



THE AMAZONIAN MYTH OF HONORATO AND CANINANA: A BRAZILIAN WAY TO EXPLAIN THE SYZYGY

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the meaning of Anima and Animus archetypes through the Amazonian myth of Honorato and Caninana. Myths are archetypal narratives and as such have an arbitrary nature. Some of the myths are classified as cosmological for they describe the creation of new worlds as new realities. The myth of Honorato and Caninana falls into this category and the same motifs found in this myth have also been found in other myths throughout the ancient world. This essay also emphasizes the importance of having myths as a therapeutic tool.

Palavras-chave: Myths. Amazonian life. Archetypes. Therapy.

O MITO AMAZÔNICO DE HONORATO E CANINANA: UM JEITO BRASILEIRO DE EXPLICAR O SYZYGY

RESUMO

Este ensaio explora o significado dos arquétipos Anima e Animus através do mito amazônico de Honorato e Caninana. Os mitos são narrativas arquetípicas e, como tal, têm uma natureza arbitrária. Alguns dos mitos são classificados como cosmológicos, pois descrevem a criação de novos mundos como novas realidades. O mito de Honorato e Caninana se enquadra nessa categoria e os mesmos motivos encontrados nesse mito também foram encontrados em outros mitos em todo o mundo antigo. Esse ensaio também destaca a importância dos mitos como uma ferramenta terapêutica.

Keywords: Mitos. Amazonia. Arquétipos. Terapia.



INTRODUCTION

Myths possess an arbitrary nature. They speak of complex atemporal facts by exploring ideas that can be both spatial and non-spatial; thus expressing contents springing from the personal and the collective unconscious as if it were a continuum (CAMPBELL, 1949; 1972; ELIADE, 2005; FRANZ, 1995; HAULE, 2011; HILLMAN, 1994; JUNG, 1967a; 1970a). This essay is concerned with Jung's understanding of myths as a tool to support clinical work as they connect the modern man to the living world of his ancestors within his psyche (FRANZ, 1995; HAULE, 2011; HILLMAN, 1994; JUNG, 1967a; 1967b; 1969a; 1969b; 1970a; 1970b; NEUMANN, 1989). I will explore the meaning of the two archetypes, Anima and Animus, by having the myth of Honorato and Maria Caninana as a representation of the powerful dynamic between the masculine and the feminine functions.

THE MYTH OF HONORATO AND CANINANA

Myths are symbols and as “a product of the unconscious archetype (JUNG, 1970a, p. 329)”, to be fully appreciated, need to be seized and comprehended as a psychological phenomenon. By using a reductive method of interpretation, one can only perceive myths through senseless reasoning placing them as fantasies or illusory events. Jung says that myths are “an important psychological truth (JUNG, 1970a, p. 91)” and Eliade (2005) emphasizes its living nature. According to Eliade, places where myths are still alive there is a careful distinction between true stories and false stories.

Following Eliade's conclusions, the indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon basin, fall in the category of people who consider myths as true stories. True stories are the ones where the sacred and supernatural are portrayed; while false stories display contents considered profane. Analytical psychology uses myths and fairytales as expressions of the collective unconscious. They are dream-like stories kept alive through the oral tradition:



Myths and fairytales give expression to unconscious processes, and their retelling causes these processes to come alive again and be recollected, thereby re-establishing the connection between conscious and unconscious (JUNG, 1969b, p. 180).

In this Amazonian creation myth, the virgin, represented by a young native Brazilian, is pregnant and the father is the legendary *Cobra Grande*, also known as *Cobra Boiúna*. From this coniunctio, twin snakes were born, a male and female: *Honorato* and *Maria Caninana*.

HONORATO AND CANINANA

In an Amazonian tribe, a young indigenous woman became pregnant of the *Boiúna*, a large snake, also known as *Sucuri*. She then gave birth to twin children, who happened to be two baby snakes. One of them was a boy, called *Honorato* or *Norato* and the other was a girl who received the name of *Maria Caninana*. After looking at her babies, the mother was horrified and threw the two children into the river to get rid of them. Honorato and Caninana grew up as snakes in the river. Honorato was good mannered, but his sister was not. She would do harm to both animals and people. Caninana did so many bad things to others that Honorato ended up killing her to put an end to their evil acts.

Occasionally, during full moon nights, Honorato would lose his spell and acquire human shape turning into a fine young man. He would then leave the river waters to a regular life as a human being. In order to break Honorato's spell, a very courageous person needed to pour milk into his mouth while he was back into his giant original snake form. Immediately after that, the person must hit his head enough times to let the blood come out. But no one had the courage to face such huge monster. Until one day, when a soldier was able to free Honorato from his curse. Honorato was then able to live a regular life with his new family and never returned to his snake form ever again (<http://contoselendas.blogspot.com/2004/11/cobra-norato.html>).



AMAZONIAN ARCHETYPAL SERPENTS

In the Amazon basin, serpents assume a supernatural and conflictual archetypal form (SLATER, 1994). The inhabitants of the Amazon River banks, also known as *Ribeirinhos*, believe that the big snake, Cobra Grande or *Boiúna*, is both a terrifying monster and the guiding eyes during the moonless night's canoe trips throughout the giant river. The Honorato and Caninana's myth attempts to explain the beginning of a new era by describing the conjunction of a young woman and a supernatural being (the *Boiúna*); this characterizes it as a cosmological myth (CAMPBELL, 1972; ELIADE, 1975; 1991; 1999; 2000; 2005; FORD, 2000; FRANZ, 1995; HAULE, 2011).

The ambivalence of serpents is described in cosmological myths of several different parts of the ancient world (ARAS, 2010; CAMPBELL, 1949; 1972; ELIADE, 2005; JUNG, 1967a; 1969b; PLAUT, 1981). "The cobra is nevertheless as much an emblem of deathlessness as it is of death (ARAS, 2010, p. 198)." Its power to see beyond the obvious comes from an acute intuition, which is also a quality found in the old wise woman in some of the brothers Grimm's fairy tales (GRIMM & GRIMM, 2003). Honorato and Caninana are not different from any other mythical figure that spring from an inner psychological experience (BACHELARD, 1983; CAMPBELL, 1949, 1972; FORD, 2000; JUNG, 1969a). The duality and ambivalence found in this Amazonian myth unveils typical trickster motifs, which is directly connected to the alchemical figure of Mercurius (HILLMAN, 2007, 1994; JUNG, 2009, 1968, 1967b, 1969a, 1969b; SLATER, 1994). The Mercurius serpent represents "what is totally unconscious and unable to become conscious (JUNG, 1969b, p. 234, para 370)" leading to Caninana's attitude towards the environment and Honorato's repressing and eventually total suppressing of it.

The dynamic between Honorato and Caninana can be seen as the attitude one's conscious mind can develop towards the unconscious: "The more negative the attitude of the conscious towards the unconscious, the more dangerous does the latter become



(JUNG, 1967a, p. 294 – 295).” This explains Caninana’s behavior and Honorato’s lethal attitude towards her. It is important to remember, though, the twin snakes represent a single psychological process, which Jung called the “tension of the opposites (1970b, 1969b)”. In this myth, Honorato is portrayed as the good brother and Caninana as the terrible sister leading to Jung’s thoughts of the two unconscious functions that he called Anima and Animus. At times, Jung describes the Anima archetype as the personification of the soul, the sister-anima, the dragon, the old woman or the unconscious in opposition to the Animus (JUNG, 1970a, 1969c, 1967b, 1966). There are also some of the Jung’s works portraying Anima and Animus as a pair of opposites representing the feminine and masculine functions of the unconscious mind (JUNG, 1970a, 1969a, 1966).

The wholeness is thus an objective factor that confronts the subject independently of him, like anima and animus; and just as the latter have a higher position in the hierarchy than the shadow, so wholeness lays claim to a position and a value superior to those of the syzygy. The syzygy seems to represent at least a substantial portion of it, if not actually two halves of the totality formed by the royal brother–sister pair, and hence the tension of opposites from which the divine child is born as the symbol of unity (1969b p. 31).

Jung (2009) describes how the serpent taught him the difference between the two irreconcilable principles in his psyche, which he called forethinking and pleasure. No one can deny the tension of opposite forces everywhere, either inside or outside one’s mind. Is this tension a permanent state or a necessary, but temporary, psychological process of rebirth, that is, an ongoing transformation that all of us go through during a lifetime? The discussion about Anima and Animus is quite important. It has consequences in this civilized society that has been steadily and successfully repressing and suppressing emotions, feelings, creativity, nurturance, spontaneity, kindness, intuition, and all the psychological functions mistakenly associated with the female character.

THE SYZYGY SNAKE: ANIMUS AND ANIMA

Maimonides (1995), the lead Jewish thinker during the Middle Ages, challenges several interpretations of the Genesis creation story. He begins by working on the word *tzelem*, image, in Hebrew. In this passage of the Torah, Moses describes how God created human beings: "And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (PLAUT, 1981)." First, one must ask: What is the purpose of this widespread idea that the first woman was created from the first man's rib? It is clear that God created both male and female at the same time, both in His image. But before engaging in this discussion, let's take a look at what Maimonides has to say about the word image.

Maimonides brings an interesting perspective about the word image, which is congruent with Jung's view (JUNG, 1969b). He helps to clarify a number of misconceptions regarding the meaning of gender in opposition to its psychological function. For instance, image in Hebrew has several meanings, and one of them is related to form and shape. Maimonides argues that God did not create male and female in His image meaning the same bodily form and shape, but having "the divine intellect (p. 53)" bestowed upon them. "I suggest further that the idols shapes and outlines are called images because what is intended by them is their supposed function, not their shape and outline (p. 52)." This is a different view, which can complement Jung's biased Christian view of creation and feminine and masculine archetypes. Jung (1969b) says that "God unfolds himself in the world in the form of syzygies (paired opposites), such as heaven/earth, day/night, male/female, etc. (p. 254, para 400)", which again, is an anthropomorphic view of the world, congruent with the Christian faith.

Jung (1969b)'s anthropomorphic view on the Anima and Animus archetypes is obviously biasedly Christian (HILLMAN, 1985). Human beings are reasoning animals as the Jewish thinker, Maimonides (1995), eventually concludes. Psychologically speaking, we carry both functions within as indicated by the creation story in the Genesis and other creation myths (CAMPBELL, 1972; ELIADE, 1975; 1999; 2005;



FRANZ, 1995; JUNG, 1967a). It is also quite evident in the myth of Honorato and Caninana that they represent the psychological syzygies or Anima and Animus, the twin siblings. In *The Book of the Dead*, Osiris is also represented by the twins: "I am the Divine Soul which dwelleth in the Divine Twin-gods. Who is this Divine Soul? It is Osiris (WALLIS BUDGE, 1995, p. 389)" and so, this idea of psychological opposing forces is an imprint that we all carry along; therefore is an archetypal function.

In today's world, where women are still struggling to guarantee their rights, in spite of the accomplishments of the last fifty years, I question how ethical is to associate the Anima archetype to the females or feminine functions of the mind. At the same time, to associate the Animus archetype to the masculine and portray it as intellect and redeemer of the new world is to continue the pervasive job of nurturing the macho society.

Myths and fairytales give expression to unconscious processes, and their retelling causes these processes to come alive again and be recollected, thereby re-establishing the connection between conscious and unconscious (JUNG, 1969b p. 180).

This particular myth is very popular and it sounds awfully real to the population still living near the Amazon River banks. When Jung (1967a) stated that "the man who thinks he can live without myth, or outside it, is an exception (p. xxiv)" he could not be more accurate about the current events. When a therapist looks closely to a client mythology, there is always an archetypal image influencing the behavior. The client may be not fully aware of it, but he or she is living a myth. In a collective level, I see the phenomena ISIS as a terrible example of a group grabbed by a myth and constellated by a single archetypal image. Thus, when Honorato is portrayed as the good cobra and Caninana the evil one, he is somehow justified on his murderous attack to his twin sister by the Amazonian community.

THE SELF

Caninana's death by the hands of her twin brother in the deep waters of the Amazon River is an archetypal image. The story suggests it was an act of love.

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Bachelard (1983) states that “If one loves, then immediately one also admires, fears, and defends (p. 66).” The profundity of the dreams, according to Bachelard, united the psychological forces into a powerful One. Since he killed his twin sister, Honorato is now living in a supernatural world, where he is not either fully a snake or human, thus the killing in the water is also archetypal:

This, therefore, is why water is the matter of a beautiful and faithful death. Only water can sleep and all the while keep its beauty; only water can die, be still, and yet keep its reflections. In reflecting the face of a dreamer who is true to the Great Memory, to the Universal Shadow, water gives beauty to all shadows, it gives new life to all memories (p. 66).

Now, in order to become a human being, a man able to live a regular life in the community, Honorato needs to have someone with enough courage to feed his mouth with milk and get the blood out of his head. The ritual involved in the transformation of the half snake and half man into a whole functioning human being represents another psychological dynamic. The Self as the archetype of wholeness (JUNG, 1969b) unfolds itself by integrating the opposing forces of the mind, which can be several. Thus, the twin snakes are living in one being represented by Honorato, who now needs to learn about nourishment and intuition and how to control his fire (BACHELARD, 1964): The milk and the blood are both archetypal images representing this process.

Another way to look at the dynamic depicted in this myth is what Jung (1969b) describes as *complexio oppositorum* or an alchemical fusion of the masculine and feminine. The battle between the twin snakes could be interpreted then as the conflict between “consciousness and the shadow (p. 152, para 237).” From this process, which is not necessarily a killer of the shadow, but a knowing of its danger and a conscious suppression of its impulsivity, comes a new being able to incorporate “forethinking and pleasure (JUNG, 2009)”, intuition and sensation, thinking and feeling, or other psychological functions demanding integration.

The Self also represents acceptance, kindness, forgiveness, openness, endurance, unconditional love, courage, faith, grace, and many other qualities that facilitate the process of becoming whole. Since its function is to, graciously, embrace



all the pieces of our psychology, the Self is God within. The Self is the Great Mother (NEUMANN, 1983, 1963) with plenty unconditional love and acceptance.

THE MYTH OF ONE'S LIFE

There is an ancient person inside each one of us. Even before we are born, someone has created a story to give meaning to our existence. Such personal stories sound novel to our parents, but they follow an imprint. When we pay attention to each one of them, those personal myths are, in fact, part of an ancient cosmology. From the most humble human being to the ones born in fancy residences, there is someone who believes we are gods and goddesses. Then, as each one of us grow up incorporating the values of those myths, becoming the hero with more than one thousand faces (CAMPBELL, 1949), we tend to forget about the transition between myths happening during the time of development and social interaction.

Myths have an arbitrary nature. Similar to archetypes, myths are stories springing from deep unconscious processes. They reveal complex and atemporal facts and, by exploring their meaning, the psychologist holds a powerful clinical tool that will help the client to explore something more profound than a symptom. The work with myths as a therapeutic tool demands an effort that not all therapists are willing to take. Some think it is easier to address behavioral issues taking an approach that deals only what is tangible and can be called scientific. We are overdue for embracing the psychological phenomenon as science, yes; but one that speaks its own mind.

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