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**The Dialectic of the Marvelous: Graça Aranha's Fictional  
Philosophizing**

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**The Dialectic of the Marvelous: Graça Aranha's Fictional  
Philosophizing**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

*So, he thinks, may I never go back to the lamplight; to the sitting-room; never finish my book; never knock out my pipe; never ring for Mrs. Turner to clear away; rather let me walk straight on to this great figure, who will, with a toss of her head, mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest.*

-Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

## **Abstract**

# **The Dialectic of the Marvelous: Graça Aranha's Fictional Philosophizing**

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This essay considers the relationship between the creative and philosophical writings of Graça Aranha, in part as response to the critical tendency to exclude the majority of his works when analyzing his *oeuvre*. Aranha's major work of philosophy, *The Aesthetic of Life*, proclaims that aesthetic experience is the “basis of perfection”: the solution the alienation initiated by the duality of consciousness. Yet, the aestheticism of his philosophical treatise is ruthlessly tested through the dramatic embodiment found in his three works of fiction: *Canaan* (novel), *Malazarte* (play), *The Marvelous Journey* (novel). Aranha's interest in philosophical dialectic is manifested most effectively in the drama of ideas which runs through his fiction. Consequently, Aranha's works should be evaluated and explicated with attention to the ways in which they comment on each other. In particular, the fictional works suggest a negative aspect to Aranha's aesthetic concept of the marvelous. The three creative works employ and anticipate ideas found in Psychoanalytic theory, Marxist theory, and Existentialism in order to illustrate that the marvelous experience is a kind of death of the subject. Additionally, this essay

contributes to the critical dialogue over Aranha's place in or outside of Brazilian modernism. The representation of Brazilian dance and ritual found in the two novels are explored as a noteworthy modernist approach to the questions of cultural and aesthetic decadence that influenced the modernist period in both Europe and Brazil.

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The purpose of this essay is to supplement the critical perspectives on the Brazilian novelist, playwright, and philosopher—Graça Aranha. Aranha is famous in the history of Brazilian letters for his passionate enthusiasm in the public forum and his modest body of writing. Late in life, he denounced and eventually resigned from the Brazilian Academy of Letters which he had helped found. Also, his role in Brazilian Modernism to this day remains contested. He had only one literary success: *Canaan*, his first novel. But if he is seen as a figure of limited importance, at least some of the blame should fall on the critical tradition that has spent little effort reevaluating his various texts. Most criticism of Aranha evidences a marked lack of profundity precisely because it does not grasp the complexities which arise through the intertexuality within Aranha's body of works.

Aranha was born in 1868 and died in 1931; that is to say, his life straddled the turn of the twentieth century. Certainly in his youth, the dominant philosophical school in Brazil was Positivism. In fact, the influence of Positivism remained prevalent in Brazil through the end of Aranha's life. Aranha's philosophical aestheticism may be seen as a reaction to an excess of scientific spirit—an optimism of enlightenment—found in his society. In *The Aesthetic of Life* he writes of the dominant intellectual trend: “The philosophy of practical action guides Brazilian energies towards the material labor of possessing the land and accumulating wealth” (*Obra Completa* 655). Aranha's thought developed largely in response to the pervasive positivism in Brazilian science and philosophy. In doing so he was not alone, and works by contemporaneous authors such

as Machado de Assis and Lima Barreto masterfully satirize the positivistic ideas of “order and progress” dominant in their age.

Much of his adult life, from 1900 until 1921, Aranha lived as a diplomat in Paris. Aranha wrote two novels: *Canaan* (1902) and *The Marvelous Journey* (1929); and the play *Malazarte* (1911). In addition to the three creative works (which I will refer to together as fiction, including the play *Malazarte*), Aranha also published a book of philosophy entitled *The Aesthetic of Life* (1920), as well as the essays *The Modern Spirit* (1925) and *Machado de Assis and Joaquim Nabuco*; and the unfinished posthumous autobiography, *My Own Novel* (1931)<sup>1</sup>.

*Malazarte* was performed at the *Théâtre de l’Oeuvre* in Paris during the year of its publication. Considered the center of symbolist theater, the *Théâtre de l’Oeuvre* was founded by Aurélien Lugné-Poë and staged works by Jarry, Maeterlinck, Wilde and Strindberg. In spite of its historic premier, Aranha’s play has been given little attention in Brazilian criticism. Far less attention has been paid to *The Marvelous Journey*. The novel Aranha published two years before his death is not the focus of any critical work. It usually receives little more than a single passing comment. Criticism of Aranha tends to perpetuate this myopic view of his writing; yet in some ways *The Marvelous Journey* is the richest work he produced. It offers the most profound exhibition of Aranha’s themes and should be seen as the culmination of his career.

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph lists all seven of Graça Aranha’s works collected in the complete works (Obra Completa) published by the Instituto Nacional do Livro in 1969. All citations from Aranha are my translations from that edition with the exception of the citations from *Canaan* which are from Mariano Joaquin Lorente’s translation.

Aranha's legacy is dependent on his first work, the novel *Canaan*, and his participation in the foundation of Brazilian modernism. A good deal of criticism considers the question of categorizing Aranha as modernist or pre-modernist. As is often the case, the efforts to firmly place Aranha within a literary movement have been rather unfruitful. Certainly Aranha's thematic foci are representative of global modernism: aestheticism, cultural decadence, antagonisms between art and society. In addition, the technique of inconclusiveness which organizes all three works of fiction reflects the modernist engagement with perspectivism. In spite of his disownment by the more celebrated figures of Brazilian modernism such as Oswald de Andrade and Mario de Andrade, Aranha's fictional dramatization of the potential for cultural renovation is characteristically modernist.

Aranha's clear concern with cultural and artistic decadence evidences his immersion in European intellectual debates of the turn of the century. The modernist cultivation of 'the new' was often extended to geography as modernists who sought rejuvenation explored the exotic, the oriental, and the primitive<sup>2</sup>. If Aranha appropriates the sense of decadence diagnosed by his European predecessors, in his fiction he explores the capacity of Brazilian art to overcome Western decadence. Representations of local folk myths and artistic forms, in particular dance, are set against insular European forms which are plagued by stagnating decadence.

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<sup>2</sup> This historical phenomenon is widely recognized as a defining feature of modernism, and voyages to southern climes and exotic places abound in modernist narratives. D. H. Lawrence, Hemingway, Forester, Artaud, as well as Picasso's appropriation of African masks all come to mind.

Most notably in *The Marvelous Journey*, Aranha explores the aesthetic capacity in Brazilian art, ritual, and myth. This effort is closely related to Oswald de Andrade's theories of cannibalistic art. Aranha's approach uses peripheral forms because they stand outside of decadent European culture, particularly myths from his rather remote native state of Maranhão. Thus, Aranha embraces a solution that many European modernists lacked the familiarity to attempt in full: he centers his work on the new cultural forms born in the new world of Brazil.

The primary critical omission surrounding the work of Graça Aranha is that his works are not treated as a whole<sup>3</sup>. Often, criticism is devoted to his only literary success and first work, *Canaan*. However, this work is closely related to Aranha's subsequent writings in both theme and structure. A single-work focus certainly has its place; however, this trend is so dominant that it effectively sanctifies the position that only *Canaã* needs to be studied. I will cite a typical example from Cyro dos Anjos's article, "Graça Aranha, sua obra, sua vida." In its title, the article presents itself as offering an encompassing survey of the writer. Instead, after an eloquent and informative description of Aranha's life, dos Anjos proceeds to exclude all works except *Canaã* from the textual analysis:

I won't occupy myself with the metaphysical and aesthetic doctrines of Graça Aranha... In the time I have also does not allow me to address *My*

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<sup>3</sup> The singular exception to this is José Carlos Garbuglio's *The Sensory-Aesthetic Universe of Graça Aranha* (1966). Garbuglio's work makes effective use of *Malzarte* and *The Marvelous Journey* in tracing the tropes related to the senses and aesthetic experience found in Aranha's works.

*Own Novel* and the introduction to *The Correspondance of Machado and Nabuco*, though critically admired writings. Nor is there occasion to pause over *Malazarte* and *The Marvelous Journey*, works of poor critical reception. (156)

Dos Anjos's position is representative of the dominant tendency in critical evaluation which limits itself to analysis of *Canaã*.

The other error I wish to correct is the critical tendency to interrogate the metaphysics and aesthetics found in *The Aesthetic of Life* without examining the complexity of these philosophical ideas in Aranha's fiction, and vice versa. Understanding of Aranha's body of work is limited by separated treatment of his philosophy and fiction without the comparative approach that they invite. Such fragmented criticism misses the complexity and dialectical nature of his *oeuvre*. Alfredo Bosi divides Aranha's work: "There are, therefore, two phases to consider in the work of Graça Aranha: the novelist of *Canaan* and *The Marvelous Journey*, and the doctrinaire of *The Aesthetic of Life* and *The Modern Spirit*" (*O Pre-Modernismo* 105). This schema does not work for two reasons. The first is obvious—*Malazarte* is excluded. The second is essential to my argument: there is a remarkable integration between the fiction and philosophy of Aranha<sup>4</sup>. Aranha's philosophy does pervade his fiction and the two should be examined comparatively and in relation to each other.

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, a common reproach is that Aranha's philosophy enters too heavily into his creative work.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche (whom I will explore as Aranha's most significant continental influence) emphasizes the fact that enlightenment will, like a snake recoiling, turn back on itself and produce myth. Pure philosophy will prove its own limits and humanity's need for tragic myth. Noting Socrates' turn to art, Nietzsche imagines:

[Socrates] must have asked himself the following question—perhaps whatever is not intelligible to me is not necessarily immediately unintelligent? Perhaps there is a domain of wisdom which excludes the logician? Perhaps art is even a necessary correlative of and supplement to science?. (80)

In the Nietzschean dialectic of enlightenment, logic (Socrates) confronts its own limits and bespeaks the necessity of return to art and myth in order to represent the world. As in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the philosophy in Aranha's *The Aesthetic of Life* prescribes art. In the dialectic of enlightenment, art must always come after philosophy in order to restore the connection to life that enlightenment has severed.

Aranha uses art to continue beyond philosophy. Art may manifest or contain thought in ways that traditional philosophical exposition cannot. Yet there is another difference which proves crucial to the work of Aranha: philosophy traditionally aims at a decisive logic, whereas art may remain open and encompass contradiction. Art is the domain of paradox and superfluity; philosophy tends toward conclusive proof, systematization, clarity and demarcation.

In *My Own Novel*, Aranha foregrounds his commitment to dialectical philosophy; its discovery, he says, had singular impact on his thinking. By the philosopher's own assessment, his is a philosophy that negates and turns. This quality of Aranha's philosophical thought led him to dramatize the development of his ideas and to further that development. There is a strong traditional and logical connection between dialectic and drama. Martin Puchner, in *The Drama of Ideas*, comprehensively outlines a long history of interpenetration between dialectical philosophy and drama. Plato is the famous father of this line of writers. The progressive movement in dramatic action and dialogue facilitate the development of dialectic. The monologic quality of the theoretical essay is seen as a flaw by some philosophers. Consequently, many of them adopt dramatic or dialogic style.

Rather than dividing Aranha's works, I seek to illustrate the extremely tight relation between literature and philosophy that occurs in Aranha's *oeuvre*. The relation is reciprocal: the philosophy ultimately leads to art and the art back to philosophy. Seen as a whole, Aranha's project is fundamentally one of metafiction which brings into being an existentialist self-criticism of his own philosophy. The relationship between his philosophical and creative writing points to a self-conscious critique of the aestheticism of *fin-de-siècle* philosophy and literary theory that Aranha embraces in *The Aesthetic of Life*. I will also look briefly at the ways in which Aranha's ideas align with his literary style—most saliently in Aranha's symbolist stylistics and his use of drama.

My analysis of Aranha's philosophical writings seeks to elucidate their place in two broader contexts: first, post-Kantian metaphysics and aesthetics, and the *fin-de-siècle* theories of decadence and aestheticism; second, within the totality of Aranha's writings, all of which interrogate the ideas presented in *The Aesthetic of Life*. The central thesis of my analysis is that these ideas are presented seriously and thoughtfully in the philosophical treatise, *and* are thoroughly and comprehensively polemicized in Aranha's creative writings. Through his fiction, Aranha creates a kind of critical thought which does not exist in his theoretical writings—his art philosophizes in a way that his philosophy does not.

### ***The Aesthetic of Life: Enlightenment's Alienation and Aesthetic Unity***

The concern of Aranha's philosophy is human alienation, or, the exile of humanity from the union of the Whole. The development of human consciousness separates the subject from the object in a painful disharmony. Aranha's philosophy is an instantiation of what Derrida calls the fundamental idea of western metaphysics: that there is a center (transcendental signified) to being from which we are alienated. In Plato, this is the noetic realm of Forms, in *Genesis* the garden. Aranha's fundamental alienation is from the oneness of being. Aranha hypothesizes a widespread “cosmic terror” which separates individuals from garden of the Brazilian wilderness. There is much precedence for Aranha's theory since metaphysical alienation has many antecedents in western philosophy. Also, the trope of exile in Brazilian literature is very

widespread (*Iracema*, for example). In fact, the current population of Brazil is mostly product of exile, across the sea from Europe and Africa. Additionally, Christianity is fundamentally premised on humanity's alienation from God in earthly sin. Aranha's theory of alienation also references the dissolution of the primary metaphysical unity by the *principium individuationis* of the psyche. In Schopenhauer's philosophy as well as Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, the *principium individuationis* is the original source of suffering in existence. Aranha too writes of the primordial suffering in humanity as result of individuation. However, Aranha's theory contains a significant difference. He describes alienation not as a symptom of a metaphysical duality in existence, but as the product of civilization and mental development.

Critics generally assign the term of monism<sup>5</sup> to Aranha's philosophy, citing the influence of Tobias Barreto and the Recife School. However, just as Baudelaire<sup>6</sup> and Nietzsche equivocate on this point, Aranha's "monism" is often obfuscated by his concern with the existential dualism at the heart of humanity. Aranha theorizes a metaphysical monism that seems to be universally sundered by consciousness, locating the subject-object dualism at the heart of humanity. This is perhaps an explanatory factor for the strong affinity between the ideas in Aranha's fiction and the psychoanalytic theory

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<sup>5</sup> Aranha is commonly said to follow the doctrine of Monism. Cruz Costa points to the 1894 preface that Aranha wrote for Fausto Cardoso's *The Monistic Conception of the Universe*, in which Aranha praises the German scientist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel (Costa 89). The chapter "The Unity of Nature" from Haeckel's *The Riddle of the Universe* contains a good example of the kind of thought Aranha appropriated from Haeckel. However, as Costa goes on to note, locating Aranha within this philosophical tradition is reductive: his works show a fairly eclectic body of influence as well as some original theory of human existence which makes use of psychology, phenomenology and aesthetics.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter four of Hazard Adams's work is devoted to the symbolist movement and in particular the theories of Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Adams shows how Baudelaire's idea of correspondences is often predicated on a theological dualism inherited from Swedenborg's theory of correspondences.

that emphasizes the earliest phases of the human psyche. The subject's fearful consciousness of nature and the consequent demands of enlightenment produce the fundamental alienation of all individuals. So, for Aranha the metaphysical reality of the Universe is an indivisible unity, but the existential reality of human life is condemned to the subject-object dualism whose only hope for transcendence lies in the improbable pursuit of aesthetic harmony.

Aranha's myth of exile is an example of the philosophy of the dialectic of enlightenment as treated by Adorno and Horkheimer, Nietzsche, and Schiller, among others<sup>7</sup>. According to this theory, enlightenment—science, dialectic, or instrumental reason—leads to a fragmented epistemological existence. Through abstraction the human subject removes itself from the original metaphysical unity of existence. Thus, as Wordsworth says, enlightenment is a “sordid boon” through which we master nature and lose it. Though it is not an expression Aranha uses (I have taken it from the title of Horkheimer and Adorno’s book published in 1944), Aranha theorizes the dialectic of enlightenment:

At the dawn of humanity, religion and philosophy were fused and generated a single vision of the universe. Little by little, the investigation of the material, the scientific interpretation of Nature, separated philosophy from religion—putting the former in the service of the latter,

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<sup>7</sup> *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, respectively. Schiller’s work was a direct influence on the others and already contains the complete theory. The dialectic of enlightenment is a quintessentially Romantic philosophy.

which, breaking the unity of the Whole, institutes the perturbing duality of mind and matter. (*Obra Completa* 591)

Since Aranha believes that art, religion, and love may be united under the concept of ‘the aesthetic,’ it is best to use that term and identify the opposition between (instrumental) science and the aesthetic which occurs in his version of the dialectic of enlightenment. Aranha defines science as the human effort to dissociate “natural phenomenon and attempt to explain and dominate that phenomena; the Universe ceases to be a single, unified being and becomes a plurality of fragments” (592). Enlightenment and its science amount to the epistemological deconstruction of the world’s unity.

Aranha, following Schiller, asserts that the aesthetic unifies whereas the scientific separates. The aesthetic is the solution to the problem of enlightenment which is the source of painful alienation and fragmentation: “Science can never satisfy the human anxiety which aspires to realize the cosmic Unity. Science only treats the fragmentary” (591). The instrumentality of science makes it a tool of separation and subjugation. The alienation from the natural world that results from its subjugation is a central focus in *The Aesthetic of Life*, and also constitutes the ground of a pervasive symbolism in Aranha’s fiction.

According to Aranha’s philosophy, the aesthetic experience of harmony may be sought in three different pursuits: art, love, and religion. Aranha theorizes at least some degree of equivalence between the different modes of the subject’s re-immersion in unity: “In the sublime heights of the ideal, Love is religion and Religion is love” (590). Love is

a fundamentally religious longing for the infinite—the desire to experience the fullness of the whole in the love relationship. In *The Aesthetic of Life*, Aranha says that love has its origin in the fundamental human longing for union with the Whole—it seeks to fill the lack created in individuation. Aranha suggests that love is in fact a solution to the metaphysical alienation: “In love, human beings reach eternity... the primordial unity of the Whole” (609). Love in *The Aesthetic of Life* allows for the union which negates the individual’s alienation.

Just as the lover concentrates herself on the *image* of the beloved, Aranha believes that religious experience is aesthetic. Aranha’s claim that the aesthetic enters into the religious is easy to accept. Art and religion are perennially linked. Religion has historically made use of all artistic media, and the origins of art are often associated with ancient ritual and mysteries. Though true of monotheistic religions, it is for Aranha the pantheistic world-view that allows for a fully aesthetic experience. Divine immanence makes magic universal, and this magic may be perceived by the individual subject as spectacle that contains all existence. A more divine nature experienced by a “naïve” subject manifests the aesthetic play which is lost when analytic enlightenment breaks nature down into force, law, and number. Aranha’s preference for pantheism reinforces the monistic metaphysics of his philosophy. The radical immanence of the divine eliminates the need for a transcendental divine realm. Indeed, Aranha’s appropriation of pantheism operates as an expression of his metaphysics as well as the foundation for his conception of the aesthetic and the marvelous:

Pantheism, the supreme form of religion, easily becomes aesthetic. For the mystic who has been able to abolish the individual existence of god in order to animate and deify the Whole, the understanding of the Universe is purely spectacular, it is the sublime play of forces of Nature which multiplies itself in images, infinite and variable expressions forms and things. In this way Religion, Art, and Love converge marvelously in the human spirit, eager to join the grand unconsciousness of Nature. (591)

The purpose of aesthetic activity is the (re)absorption into the unconscious bosom of nature, which is itself the divine. The benefit of the aesthetic remains for Aranha what it was for Schiller in 1795—recaptured unity.

### **Theory and Representation of Nature**

The representation of nature is dialectical throughout his works; nature is a symbol of both vital harmony and sublime terror. The symbol of the arbor, for instance, appears on the first page of *Malazarte* and *The Marvelous Journey* and incorporates a complex dialectic that works between nature and artifice, exteriority and interiority, and freedom and bondage. The divergent perspectives of nature are reflected in different characters, in their harmony or dissonance with nature. In the works of Aranha, one finds a dialectical confrontation between the Romantic conception of a luxuriant, divine nature and the vision of nature as an insular and dark terror, as depicted by Conrad. The two

opposing positions are present in *The Aesthetic of Life* but the form of exposition makes Aranha's philosophy particularly difficult to grasp. What reads as a confused position in the philosophical treatise is allowed to develop, dramatically and symbolically, in the fiction. Ultimately, as result of this formal difference, the fictional works serve as a much better platform for Aranha's ideas on nature than *The Aesthetic of Life*.

Descriptions of harmonious nature, as the giver of aesthetic bliss occur throughout Aranha's works. Throughout the first half of *Canaan*, Milkau lives content in the aesthetic contemplation of the Brazilian wilderness. However, this perspective is upset in a series of shocking events. Nature's transformation is shown in events of violence in the second half of *Canaan*. Aranha associates death with devouring, with food. In doing so he follows Milton and *Genesis*. The first lines of Milton's epic tells that "mortal taste / Brought death into the world" (ln. 2-3, p. 10). In Aranha's fiction the scenes of death are all devourings. Nature eats itself in constant transformation. This is to some extent an unpleasant notion, and the scenes in *Canaan* are horrifying. The deaths in chapters eight and nine are announced by the flight of a vulture. When the Brazilian men from town discover a neighbors rotting corpse they must fight off dogs and vultures in order to recover the body. The battle scene between the men, dogs, and vultures over the decomposing corpse cruelly represents nature's self-consumption. The men attempt to protect civilization—symbolized in the form of burial rites—from devouring nature. Another brutal scene follows when the neighbors of Milkau and Lentz beat a horse to death. Milkau tearfully questions the "fecundation by blood" (*Canaan* 154).

A third scene of violence opens chapter nine. Mary, upon beginning labor, seeks to avoid her masters and retires under a tree. The pain of the birth puts her in a kind of hallucinatory swoon during which she fades in and out of consciousness. A group of wild pigs, attracted by the blood, carry off and destroy her just born son. Another servant sees this and runs to the house reporting that Mary has thrown her son to the pigs, an act of infanticide. Thus, in two chapters we have seen the dignities of birth and death undermined by nature and, more specifically, consumed by animal life. Milkau is forced to engage two aspects of nature: garden of peace and devouring terror.

The brief (six-line) scene description that opens the play *Malazarte* juxtaposes a caged bird and climbing vines. The stage immediately gives an image of nature bound, or imprisoned, and the converse image of nature's excess and energy, which grows parasitically and incessantly in expansion. Also located in the garden is a *caramanchão* ("arbor" in English), an object which layers nature and human artifice. It is a large, often wooden, construction, reminiscent of an altar or shelter, but usually purely decorative or aesthetic; placed into nature and then covered again with natural objects (usually flowers or vines), which are selected and arranged aesthetically. Additionally, the border at the far end of the garden is "garnished by plants" (*Obra Completa* 496). The scenery displays nature under human control—it is boxed, subjugated to Euclidean forms. Philosophies of the dialectic of enlightenment maintain that the instrumental organization of nature by the human subject is coextensive with the subject's alienation from that nature. The quietly stated, "In the garden, an arbor," is an expression of the human

domination of nature, the civilization of nature. The arbor is analogous to the bower of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*—the primordial structure of civilization that humanity introduces into nature.

As in *Malazarte*, the image of a *camaranchão* occurs on the first page of *The Marvelous Journey*. Here it is called a kind of prison, and a symbol of false and inharmonious relation to nature. It functions as a symbol of the subjugation of nature. The other two prisons listed are banquets and flower beds. Flower beds too are ordered and rectangular aesthetic organizations of nature. Human life becomes mediated when confronting nature through these reconstructions. Structurally, the banquet on its table, the flower bed and the *camaranchão* are rectangular enclosures surrounded by the borders of the home in which they have been placed. In this way they are like cells in a prison.

Teresa wants wild nature: “I will transform this into something savage, let everything return to the primitive” (229). Her use of the words savage and primitive is, of course, suggestive. She associates the savage with energy and freedom. It is in this same opening scene that she meditates on the sense of liberation which she imbibes from watching the ships in the bay. The sea is always present in *The Marvelous Journey* and *Malazarte* as a symbol of boundlessness. Teresa longs for the sea and to return to nature. These are two womb-like figures that recur as objects of desire in Aranha’s works. Exile from the garden merges with the psychoanalytic archetype of separation from the mother. Frequently in psychoanalytic theory, the entrance into civilization corresponds to the

beginning of the oedipal stage in with the father (law) tears the child from an insular relationship with the mother. Through Aranha's trope of the *marvelous mother*, he develops a dramatic dialectic between the maternal aesthetic and paternal social action.

In his article “Malazarte and the Irrationalist Aesthetic,” André Tezza Consentino correctly asserts that “The symbolist scenery of Graça Aranha conforms to *Art Nouveau* aesthetics” (250). However, he does not address the significance of the symbolism of Aranha’s writing, nor does he elucidate the tropes used by Aranha to explore the relationship between nature and civilization. The arbor is an art nouveau structure, a rectilinear construction draped with vines or flowers. This image, as I have attempted to illustrate, integrates into the heart of Aranha’s philosophy, as well as the pattern of theme and imagery running through all three works of fiction. The symbolism of the natural setting in each of Aranha’s works has rich significance. Both the action and the characters also serve as dense symbols for complex ideas. It is strange that Consentino begins his essay by characterizing Aranha’s drama as symbolist, yet never evaluates the symbolism of Aranha’s texts. In calling *Malazarte* “A play that simply proposes to enumerate and discuss philosophical questions,” Consentino neglects the profound symbolism of Aranha’s fiction (256).

José Paulo Paes’s work, *Canaan and Modernist Ideas*<sup>8</sup>, does, on the other hand, highlight the sustained nature-symbolism found in Aranha’s work. His book gives a comprehensive account of the art nouveau movement and its affinities with Aranha’s

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<sup>8</sup> Paes’s work is very informative and has great depth, yet as the title suggests mostly focuses on *Canaan*. Still, it offers one of the best explications of Aranha’s themes and dramatic style.

literary career. Paes writes that the numerous and detailed descriptions of nature, “add nothing to the development of plot or character, but do serve, at the ornamental level, as a symbolic mediations between nature and Milkau’s utopian project” (22). Paes recognizes the pregnant nature-symbolism. However, by isolating the symbolism from development of plot or character, he underestimates its integral place in Aranha’s work. In fact, the symbolical relations that surround Aranha’s representation of nature are indispensable to understanding his literary and philosophical body of work.

### **Symbolism and *Symbolisme***

The influence of symbolist<sup>9</sup> theory, in particular Baudelaire’s doctrine of correspondences, adds considerable complexity to the philosophy and themes woven into Aranha’s texts. A basic tenet of Aranha’s philosophy is the belief in a primary metaphysical state of the unified Whole. The divisions of enlightenment are an illusion of consciousness—existence is an inseparable unity. Following this idea Aranha affirms the ancient philosophical proposition that all is in all. All points are an *aleph* (as in the Borges story) and “Every part of us is the vivifying and magnificent Earth, all is found within us” (*Obra Completa* 597). Aranha’s philosophy formulates its metaphysics using what Hazard Adams calls a “secular symbol,” in which all particulars “contain the universal” (Adams 18). Adams’s book, *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, examines theoretical variations of the secular symbol. This symbol is premised on a specific type of monistic philosophy in which correspondences are unlimited by any dualism or

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<sup>9</sup> In *The Modern Spirit*, Aranha provides a short list of the literature of “universal genius”: “Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Schiller, Racine, Shelley, Byron, Baudelaire, Mallarmé” (758).

separation of metaphysical realms. Aranha uses this form of symbol when representing aesthetic experience.

This symbol, whose function is primarily to unify, may serve as an agent of the reversal of enlightenment and attainment of aesthetic unity. The symbol as constituent element of Baudelaire's correspondences seeks to reconnect all elements of the world which have been separated by instrumental human abstraction. The symbolist aesthetic therefore perfectly suits Aranha's basic existential goal of reunion with the Whole.

Insofar as the differential linguistic sign is the central tool of enlightenment, symbolist literature and metaphor seek to counter enlightenment's fragmentation precisely through its own opponent's medium: the body of concept relations is reworked towards unity. Metaphor brings into relation those things previously separated through the mostly metonymic process of extending conceptualization.

The abundant natural descriptions found in Aranha's fiction are persistently reminiscent of Baudelaire's line from "*Correspondances*": "Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent" (*French Symbolist Poetry* 12). The third chapter of *The Marvelous Journey* opens with imagery of solar correspondence: "In the refulgence of the sun, Teresa's dark hairs radiated effluviums of gold. The rays flashed in her brown eyes. In the foaming waves shone innumerable suns" (*Obra Completa* 250). Much of the chapter is filled with imagery of this style. From the hill overlooking the sea, Teresa, Juju, and Filipe are spectators of city, land, and ocean. Their symbolizing gaze is able to weave a unity out of the phenomenon around them: "The passage of the birds traced an arc which

encompassed space, fixing a spiritual line which suggested the curve of the universe” (257).

Reflective of Aranha’s theory of nature as transformation, the representation of correspondences in his work is frequently infused with a sense of flux, or motion. *The Marvelous Journey* begins with the description of an energetic flood of the senses: “Teresa shook with each sonorous vibration. The floating aromas invaded her and made her shudder. She laughed which stirred the air and startled her, when suddenly her senses were overcome by a strong fragrant wave of Jasmine” (229). The juxtaposition in the phrase “sonorous vibration” emblematizes the way Aranha’s style links motion and sensory experience<sup>10</sup>. Light pulsates and sounds reverberate throughout Aranha’s descriptions.

Many chapters open with a narrative redolent of stage directions. These scenes evoke a dizzying sense of nature which hums and buzzes in sonic motion. It is as if these natural settings seek to fuse sound and motion in the realization that sound, operating through waves, is a kind of motion. The ocean becomes an important locus for this effect and the sound of its waves pervades *The Marvelous Journey*. By representing prodigious sensation whose abundance leads to synesthesia, Aranha seeks to represent the fullness of aesthetic sensation which allows for a total aesthetic experience. He attempts to bring the

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<sup>10</sup> A comprehensive account of the interrelation between sound and movement in Aranha’s works, inclusive of *The Marvelous Journey*, can be found in the third chapter of José C. Garbuglio’s book, “The Sonorous Universe: Auditory Sensations.”

innumerable interactions and flux of nature to the page. This salient aspect of Aranha's style leads many critics to characterize his work as theatrical.

Indeed, the emphasis on sound and movement in Aranha's fiction may be seen as an approximation to the values and techniques of the theater, yet at the same time, narrative description of sound and movement is altogether distinct from the use of, say, music and dance on a stage. Nonetheless, it is useful to consider the theatricality of Aranha's works. Critic José C. Garbuglio assesses the theatricality of Aranha's works and the limits of this term in regard to Aranha's style: "he was given over to the concept of theatrical author to which he never attained... he created fiction with theatrical elements and theater divested of representational quality" (22). In this statement Garbuglio distills a valuable characterization of Aranha's creative writing. Aranha does with some degree of success represent the aesthetic sensations of sound and movement using the written word.

Dancing, its different forms and stages, is an essential symbolic motif in *The Marvelous Journey* and *Canaan*. Dance serves as an important illustration of Aranha's cultural and aesthetic theory. In theories of decadence, cultural renewal becomes the basis of aesthetic renewal. Comparable to Artaud's theoretical praise of Balinese dance, Aranha locates an aesthetic power in Brazilian dance. In chapter five of *Canaã*, Joca bursts into a frenzied dance: "Carried away by the music, which spoke to his very soul, the mulatto was transported beyond himself and seemed to be transfigured by his intense and extraordinary happiness" (*Canaan* 97). Like the dancers in the Macumba ceremony

of *The Marvelous Journey*, Joca experiences a kind of ecstasy in the dance, a transportation of the soul. Joca's dance is emphatically one of freedom: "drunk with music, standing on the tips of his toes, with arms outstretched, he seemed to be trying to fly" (97).

The pure energy driving Joca's dance strains for flight; it is itself an aesthetic movement of liberation. In contrast, the traditional German dance is enclosed and mechanical: "The older folks cleared the yard and stood around, forming a sort of frame for it. Then the young ones began to turn round and round as if they had been a wheel blown by the wind" (87). The frame, just as in Blake's work, is a symbol of restriction and the binding of natural energy. Similarly the dancers are like wheels, not the wind. They are instruments that lack freedom and creativity. The wheel-dancers are mediated from nature and in their controlled precision have excised some of the current of life.

Despite the rich symbolism Aranha generates in representing dance, this project is better suited to the theater—the medium in which the aesthetic perceptions of the audience may be engaged through the performance. The theater audience, more than the reader, may be fully absorbed through the use of sound, pictorial representation, and corporeal motion. Dance is central to the aesthetic and cultural theory in both novels, yet is absent from *Malazarte*—the only work that could actualize it. One may criticize Aranha for not adapting his form to his project, yet, conversely, one could assume the perspective that Aranha stretches the form of the novel in his efforts to represent the fullness of life in the written word. The question remains, however, as to why Aranha's

only piece of theater includes far less performance of music and dance than the novels; and yet music and dance are so central to Aranha's stylistic and philosophical conceptions.

### **Aranha's Aestheticism and the beautiful lie**

Aranha's philosophy posits an aestheticism that, though particular to his own philosophy of nature, shows a clear coherence with the various European theories of the turn of the century. He declares in *The Aesthetic of Life* that the goal of humanity is to attain the “profound sentiment that the Universe represents itself as a spectacle in which there are only forms that displace each other, multiplying, dying, and returning to life in an indefatigable metamorphosis” (*Obra Completa* 595). Aranha’s notion that the world is to be considered aesthetically, as in other thinkers influenced by Nietzsche, is a hallmark of early modernism.

With the death of God, and the collapse of the idols and moral, political, and religious teleologies, the human subject turn away from the search for meaning in the depth of life or the universe. In many cases (certainly Nietzsche’s), aestheticism grows out of decadence philosophies which declare that nothing exists “behind” existence. Many *fin-de-siècle* thinkers grew suspicious of dualistic philosophies which posit an unattainable essence to existence. Nietzsche’s aestheticism at different points in his career either asserts that appearance is the only reality, denying any philosophical claims

to the existence of the *noumena*, or that the appearance is worth more—that art is more valuable than truth.

Aranha's character Dionísia, like Wilde, proclaims the supremacy of the lie. Wilde's (and sometimes Nietzsche's) valorization of the lie is echoed in *Malazarte*. In act III, Dionísia becomes captivated by Malazarte's storytelling ability. When Eduardo attempts to discredit the stories as lies, Dionísia exclaims: "But how beautiful! If only I could lie with him! Yes... the lie is truer than all the world's truth. It has more life, more blood, more color. It is *worth more* than the truth because it represents things as they ought to be but are not because of our reason" (My italics, 525). According to Dionísia, we are to blame for truth, which is not beautiful. The beautiful lie ages into truth. Old Science has removed the vitality and beauty from the world. Living in Paris for the first two decades of the twentieth century, Aranha would have encountered various aestheticisms all around him.

Aranha's epigraph to *The Aesthetic of Life*, "The aesthetic conception of the Universe is the basis of perfection," recalls the line from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, "for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* are existence and the world *justified* to eternity" (38). This is probably the most salient of many connections between Aranha and Nietzsche. Yet, although Aranha writes about Nietzsche, it is not as an influence on his own work. The argument in *The Aesthetic of Life* ignores the considerable debt to Nietzsche that will be illustrated throughout this essay. This famous pronouncement of Nietzsche's, Martin Puchner calls the "battle cry of aestheticism" (Puchner 138).

However, both Nietzsche and Aranha would move beyond these categorical elevations of the aesthetic. Nietzsche continued his search for the ultimate justification of existence throughout his philosophical career. The “Forward to Richard Wagner” which begins *The Birth of Tragedy* contains another statement which is often equated with the one above: “I am convinced that art is the highest task and the real metaphysical activity of this life” (17-18). Though the two pronouncements are similar, the difference is crucial for Aranha and Nietzsche. The first is concerned with the “justification of existence”; the second statement addresses the “task” and “activity” of humanity. The first is a matter of theodicy, the second man’s existential goal. In the case of both thinkers, the second question becomes the more important one. Nietzsche would make “man’s highest task” the fundamental purpose of philosophy. Aranha, through his three creative works, dramatizes the possibilities and results of making the aesthetic this task.

Like Schiller, many romantics, and the later proponents of aestheticism, Aranha claims the autonomy of art: “As an inalienable and primordial function of the human spirit, the aesthetic sentiment is not subordinated to the logic of social utility” (Obra Completa 599). The aesthetic sense operates untouched by instrumental enlightenment. Art’s indifference to utility is the basic tenet of the historic conceptions of its autonomy. Notwithstanding this position espoused in *The Aesthetic of Life*, Aranha’s fiction manifests a critique of the possibility and the value of this autonomy. To this end, Aranha utilizes his fiction to engage in a critical examination of aestheticism, similar to that which propelled the historical avant-garde movement. If aesthetic unity is “the basis

of perfection” in Aranha’s major philosophical tract, the three fictional works illuminate the difficulties attendant to the pursuit of perfection. Aesthetic experience is characterized as absorption throughout Aranha’s *oeuvre*, and the dangers and obstacles of the pursuit of such absorption are evidenced in the drama of Aranha’s fiction.

### **The Intimate Relation of Drama and Dialectic**

Philosophers who depend on paradox and contradiction, such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, frequently employ dramatic philosophy. Dramatic philosophical modes such as the dialogue or intertextual pseudonymic writing recognize the need for open philosophy, and many of these writers hold a perspectivist view of truth. Not surprisingly, perspectivism occupies an important place thematically and structurally within the plot and setting of *The Marvelous Journey*.

Martin Puchner traces this tendency to the greatest philosophical dramatist, Plato. Puchner identifies a long-standing link between drama and dialectic:

Dialectics, Socrates’ key term for describing the philosophical dialogue, goes back, as Hegel knew, to the Greek verb *dialegestai*, which means ‘holding a conversation.’ In other words, dialectical philosophy is precisely the kind of philosophy that finds its most proper expression in Plato’s philosophical drama. (Puchner 129)

The history of philosophy may be conceived as an intertextual conversation between authors. Therefore the model of dialogue, of sustaining multiple view-points simultaneously is perhaps philosophy's truest mode. Puchner suggests a concise model for this kind of dramatic philosophy in taking Kierkegaard's title *Either/Or* as philosophical approach: "a philosophy grounded in dialogue, a philosophy based on the simultaneous existence of at least two opinions, two people exchanging thoughts" (129). Whereas such an exchange of ideas may be labeled equivocal or simply sloppy in a philosophical treatise, it is in reality a better reflection of the way human thought forms and develops. If one concedes that truth is a matter of conversation between individuals or a matter of perspective, then dramatic literature may constitute a more effective mode of philosophy than the traditional treatise, or at least a more honest representation of human thought.

In addition to the dialogic structures of dramatic philosophy, there remain the other qualities of drama that may be utilized in the presentation of ideas. For, instance, Kierkegaard's *Repetition* makes use of bodies, human events, emotional states; it is full of plot. Indeed, most of Kierkegaard's philosophical work is supported by human drama. I understand dramatic literature as a style or collection literary devices. Drama may exist in novels, for instance. There is a great difference between theater, which is dependent on performance and its qualities as a medium, and drama. Here I am following Puchner in a distinction that I think should not be controversial. Puchner explains that "The dramatic is a category that insists on the primacy of character, direct speech, scene, and

action, to the exclusion of narration and interiority... the dramatic is realized not only in plays but also in certain novels" (125). The dramatization of ideas occurs when philosophical considerations prompt the characters to action, shape dialogic debate between characters, or determine the scenery as it relates to plot and symbolism. Each of these occurs throughout Aranha's works, and though two of the three are novels, all of them are fully organized as drama of ideas. Now I turn to a detailed analysis of these works in order to illustrate the ways in which they supplement and enrich Aranha's philosophy.

### ***Canaan***

Aranha's literary project was self-consciously dramatic from the beginning. After two and a half pages of narrative prose the second chapter of *Canaan* slips into a dramatic dialogue. The narrator disappears behind the two dramatic speakers of Milkau and Lentz. Though much of the book consists of conversations between the two Germans, in chapter two the page is formatted explicitly as dialogue. The conversation, throughout the book, is almost invariably philosophical. In particular, Milkau and Lentz debate the development and definition of culture, race, and nation.

For much of *Canaan*, the two German colonists embody the opposite drives of destruction and creation: "the two men were the exponents of two entirely different cultures. One offered to the world warlike exploits, butcheries, bloody sacrifices; the other, a simple farmer, offered it fruits from the earth, flowers from his garden" (143). It

is important to note here that in Aranha's novel different races, i. e. the German and Brazilian (of mixed race), contain varied and even opposed tendencies which are represented in the character foils of Lentz and Milkau, Felicissimo and Joca. Later in the chapter when Lentz declares his pride in "Prussia's mighty past," Milkau reproaches his companion: "what you love best in that way is precisely what is most humiliating and shameful. You love its destructive spirit, the devil which agitated it, its overbearing soul, slavery, war, blood, everything that separates and destroys" (*Canaan* 145). Lentz's cultural chauvinism and praise of war are, I believe, dramatic representations of false appropriations of Nietzschean and post-Darwinian thought at the turn of the century.

Aranha's use of Nietzsche's theory is complex, and makes dramatic use of the different and often opposed interpretations which may be derived from Nietzsche's works. Consentino's analysis of Nietzschean ideas in Aranha's works is incomplete. He seems to favor two of Nietzsche's later works in tracing the philosopher's interest: "Nietzsche's works concerned with morality, especially *Beyond Good & Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals* are the most relevant to studying Aranha" (Consentino 251). My analysis highlights an entirely different set of Nietzsche's works, all of which come earlier in his career. Furthermore, Consentino misses the dialectic of Nietzschean thought found ranging across both characters. Instead, Consentino asserts that Lentz represents Nietzschean ideas which are countered by the criticisms which come from Milkau who represents the perspective of Aranha. This is also the position Bosi takes in analyzing *Canaan*: "Lentz's words sound like Nietzschean echoes" (*O Pre-Modernismo*

106). This is not quite correct. Both critics miss the multiple Nietzschean resonances in Milkau's character. *Canaan* is a kind of laboratory or stage which allows various interpretations of Nietzsche's philosophies to engage with each other.

Lentz embodies a misguided understanding of the superman. Consentino's article suggests that Aranha represents Nietzschean ideas as he interprets them and believes them to be largely flawed. This does not accurately describe Aranha's use of Nietzschean philosophy. Lentz stands as a dangerous misinterpretation of the Nietzschean doctrine of the will to power and a nationalistic corruption of Nietzschean ideas. Due to the variety of Nietzschean influence in Aranha's writing, it seems more plausible that Lentz is meant to embody an erroneous interpretation of Nietzsche's ideas rather than what Aranha truly took to be Nietzsche's intent. Lentz-style Nietzscheism, for Aranha, indicates a false path of Nietzschean interpretation. This is the kind of thought that, like Lentz's, exalts war and destruction—prophetic of the misappropriation of Nietzsche's writings by the Nazis.

Milkau's beliefs, too, embody Nietzschean philosophy, but in its more subtle and fruitful interpretations. Lentz exposites a crude, evolutionary doctrine of the will to power, whereas Milkau represents himself as a noble and fecund Zarathustra that overflows and loves humanity. Additionally, Milkau does live a life of harmonious aesthetic contemplation for much of the novel, in effect following the battle cry of aestheticism. Milkau embodies the two Nietzschean philosophies that Aranha takes

seriously and wants to explore as existential possibilities; Lentz personifies the infernal, destructive interpretation of Nietzsche that Aranha wants to discourage.

In Paes's book on *Canaan*, he notes the moments where Milkau himself becomes an allusion to Zarathustra (Paes 39). However, the most pronounced philosophical trait of Milkau's is the persistent devotion to aesthetic contemplation that he maintains for the first half of the book. Aranha's adaptation of the aesthetic ideal explored in *The Birth of Tragedy* is the most extensively dramatized philosophical idea throughout his work. However, Milkau's aesthetic bliss is undermined over the course of the book. Referring to Milkau, Paes points to a "dialogic split" within his character that shapes his development.

Already in *Canaan*, there is the recognition that the subject, the ego, and consciousness—which for Aranha are coextensive—dissolve in the aesthetic experience. Paes illustrates the ambivalent characterization of aesthetic contemplation, already present in *Canaã*: "The mind loses the rational faculty and is paralyzed in adoration" (41). Paes's allusion to the paralysis of adoration effectively recreates the language of ambivalence used frequently by Aranha. Aranha's writings turn on this conflict between the ideal and action: the dubious fact of being lost in paradise. The ambivalence towards the aesthetic ideal grows to a climax at the end of the novel. The subversion of Milkau's existential aestheticism saves *Canaan* from being, as Bosi calls it, a "thesis novel" (105). Milkau's last words in the novel declare his incertitude and the book closes without any final theory of life.

The integration of philosophical ideas extends beyond dialogue and into the plot of the novel. Milkau is brought into the conflicts of civilization—by pity—as if awoken from a dream. Events force his critical reflection on the aesthetic ideal. Milkau’s nobility and then his suffering, both defining qualities of different modes of Nietzschean heroism, negate his attainment of aesthetic perfection: “even then the torture of pity, the continual presence of the misfortune of others, seemed a blot on his radiant vision” (*Canaan* 144). The action in *Canaā* supports the dialectic that the novel embodies. In *Canaan*, brutal realities of nature and the protagonist’s recognition of human suffering demolish ideals, including the aesthetic ideal which guides Milkau for most of the novel.

At the end of the book, Milkau encounters the precipice of nihilism. The final climb into the wilderness and mountains is a philosophical allegory. As Milkau and Mary journey into “unending darkness,” the difficulty of their path allegorizes the trials of the hero: “The road was always at the edge of the precipices, and to the fugitives came, like an infernal hubbub away down in the bottom of the frightful valley, the roar of the Santa Maria” (188). They continue to ascend toward the mountaintop when Milkau suddenly sinks into despair. He experiences the *fall* of man, the exile from Eden: “his stiff tired body seemed to crumble down; and he fell and rolled towards the abyss and towards death.” After Mary saves him, Milkau mutters that “There is nothing left... nothing left... Only, only... death” (189). The repetition of the word nothing announces nihilism—identified by Nietzsche as the greatest and most urgent challenge of philosophy. The two plod on and Milkau begins to look for the land of Canaan. As

Milkau's desire for death flames up again, he grabs Mary and "advance[s] happy and infernal towards the abyss" (*Obra Completa* 224). The end of the novel illustrates how the same desire that seeks aesthetic perfection may turn to the abyss of death for completion; it intimates a sinister relationship between nihilism and aestheticism.

As in all of Aranha's works the abyss is water—here the Santa Maria River which Milkau attempts to leap to. In Aranha's fiction water, like the Brazilian wilderness, is the object of aesthetic marvel and at the same time an abyss which devours. It mixes desire and death. The novel ends with Milkau's (apparently voicing Aranha) admission that he cannot determine the metaphysical truth of existence or of the eternal recurrence. Nietzsche's different philosophic conceptions are presented throughout *Canaan*, but without reaching final judgment—there is no end, no Canaan to rest in. The final note of inconclusiveness is emblematic of Aranha's master project of the dramatization of ideas.

### ***Malazarte***

In *Malazarte* love and death live on in eternal tragicomedy. Eduardo survives, but his story is marked by death. He lives on in the civilized world but fails to achieve the union of aesthetic perfection. Tragicomedy, according to John Fletcher and James McFarlane, is "the Modernist mode *par excellence*" ("Modernist Drama: Origins and Patterns" 506). And it is this mode that allows Aranha to stage the ambivalent existential drama of aesthetic experience. Aranha's conception of the drama of human life echoes

that found in the long, opening aphorism from *The Gay Science*, “The Teachers of the Purpose of Existence.” Discussing the regeneration of the teachers of morality, Nietzsche writes, “*in the long run* every one of these great teachers of a purpose was vanquished by laughter, reason, and nature: the short tragedy always gave way again and returned into the eternal comedy of existence” (75). This is the wisdom that Malazarte tries to impart to Eduardo, yet Eduardo ultimately fails to leave the seriousness of the civilized world.

There is a marked sense of fatality in Aranha’s writings. This is particularly evident in *Malazarte* when Eduardo laments that it is “the cause of unspeakable agony. To see the fatality of all things, to move within this detestable world from which I cannot liberate myself” (*Obra Completa* 514). Ultimately, Eduardo resigns himself to the fact that he must live in isolation, alienated in the civilized world of laws, family, and individual death. The marriage occurs between Dionísia and Malazarte, and Eduardo, the thoughtful protagonist is left alone on the shore.

Malazarte is called the destroyer and arrives with a vulture chained to his foot. He is the personification of death but also eternal regeneration. In an early scene, Malazarte leaves and returns. When he returns, he says enigmatically, “I turned with things and here I am” (502)<sup>11</sup>. Joseph L. Henderson’s essay “Ancient Myths and Modern Man,” describes the trickster archetype of the shaman. Malazarte is of this type and

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<sup>11</sup> These words are reminiscent of Dionysus’s first words in Euripides’s *The Bacchae*. This work also shares the theme of the Bacchic dance found in *The Marvelous Journey* and the brutal scenes of nature in *Canaan*.

carries the vulture as symbol. Malazarte is bad luck for others, never for himself. He is able to use nature to manipulate ingenuous men and women. He is a thief of lovers and money, eternally escaping. Henderson argues that the bird's status as part of nature and keeper of the distant skies makes the bird "the most fitting symbol of transcendence" (Henderson 147). Malazarte's shiftiness, his being-transformation, gives him a kind of divine status; just as he claims that his vulture has divine powers. Hermes carried a winged-staff and travelled with bird-like movement.

Malazarte is himself a force of nature; he enters "like a forest myth" (499). Like both myth and nature, Malazarte eternally returns in transformation, "always walking, always changing" (502). According to Eudinyr Fraga, the central idea around which *Malazarte* turns is that there is no death, only birth through transformation. Fraga also highlights the fact that desire and death are united in Dionísia (*Symbolism in Brazilian Theater* 83). Indeed, both Malazarte and Dionísia embody creation and destruction—the eternal regeneration that lives through death. Malazarte declares: "What do I care of death? To me, life and death are the same" (506). Militina sees the devil in Malazarte, but Eduardo responds that "Malazarte is splendid life, a marvelous expression of Nature's infinite transformations" (507). Malazarte represents the wild Romantic nature whose embrace leads to marvelous aesthetic experience.

Act I of *Malazarte* ends with the image of the mae-d'agua luring Almira to her death, swallowed into a well. Almira's enchanted desire to see the marvelous mother drowns her. Prior to this, we learn that Eduardo has lost the "vision" of the mae-d'agua

that he had in childhood. Almira declares her belief and is able to become “possessed by an enchanting magic” (510). Consequently she is the one devoured in the well. The difference between Eduardo and Almira suggests the idea that aesthetic absorption requires innocence. There is a strong affinity between the complementarity in Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and the dialectical views dramatized in Aranha’s fiction. Aranha’s characters are caught between innocence and experience—the aesthetic dream and the call of human causes. As an adult, Eduardo is enraptured by the aesthetic experience of nature and love, yet ultimately barred this world by the common demands of experience: family and money.

The scene in which Almira is entranced by the mae-d’agua recreates the myth of Narcissus. Almira, looking for the mother in the water exclaims, “How deep is the well! The water below is pure as a mirror” (510). The Frankfurt School critic Herbert Marcuse sees in the myth of Narcissus an example of Eros liberated from repression, committed to “the redemption of pleasure, the halt of time, the absorption of death; silence, sleep, night, paradise” (*Eros and Civilization* 164). The constellation that Marcuse presents here elucidates the appropriation of the figure of Narcissus by Milton, the Symbolists, and Aranha<sup>12</sup>.

Marcuse cites Freud’s hypothesis of the primary ego stage before differentiation and detachment: “originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a

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<sup>12</sup> Marcuse’s chapter “The Images of Orpheus and Narcissus,” treats the use of the image of Narcissus in Rilke, Gide, Valéry, among others.

much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it” (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 15). What Freud calls the “oceanic feeling,” corresponds rather well to Aranha’s aesthetic longing. Indeed both Freud and Aranha, like the Romantics, choose the ocean as symbol of transcendental unity. The image of Narcissus is always found on the water. Aranha’s mae-d’agua is the all-encompassing myth which unites the aesthetic experience, desire, pleasure, and death. She is a siren, but further, she is a mother—the specter returned from the origin of life when all was unity and gratified desire.

The figure of Narcissus is linked to the mother in Freud’s oedipal scheme. The law of the father is imposed through the threat of castration, and this law is the reality principle itself. Citing Hans W. Loewald, Marcuse explains that “The development of the ego is development ‘away from primary narcissism’; at this early stage reality ‘is not outside, but is contained in the pre-ego of primary narcissism’” (229). The Narcissistic stage is the unalienated ego—the pre-oedipal state of unity. It is equivalent to Aranha’s state of aesthetic perfection and is the original location of his Garden. Milton embodies the myth through Eve, whose status as the mother of humanity makes her a choice consistent with psychoanalytic theory. Similarly, Aranha’s figures of oceanic bliss are feminine—the mae-d’agua and Dionísia. The period of primary narcissism precedes the father’s separation of the child from the mother. It is a stage of motherly-bliss. Marcuse affirms that “This reality is first (and last?) experienced in the child’s libidinal relation to

the mother” (229). The parenthetical question is Aranha’s too. If aesthetic perfection is his philosophical ideal, his fiction interrogates its possibility and outcome.

In the pre-oedipal stage, the ego is undifferentiated from the mother and experiences polymorphous sensuousness. The repression which leads to genital-focused sexuality is coextensive with the repression which differentiates the ego from the external world and allows it to protect itself from the external environment. This dual repression marks the entrance into civilization. Madelon Sprengnether’s *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* traces the place of the mother in Freud’s theory while evidencing his difficulties or hesitations in theorizing the feminine. In her work she notes the centrality of the oedipal separation: “Freud maintains that civilization itself depends on the male subject’s detachment from and transcendence of the mother” (3). Productivity and social achievement, considered masculine, depend on the renunciation of the sensory-aesthetic pleasure of the pre-oedipal mother stage. Here we see that productivity is opposed to the aesthetic—the father’s law of social action to the marvelous mother. In *Malazarte*, the creditor and later the lawyer impose civilization’s demands upon Eduardo, negating any possibility of his marvelous aesthetic absorption.

Marvelous is an essential term for analyzing Aranha’s writings. Its dual-valence, as that which offers fulfilling pleasure but also negates social action, encompasses the dialectic which runs throughout Aranha’s work. The pre-oedipal experience—the stage of the marvelous mother—is one of undifferentiated aesthetic perfection. Through aesthetic experience, the adult may attempt to recuperate this perfect existential unity.

However, such efforts undertaken by Aranha's protagonists are haunted by the specter of death. If the marvelous mother offers the promise of eternal bliss it also harbors eternal death. As discussed above, the alienation of the ego from the external world is the basis of its own existence as well as the world's. Reunion with the marvelous simultaneously annihilates both the individual ego and the external world.

In Sprengnether's analysis of the "spectral mother," she points to the etymological double valence of the word spectral which invokes both spectacle and specter. These two connotations are the two sides of Aranha's marvelous. Spectacular and spectral are the divine and fallen sides of the aesthetic life. In chapter fourteen of *The Marvelous Journey*, Teresa finds herself in a ghost world when her dream of love is momentarily disrupted by jealousy. She returns home, and there finds everything she had renounced turned unreal: "mundane life, the hills, the bay, the palm trees, husband, daughter, the servant. All so far, all spectral. Teresa couldn't tell if she was her real self within a world of ghosts, or a phantom caught in the real world" (*Obra Completa* 386). Existential perfection treats the world as spectacle, yet this attitude evacuates the reality of the world, turning it into phantasmagoria. So if the spectral world is world as spectacle and specter, aesthetic contemplation becomes a kind of death of the worldly.

Just as psychoanalysis links the spectral mother with incest and refusal of social action—the death of reproduction and productivity respectively—Aranha's characters that seek to reintegrate themselves into an aesthetic unity become enveloped by the spectral mother. Thus, womb-like, the marvelous constitutes a state of envelopment,

opposed to the social and productive ego-development associated with the father. Indeed from the perspective of the father, the womb is a tomb, the death of the productivity on which rests civilization. In Aranha's fiction, the affiliation of the marvelous to the womb extends further in that the death of the ego by way of marvelous envelopment is symbolized by water. It is a death-by-water, as are both of the real deaths in *Malazarte*. The mae-d'agua is found in the water and lures its spectator to drowning.

Water is the site of aesthetic contemplation and death in Aranha's fiction. The sea, a kind of primordial womb which birthed all life, is the central focus of aesthetic contemplation for Teresa too. As if drowning, she and Felipe attempt to submerge their subjectivities in love. Eduardo in *Malazarte* remains on the shore resisting the sea and remaining in civilization. In *Canaan* water becomes the sweet river of oblivion for Milkau.

### ***The Marvelous Journey***

*The Marvelous Journey* contains perhaps the strongest critique of the very idea of aesthetic perfection. Its possibility and value are questioned throughout Aranha's last novel. Aesthetic perfection requires unconditional devotion which inevitably must either succumb to or negate the economic, political, and familial facts of human reality. Perfection is tyrannical and resistant to the factual and historical concerns of the sublunary. Marcuse's theory in "The Affirmative Character of Culture" raises this problem of

possibility in asserting that “the spiritualization of sensuality demands of the latter what it cannot achieve: withdrawal from change and fluctuation and absorption into the unity and indivisibility of the person” (112). Thus, each protagonist is either bound to the horizon of mundane concern or ineluctably drawn into it as in the case of Milkau’s encounter with Mary.

The events of *The Marvelous Journey* suggest an ethical critique of aestheticism on the grounds that it is a form of navel-gazing. Eros is bound in the service of aesthetic gratification and the lover divests herself of external concern. In *The Marvelous Journey*, the lovers live exclusively for the aesthetic, which, deprived of sensory contact with the desired object, focuses on the delights of the imagination, or mind’s eye: “[Teresa] walked rapidly toward the garden. There she threw herself down into a chair and without speaking, without crying, closed her eyes, in order to, without restriction, see Felipe” (407). This image of Teresa closing her eyes, blocking out the world, reveals the fundamental danger of isolation which accompanies love in all of Aranha’s fiction.

Nietzsche’s thought contains this same view of love: “to the lover himself the whole rest of the world appears indifferent” (*The Gay Science* 89). Teresa and Felipe embark on a course towards negligent isolation. The marvelous journey is among other things, a voyage of abandon and irresponsibility. Vision encloses in a circle which is filled with aesthetic love. Thus, Felipe is able to ignore—to forget—politics and Teresa conceives of leaving her three year old daughter. Aranha’s two lovers are, as Nietzsche says, “prepared to make any sacrifice” (89). And it is this exclusivity of the love

relationship that constitutes the central problem generating the action in *The Marvelous Journey*.

Prior to this last work, the problem of love's exclusivity is anticipated in the opening scene of *Malazarte*. Eduardo's mother, whose character name is simply "A Mæ," reads an old love letter from her late husband: "I see you in everything, but when I search, you are not in my strange surroundings... I make this journey in such anguish over your memory that I often forget we have a child" (496). This seemingly inconsequential "relic" from the past in *Malazarte* recapitulates the structure of *The Marvelous Journey* published eighteen years later. In both cases the love union rejects everything external to it, including its child.

Love limits intrusion because it is imperious. At one point Felipe tells Teresa that love "demands absolute dominion, above all contingency" (471). Love in *The Marvelous Journey* anticipates the tenets of Sartre's existential phenomenology in *Being and Nothingness*. It operates through the oscillating annihilations of the subjectivity of the lover and the beloved. Aranha's novel aligns closely with Sartre's existentialist theory of love: "Teresa felt profound satisfaction at having snatched Felipe away from all other women and anything that wasn't herself. She devoured him with her caresses; she wanted to absorb him with her body" (394). The desire to trade subjectivity for objectivity is evidenced in Teresa's letter to Felipe: "How happy I am to belong to you, to be your companion, your disciple, your thing" (415).

Later, when Felipe returns from his journey, Teresa refuses to tell Felipe of her recent suffering and “so that he wouldn’t insist [she] killed him with kisses” (470). Love in *Being and Nothingness* and *A Viagem Maravilhosa* consists of the annihilation of self of the lover or beloved in order to create an unopposed union. Her desire to “kill” Felipe—negate his subjectivity—comes just moments after she delivers herself to him: “Take me, subdue me, you are all-powerful... my God, my lord, my lover” (469). Love is marvelous, but it is also the desire to unify subject and object, to be *causa sui*, to be God. The desire for this transcendence will implement any means, even suicide, in order to attain satisfaction.

A desire for death, redolent of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, manifests itself in desperate moments of realization of Aranha’s protagonists. Teresa and Milkau enact especially poignant instances of desire’s turn to death. Indeed, in *Canaan*, *Malazarte*, and *The Marvelous Journey* the existential search for aesthetic unity leads the characters to their own death. Teresa and Milkau acknowledge their own desire for death but are restrained by their partners; Almira is devoured by the image of the mae-d’agua. So it is death, continues Marcuse, that “appears not as the cessation of existence in nothingness, but rather as the only possible consummation of love and thus as its deepest significance” (“The Affirmative Character” 111).

Teresa arrives at this realization and desperately tells Felipe “My love, my love, we need to die. Let us end all this torture and rest forever united and eternal... The world is miserable and not paradise” (477). Her desire leads her to death, a love suicide with

Filipe. Felipe, whose recent journey reestablished his connection to the world, rejects her plan. Dissuaded from physical death by Filipe, Teresa-in-love longs for self-annihilation: “Teresa swore to obey. She delighted in obedience. She was a slave to passion” (477). In *The Marvelous Journey*, Eros and Thanatos, the life drive and the death drive, weave themselves together.

In Aranha’s last novel, “perfection” is a lie—ignorant bliss. It is fundamentally at odds with any concerns of the empirical world. Aranha’s aesthetic transfiguration is “affirmative” in Marcuse’s language. Developing an idea already extant in Marx’s early writings, Marcuse writes that “[Culture] exalts the individual without freeing him from his factual debasement” (103). It is this criticism which agitates much of the differentiation between the modernists and the avant-garde. The affirmative quality of art makes of it a guarantor of ideology. This idea is the basis for Marx’s condemnation of religion. Marx’s critique contends that the reassurance gained by religious faith engenders complacency. In an 1843 essay Marx writes that “The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of men is a demand for their *real* happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a *call to abandon a condition which requires illusions*” (*The Marx and Engles Reader* 54).

This fact is increasingly given dramatic representation as the novel progresses. In the first paragraph of the final chapter, as Felipe sits on the train returning to Rio, the reader is told that Felipe “failed to remember that this marvelous river was formerly known as the river of slavery. For him, it was the river of enchantment” (468). Marx is

alluded to in the previous chapter, and this problem is central to the history of Marxist aesthetics. Marxist theory and references to the thinker himself appear conspicuously for the first time in *The Marvelous Journey*. In chapter twelve Teresa and Felipe descend towards the sea from an opulent church by way of a street filled with the abject poor. Teresa holds Felipe's hand and closes her eyes. When they reach the water, they stop and gaze "back upon the hill, where the church shone, transfiguring in its splendor of light, the misery" (352). Transfiguration is the gift and curse of the aesthetic.

In the opening description of Teresa, in which we receive the representation of her interior monologue, a focus on imprisonment and the desire for liberation and expansion dominate her understanding of self. Like Milkau, who runs on and on towards a non-existent Canaan, Teresa longs for expansion and the escape of contingency—for new lands and spaces. Transcendence of the prison of contingency becomes the ultimate task for Milkau, Eduardo, and Teresa. Aesthetic experience arises as a liberated space. The delights of the imagination are not limited in the way that physical reality is dependent on the constraints of time and space. Yet aesthetic transcendence is fraught with problems. Aranha's fictional philosophizing, like much of Plato's, ends in a kind of aporia: one may value the transcendent liberation which offers grounds for harmonious union, yet one must also recognize it as dangerous illusion.

## **Decadence and Rejuvenation of Culture**

In *The Aesthetic of Life* Aranha posits that cultural progression consists of a society's movement towards the realization of the oneness of existence. In this way, the life-cycle of entire cultures is a kind of arc: beginning in unconscious absorption in the world, separated from this absorption by fear and knowledge, finally tasked with overcoming this separation through the mind's efforts at reunion with the unconscious, undivided Whole. Though not self-consciously, Aranha's theory corresponds to a psychoanalytic conception of individual human life. Aranha holds a single criterion for evaluating civilization: "Culture, which is the subjugation of the animality of the human, is elevated to the degree that humans are able to understand the infinity unity of the Whole" (635). Yet, Aranha declares that history, like nature, is not teleological (637). Comprehension of the unity of existence is an ideal and not a historical necessity. There is no recuperation of the ideas of past human societies. Aranha admits that there is no return to the naïve, to the Greeks or ancient Hindus (637).

Aranha's theory of culture in *The Aesthetic of Life* appears to be grounded in a nationalism which is itself the target of criticism in the fiction. Particularly in the chapter entitled "The Nation," Aranha's ideas seem very nationalistic. They are also rather unsophisticated as his ideal of the Brazilian nation is the Portuguese (Latin) spirit transplanted into the ardent and vibrant Brazilian land. He is intentionally Eurocentric in this chapter and expresses his desire for a Europeanized Brazil. The fiction, however, affirms a different perspective: beginning with *Canaã*, the earliest work from 1902,

Aranha consistently valorizes cultural syncretism as a solution to European decadence. The fictional works all present syncretic and folkloric events—dance, myth-making, religious ritual. Additionally, there is a discursive critique of nationalism given by Milkau, the protagonist of Canaã.

In *The Aesthetic of Life*, Aranha concludes from the willingness of the multitudes to fight for national interests that the national sentiment is an inalienable part of the modern individual. In so doing, of course, he ignores mass manipulation and the apparatuses of nation building in favor of a conception of the nation as a profound expression of collective past premised on biological connections. Aranha's idealization of Brazil takes shape as a kind of tropical Portugal. A nation of Portuguese spirit and language rejuvenated by the lively exuberance of the Brazilian continent: "It Brazil's privilege to consist of two forces: that which comes from the Portuguese race and that which comes from the ardent physical environment—the transplant of the latin soul in the Brazilian wilderness" (643). Additionally, in all of Aranha's works, fictional and theoretical, there are representations of African races as weak, in danger of succumbing to fear and superstition. However, in the fictional works, mixed-race Brazilians may become the source of cultural rejuvenation precisely because the syncretism of cultural mixture generates the new.

The disquieting racial theory is far less present in the fiction, and it is here that Bosi's statement about the division between the theoretical and fictional works seems most apt. The link between biology and nation implicit in *The Aesthetic of Life* does not

reflect the complexities in the works of fiction. Certainly in *Canaan* nationalism is categorically rejected by Milkau, and Lentz's Aryan chauvinism is a clear anti-model. Lentz becomes the translation of the Satan-Eve-Narcissus complex into an allegory of decadence. Like Satan and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, Lentz is enclosed in himself. Lentz stagnates, trapped in his own isolation: "he became tired of the unbearable monotony of seeing himself everywhere... he wanted to go back to chaos, to destroy everything, to create new beings who would not be his own image" (*Canaan* 181). Finally, Lentz seeks solace in the Doce River and reenacts the myth of Narcissus like Eve in *Paradise Lost* and Almira in *Malazarte*. In the figure of Lentz (Aryan/white) racial purity and decadence are causally related. He is the bellicose superman of war and domination, which, like the serpent, recoils back onto itself in self-destruction or at least stagnancy.

The solution to decadence, voiced by Milkau, is transculturation. Cultural progression requires, above all else, the introduction of foreign elements. Xenophobia is the cause of decadence. In one of his final conversations with Lentz, Milkau declares:

There are no races capable or incapable of civilization; history is nothing but a record of the fusion of races. Only stationary races, that is to say, races that do not become fused with others, be they white or black, always remain in a state of savagery. (175)

Through his literary characters Aranha makes a significant claim for the aesthetic and cultural theory of *fin-de-siècle* and modernist writers: the decadence of Western culture

arises from its insular and superannuated ideas. The syncretic development of culture in the Americas arises as a creative space for the enriching renewal of culture and art.

In the interior monologue which opens *The Marvelous Journey*, Teresa desires wild, luxurious nature: “I will transform this into something savage, let everything return to the primitive” (229). Her use of the words savage and primitive is, of course, suggestive. The search for rejuvenation through the primitive, particularly in artistic form, is common in modernist aesthetics, and stems directly from philosophies of decadence. James Clifford’s “On Ethnographic Surrealism” refers to this tendency, and, though his article treats the interwar period (emphasizing the post-war mentality), this phenomenon may be linked to a philosophical trend which extends back throughout the modern period. Clifford writes that “The ‘primitive’ societies of the planet were increasingly available as aesthetic, cosmological, and scientific resources” (542). Clifford’s object of inquiry is the artistic implementation of “play of the familiar and the strange.” Such technique does constitute the broad structure of *Malazarte*, which is a blend of traditional realist theater with the strange and the mythic. In a similar way Aranha’s two novels mix traditional narrative conflicts with scenes of indigenous and syncretic ritual, dance, and myth.

Milkau witnesses the creation of a new, local myth in *Canaan*. The horrifying battle scene between the men, dogs, and vultures over the decomposing corpse illustrates nature’s self-consumption. In spite of the scene’s horror, the reader learns that from this terrible natural event “a new myth was born at Doce river” (152). Myth-making is an

endless, creative response to life. There is no humanity without myth and the emphasis on new myths suggests that the progress of human societies is dependent on the ability of these societies to overcome their fears by the creation of myths.

In Chapter three of *Canaan*, Joca tells his folkloric myth of the *mãe-d'água* and *currupira*. As the Germans and Brazilians tell stories, it becomes evident that there is a correspondence between the German Lorelei myth and the *mãe-d'água* from Maranhão in the Brazilian northeast. The siren seems to be a universal archetype, as Brazilian as it is German, or Greek. Both groups are fascinated with the other's myths. The exposure to new forms offers a deeper understanding of their own. After Joca's tale, Milkau meditates on the genesis of all myths in the human mind and dreams of a universal mixed race that knows no slavery.

Andreza, a minor character in *The Marvelous Journey*, relates a myth of a lizard, which again illustrates the equivalency between African and European myth. Affirming the power of the *mandiguero*, Andreza relates a myth from Maranhão:

Do you all know the marandová? The green lizard of the leaves? Well I saw the marandová impregnate a virgin woman with its eyes after walking in her urine on the ground. (436)

Andreza is immediately ridiculed by Ritinha, her ward, but the basic structure of the myth is an incorporeal insemination, like the Christian annunciation. Ritinha fails to realize the parallel, "Quit being a fool" she replies, yet both describe a miraculous genesis. They are

both tales of miracle. Aranha makes a clear effort to demonstrate the correspondences between myths. There is a perennial human faculty of mythopoesis which must be harnessed in order to ensure cultural progression.

As explored above, Aranha frequently characterizes aesthetic experience as absorption. The Dionysian experience leads its revelers into a state of *enthusiasmos*—absorption into the body of the god. Malazarte is perhaps a transformation of Dionysus. However, the two episodes of dance in *The Marvelous Journey* provide the richest representations of Dionysian aesthetics in Aranha's body of work. In doing so he contributes to an important trend among both European and Brazilian modernists. Nietzsche describes the Dionysian experience as intoxication:

Either under the influence of the narcotic drink of which all original men and peoples sing in hymns, or in the approach of spring which forcefully and pleasurable courses through the whole of nature, those Dionysian impulses awaken, which in their heightened forms cause the subjective to dwindle to complete self-oblivion (*The Birth of Tragedy* 22).

In *The Marvelous Journey*, there are two scenes of Dionysian experience: the Macumba ritual involving Teresa and Radagásio's servant Balbina, and the Carnival celebration which closes the book.

The Macumba ceremony in *The Marvelous Journey* is certainly the most evocative example in Aranha's writing. Balbina's visit to the *pai-de-santo* (Macumba

priest) is suffused with aesthetic experience—it is a visit to an artistic space. The scene is an effective illustration of Aranha's idea that art, religion, love and philosophy are entwined and in some sense all aesthetic. The center-piece for the ceremony is a kind of frenzied, Maenad dance. Indeed, in this scene from chapter sixteen Aranha represents the Dionysian aesthetic experience, complete with *enthusiasmos*, collective dancing, alcohol, sexual license, and animal sacrifice. Though the setting is somewhat squalid, the treatment is very objective, and the Afro-Brazilian ceremony is fully Dionysian. The aesthetic experience of the Macumba ritual allows for the union which Aranha calls the "basis of perfection."

The ritual is a collective aesthetic experience. This fact gives it unique status in Aranha's literary world. In fact, the two scenes of Dionysian dance at the end of *The Marvelous Journey* may suggest a positive alternative to the isolationism of other aesthetic experience. Theorists of modernist aesthetics such as Nietzsche, Artaud, and Oswald de Andrade sought to reintroduce an element of communal experience into the theater. For Nietzsche, tragedy was initially a religious ritual. De Andrade criticized the bourgeois realist theater and lauded Nietzsche's attempt to reinstitute Dionysian theater and recuperate the "religious character of theater, as collective festival, festival of the masses, of the nation" (*Ponta de lança* 90). Aranha represents the Macumba ceremony as a fusion of religion and art and therefore a powerful source of aesthetic union: "they danced the samba in religious rhythm, in reverence to the priest" (*Obra Completa* 425). The pai-de-santo, or priest, announces and conducts the dance. The aesthetic force of the

dance, its rhythm, serves the spiritual purpose of merging the individual personalities into the communal divine spirit.

The final scene of *The Marvelous Journey* ends with a dance of free and creative energy. The music and dance of Carnival overtakes the rational and money-driven Radagásio. Carnival pulls and drags Radagásio out of his automobilistic isolation into the dance. The aesthetic, allied in music, dance, and magic “envelops” Radagásio—like the creeping of the vine, or the nest, or the womb. The Dionysian recurs here as the individuals merge into a unity of rhythm and sound. The creative power of nature coursing through the crowd’s aesthetic celebration forcibly dissolves Radagásio’s resistance: “The excited Bahian women, happy, push Radagásio into the multitude. The frenzied men collide with him and each other. Maxixe, Macumba, candomblé. It was the samba of Radagásio. Fim” (489).

## Conclusion

All of the writings of Graça Aranha interrogate the possibilities, triumphs and failures of aesthetic experience. The different modes of aesthetic experience, theorized in *The Aesthetic of Life* and *The Modern Spirit*, and dramatized in the three creative works, are all conceived as human efforts to attain a sense of unity that the human individual loses because of enlightenment and the demands of civilization. If his philosophy seems quixotic, his fiction offers a thoughtful and often critical commentary on his own theories

of the aesthetic ideal. Because of this interplay between texts, Aranha's body of work is quite complex, and critical work which eschews a comparative approach tends to be reductive. His life and thought was stretched between Maranhão and Paris, deeply influenced by the folklore of his native state as well as the continental theory of his age. As a result, Aranha was able to create literature which established a connection between peripheral modernism and European modernism. He stands as a notable bridge between two continents, and his work, in particular the fiction, offers an intriguing blend of modern aesthetic theory, drama and folkloric myth. Future work, particularly on Aranha's final work *The Marvelous Journey* and its suggestion of the parallel between Brazilian dance and ritual and Dionysian collective aesthetic experience, will serve to reclaim Aranha's literary innovations and place in global modernism.

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