

10.3 Contemporary patriarchy: Discussing gender in a creative process

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A b s t r a c t

This work addresses conditions for women through a scenic creative process called “Ithaca revisited”. “Ithaca revisited” is a theatrical work-in-progress based on an episode in the Odyssey where Ulysses returns to Ithaca, but it is told from Penelope’s point of view. If Homer showed Penelope as the abandoned female, here we meet her anger and resentment. “Ithaca revisited” invites other powerful, vengeful women to share the stage with Penelope: Fausto Fawcett’s Katia Flavia and Oscar Wilde’s Salome. We question the idea of Ulysses being a hero in comparison to Penelope from a contemporary viewpoint, bringing up a feminist discussion of claiming space and rights, especially for women. Do we read in the Odyssey that a woman should passively wait for her man? Is he her saviour, the great hero? What is a hero? In which ways does this story, among others, reinforce the existing patriarchy in our society and the lack of female solidarity that often legitimizes male abuse and irrational female actions?

Keywords: *Gender, creative process, Greek mythology, powerful women.*

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1. Overview

Ithaca Revisited is a performance created by Andrea Copeliovitch, based on Oscar Wilde's play "Salome" and in Fausto Fawcett's song, "Kátia Flávia, Godiva do Irajá", to present the myth of Penelope. The myth shows the world not as a unique possibility, the Greeks understood the world through the myth. According to JAA Torrano:

Mythos is one of many words that the language of Homer and Hesiod has to designate the act of speech. In this vocabular richness, myth corresponded to the astonishing accuracy with which the man in the great time of the world perceives and realizes the various nuances of concreteness and plurality, a sense of reality is discovered, whose privileged mode of knowledge is the instantaneous intuition of the totalizing sense of being in beings immediately given in each case (Torrano, 1996, p. 25).

There are so many questions involving the inexplicable, the mystery; the myth may be an interpretation of a light on the mystery, or perhaps it is the reality that allows us to glimpse a light on the mystery, or perhaps it is still the mystery itself imposing upon our daily interpretation of reality. Our tendency is to have a unilateral and reductionist interpretation of the world, the myth, poetry, art allow us to open our minds to the possibilities Life presents. Language or speech is not direct and clear, because life is not direct nor clear, a day is composed by night, and truth is composed by mystery. If we are too affirmative, we generate prejudice: there is no exception in affirmative thought nor in direct speech. Poetical language allows us to think in different directions at the same time, accepting different views of a world we have been interpreting through language.

Narrating the world through myth presents life and its innumerable possibilities, so here we go back to Penelope's myth to try to present different possibilities of interpretation.

2. Kátia Flávia

The song, composed in 1987 by Fausto Fawcett and Carlos Laufer, was the first inspiration for this work. It tells the story of a woman that kills her husband, someone important in contravention world and runs away in a stolen police car. She sends a radio from the car: "Hello, police, I am wearing an Exocet: panties!" (Extract from the lyrics by Fausto Fawcett). According to the zine, GauchaZH, the song was released in a moment when Brazil got rid of a "suffocating Dictatorship" (GauchaZH, 2018).

The song, a partnership between Fawcett and bass player Carlos Laufer, was launched in times of political openness, a time when the country freed itself from the suffocating censorship of the military dictatorship. Turning on the TV and seeing some talk about sex, as well as having erotic magazines in newsstands, began to become something common. At the same time, the press reported wars dealing with missiles, fighter planes and other armaments almost as protagonists of the conflicts. With a watchful eye to this process and facing journalism as a contemporary mythology, Fawcett mixes these and

other elements in *Kátia Flávia*. The song ended up becoming a good chronicle about the moment the country was crossing.

Kátia Flávia is free, she rides a motorcycle naked, like a contemporary Godiva, from Irajá, that is in Rio de Janeiro's suburb. Irajá until the sixteenth century was occupied by the Tupinambás Indians. In the Tupi-Guarani language, Irajá, comes from the term "yra-Tá", meaning "land where honey sprouts". It was originally a place where sugar cane was cultivated, being its sweetness was compared to honey, which was one of the justifications given to the name of the neighbourhood.

Today it is a suburb neighbourhood, cut by one of Rio de Janeiro's main avenue, Avenida Brasil, which was even a soap opera's theme. The highway gives access to the Amarelinho community. There is a sign in the entrance: "it's forbidden to use marijuana, cocaine too."

The Blondie Beelzebub, one of the nicknames Fawcett calls Katia Flavia in the song, has appeared in a political moment in which the Brazilian economy was chaotic, inflation level was extremely high. There was a movement called "the painted faces", in which students and members of the organized civil society went to the streets to claim for re-democratization and for the end of military dictatorship. The so called "Citizen Constitution" appears in 1988 with the guarantee of equality of all citizens, in article 5, Incise I: "men and women are equal in rights and obligations"

We ask ourselves whether this political period did provoke the freedom of the feminine role in *Kátia Flávia*...

At the same time Katia Flavia might point a liberation from a suffocating censorship, she also points for a women's liberation, she gets rid of her husband and provokes the police with the comparison between an Exocet and panties. In our imaginary, the police are mainly a masculine force (we are not excluding the existence of police women), and she claims her female underwear to be this hugely powerful weapon, and it is not in an erotic sense. She has just killed her husband, the masculine force and she is free, she runs away, she shows a wild power that resides in ancient femininity (Estés, 1994).

The search for that powerful and wild femininity was the starting point for this dramaturgical construction. Katia Flavia is also a "malandra" (malandra indicates feminine gender whereas malandro indicates male gender), a world that comes from the French term "malin", someone that is a little malicious, that comes from the underworld, and that makes her living by taking advantage of the situations, of others; also she will not be monogamous neither honest about this. There is some kind of liberation in being a Malandra, it is also in Brazilian imaginary. Malandros are amoral heroes, recognized in the world of art, for instances the antihero, "Macunaíma", title of the play written by Oswald de Andrade in 1928; and long before there were the servants in Commedia Dell'Arte who were Malandros, tricky and luxurious. The powerful Malandra Katia Flavia here might be seem as a Candomblé entity, a Pomba Gira.

3. Pomba gira

Pomba gira is a very popular character in Brazilian culture. It arises through the religious practice Candomblé, which originates the Afro-Brazilian religions. This entity is an important reference in Brazilian culture, which is associated with a woman who would have been a prostitute or courtesan. She is also associated with a person with low moral principles, being able to dominate

men for their sexual prowess, associated with being a lover of luxury, money and all sorts of pleasures.

Candomblé is a polytheist afro-religion, the gods are called Orixas, and those entities called Exus and Pomba giras could be compared to Mercury in Greek mythology. They intermedicate the communication between realms, in a way that they are able to grant earth desires, usually related to sexuality. This entity is sought by believers with amorous problems and related to sexuality, they bring the desired person or make the believer become a more desirable person; they can also grant punishment to a rival or material wealth. Exu is the male entity and Pomba gira is the female Exu. In some Brazilian Candomblé houses those entities incorporate (in more traditional houses those entities are cultivated without incorporation). There are written thesis about this entity, which associate it with the goddess Lilith, of Sumerian mythology. There are also associations with Maria Padilha de Castilla, a Spanish queen with Gypsy origins.

In summary, this mythical character is claiming the feminine place and the woman's right to sexual freedom, the same freedom that masculine gender have lived for many generations. However, control by the female gender is exercised and re-signified in different forms in Brazilian society. The thought of Simone de Beauvoir that argument about the following axiom "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir, 1949), will reflect the challenge of living within this genre in different generations. Beauvoir subverts the myth of the nice girl opposed to the naughty one. Our performance shows Penelope's naughty side. Penelope loses her role as a perfect woman model in order to incorporate a Pomba gira. Exu and Pomba gira are entities that talk when incorporated, so in "Ithaka Revisited", Katia Flavia is a Pomba gira as well as the narrator of the story. As an opposition to the woman who is patiently waiting for her man. The performance aims to show Penelope's anger towards this man, Ulysses that had her wait for so many years while living such an adventurous life, then he returns as if he still had rights over the land and the woman, so he kills her suiters. How should this be an act of heroism? We dare to judge this act as an act of barbarian.

4. Penelope

The feminine place of submission can be observed in the myth of Penelope. The mythical heroine who had in her character and conduct her greatest virtue, rather than her beauty. The *Odyssey* was written by Homer in the VIII century B.C., and we can see how the patriarchal system works: as a daughter, Penelope is a property of her father, Icarius, and becomes a property of her husband, Ulysses.

Penelope's father made a competition to marry his daughter but did not want to give her to the winner, for he did not want to separate from her.

Ulysses left the decision in charge of Penelope, who followed her husband. The one that a year later departed to fight in the Trojan War. During the period that Ulysses was in the war, which was not a short time, Icarius proposed to remarry her, for there was no information if Ulysses still remained alive. However, Penelope was devoted to her "love", or to the moral role defined by society as being a woman.

Penelope to circumvent the masculine desires, who insisted on becoming her husband, used countless artifices, among them to weave a canvas for

funerary canopy for Laertes, father of her husband. She would weave during the day, in the eyes of society, and unfold the tapestry at night, transforming this unending task and remaining in devotion to her love of Ulysses.

5. *Ithaka revisited*

This artistic construction proposes to reflect on the myths as a cultural construct of our machismo or the patriarchal system. The scene allows us to break and resignify this place of feminine submission pointing out other interpretive possibilities. We can think of Salome, “Young one”, who seduces her stepfather as a subversion of the possibility of sexual abuse or harassment. As a stepfather he should orient her formation as an ethical construction of the feminine being by not allowing this aspect of incestuous seduction. She dances for a deadly seduction, he accepts the conditions of the game. The mother incidentally represses her daughter, but in understanding the vengefulness purpose of this seduction supports and stimulates the decapitation of the bet, John the Baptist. What is the meaning of an incestuous and abusive relationship between stepdaughter and stepfather in a patriarchal and traditional society? Oscar Wilde subverts this practice by empowering young Salome, who instead of abused becomes abusive.

The Pomba gira rescues Penelope from her position of submissive woman towards another morality, towards a release not only of the woman but of the female power, in dialogue with the current moment of expansion and assurance of women’s rights, where the seductive woman is no more to be seen as a possible provocative of a rape or as an amoral being in a society like the Brazilian, in which 13 women are murdered per day, which represents almost a woman being murdered every 2 hours (Ipea, 2018). The most common site is the victim’s residences as points (Ipea, 2018). In this way, the discourse of guilty of the victim woman is still heard, her form of dressing that is seen as seductive, possible attitudes such as conjugal betrayal that in our Brazilian society is often seen as a plausible cause for a Murder, even by law, empowering the feminine is a priority; not to judge the feminine seductive aspect is something we should aim. The seduction of the feminine used as a weapon (Exocet) puts the moral of the Patriarchate at stake.

6. *The play*

The Pomba gira Narrator:

When Ulysses gets back to the Ithaca after long years at sea, after countless adventures, he finds his palace surrounded by bearded men, trying to usurp his throne, steal his money, fuck his wife...

Taken with Fury, Ulysses draws his sword...

Penelope, the abandoned wife, who was weaving upstairs hears this noise, she descends the stairs and finds her hall bathed with blood, her suitor’s degolated, her furniture Ruined, and she is taken by Fury.

She invokes the Pomba gira: Laroiê!

The first Pomba gira coming is me: Katia Flavia, Big Blond Beelzebub, Godiva Of Irajá. I have killed a contravention bigshot: My husband and I ran away in a police car, Ha, Ha, Ha.

The second Pomba gira is Salome, mini slut from Judea; she shook her ass in the face of his stepfather, Herod, in exchange for the head of the Apostle John, the Baptist, also known as Iokanaan.

Salome (original text by Oscar Wilde):

"But, wherefore dost thou not look at me, Iokanaan? Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now. Wherefore are they shut? Open thine eyes! Lift up thine eyelids, Iokanaan! Wherefore dost thou not look at me? Art thou afraid of me, Iokanaan, that thou wilt not look at me?..."

And thy tongue, that was like a red snake darting poison, it moves no more, it says nothing now, Iokanaan, that scarlet viper that spat its venom upon me. It is strange, is it not? How is it that the red viper stirs no longer?..."

Thou wouldst have none of me, Iokanaan. Thou didst reject me. Thou didst speak evil words against me. Thou didst treat me as a harlot, as a wanton, me, Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa! Well, Iokanaan, I still live, but thou, thou art dead, and thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will. I can throw it to the dogs and to the birds of the air. That which the dogs leave, the birds of the air shall devour....

Ah, Iokanaan, Iokanaan, thou wert the only man that I have loved. All other men are hateful to me. But thou, thou wert beautiful! Thy body was a column of ivory set on a silver socket. It was a garden full of doves and of silver lilies. It was a tower of silver decked with shields of ivory. There was nothing in the world so white as thy body. There was nothing in the world so black as thy hair. In the whole world there was nothing so red as thy mouth. (..)

Ah! Wherefore didst thou not look at me, Iokanaan? (...)

If thou hadst seen me thou wouldst have loved me. (...)

I was a princess, and thou didst scorn me. I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire.... Ah! ah! Wherefore didst thou not look at me, Iokanaan? If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. Love only should one consider."

KÁTIA FLÁVIA: *Penelope looks at Ulysses. His body is old, it's like a plaster wall where the Snakes have passed, it's like a plaster wall where The Scorpions made their nest. His hair is hideous, it is covered with mud and dust. It would be said that a crown of Thorns was inn over his face.*

Shh.... Salome will kiss the Mouth of Yohan the Baptist:

Salome sings The first time ever I saw your face²⁵³:

The first time ever I kissed your mouth, I felt the earth shake in my hand, like the trembling heart of a captive bird, that was there at my command, my love.

SALOME: *I Kissed Your Mouth, Iokanaan!*

KÁTIA: *Penelope also Kisses the mouth of Ulysses. His lips have a bitter taste. Is this the taste of Love?*

ANDREA: *Some say love has a bitter taste.*

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