedom from the establishment. To more fully comprehend this new world Orphic aesthetic, it is important to look at the inspiration for *Orfeu da Conceição* (1956), the play on which *Orfeu Negro* is based, which was written by the Brazilian writer and composer Vinicius de Moraes.

## **B. Vinicius, the origins of his play, and its implications**

Vinicius de Moraes (1913–1980), referred to hereafter as Vinicius, was a Brazilian diplomat, poet, playwright, singer, and composer, who was multilingual (he spoke French, Italian, Spanish and English) and a key figure in modern Brazilian culture and in the Bossa Nova movement. This proficiency in many different artistic genres and languages meant that he in some respects constituted part of high European modernism as represented, for example, by the French artist Jean Cocteau (1889–1963). Vinicius traveled to many different countries during the post-World War II period and was influenced by a number of different international literary trends—mainly American, British, and French.

In 1942, after failing a test to enter the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brazil, Vinicius was commissioned to serve:

...as local guide to the North American writer Waldo Frank, who was researching Latin American cultures. They visited various sites of African-Brazilian life: *morros* or *favelas* [hillside shantytowns], *terreiros* [places of ritual worship], and the samba schools of Rio de Janeiro. During those visits a general association between Greek and black Brazilian life occurred to them. Just after reading a neo-classical version of the Orpheus narrative, Vinicius heard a *batucada* [percussion session] and “began to think about the life of the blacks on the hillside and to Hellenicize their life.” (Homem de Mello, J. 1976). Transposing an outline of the Orphean story to a favela, the writer composed, in one night, the first act of a musical play (Perrone, 1998).

After having applied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a second time in 1943, Vinicius succeeded in becoming a diplomat, traveling to many different Western countries, where he encountered a range of literary and artistic figures. Later, in 1946, when Vinicius was posted in Los Angeles, he wrote Act II of *Orfeu da Conceição*. As Perrone explains: “Vinicius wrote act two, with a dance club during carnival serving as the ‘hell’ to which Orpheus descends, as well as a third act, which he supposedly later lost” (Perrone 1998). It wasn’t until quite a few years later that Vinicius returned to complete the play:

In 1953, fellow poet-diplomat João Cabral de Mello Neto convinced his friend to rewrite act three and to submit the play to a drama competition in Sao Paulo. *Orfeu da Conceição* won the prize, and while no plans were made to stage the play, *Revista Anhembi* did publish the text. In 1955, on assignment in Paris, Vinicius did a final rewrite of the play (Perrone, 1998).

Through his career as a diplomat, Vinicius would have been aware of the different versions of Orpheus that were being adapted into modern narratives. Most importantly, Vinicius was aware of the figure of Orpheus in high European modernism such as Cocteau’s *Orphée*, among others. According to de Oliveira,

It [Vinicius' play] also seems to be part of an international tendency of the postwar period: a preoccupation with the myth of Orpheus. In 1948, while Vinicius was still living in Los Angeles, Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971), also living there, finished composing his ballet in three scenes called *Orpheus* (Oliveira 2002, 450).

After examining the way in which Cocteau's filmic rendition of Orpheus was different to that of Stravinsky, de Oliveira explains the link between these two artists (Stravinsky and Cocteau): "Stravinski and Cocteau had worked together somewhat earlier when they had collaborated on a version of *Oedipus Rex* with a libretto in Latin" (2002, 450). This connection between Cocteau and Stravinsky is significant because it explains the connection of Cocteau and Vinicius' through Stravinsky. That link also helps to explain Vinicius' rendition of the Orphic figure as a tragic one, distinguishing itself from the other two versions, where the hero represents a neoclassical ideal: "Cocteau, like Stravinski, was mainly interested in Orpheus as the figure of the poet-musician and the way in which he finally attains an apotheosis" (Oliveira 2002, 450).

Since Vinicius was adapting the myth to his Brazilian culture, he chose for his hero Orfeu to be different in what he represents; he wanted to create a meaning specific to Brazil. To understand fully Vinicius' motive for writing the play *Orfeu da Conceição*, it is invaluable to read his Preface, where he shows a genuine appreciation of the black population of Brazil; not only that, Vinicius expresses his respect for the black population as an important part of the Brazilian culture:

A final word: This play is an homage to the Brazilian black, to whom, moreover, I owe the play; it is not only his/her profoundly organic contribution to the culture of this country—but even more so, it is his/her passionate mode of living that allowed me, without effort, in a simple lightning bolt of thought to feel in the divine musician of Thrace the nature of one of the divine musicians of the hills of Rio de Janeiro (Vinicius 1956, 14; translation by Dr. Robert Myers).

Vinicius was aware of the black culture of Brazil and the reality of their situation since he had traveled to the poor areas of the north, where they are in the majority. The fact that Vinicius chose to pay homage to black Brazilians in his play and his insistence that the play should only be performed by black actors, noted in the stage directions, is very revealing: “Note—All of the characters in this tragedy should normally to be played by black actors” (Vinicius 1956, 15). Vinicius also made a point that the language of the play should be the one that people use in everyday speech:

Since one is here dealing with a play in which popular speech [or slang] constitutes such an important part, and since the language of the people changes so quickly, in the event of another staging it must be adapted to its new circumstances (Vinicius 1956, 15; translation by Dr. Robert Myers).

We see that by utilizing the language of the local populations, this new world Orpheus is anchored in the realities of favela life and is a part of it. This contrasts with the hero Val, in Tennessee Williams’ adaptation *Orpheus Descending*, who comes from another world and enters a reality which he changes.

Marcel Camus, in creating his film, comes from a long tradition of Europeans having an interest in New World cultures such as Brazil. Vinicius, who was a white Brazilian, was also genuinely interested in Brazilian black culture but had different motives for writing his play. Nevertheless, some critics, such as Perrone (1998), viewed the play in a negative light, arguing that:

...the dominant gaze of the author is cast upon an internal “other” with a certain concession. The play celebrates beauty in the *favela* but in a mystifying fashion that conceals socio-historical contexts. Authorial discourse reflects an ambivalence toward race in Brazil in the adoption of a symbolic blackness not translated into any de-privileging of whiteness (Perrone 1998, 5).

Perrone's position—and that of other critics—is that the play constitutes an ideological imposition. One could argue that these critics failed to understand the meaning of the original Orphic myth, which itself celebrates the creation of the new through the unique mix of different cultures. Again, Vinicius' desire was to create a new Brazilian element out of the cultural integration of the black population. A particular element in Vinicius' musical works attest to his genuine interest in the integration of the black population of Brazil. This hybrid poetic that was heavily influenced to black music and aesthetics is reflected Vinicius' collaboration with the Brazilian guitarist Baden Powell do Aquinho (1937–2000) on the album *Os Afros Sambas* (The Afro-Sambas) (1966). Songs such as “Canto de Ossanha” (Song of Ossanha), “Canto de Xango” (song of Xango), and “Tempo de Amor” (time of love) employ African harmonies and poetic themes and constitute a mix of various cultures, notably European and African.

When we think that the myth of Orpheus itself is a myth about creation and about the fusion of nature and culture, the adaptation of this myth to the *favelas* and the life of Rio de Janeiro necessarily implies the fusion of cultures and the creation of the new. What Vinicius creates in his play and what will be important for us in terms of new world Orphic is the creation of music and the continuation of music after Orfeu's death.

In effect, according to Oliveira, the apotheosis of Orfeu in the play is when “his music survives his death” (2002, 453). After Orfeu is killed by the Maenads of the *favelas*, when his body is lying on the floor of the club and the Maenads have broken and destroyed his guitar, a Dama Negra (Black Woman) appears who is a “somewhat analogous to the figure of Death in Cocteau” (de Oliveira 2002, 451)—here we see the connection between Vinicius and Cocteau—and “Suddenly his music begins to be heard and the Dama Negra covers his body with her mantle...” (Oliveira 2002, 451).

Orfeu's music, which is still heard after he dies, is the power of this new world Orphic that Vinicius created and which will be one of the most clearly distinguishable influences of his play on Camus' film. In *Orfeu da Conceição* and Camus' film *Orfeu Negro*, the Orphic hero possesses not only the power to create music but also a music that survives death. He is able to do so because it is a new type of music that carries specific meanings as it is the result of the fusion of different cultures.

We will see how in Camus' film *Orfeu Negro* this New World Orpheus character had a more powerful impact as it became an international symbol, whereas the impact of Vinicius' play was limited to Brazil.

One could also say that Vinicius himself is also an American metamorphosis of the New World Orpheus, since he was the multi-genre, multi-lingual poet who created new art out of the fusion of various cultures. Moreover, not only did Orfeu's music continue after his death but so also did Vinicius' artistic creations continue to have a life of their own; as Oliveira writes:

As in the case of his Orfeu, Vinicius' poetry survives his death. He died in July 1980, and the day after his death Carlos Drummond de Andrade said in the *Jornal do Brasil*: "Vinicius became the most exact figure of the poet that I have ever seen in my life. He was a poet in books, in music and in life. Three forms of poetry" (Oliveira 2002, 453).

### **C. France's vision in Brazil**

In *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), the anthropologist recounts his academic career and what led him into the domain of anthropology. In 1935–1939, he was sent to Brazil to carry out anthropological studies on indigenous populations living in the inlands of Brazil. The book is a travel narrative in which Lévi-Strauss delves into philosophical

musings and historical examples while, at the same time, discovering and reading Brazil and its landscapes and peoples as a text.

In Chapter 9, “Guanabara”, when he arrives for the first time in Rio de Janeiro, Lévi-Strauss recounts his impressions of the city. He writes how he suddenly changes social status as he is walking in Rio’s markets and gives an in-depth description of how the city was born and how it evolved during the centuries to become the city that he discovers. In doing so, Lévi-Strauss recounts the entire tradition of previous French expeditions that were undertaken since the sixteenth century by different adventurers and explorers—notably Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon (1510–1571) and Jean de Léry (1536–1613). Jean de Léry wrote an account of his travels in Brazil titled *Histoire d’un Voyage fait en la Terre du Brésil, Autrement dit l’Amérique* (*History of a Voyage Made in the Land of Brazil, in Other Words America*) (1578). According to Lévi-Strauss, who speaks about Léry’s book, there might have been a French expedition to Brazil even before Christopher Columbus; he describes how France and Portugal were in dispute over this land and later on, because of complications among the French colonizers who were sent by Calvin and led by Villegaignon, these expeditions failed. The reason is that ideological feuds between Catholics and Protestants demoralized and weakened the French establishment in Rio, which in turn led to their being attacked by the natives, which forced them to retreat back to France. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss argues that the name Brazil, or “Brésil” in French, is actually the French word for a type wood that is found in the Amazon forest. Moreover, many other words, such as Toucan, are French in origin. According to him, these etymologies demonstrate France’s imprint on Brazil. Nevertheless, Lévi-Strauss continues with this tradition of French exploration himself by giving a description of Rio de Janeiro. What is worth noting here is the



way in which he explains Rio de Janeiro's evolution in socio-economic terms such as which social class lives where and how the city is structured according to a socio-economical hierarchy.

He notes that the richer the neighborhood is, the lower and the closer it is to the water; the poorer areas—the favelas—are located on the hilltops. Lévi-Strauss then describes the condition of the Black population living in the hills and the fact that they look forward the entire year to carnival when they descend to the city to play their music:

«Les miséreux vivaient perchés sur les mornes, dans les *favelas* ou une population de noirs, vêtus de loques bien lessivées, inventaient sur la guitare ces mélodies alertes qui, au temps du carnaval, descendraient des hauteurs et envahiraient la ville avec eux.»

[The poor lived perched on the hills, in the *favelas* where a population of Negroes, dressed in clean rags, composed on the guitar those vivid melodies which, in times of carnival, would come down from their heights and take the city with them—author translation] (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 95).

This single image—where we see black people coming down from the hills with their guitars—comes alive in Camus' film. Camus, therefore, continues the French tradition of imagining Brazil and trying to conquer it in the imaginary world through music and mythology. One recalls here Bakhtin (see Chapter 1) and the way in which black people “descend” from the hills to mix with people from other cultures such as Italian, Portuguese, Indigenous, and others.

One important element that we should note concerning Lévi-Strauss is that his anthropological quest in Brazil among the indigenous people was to try to retrieve the structural frame through which humanity was living before modernity and to place Man on a pedestal above nature and culture. Lévi-Strauss was searching for a way in which humanity was connected to nature and culture in the middle ages, classical antiquity, and the non-European cultures to find a way out of modernity. Modernity for him was the underlying cause of humanity to committing crimes such as the Holocaust and the atrocities of the twentieth century.

Villeneuve (2004) also explains why the New World was particularly interesting for Europeans and what it represented for them from a cultural point of view:

In Western imagination, the encounter with the New World implies taking a distance, and a separation. It implies a clash with an estrangement. Nevertheless, this distancing is conveniently sublimated through the idea that, by traveling to the end of the maritime space, we would finally find the past of our own culture: thus, the golden age is somewhere in this New World still alive, where the children would have paradoxically the features of the Ancients. This formidable circle wherein which would be found the first men, the inhabitants of the Terra Nova and the European colonizers, produces a memory. It engenders for some, the reunion that is as unexpected as it is violent; for others, the beginning of erasure. All passage from Europe to the Americas and the Americas to Europe is linked through this heritage that constitutes the background of Camus' work. Memory is at the same time what is being constructed in this passage and what is being obliterated, which transforms geography into archeology, the voyage into a quest for remembrance—strangely, the remembrance of *what is to become* more than *what has been* (Villeneuve 2004, 116; translation by author).

But one should put Camus' film in the context of the period in which it was made. In effect, following the events of the World War II in the 1940s, the Algerian war in the 1950s when France lost its most important colonial territory, and the collapse of the French Colonial Empire, the American continent represented for Camus—and the French—a sort of escape. This idea of a world in which the dichotomy of subject and object, dominator/dominated, colonizer/colonized would be negated was too idyllic and beautiful not to be exploited.

According to Villeneuve,

The French audience was drowned in the Algerian war at the end of the nineteen fifties and had lost any kind of “enchantment” and “magic” in its outlook on the world. By Camus having broken the infernal circle of the executioner and the victim by transposing the myth of Orpheus in a new context, he was capable of giving a momentary outlet from History in favor of an ancient and pre-historic time. The myth is not a pretext to reread history nor to be distracted from it; it is instead working to create a specific world where culture and communication is effective. Also, the narrative structure turns the film into a form of incantation (Villeneuve 2004, 110; translation by author).

It is the possibility of “magic” and “enchantment” that Camus (and France, in more general terms) was searching for. Camus through *Orfeu Negro* was able to escape the suffocating modernity that was prevalent at the time: “the displacement (from Algeria) permits exactly, on another level, to counteract the problem of subjectivity and objectivity, as oppressive as in modernity, notably in the domain of cinema where Camus operates” (Villeneuve 2004, 120; translation by author).

Significantly, it is not only Camus’ desire to break away from this oppressive modernity and the tragedy of history but also the myth *itself* that seems to resist any sort of ideological imprint. The myth of Orpheus itself charms the god of the dead—or the underworld—Pluto, and succeeds in “passing through” Death to recuperate his wife Eurydice and recreate life. Even after he dies at the hands of the vengeful Maenads, Orpheus’ head continues to sing as it floats on the river. His soul goes to the underworld, finds Eurydice again and they live together for eternity.

As a symbol of the endurance of life beyond death, Orpheus symbolizes the regeneration of life and more specifically of the regeneration of music. By virtue of being a “Classical” myth, that entails the transgression of death and passing beyond affords it the power that makes the myth into a text which resists cultural hegemony. According to Schliephake:

...although the classics have repeatedly served as foundational parts of hegemonic ideologies, they have also resisted any neat instrumentalization or interpretation, undermining dominant readings. [...] The classics have been part of historical processes at the same time that they have managed to resist total appropriation. They have possessed a degree of sameness and a degree of alterity and they have repeatedly functioned as counter discourses against ideologies of progress and cultural forgetting (Schliephake 2016, 119).

Brazilian critics (among others) viewed the film as a cultural affront. It is worth noting that what they rejected was the depiction of Brazil by a foreign culture and, more specifically, a European

one. Perrone provides a good example of such criticism; he argues that Camus did not pay attention to the realities of Brazil:

The director declared, for instance, that Brazil was a country without roots and lacked a “tradition of expression.” With reference to the places of residence of “the heroes of the film,” he is quoted as saying that blacks flee to favelas because of a “desire to defend themselves against the invasion of modern civilization.” (Silveira, P. 106). In such comments, Camus simply ignores the dynamics of national formation and the extreme socioeconomic disadvantages that drive the dispossessed to shantytowns (Perrone 1998, 7).

However, the point that these critics missed is that Camus was operating on another level. Camus was motivated by the desire to create and renew, whereas critics were obsessed with how Brazil was being represented. Since fiction’s purpose is to create new stories which in turn conceive new realities, Camus succeeded in the sense that he was able to produce a new reality by inventing a New World Orphic from the adaptation of Vinicius’ play, which was in turn an adaptation of the myth of Orpheus. And this Orphic creation was made in a new country Brazil.

One counter example against the supposed appropriation of Camus’ film of black Brazilian culture and his imposition of a Western myth disregarding local realities, is Jean-Paul Sartre’s (1905–1980) preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (*Anthology of the New Negro and Madagascar Poetry*) (1948). In this text, Sartre utilizes the myth of Orpheus to describe the descent into the black poet’s past and identity that will permit him to achieve freedom from colonialism through finding the essence of his true nature. We see in this Preface how Sartre utilizes the myth of Orpheus to oppose this “western appropriation of local population” through a Eurocentric perspective. As Schliephake explains:

With his essay, Sartre gave way to a re-interpretation of the Orpheus myth and formulated a counter discourse against Eurocentric interpretations of the myth that connected the ancient singer to a canonized high culture. It also re-located the myth into the setting of the so-called “Third World”, into landscapes and spaces ridden with abject

poverty and deteriorating environmental conditions in the face of colonial enterprises and the mining of raw materials (Schliephake 2016, 122).

In the film, one of the most important elements that demonstrates how African elements are used in a culturally attuned way is the percussive rhythm of the Samba that never stops and that is always present in the background. This continuous percussion keeps the audience in a state of trance. People are frequently seen dancing, whether on the streets, on the hilltops, and even in the “underworld,” after the part of the empty staircase where Orfeu descends to find Eurydice. By keeping this music and dance in the background and creating this state of trance and intoxication, Camus is enacting what Sartre described as a strategy by some of the black francophone poets who wished to compose their poems so that the words would sound like the drums of their ancestors in Africa. In doing so, Sartre believed that these black poets would summon up the spirits of their ancestors in Africa in order to find their true selves:

... there exist, in effect, an objective négritude that is expressed through the customs, the arts, the chants and the dances of the African populations. The poet will take it as a spiritual exercise to let himself be fascinated by the primitive rhythms, to let his thoughts flow in the traditional forms of Black poetry [...] the poet turns like a dervish until he faints, he instilled in him the era of his ancestors, he feels it flowing with its singular staccatos; it is in this rhythmical flowing that he wishes to find himself; I will say that he tries to make himself possessed by the négritude of his people; he hopes that the echoes of his drum will awake the immemorial instincts that are asleep inside him” (Sartre 1948, 24; translation by author).

We see that Camus integrates this form of expression that is African in the film so as to awaken ancient spirits both in the audience and in Brazil itself. Since he didn't use any African myth or poems that would directly make references to the African culture itself Camus uses the musical form and type of expression to bring to life the African culture and therefore African presence. Sartre continues in this idea of summoning spirits and further explains how this

poetical device that Black poets use is very effective in re-creating the spirit of poetry, which is folkloric, connected to nature and the cosmos:

“But as far as he is “from the black country where sleep the ancestors”, the Black man is closer than us to the great era where, as said Mallarmé, “the word creates the Gods”. It is near impossible for our poets to reconnect with the popular traditions: ten centuries of conscious poetry separates them and anyways the folkloric inspiration has weakened: at most we could imitate its simplicity but only from the outside. The Blacks from Africa, on the contrary, are still in the great period of mythical fecundity and the Black poets of the French language are not making fun of these myths like we do with our songs: they let themselves be charmed by them so that at the end of this incantation the *négritude*, magnificently evoked, arises. This is why I call magic or charming this method of “objective poetry” (Sartre 1948, 24; translation by author).

We can see Camus objectively portrayed the Black population of Rio using Sartre’s notion of “*Négritude*.” If we interpret the film in the manner that Cocteau views a film—as being a “poem,” and that Camus is a “poet,”—we see clearly that Camus composed this film as a poem and sought to conjure the ancestors from “the past” through the rhythmical percussion that continuously beat throughout the film.

These African elements that we see in the film are a remnant of the past that will be a part of the New World Orphic, since it will be mixed with other European elements.

#### **D. The new world Orphic fusion**

As I mentioned earlier, Camus did not restrict his film to only portraying black characters dancing and chanting, he also sought to create a Brazilian fusion between Africa and Europe using the myth of Orpheus. There are two parts in Camus’ film that are the most successful examples of this fusion of Africa and Europe to create the New World Orphic. However, before

explaining these, it is important to note that this fusion between Africa and Europe is one of the natural consequences of black consciousness—or Négritude—that Sartre was arguing for. In effect, according to Sartre, it is after having found his “Eurydice” or his soul that the Black poet is confronted a complicated paradox. Being conscious of his race and his truth about the world (the suffering that he endured because of slavery and having been deported from his continent to the Americas and other islands), he will open himself up and will want to redeem himself by giving back this excess of love, power, and truth, which he acquired during his “descent to the deep recesses of his soul” (using the analogy of Orpheus) to the world and mix with the entirety of the universe in the joy of his newly acquired freedom:

...the blacks pry in their deepest selves to find their most secret pride, and when they finally discover it, this pride contests itself: through a supreme generosity they abandon it [...] because Négritude is not a state, it purely surpasses itself, it is love. It is at the moment when it renounces itself that it finds itself; it is at the moment when it accepts to losing that it wins: for the colored man and to himself only can he be asked to renounce his pride in his color. He is the one who walks on a summit between the particularism of the past that he just rose from and the future universalism that will be the dusk of his négritude; the one who lives through this particularism until the end to find the universal dawn (Sartre 1948, 42; translation by author).

The renunciation of what makes him unique and his desire to lose himself is most apparent in *Orfeu Negro* during the Shamanic scene, which is also the climax of the film. The reason why this scene is so important is because it is this event in the film when we see the manifestation of the New World Orphic as the mix of cultures. In effect, after Eurydice dies by electrocution in a power room, having been followed by a man in a dark costume representing Death, Orfeu goes wandering in the city looking for her body. He goes into a building full of empty offices and meets the janitor who tells him that if he wants to find his loved one, he should follow him. Orfeu accompanies the janitor down a circular staircase. The camera angle is

positioned to shoot from the railing looking downward at the spiral staircase. After passing through a large gate accompanied by his dog Cerberus, the janitor takes Orfeu to a room where they participate in a ritual of Candomblé (which is a derivation of an African religion that slaves had imported from Africa) in which drums are being played and the dancers are entranced by the music.

During the ritual, when the spirit of Eurydice enters the body of an old woman and calls out to Orfeu, he turns and realizes that Eurydice is not there. It is at this moment that we see that Eurydice is lost forever. The important element during this scene is when the camera is panning across the various statues, when we see many different Catholic figures, including Saint Anthony, patron saint of lost objects. We witness here a religious syncretism or, the mixing of different religions. According to Porra, among all the clichés that are present in Camus' film, the Shamanic scene is the only one in which the syncretism of religions and cultures actually happens "Only a scene of Candomblé, a Brazilian ritual derived from Voodoo, presents a true cultural syncretism (a mix of catholic symbols, Indians and voodoo)" (Porra 2012, 447; translation by author).

This syncretism or fusion is important in that it will help us to understand how this New World Orphic is created and how this syncretism is at the core of this adaptation. It is also by representing Candomblé in cinema that Camus makes this syncretism all the more powerful since this cinematic aesthetic creates an experience that captivates the audience. According to Villeneuve (2004), the mix of cinema and Shamanism makes the Shamanic scene the climax of the film, since it is an ethnic experience (where the viewer is in the room with the dancers and the sorcerers and finds him/herself taking part in this Shamanic experience) and it is when cinema is able to allow us to experience multiple cultural realities:



The pastoral narrative of the lover who is misled by death seems to be here at the closest point to be abolished through the realism of an ethnic experience. [...] From the perspective of the audience, this here (the scene) announces the inevitability of a rupture because it breaks the jubilation of the poetical and the carnivalesque, its apparent lightness, in the deep *intensity* of a brutal experience; if the “voice” of Eurydice can still lie, the body of this old lady cannot, not more than the secular gestures of the sorcerer and the young women in trance. The spectator reintegrates the sphere of throbbing sounds, complaints and cries, as if the cinema, in the heart of its own *mimesis*, was accomplishing this turning back through which, as a shamanic device, it makes “appear” the foundation of all experience, its phenomenological mark (Villeneuve 2004, 113; translation by author).

This experience that the audience watches is powerful because the scene does to us what Orpheus does with his music: it transforms the listener and enchants him through the magic of his voice and music. This enchantment could be interpreted as a loss of subjectivity. Therefore, this New World Orphic is not only the spirit of enchantment and intoxication, but of a loss of self. Villeneuve (2004) explains it:

...delimited by the millenary form of the myth, passionate love repeats itself, but even the passion of repetition overflows in its turn with intensity, it makes itself into song and percussion, borrows in an untimely fashion the ways of the body which, in its ecstasy, has the power to engulf all form. [...] By engaging himself in hell, Orfeu will find Eurydice, but through an unprecedented surge of bodies, through the encounter with the *de-subjective* shamanic trance (Villeneuve 2004, 115; translation by author).

So in a way, Camus was successful here in creating a myth that does not include the oppressive binaries of modernity such as the object–subject and colonizer–colonized by creating a New World Orphic that has a religious power which contains the power to erase all subjectivity: “...the film plunges the listener in a trance through its rhythms, as auditory as visual; beyond the orphic theme, it converts its own device in a shamanic experience of incantation” (Villeneuve 2004, 112). The Carnavalesque element that is brought to Europe has been mixed with the magical pantheism of the African religions to create a new type of

enchantment, and this capacity to entrance in a shamanistic way is the power of this New World Orphic. Camus added this African Shamanistic element to the character of Orpheus when adapting the myth to Brazil and this new trait will be found in the music of this New World Orpheus.

### **E. The character of Orfeu and what he represents**

At the beginning of the film, we see Orfeu, who is black, who lives in the favelas of Rio and works as a tram driver during the year. He gets his guitar back from an office crowded with people as it is Carnival, and he goes back to his little house up in the favelas. Orfeu greets two young boys and as they sit together in his house sings a song he recently composed to be played at the Carnival while at the same time enchanting his pets that are many. Orfeu is the Black working man of Rio, who is poor and works in a lower class job but, as soon as the Carnival comes, he becomes the leader of a samba school, a composer, a lover and a role model for his community. Even the children want to become like him.

Schliephake (2016), delves into the socio economic situation of Orfeu and the ways in which he represents the spirit of music:

...his poverty does not restrain him from singing his poetry tinged songs, which use the motif of tragic lovers, and from taking on the role of a community leader. And while his performances draw heavily on context and improvisation, Orfeu makes clear that there were “other Orfeus before” him. He is both a creator and a conserver, who stands in a long line of musical tradition passed on down the generations (Schliephake 2016, 125).

This musical tradition—which we saw in Vinicius’ play after the death of Orfeu—is one of the central aspects of the myth of Orpheus that Camus was able to transmit through cinema.

Camus not only attests to the continuity of music through the ages as a “spirit” that is transmitted from generation to generation but also as a representation of the eternity of music.

After the death of Orfeu at the hands of his jealous ex-fiancée Mira, we see two little boys and one girl who pick up Orfeu’s guitar and sit on top of the hill overlooking the ocean. As one of the little boys plays the guitar the little girl starts to dance to his music, the sun rises and we see that the day and life have started anew. The little boy may therefore be interpreted as the new Orfeu who will carry on his musical tradition. Camus’ inclusion of this figure of continuity and rebirth is also a gesture of open-endedness, in tune with the film’s efforts to escape ideological enclosure. According to Perrone: “This conclusion comprises a symbolic rebirth and corresponds to the mytheme of the continuity of music” (1998, 11). In terms of the new world Orphic, this open-endedness means that the spirit of music that the new world Orphic represents is not static with a definition of what it is and what it should be, but it is the fusion of different cultures that will continue to live and will continue to mix with different cultures to create new music and new representations in the future. In other words, this new world Orphic is now eternal and carries the possibility of rebirth and creating life out of death for ever. This open-endedness will be used by Diegues and Veloso to create their own version of Orpheus, as we will see in the next chapter.

## **F. Orfeu’s music and its implications**

As mentioned before, during the year, Orfeu is poor and working-class but during Carnival he metamorphoses into a powerful symbol for his community. From a Bakhtinian point of view, Orfeu represents the spirit of the European tradition of Carnival where, under the

intoxicating effects of Carnival, he metamorphoses into another being and his socio-economic situation changes:

The principle of laughter and the carnival spirit on which grotesque is based destroys this limited seriousness (human necessity) and all pretense of an extratemporal meaning and unconditional value of necessity. It frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities (Bakhtin 1984, 49).

From a musical perspective, the song in the film that would best describe this European tradition of a break in time and space, in which the spirit of Carnival transforms the condition of life for a brief moment is, “A Felicidade” (Happiness) (music by Antonio Carlos Jobim, lyrics by Vinicius de Moraes) where it writes:

A felicidade do pobre parece  
A grande ilusão do carnaval  
A gente trabalha o ano inteiro  
  
Por um momento de sonho  
Pra fazer a fantasia  
De rei ou de pirata ou jardineira  
Pra tudo se acabar na quarta-feira  
  
Tristeza não tem fim  
Felicidade sim

Translation [by author]:

The happiness of the poor seems  
The great illusion of Carnival  
The people work all year long  
  
For a moment of dreaming  
To make a costume  
Of a king or a pirate or a gardener  
For everything to finish on Wednesday  
  
Sadness never ends  
Happiness does

The power of this song is that on the one hand, it conveys the spirit of Carnival from Latin Europe, where just a moment of joy and revelry erases an entire year of toil and hard work. On the other hand, through the Bossa Nova rhythm of the song a new genre of music that is created. This song—among many others in the film—represents the musical manifestation of the new world Orpheus. In effect, it is the music of the film that made the film popular throughout the world, because it represents the fusion of different cultures. When describing the success of the film’s music, Perrone (1998) makes the point that:

One area of near unanimous agreement, as befits a film of this title, is the exceptional music, whose quality and power are universally remarked. The film and the sound track of *Black Orpheus* exposed countless people worldwide to Brazilian music and became points of reference in the history of contemporary popular music. While pervasive batucada [samba percussion] drives the film, the greatest impact was made by the distinctive lyrical theme songs—“A Felicidade” (Antonio Carlos Jobim-Vinicius de Moraes) and “Manha de Carnaval” (Luiz Bonfá Antonio Maria)—which gave great impetus to the emerging Bossa Nova movement (10–11).

If we look closely at the origins of “Bossa Nova” itself (“New Beat” in English), in the song “A Felicidade,” we see that this spirit of European Carnival that Vinicius evokes with the harmony of Jobim has a peculiar rhythm to it. This rhythm, which is a “Samba” rhythm but at a slower tempo, is African in Origin. Samba was originally an African rhythm that came from a West African religious ritual attributed to a specific god. Like the shamanic scene in the film, this rhythm would be played during a ritual to call forth the specific god. By delving on the evolution of Brazilian music in the twentieth century, Grasse (2004) retraces the origins of bossa nova and explains how this genre is a mixture of different other genres:

A sophisticated, internationally consumed urban popular music boasting extensive cross-stylistic, cross-cultural sources, bossa nova represents an innovative fusion of Brazilian traditions of samba-canção (“samba song”, a commercial urban genre from the Golden Era of 1930–1950), modinha (“little song”, a varied Luso-Brazilian popular song

tradition), and an ingeniously distilled rhythmic vitality drawn directly from samba. The batida (guitar rhythm; roughly “hitting”; also termed as violão gago; “stammering guitar”), quiet vocal style, and virtuosic syncopations between the two remain Gilberto’s hallmarks of Brazilian originality (294).

So, we see that this song “A Felicidade” (Happiness) in the film –along many others such as “Manha de Carnaval” (Morning of the Carnival), and “Samba de Orfeu” (Samba of Orfeu) – portray the powerful spirit of fusion between different cultures that Camus was able to create in his film through Orfeu’s character and life.

The music that complements the film and Orfeu’s character allowed Camus to create a new world Orphic poetic where the hero Orfeu is anchored in the socio-economic reality of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil but, when Carnaval comes, he is transformed into the mythical figure of Orpheus but adapted to the culture and historic reality of Brazil. Through this film, we come to understand that this new world Orpheus is the fusion of cultural traditions through Camus’ capacity to transform the reality of a part of the population of Brazil—by the power of carnival. Moreover, Orfeu possesses religious qualities that are able to transcend death and create life through Shamanic powers. This renewal and newness is mostly apparent in this adaptation through the medium of music, the mix of European and African music that becomes an eternal spirit capable of creation and renewal. Through the power of the music and the portrayal of the myth, the film won prizes when it was released: “Camus’s Orfeu Negro won the 1959 Academy Award for Best Foreign Film and the Palm d’Or at that year’s Cannes Film Festival” (Grasse 2004, 293). Moreover, through this film that was watched all over the world, Brazil came to be associated with bossa nova and exotic images, which will be the main reason behind the next version of the new world Orphic.

## CHAPTER IV

### ORPHEUS IN THE *FAVELAS*

#### **A. The Brazilian new world orphic of *Orfeu Negro***

As we saw in second chapter, the new world orphic of Marcel Camus is, on the one hand, the product of a Brazilian desire to integrate a marginal black population as inspired by Brazilian modernism. On the other hand, *Orfeu Negro* is also the product of a long historical tradition of French anthropological thought that imagines Brazil as the perfect space to create a new form of culture based on French intellectuals' visions, like Sartre and Lévi-Strauss. This new world orphic, as manifested in Camus' film, has numerous traits. To understand the newer version created by Carlos Diegues (1940) and Caetano Veloso (1942) in the film *Orfeu* (1999), it is important to recapitulate the traits of Camus' new world orphic. These traits include the African aspect, in which the protagonist is from the marginalised black population of Brazil of African descent, and the power of entrancing the listener through the hero's music because he is a religious figure who represents the syncretism of Christian Catholicism with African shamanism and pantheism. The presence of music in life also plays a role, in particular music that has a social function for the community and the broader culture. A further trait is the carnivalesque element of life in which this new world Orpheus has the power to change the established order by turning the high into the low and the low into the high. The protagonist is a community leader and a model for his community, the *favela*. He is a hybrid character who represents various cultures and is not entrenched in a specific ideology of representation of a specific political ideal.

## **B. The rejection of Camus' film by the Brazilian audience**

Although having won prizes at the Cannes Film Festival and succeeded in popularising bossa nova internationally, Camus' film did not succeed in an artistic or commercial sense in Brazil. In the eyes of the international audience, *Orfeu Negro* became a symbol of how Brazil looks and sounds. For Brazilians, it was the opposite, it became a symbol of stereotypes and exoticism of their country. Vinicius de Moraes, who wrote the play that Camus adapted into the film, viewed the film negatively after watching it in a theatre in Rio: "Vinicius walked out of a special screening at the Presidential Palace in Rio and eschewed scheduled homages to what a biographer called "such a disfigured Orfeu" (Pecci 1994, 285-286). To Vinicius and other Brazilians who were close to the play, Camus had lost the pathos and poetry in his transposition to the screen. The film's attitude was deemed 'exotic'. In the words of a leading modernist poet, Manuel Bandeira: "...in it there is a *partis pris* of exoticism" (Bandeira 1966, 139 – 140; as cited in Perrone 1998, 6-7). Vinicius' rejection of Camus' film is significant especially because the film is an adaptation of the play he wrote. However, Vinicius rejected this foreign interpretation of his play and did not see the film as representing his vision of Orpheus in Brazil. In the same vein, director Carlos Diegues and Caetano Veloso also rejected Camus' film. What these two artists rejected was similar to what Vinicius had rejected. For them the film did not portray Brazilian culture as they perceived it. To understand why Diegues and Veloso rejected Camus' film, it is important to understand the motivation behind their desire to create their own Brazilian adaptation of the myth in the modern urban reality of Rio de Janeiro. For Veloso, Camus' film was an outward gaze into Brazil that projected a colonial and Eurocentric perspective. According to Veloso (1997) (as cited in Perrone 2002), he watched Camus' film in a theatre in Bahia as a teenager. His impression of the film is very revealing:



. . . the whole audience and I laughed and were ashamed of the bold inauthenticities that French filmmaker allowed himself in order to create a product of fascinating exoticism. The criticism that we Brazilians made of the film can be summarized in this way: How is it possible that the best and most genuine Brazilian musicians should have accepted to create masterpieces to adorn (and dignify) such deceit? (*Verdade tropical*, 252) (Perrone 2002, 51).

As I have explained in the second chapter, Camus' film and its narrative come from a long-standing tradition of French philosophy and anthropology. Although being aware of this tradition, the fact that Veloso is originally from Salvador de Bahia, made it that he could not connect with this tradition since Rio de Janeiro shares a history with France. What mattered to Veloso was how he saw his culture being represented. This is particularly important in our understanding of myths and their adaptation, as the context into which a myth is adapted is important for its reception and how the audience understands it. Since Camus did not intend the film to be for Brazil but France, the Brazilian audience did not appreciate it: "After an initial wave of hopeful news and enthusiasm about Camus' film, reception in Brazil was largely negative. One nationalist objection concerned the wide distance and consequential differences between the final film version and the play by Vinicius, whose poetry was lost in the view of many. Most detractors considered the cinematic approach to be overly 'exotic', or even demeaning" (Perrone 2002, 51). Even more important in Veloso's critique is that he questions why Brazilian musicians accepted this masterpiece. Apart from his being a musician, this critique attests to the power of the music in Camus' film and that the music succeeded. This chapter will suggest how music survived in Diegues' film as well by exploring Veloso's relationship with bossa nova and its importance in the later adaptation, *Orfeu*.

Carlos Diegues, the Brazilian director of *Orfeu*, was a member of the *cinema novo* (new cinema) movement in Brazil in the 60s and 70s during which time films focused on social

inequality. Diegues watched Vinicius' play during his youth and was influenced by it: "Diegues sat as a sixteen-year-old in the Rio de Janeiro Municipal Theatre audience to see Moraes' play in 1956" (Grasse 2004, 305). Having been aware of the implications of Vinicius' play from seeing it in context meant that Diegues understood the social purpose behind Vinicius' play. This understanding of the context explains the disappointment Diegues felt in watching Camus' film, *Orfeu Negro*. Diegues saw Camus' film as an exoticisation of Brazil and the culture of Rio de Janeiro: "Diegues himself declared to the press that he too had been very disappointed with Camus' film. When he first saw it, he was just starting his career as a film director, but nonetheless he was profoundly upset by the exotic images of Brazilian life" (dos Santos 2003, 52). Camus' film basically failed to speak to the Brazilian population because it was seen as foreign, exotic, and out of place. The storyline, which depicts the black population of the *favela* living as if in a dream and the disregard for this population's problems was negatively perceived by Brazilians as it was not realistic for them.

Nonetheless, the only aspect of Camus' film which was appreciated by Diegues and Veloso was the music. How Diegues and Veloso reintegrate the music of Camus' film into their adaptation of the film *Orfeu* (1999) reveals how their new world Orpheus uses elements of Camus' film to reinvent this mythical hero and how this use of the old into the new carries meaning in a new world orphic.

Furthermore, considering their disgust with Camus' film, Diegues and Veloso decided to create a more truthful representation of modern Rio de Janeiro and its *favelas* through the adaptation of Vinicius' play into the harsh reality of the *favelas* in the 90s. In a way, Diegues and Veloso collaborated to create a Brazilian film by Brazilian artists for a Brazilian audience. In

doing so, the artists created another version of the new world orphic that now represents the environment of Rio's urban reality in a realistic fashion.

### **C. The character of Orfeu and its implications**

The film *Orfeu* begins in the favela before dawn when a group of children, who are admirers of Orfeu, arrive at his house and ask him to play music to make the sun rise. We then see Orfeu in his room after he has finished making love to his girlfriend Mira. He seems bothered by the children. Nonetheless, Orfeu decides to comply with the children's demands, opens the window and stands on the balcony to play the guitar. The sun rises and different animals gather to listen to Orfeu's music and are enchanted by it. Through this introductory scene, Diegues connects this Brazilian Orfeu to the myth of Orpheus in the sense that both charm nature, animals, and children through the power of their voices and guitars. Here, Orfeu is a role model for the children of the *favela*. After this scene, there is a difference in Orfeu's character from the previous scene. And this difference is his relationship with music and composition.

After Orfeu returns to the room from the balcony, he dresses, sits at his laptop and tells Mira that he needs to work on his compositions. He also tells her that he will go to the carnival rehearsals and so he will not be able to stay with her for the day. Here is a new way in which this Orpheus interacts with music.

Concerned by representing reality as it is, Diegues portrays music as an industry that is part of the economic system. Compared to Camus' *Orfeu*, in which music is a part of life in the Carnavalesque terms of the word - an escape from reality and an opportunity to mix with the other - music in *Orfeu* is a business endeavour and a profession. As dos Santos (2003) noted:

“Orfeu also represents carnival as a manipulated activity, part of a cultural and tourism industry. While the main character goes to carnival parades, which is how he makes a living, Eurydice remains at home and watches her lover on television” (65). This idea of Orfeu going to the carnival as a ‘job’ and Eurydice staying at home to watch him on television is evocative of the traditional work/home culture where music and carnival are synonymous with work as compared to music and carnival as an outlet - or escapism - as emphasised by Bakhtin.

This portrayal of music as part of an economic system is even more pronounced during the preparations for the carnival and what it means for the population of the *favelas*. A good example in the film is in the beginning when Eurydice goes to a Samba school rehearsal with Carmen after settling in the *favela*. In this scene, after we see the dancers practising and designing their costumes, Carmen introduces Lurdes to Eurydice, a dancer who was born in the *favela* but, because she won a previous carnival competition, moved up in the social ladder and moved out of the slums into a better area of Rio de Janeiro. Carmen also tells Eurydice that although Lurdes found her way out of the *favela*, she comes back every year to participate in the carnival, which attests to the power of the carnival in the culture of Rio de Janeiro, especially an activity that can transcend class divisions.

Another example of the utilitarianism of music in the film is when Lucinho (the leader of the brutal drug trafficking gang and long-time childhood friend) asks Orfeu why he did not leave the *favela* for a better life. Orfeu tells Lucinho that he did not leave because he wants to win the carnival competition to become an example for everyone in the *favela* and to show the people that anyone can succeed without being involved in crime, drugs, and corruption. We see here that music is a way out of the slums or ‘hell’ and not as a relief from the hardships of life through a transformation of this hell, as is the case with the traditional carnivalesque European tradition.

This Orfeu lacks the magical transformational powers of music of the mythical Orpheus.

According to dos Santos (2003):

The exceptional powers of music, which could even change the course of life and death as present in the legend, do not appear in the film. As a matter of fact, the hero is very much concerned about the dangerous life in the favela and expresses a desire to leave the shantytown and live with his lover in a safer world (61).

One could say that this wish to get out of the *favela* serves to emphasise the hellish nature of that environment. Instead of Orpheus' magical abilities in this adaptation, magic here is manifested here through the power of the *favela*, which is a real 'Hades' from which there is no escape. The power of this hell is especially relevant towards the end of the film when Orfeu is unable to save Eurydice from death:

Hell is nothing else than the residues of dirt and the violence of the *favela*. Eurydice is as good as dead and there are no hopes of a return. At this moment, the search for Eurydice is secularized and there is only one discourse possible: this hell is the reality of the *favelas*, of their violence and their misery (Porra 2012, 454; translation by author).

Nonetheless, in this film, Orfeu is a superstar and a celebrity. Everyone knows him in the *favela*, and he is loved, feared, and respected by all, even the police. When the chief of the local police, Sergeant Pacheco, asks Orfeu to get in his car to talk about Lucinho, one police officer called Stallone expresses his admiration for Orfeu by singing the samba that he played at the carnival during the previous year. This scene reminds us of *Orfeu Negro* after the carnival, when Orfeu asks the police officers where Eurydice is, and one of the policemen does not answer his question but tells him that he loved a particular samba song from Orfeu's samba school. His lack of magical powers compared to the mythical Orpheus serves to anchor his character in the reality

and culture of the *favela*. In a sense, this new world Orpheus is a powerful figure for the community in that he is a superstar and a celebrity in the modern sense of the term.

This adaptation of the mythical Orpheus into a modern celebrity is how Diegues was able to incorporate realistic features of Rio de Janeiro's culture into the film to create a realistic adaptation of the myth. Moreover, Diegues used many *Carioca* (citizens of Rio de Janeiro) cultural figures to portray reality in his film. According to dos Santos (2003):

...Diegues used techniques common in documentary films, such as short takes and close-ups. [...] he also used some artifices of production, casting actual celebrities of Rio's cultural life in bit parts. Nelson Sargento, an important musician of the older generation of Brazilian sambistas, and Caetano Veloso are briefly featured. What's more, to play the lead role the director chose Tony Garrido, who is not an actor, but a well-known member of a famous Brazilian reggae band called Cidade Negra. Garrido is shown in the film parading in the Viradouro samba school, which coincidentally had the Greek legend of Orpheus as its main theme that year (60).

Through mixing reality and fiction, Diegues was able to blur the lines between both realms in his cinematic techniques and create a new reality. This new creation is the product of cinema and art, since reproducing reality through the medium of art creates a new reality. This new reality is the hell of the *favela* which is so powerful that music and carnival are unable to release people. Both Orfeu and Eurydice die at the end of the film, which attests to the demonic reality of the *favelas*.

In the scene in which Orfeu meets Lucinho in his gang's lair where he hopes to find Eurydice, he drinks liquid from a cup that is distilled by an Indian priest. After drinking it, Eurydice appears in a mirror and as soon as Orfeu sees her and tries to touch her, the mirror breaks into pieces. Diegues alludes here to Cocteau, and we understand that there is no other dimension or reality except that in which the story is taking place. In Cocteau's *Orphée*, the

protagonist enters the mirror and trespasses into the realm of the dead, where he finds his wife and can bargain with the judges of Hades to take his wife back into the living world. In *Orfeu*, there is no hope of finding Eurydice in the other world. She is dead, and there is no chance of getting her back from the other world. Diegues creates his own reality, different from all the other writers and directors before him in that the other world does not exist. The only world which exist is the one through which the story takes place in. In Cocteau's *Orphée*, Orphée enters the mirror and we are in another world. In Williams' play, the confectionary is the other world where everything happens and everything is possible. In Camus' film, the other world is the religious ceremony where it is as if we are in another world, in another era, watching an ancient ritual where spirits dialogue with the living. But here in Diegues film, the only reality is that of the *favela* and he creates this harsh reality by showing us that there is no escape.

Sexuality in *Orfeu* is important because the film again has a different interpretation of Orfeu. Sensuality and love in this film are different in that Orfeu is a sensual lover. Basing the film in modern Rio de Janeiro, Diegues portrays the sensual libertine spirit that characterises this city. The film begins with Orfeu passionately making love to Mira. We also learn that Orfeu is very successful with women. During the scene of the rehearsal for the Carnival that I mentioned earlier, Carmen tells Eurydice that Lurdes was once Orfeu's girlfriend, only to add: "Almost everyone here's been his girlfriend." In contrast, Orfeu's relationship with Eurydice is pure, romantic, and devoid of any lust. After Lucinho and his gang brutally kill a man accused of meddling with the cabman's daughter, Eurydice decides to leave the *favela*. Dressed in a pink princess costume, Eurydice packs her trunk and when she starts to descend the stairs, Orfeu catches her and tells her that he loves her and will do anything to protect her. It is then that they enter her house and make love. The music and the romantic kissing is reminiscent of Brazilian

*novelas* (soap operas). Eurydice tells Orfeu that it was her first time making love. As Orfeu stands up from the bed naked, Eurydice asks him to cover himself. Eurydice is modest and Orfeu respects her wish. Through this attitude towards love and sensuality where Orfeu is both a sensual and romantic lover, we understand that this new world orphic is different from previous versions. In Tennessee Williams' play, the act where Val and Lady make love is hidden from the audience, which reflects the culture of the southern United States in the 1950's, when the play was created and staged. In Camus' film, Orfeu never kisses Eurydice and longs for her until she dies. Even in Cocteau's adaptation, Orphée never makes love to his wife and is always preoccupied by the messages coming from the radio, which is why he loses her. In *Orfeu*, Orfeu and Eurydice consummate their love almost immediately, and in so doing realistically portrays the culture of love in contemporary Brazil. However, this representation of love and sexuality has been criticised by Brazilians and critics as unrealistic:

Even if the intention was to be faithful to the facts of a real-life relationship, the film fails because the practices we see displayed in the film are not very common among the Brazilian population, although still idealized by sectors of bourgeois society [...] *Orfeu* contains many codes of a soap opera, in which the romantic encounter of the couple entails the ideal of a bourgeois future life. It seems that in the attempt to escape the highly sensual and erotic images of *Black Orpheus*, the new version ended up as an implausible love story (dos Santos 2003, 64).

However, since *Orfeu* is a fictional narrative, the torrid sensual scenes with Mira contrast with the love-making scene with Eurydice. This contrast highlights the love between Orfeu and Eurydice to remain faithful to the myth where Orpheus loves Eurydice so dearly and purely that he even rejects the maenads after he loses her.

Having seen how the character of Orfeu relates to a new world orphic who is a music superstar and a sensual and romantic lover, it is important to consider what his character in the



film means in the broader context in representing the new world African-American Orpheus in the continental sense of the term.

#### **D. The new African-American Orpheus and its significance**

As I have pointed out earlier concerning the adaptation of the myth of Orpheus in the Americas, race is very central to these societies. In *Orfeu*, race plays an even more important role since the film is intended to represent the complexities of modern Brazil, which is a racially and culturally diverse country.

Firstly, the representation of the police and the relationship between the police and the population of the *favela* is very revealing in that it shows a distinct racial feature that characterises this new world orphic, which is fluidity and the lack of a fixed cultural homogeneity.

The representation of racial fluidity in *Orfeu* can be further illuminated, and its Brazilian specificity set off, by comparison with another near-contemporary film which is the American film *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), which was written and directed by John Singleton (1968 – 2019). The film tells the story of Trey Styles, a young black man and his upbringing in the then-booming gang culture of Los Angeles. The director, in the same fashion as Diegues, wished to represent the violence of the reality of urban Los Angeles realistically. At the beginning of the film, when Trey Styles is still a child, he is sent by his mother to live with his father Furious Styles (as they are divorced) for a moral upbringing. One night after a burglar enters the house of Furious and escapes, the police arrive and a black police officer asks Furious what happened in a menacing tone. The menacing tone serves to point out the attitude of black people who enter the police in an effort to be assimilated in the dominant white police establishment, and they want to

show this assimilation by being harsh on the people of their own community. Notably, there is not one white person in the entire film in which we are shown the harsh reality of black urban life. Weapons, gangs, and despair delineate the film. In the realist fashion, the film depicts life in this secluded and hellish 'ghetto'. There is no interracial mixing as there are no whites and no escape from this culture. The police force is a by-standing element that does not interfere with the people, but only controls and dominates from a distance as it is separated from the urban community.

This relationship is contrary to the one in *Orfeu*. At the beginning of the film, when the police raid the *favela*, the police officers are from different backgrounds, and we see one black policeman who is comical. Sergeant Pacheco is the godfather of Lucinho, the leader of the drug-trafficking gang that controls the *favela*. The chief of police even takes Orfeu to his car after a carnival rehearsal and tells him of his plan to kill Lucinho because Lucinho's father asked him to do so if his son ever became a drug dealer. Sergeant Pacheco respects Orfeu since he is a very famous person in Rio de Janeiro and asks him to try to talk to Lucinho. We see that police affairs are interwoven with the population of the *favela*, as opposed to Los Angeles where the neighbourhood is segregated.

What is more, the *favela* is mixed, diverse, and everyone is connected. We also see the entire spectrum of Brazilian people: the owner of the bar where most of the interactions between the main characters happen is of Japanese origin. Orfeu's parents are black, and the ties to Africa are strong as Orfeu's mother is a believer of African-based rituals. Some of the hoodlums are white. Eurydice is a young woman of Indian origin who comes from north-west Brazil. Her presence manifests the desire to represent everyone in Brazilian society:

...the film is the product of a society in which the issues of ethnic minorities and multiculturalism have become part of the discourses of everyday life. [...] Eurydice in this new version is a descendant of the native population of the Northern region of Brazil, and clearly stands for one of the most forgotten and under-represented Brazilian minorities (dos Santos 2003, 50).

Moreover, Orfeu's falling in love with Eurydice points to this freedom and the possibility of racial mixing.

We are therefore shown the urban reality of the *favela* through the diversity of its population. One thing worth noting is that contrary to the North American version of multiculturalism, where different pockets of communities live together but separately, the Brazilian model is one in which, regardless of their origins, all people who are part of the *favela* mix to create a social milieu of symbols, language, and customs. In a way, Diegues respected Vinicius' desire to have the story adapted to the local language and customs. By showing this fluidity of race, Diegues' new world Orpheus represents a fluid racial apparatus of an unfixed nature.

Having made the audience aware that Orfeu's parents are black Brazilians, Diegues stays faithful to Vinicius' play: "...Diegues reintroduces in his film major motifs from Vinicius de Moraes' play: [...] Orfeu's familial context with the figure of his parents..." (Porra 2012, 453; translation by author). Moreover, both of Orfeu's parents represent religion in modern Brazil. The father is protestant, and the mother is a believer of African-based rituals. Although the mother's character is a caricature and a bit exaggerated, the character of the father, Maestro Ignacio, is very significant. He represents the influences of the North American Protestantism in Brazil. Orfeu's father Ignacio turned to religion to save himself from alcohol. He is very religious and observant and is frequently seen reading the Bible. We see traits of this North

American influence through individualism, in the fact that Ignacio, who is very religious, does not interfere with Orfeu having numerous lovers and engaging in pre-marital sex.

An important element concerning religion is the reference to the biblical story of Abel and Cain. At the beginning of the film when Ignacio tells Orfeu about Cain and Abel when he is reading from the Bible, we come to understand that this story is another underlying theme of the film. The reason for this parallel with the story of Abel and Cain is that it foreshadows the jealousy between Lucinho and Orfeu who were childhood friends and consider each other brothers. But, because Lucinho is jealous of Orfeu and his success, he is responsible for killing Eurydice, which causes Orfeu to take his revenge and kill Lucinho.

The importance of the story of Abel and Cain for the myth of Orpheus is that the myth of Orpheus permits fluidity in the plot and makes the adaptation of the myth capable of adding and mixing other stories. Therefore, this new world orphic is capable of assimilating different story elements which enhance the original meaning of the story. This adaptability is also part of the cannibalistic power of this new world orphic that is made more prevalent by the musical aspect of *Orfeu*. This new world orphic aesthetic is very powerful in that it creates newness through assimilating different thematic elements and is capable of blending various foreign elements and making them its own.

As we continue with this idea of cannibalism in *Orfeu*, another important element that embodies the integration of a foreign element and its use and transformation in Brazil is rap music. The integration of this musical genre is important as we understand that by importing music separate from religion from the US, this story is now African-American and represents the entire American continent.

In the 1990s, rap was imported to Brazil from the US along with many other musical genres. According to Grasse (2004): “rap is the latest in a long series of African-American music styles finding their way south, a list including blues, boogie-woogie, jazz (from swing to bebop, to cool), rock and roll, R&B, soul, funk, disco, gospel and hip-hop” (302). Notably, these genres of music come from black American culture and were successfully exported into the young urban community of Rio de Janeiro because of the racial connection. Of all these genres, rap is the most significant as it is a form of protest song in which the singer usually denounces marginalisation, poverty, and the harsh reality of urban life: “In the 1990s, a Brazilian rap movement also emerged, giving voice to more aggressive critiques of racial discrimination and social marginality” (Dunn 2002, 84).

Through the assimilation of rap and its use in *Orfeu*, we see the new form of Orphic aesthetic mentioned earlier where this genre is reinvented through adaptation. In Diegues’ film, rap is significant primarily during the parade of carnival. When Orfeu is marching with the samba school, after he finishes singing the chorus with the other members of the school, he sings the verse of the samba song in rap, blending rap and samba. After the carnival, the policeman, Stallone (a name from U.S culture), who admires Orfeu’s music criticises him for having used rap in the samba because he thinks it is rubbish. We see here the creation of the new by mixing rap and samba in carnival and the reactions of that mix from the general public. We note that there is open communication between the artists and the audience.

In terms of a new world orphic, the use of rap in the context of the *favela* and Brazil is depicted through this new African-American Orpheus, who is the fusion and near-finality of the mix of various cultures on the American continent. It is through the final addition of Afro-American music in Brazil that this new world orphic acquires its near-finished state.

Apart from Diegues achieving his goal in his film by representing the true nature of the *favelas* as best he could, “the film was chosen as the best Brazilian film in 1998, in a context also sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, receiving the Glauber Rocha Award” (dos Santos, 2003, 56). Importantly, as I pointed out in the second chapter, winning prizes does not necessarily translate in having powerful artistic value that carries important statements for a specific culture. The perspective of the public is important to judge a work of art since Diegues’ *Orfeu* was intended to represent the reality of the *favelas* for the people of Rio de Janeiro. Therefore, *Orfeu* cannot be considered the complete version of the new world orphic as it fell short of accomplishing its goal.

Nonetheless, through the music of the film, the Brazilian adaptation of foreign elements, and the parties involved in the creation of the film, we come to understand that Caetano Veloso and his artistic persona represents in some sense the finality of the African-American new world orphic.

#### **F. Caetano Veloso and the final new world orphic**

The aspect *Orfeu* manifested most successfully through the new world orphic aesthetics in modern Rio de Janeiro was the music. Moreover, through Veloso’s treatment and use of music in *Orfeu*, we understand that Caetano Veloso can be seen as a successful manifestation of the new world orphic, as I explain below.

Before delving into the character of Veloso and his significance in terms of the new world orphic, we must understand one core element of Brazilian modernism on which Veloso based his artistic visions: *Anthropofagia* (Anthropophagy) by the modernist Brazilian poet

Oswald de Andrade (1890 – 1954). *Anthropofagia* essentially stands for cultural cannibalism, where Brazilian artists take inspiration from international artistic trends and adapt them to their reality by making them ‘Brazilian’. Then, these artists export these newly transformed artworks to the world. The analogy of cannibalism here is useful as a metaphor for ‘eating’ everything foreign to Brazilian artists because they incorporate it into themselves, and by this process, transform it. This adaptation of art is a form of metamorphosis as well. In explaining the context for Andrade’s ideas in Brazilian culture, Harvey (2002) explains that *Anthropofagia* came from the fact that Brazil was located on the periphery of the cultured world (or first world) at the time, and *Anthropofagia* offered a way for Brazilian artists to gain cultural ascendancy in the world: “Oswald urged Brazilian artists who found themselves on the global periphery to consume, digest, and regurgitate anew everything they could to make the entire universe their aesthetic patrimony” (Harvey 2002, 106).

Having found inspiration in Andrade’s work, the singer, songwriter, composer, writer, and actor Caetano Veloso, who was a young Brazilian in the 60s, along with singer and composer Gilberto Gil (born in 1942), who is black, founded an artistic movement called ‘Tropicalia’. Veloso and Gil, through this artistic movement, intended to create an authentic Brazilian musical expression that “appropriated local and foreign musical styles and relativized prevailing notions of authenticity in popular music” (Dunn 2002, 73).

We see the use of a local style and its transformation in *Orfeu* through bossa nova and also samba-rap. Noteworthy is that although Diegues and Veloso wanted to create a new film that had no element of Camus’ film in it, they used the two famous bossa nova songs of Camus’ film *A felicidade* and *Manha de Carnaval*. They re-cannibalized and recontextualized them.

Bossa nova here is integrated (or eaten), transformed, and made anew. Its presence is a form of rejuvenation and a way to reframe these songs in a new context to create new meaning. This use of bossa nova songs is also a way to transgress boundaries and reject the claim of what should be included or not, and the freedom to create regardless of context and meaning. This new world orphic possesses no boundaries in terms of genres and styles and creates new meaning. Critics such as Grasse (2004) asserts that the use of these songs is a reference, or a 'homage', to bossa nova artists since Veloso was part of bossa nova's second generation:

It is perhaps a personal homage to the style by Veloso, the cultural icon and second-generation bossa nova champion responsible for successfully transposing the genre into the 'cannibalistic' tropicalismo of the late-1960s. Orfeu's bossa nova is a deserved testimony to musical heroes of the 1959 film soundtrack (307).

Through cannibalism, bossa nova was transformed and rejuvenated simply by being put in a new context. We see the new world orphic aesthetic of rejuvenation and transgression of death in a new context to allow freedom and the possibility of creation.

Also, the appearance of Caetano Veloso in the film singing a song with a guitar on the balcony of a house attests to his transgressive character. He transgresses the role of the musician by being an actor who acts as a musician in a film.

Another important element concerning Veloso's new world orphic aesthetic is the integration of African-American culture in his character and his art. Although having made the hero of *Orfeu* a black Brazilian, Veloso is more representative of the new world orphic than Orfeu, because not only does he have African roots, he is genuinely interested in the African diaspora in Brazil since he travelled with Gil to Lusophone Africa to connect Africa and Brazil: "Within their generational and cultural milieu, Gil and Veloso stand out as artists who have



engaged intensively with Afro-diasporic culture in order to advance critical perspectives on Brazilian modernity and its attendant discourses of cultural nationalism and authenticity” (Dunn 2002, 74). And also, Veloso is from Salvador da Bahia, which is the center of black Brazilian culture.

As I pointed out earlier, during the last three decades of the 20th century, Afro-American music was imported and adapted to Brazilian culture. Veloso defended this appropriation because his artistic philosophy insisted on representing black elements in Brazilian culture:

Countering the denunciations of Brazilian soul in the national press, Veloso supported the movement in terms of identity politics: “I like seeing Brazilian blacks identify with American blacks. I adore Black Rio. I think the blacks are affirming themselves more as blacks than as Brazilians and this is important” (Calado, 272; as cited in Dunn 2002, 84).

Considering that Veloso comes from Salvador da Bahia, where most of the population is black, he, along with Gil, rejected the Brazilian concept of *mestiçagem* of the 50s. They thought that the notion of ‘diaspora’ and the connection with Africa was more reflective of the spirit of modern Brazil. Moreover, representing the marginalised black and a certain politics of alterity was more important to modern Brazil: “The Tropicalists did not consciously inaugurate a "cultural politics of difference" in Brazil, but they did propose a discourse of alterity and marginality that encouraged more explicit expressions of new subjectivities in popular culture in the following decade” (West 1990, 19-36; as cited in Dunn 2002, 77).

In terms of new world orphic poetry, the difference between Camus and Veloso is that Veloso wanted to represent the African element that constitutes Brazil by Brazilians in a realistic fashion rather than representing it from a distance.

Carnival, through the Tropicalia movement which underwent several metamorphoses and transformations during the 70s, 80s, and 90s, came to represent a significant vehicle to express Brazilian modern identity: “During the 1990s, Tropicália re-emerged as a key point of reference for new musical and cultural movements and the subject of several public commemorations, most notably during Carnival” (Dunn 2002, 87). Carnival also came to be a sort of laboratory where people of varying backgrounds experimented with music and dance as a form of expressing their identities and the possibility of metamorphosis and change. In this case, the African element is the predominant one through the black protagonist Orfeu and the music he sings during the parade, which is rap and samba.

In a way, Veloso created new world orphic poetry in which the new elements that are created tend to focus more on African elements or reflect the African diasporic elements and their integration in the American continent.

In addition to the process of eating and digesting products of different cultures to make them his own, Veloso plays around notions of music and transforms the past to create the present and change the future. This magical orphic aesthetic that Veloso displays is most evident in his album *Estrangeiro* (1989), produced by Peter Scherer and Arto Lindsay. Although a decade earlier than the film *Orfeu* (1999), the album portrays new world orphic aesthetics that are relevant to Veloso’s character and orphic nature. The song *O Estrangeiro* (the stranger) (1988), is the most relevant song that portrays most of the Orphic poetics we have explored before but in a more representative and symbolic manner.

In the first verse of the song, when describing the beauty of the bay of Guanabara, Veloso references the various artists and writers who have been there before him and expresses what he thinks of them:

O pintor Paul Gauguin amou a luz da Baía de Guanabara  
O compositor Cole Porter adorou as luzes na noite dela  
A Baía de Guanabara  
O antropólogo Claude Levy-Strauss detestou a Baía de Guanabara  
Pareceu-lhe uma boca banguela.

The painter Paul Gauguin loved the light of the bay of Guanabara  
The composer Cole Porter adored the light at night in the Bay of Guanabara  
The anthropologist Claude Levy-Strauss hated the bay of Guanabara  
It appeared to him as a fussy mouth. (Translation by author)

Here, Veloso derides Lévi-Strauss' impressions of the bay of Guanabara because (as we saw in the second chapter) he judged it from a socio-economic perspective, and because Veloso did not like the impression the black people on the hills made on him.

It is also important to note that before publishing the album, Veloso divorced the actress Andrea Gadelha (or Dedé) in 1983 (who he married in 1967) and was married for the second time in 1986 to actress and producer Paula Lavigne (1969), who helped him produce the album. The two songs *Esse Amor* (This love) and *Branquinha* (Little white one) are dedicated to both his ex-wife Dedé and Lavigne. From the title, which may be a reference to Albert Camus' *L'étranger* which in itself implies estrangement and loss, we sense melancholy, loneliness and longing for loss of love which are orphic themes, such as when Orpheus mourns the loss of Eurydice:

E eu menos a conhecera mais a amara  
Sou cego de tanto vê-la, de tanto tê-la estrela

And I had less known her but loved her  
I'm blind to see her, to have her star. (Translation by author)

After that, the wandering of Veloso on the beach reminds us of Baudelaire's wanderings and loneliness in the streets of Paris in the 19th century. We feel the anger as the artist expresses his impressions of the landscape and the beach:

Um Pão de Açúcar com umas arestas unsuspeitadas  
À áspera luz laranja contra a quase não luz quase não púrpura  
Do branco das areia e das espumas  
Que era tudo quanto habia então de aurora

A sugarloaf with some unsuspected edges  
In rough orange light against almost no light almost no purple  
From the white of the sand and the foam  
That was all that inhabited at dawn. (Translation by author)

The detail of the colour orange reminds us of the setting sun or the dawn, therefore the situation of in-betweenness and change.

Another element that Veloso manifests is the reinterpretation of space according to his perspective and the interpretation of his country and its landscapes as opposed to previous European explorers and artists. According to Perrone and Dunn (2002): "The oneiric lyric contests touristic images and constructs a persona at odds with conventional interpretations of the city, the nation, and its guiding values" (22-23). Veloso continues the song with his references to colonialism and the legacy that it left on Brazil:

O macho adulto branco sempre no commando  
[...]  
Reconhecer o valor necessário do ato hipócrita  
Riscar os índios, nada esperar dos pretos

The white adult male always in command  
[...]  
Recognise the necessary value of the hypocritical  
Strike out the Indians, expect nothing from the blacks. (Translation by author)

Veloso comments on the abandonment of the black population by European colonialism and the fact that it is important to recognise the hypocrisy of the entire colonial enterprise that

was founded on the elimination of Indians and the enslavement of Africans. We see here the African diasporic element of the new world orphic as a marginal element that Veloso insisted on including in his art. Also, we see how his voice helps to put in perspective the voice of Brazilian artists to express their impressions of their city for themselves. At the end, Veloso finishes the song with two lines in English, where he says:

Some may like a soft Brazilian singer  
but I've given up all attempts at perfection.

The desire not to sound pretentious by accepting the fact that he is not perfect at singing in a soft Brazilian manner is also representative of the new world orphic poetics in which the work of art is self-reflexive and always a process of transformation. By singing in English, Veloso adds the element of non-seriousness in his art to create a joke, which is very carnivalesque.

We have seen how the persona of Caetano Veloso and his music come to represent a manifestation of the new world orphic which can be seen as a prism or a cultural reference that best expresses these new world Orphic aesthetics which we have seen since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Also, one could compare his persona and his oeuvre to Bob Dylan (born 1941) who also represents these new world Orphic aesthetics since he was at the same time a musical figure and a literary one (he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016). Dylan's use and disruption of the high and low in his art is reminiscent of Veloso's carnivalesque elements in his music.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have seen how the new world orphic was created and manifested in the adaptations of the mythical Orpheus figure in the Americas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Having begun in high modernist Europe and finding its way to America, Orpheus has been adapted to different American societies through different mediums such as theatre, music, dance, and film. Through each adaptation, the new world orphic acquired new meanings as it was able to continually adapt itself to the culture in which it was set. Through the mythical powers of Orpheus to create music and fuse different cultural entities to create newness and change, the adaptation of the myth created newness in various cultures of the Americas. Moreover, through the succession of each new world Orpheus, every version became an evolution of the previous one, until this evolution achieved a sort of aesthetic completion in the character and oeuvre of the singer-songwriter-composer Caetano Veloso. I summarise each of the new world Orpheuses to understand, for our conclusion, how the final version of the new world orphic came to be.

The first text we analysed was Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending* (1957). Before writing the play, Williams had been in contact (while in France) with Jean Cocteau and was influenced by the French poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and other notable figures. Having been inspired by these artists, especially by Cocteau, who thought that poetry and art should be multi-generic, Williams wrote his play set in the southern United States of the 50s. Seeing himself as an artist who mixed and experimented with different styles to create a form of bricolage in his work, and drawing on his own sexual experiences, Williams used elements from his life, mythology, and the culture of the South to create his new world orphic. The new world orphic that Williams created in the character of Val Xavier portrays highly

unusual physical characteristics, such as a high libidinal sexual energy. Part of the poetry is the reversal of gender roles, in which men are passive and women active. Williams also portrays musical sensibility of a new style as manifested through Val Xavier. This new musical sensibility is the mix of cathartic blues and Dionysian/carnavalesque aspects of music. This mix allows this new world Orpheus to enchant his listeners and charm them while intoxicating them with the spirit of revelry and chaos. In the broader context, Williams represents the African-American spirit or force that underlies the dominant white establishment. Furthermore, how this force, which is the mix of various cultures which are repressed, is unleashed and liberated through Val's death and the burning of the confectionary at the end of the play, is the manifestation of the spirit of the racial mixture that characterises the new world. The subsequent versions of the new world Orpheus enhance and display this new spirit.

The second text we analysed was Marcel Camus' film *Orfeu Negro* (1959). In this film, we analysed the evolution of the second phase of the new world orphic in the Americas. We examined the influences that Brazilian poet Vinicius de Moraes, who wrote *Orfeu da Conceição* (1956), had while travelling for work as a diplomat to North America and Europe. Because of his vision of black Brazilians and the role they should play in Brazilian society (in line with the philosophy of *mestiçagem*), Vinicius decided to write the play on which Camus based his film. Camus took Vinicius' idea further in creating his own adaptation of the myth of Orpheus in Brazil. Coming from a long tradition of French intellectual thought based on a vision of the Americas as the ideal place to forget the atrocities of the 20th century, in Brazil Camus found the ideal country to adapt the myth of Orpheus and create a new vision of culture. The new world Orpheus created by Camus is a black Orpheus who lives in the *favelas* of Rio. Through carnival and the power of music, he is a mix of European and African traditions. He is a tram driver

during the year but is metamorphosed into a community leader during carnival. Through the entrancing music that is played during the shamanic ritual when Orfeu is searching for Eurydice, a new type of magical quality is manifested, which is the power to entrance the listener and summon the spirits of the past, in an African fashion. Moreover, the creation of the musical genre bossa nova is the manifestation of the new world orphic aesthetic in Camus' film since this genre is the fusion of Europe and Africa in the Americas. Through the mix of European harmony and African rhythms, bossa nova was successful in creating the sound of Brazil and a new spirit and new art in the new world.

Next we analyzed the film *Orfeu* (1999) by Carlos Diegues and Caetano Veloso a profoundly local metamorphosis of the new world orphic through the character of Orfeu. This adaptation was spurred by the Brazilian population's disappointment with Camus' film. After having found the desire to create an adaptation of the myth of Orpheus for the Brazilians by Brazilians to express and portray the local nature of life in Rio de Janeiro, Diegues and Veloso created a new world orphic that manifested Orpheus in the new world. In this adaptation, he is a more grounded and radically heterogenous character in the harsh reality of the *favela*. Orpheus here is a celebrity and a star to the people of the *favela* but lacks any magical and transformational power. Orpheus is both a sensual and a romantic lover and he truly loves Eurydice. He is a musician by trade, which suggests that music in this adaptation is embedded in the economic system of Brazil where music is one of the only escapes out of the harsh reality of urban Rio de Janeiro. From a broader perspective, this new world Orpheus represents the adaptation of Afro-American culture imported from America and adapted to Brazil. The music genres in the film attest to the powers of adaptation and creation that Orpheus manifests in his



art. Through rap, samba and funk, he is African-American because he represents the fusion of Africa and the Americas.

Because of limitations in the character of Orfeu as portrayed in the film, such as the exaggerated characters such as Orfeu's mother, the lack of magic and reality TV motifs, this new world Orpheus may be seen as a manifestation of the Orphic spirit adapted to the Americas that is flawed because of its entanglement with commerce. It is rather the character of Caetano Veloso, his persona and charisma, and the cultural movement of Tropicalia which may be seen as the most representative figure of the new world orphic in the Americas. We can also say that Veloso can also be considered as a prism or symbol for this new world Orphic aesthetic. We have seen how Veloso's cannibalistic attitude towards music and art in general makes him the true new world orphic who is formless and capable of creation through the adaptation of a range of forms of art and in so doing, transforming them into his own. We have seen how his song "O Estrangeiro" on his album *O Estrangeiro* is arguably the clearest manifestation of this new world orphic aesthetic that we have seen in this research. The various themes in the song such as melancholy and loss, derision and subversion, interpretation, and creation are the manifestations of Veloso's power of adapting and creating new art through new world orphic poetics.

This thesis opens many possibilities for further research and areas of inquiry. Since the areas that were covered concerned the connection between America, Europe and Africa, many different connections can be made between literary and artistic subjects. For example, research could be conducted to find the connections between different artistic figures that link Tennessee Williams and Cocteau with other artists such as Rimbaud and Elvis Presley. Another possibility is to explore the connections between subjects of modern Brazilian and American rap with African mythological poetry. Furthermore, one could consider the connections between 17<sup>th</sup>

century European opera and modern Brazilian *novelas*. Many other elements from various cultures in the Americas can be established now that new connections have been made clear through the new world Orpheus.

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