Anarchetypes

Reevaluation of marginal literary forms and genres (ANTIP)

The state of the art

The concept of archetypes has nourished, throughout the evolution of European culture, a series of metaphysical and psychological systems and hermeneutics, from Plato and Philo of Alexandria to C. G. Jung and Gilbert Durand. It has worked as a powerful philosophical and heuristic instrument designed to explain the invariants, the constants, the *universalia* that inform natural, human and cultural objects. The concept starts from the basic assumption that, behind any series of recurrent phenomena, there lies an original pattern that gives coherence and unity to all variations. In a diachronic overview of the European history of ideas, I have argued that archetypes have received three main definitions, depending on the medium of their manifestation: ontological or metaphysical (archetypes as objective essences and models); psychological or anthropological (archetypes as *apriori* schemes of the human psyche); cultural (archetypes as *topoi* or *loci* of cultural, literary, arts, musical, media creations). (Braga, 2007). In literature and the arts, the archetypal conception has nourished the concepts of structural center and organic composition, which have set up the most important aesthetics and poetics of European culture, from Aristotle and Horace to Northrop Frye and Roman Ingarden. These structural principles have been used as criteria for value judgments and for constituting the literary canons, condemning to marginality a series of literary works and genres which do not endorse the idea of structure.

However, at present, after the "postmodern turn", the term "archetype" is regarded with reservation and has rather idiosyncratic acceptations, as it is largely obsolete and outdated. We live in a world where a nominalist skepticism makes us distrust the concept of original, immutable models, located in a religious or metaphysical *illud tempus*, with a hard ontological presence. On the other hand, the concept of archetype has also been compromised in a psychological sense; contemporary philosophers and psychologists tend to eschew the Neokantian concept of *apriori* principles and the Jungian theory of archetypes, conceived as matrices of a purported collective unconscious. Even though neurosciences and new evolutionism pose the existence of innate structure, called human primitives and schema-images, which could carry further on the function of cultural invariants (Braga, 2019: 32-52), archetypal approaches to culture and literature such those of Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Northrop Frye, Gaston Bachelard or Gilbert Durand seem somewhat old-fashioned and irrelevant.

Moreover, besides this skeptical deconstructive postmodern paradigm, it appears that the contemporary evolution of our world asks for new instruments for comprehending human reality. The all-encompassing phenomenon of globalization and the constitution of a planetary civilization convey not only a sense of technological enthusiasm and evolutionary hope, but also ethical concerns about dehumanization and apocalyptic fears of extinction. In order to avoid global "massification" and the loss of collective and individual biodiversity, cultural theories have developed concepts such as multi- and interculturalism, fluid societies, cosmodernism, planetarity, etc., which describe the world as a "rhizome" network of specific cultures collaborating on a global scale. This new attitude seems to be reflected also by a "spatial turn", a change of paradigm in which "temporal studies", focused on the ideas of evolution and progress, tend to be replaced by "spatial humanities", which bring about, instead of a linear teleological conception, a more "democratic" worldview which poses cultures as cells of a non-hierarchical and rather fractal total web.

In cultural and literary studies, this "planetary turn" has engendered concepts such as world literature (David Damrosch), literary geographies (Franco Moretti), geocriticism (Bertrand Westphal and J. Tally jr.), rhizome forms and "thousand plateaus" (Deleuze and Guattari), etc. My purpose is to submit the concept of archetype to such a deconstructive criticism, in order not to destroy and delete it from the history of ideas, but to simply limit it to a specific domain and to supplement it with a conceptual counterpart, able to describe the complementary domain of non-archetypal forms.

We start from the observation that, in literature, arts and cultural products, archetypal works and genres have an inbuilt structure, a *cogito*, a global signification that can be easily seized by the reader and summarized in an "abstract". An archetypal composition is a work in which a quantifiable scenario may be detected, a scenario that may also be identified in similar works, forming a sort of skeletal structure, a genetic imprint of the entire group of works. All the great myths, whether archaic or modern, may form an archetypal scenario, as it happens with Joseph's episode from *The Book of Genesis* in Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers*, or with the Homeric *Odyssey* in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It was not by chance that Northrop Frye saw the Bible as the "great code" of European literature (Frye, 1999). World literature may thematically be divided into large corpuses of texts whose familial gene derives from an archetypal pattern. For instance, Christopher Booker identifies the seven great "plots" of world epics (Booker, 2004). Similarly, starting from Mircea Eliade's syntheses of religious rites and initiations (Eliade, 1991, 1995), Léon Cellier (Cellier, 1977), Simone Vierne (Vierne, 2000) and Isaac Sequeira (Sequeira, 1975) have defined the vast category of initiation novels. Other series of texts organized in accordance with certain themes may also be identified: the descent into the inferno (Culianiu, 1994; Brunel, 1974), the shamanic voyage of the soul (Culianu, 1997), the spiritual quest (Torrance, 1994), *regressus ad uterum,* etc. Such an undertaking may even generate a *Dictionary of Literary Myths*, as that coordinated by Pierre Brunel (Brunel, 1988).

Originality and innovation

I have done extensive research on the concept of archetype and on the methodologies based on it (archetypology, myth-criticism, psycho-criticism, etc.). In a book entitled *10 Studies in archetypology* (1999, 2007), I showed that, throughout the history of ideas, the concept of archetype has received three main acceptations: metaphysical (or ontological), psychological (or anthropological) and cultural. Each definition supported a religious, philosophical or cultural system of thought, which was used, at one time or another, for explaining the nature of the universe, of the human race or of its cultural products. Although we can no longer ascribe archetypes physical or psychological validity, we can however envisage them as epistemic constructs, with their internal conceptual structure and logical consistency. Cultural history appears as a succession of metaphysical and anthropological "narratives" that pertain to the spiritual heritage of our race. In another book, *Archétypologie postmoderne* (2019), I applied such a perspectival and relativistic approach of the concept of archetype to a series of major literary works, such as Sophocles's *Oedipus* and Euripides's *Bacchaes*, Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueno* and Umberto Eco's *L'isola del giorno prima*. However, this "postmodern" solution to the problem of archetypes, based on relativism, allows a still more radical approach: to question the concept of archetype in itself, not only in its metaphysical, psychological or cultural applications.

To the concepts of archetype and archetypal structures, I oppose a concept I have created, defined and coined in a book entitled *From Archetypes to Anarchetypes* (Braga, 2006): the anarchetype. As it can easily be seen, the term "anarchetype" is composed of three Greek words: the privative particle *a, an*, "a-, without, anti, against" + *arkhaios*, "old, originary, first" or *arkhê*, "beginning, origin" + *typos*, "type, model." Two by two, these Greek roots are already present in the concepts of "anarchy" (*an* + the verb *arkhein*, "to command, to lead") and "archetype" ("originary model, first type"). The anarchetype would be, depending on how we want to combine the three words, either an "anarchic model" or an "anti-archetype."

As its name suggests, the anarchetype is a concept that manifests itself anarchically in relation to the idea of a model or a center. The archetype and the anarchetype describe two types of imaginary and creative configurations and "behaviors." Archetypal structures are organized in accordance with a central model, which imparts meaning to all the components deriving from it or depending upon it; anarchetypal structures are structures in which the components are anarchically related, systematically avoiding the imitation of a model or integration within a unique and coherent sense. The opposition here is, of course, not that between the real and the virtual, since both the archetype and the anarchetype have the same reality; what distinguishes them is the fact that the former has a central organizing nucleus, being like a solar system configured around a star, whereas the latter is

diffuse and centerless, like galactic dust that has either not coagulated into a solar system yet or is the result of the explosion of a supernova. As these two antagonistic metaphors – the astral body and the galactic cloud – suggest, it is not compulsory for the archetype and the anarchetype to derive from one another (although both cases are possible); they may well coexist without there being a question of a succession relation between them.

By the concept of anarchetype, I question the *aesthetic of centeredness*, that is the idea that literary works can acquire aesthetic value only insofar as these texts are reducible to a *cogito*, *ratio*, synopsis, or *Gestalt*. My proposition is to divorce aesthetic value from the structural coherence of form. Severing the umbilical cord between the two allows, I submit, for a revaluing of underappreciated works and generic forms as well as for a "democratization" of genre theory through the rehabilitation of certain artistic forms, types of text and literary genres that have been long marginalized.

The anarchetype is, then, a morphological class that describes a certain way of building literary works; it is neither a historical category that defines a particular literary current or cultural paradigm nor a generic rubric that provides norms for this or that literary or artistic genre. All major cultural epochs and genres can include both archetypal and anarchetypal works, even though the number of such works varies depending on the paradigm holding sway at the time. Thus, cultural moments dominated by a single, unrivaled model of understanding the world have often yielded archetypical works that follow the ontological scenarios sanctioned by their mainstream religions or ideologies. On the other hand, the more convulsive and revolutionary intervals that have seen an overhaul of their *Weltanschauungen*, when explanatory narratives have multiplied and come to compete against one another, have given rise to disjointed and fragmented works, torn between convergent and centrifugal tendencies. Roughly put, such works' formal and thematic configurations are anarchetypal or, more broadly, anarchic.

Corin Braga

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