

Maria das Almas, by Rodrigo Estramanho de Almeida. A Tropical and Vicentian Antigone

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In memory of
José Vicente Bañuls Oller,
author of a remarkable oeuvre
on the Antigone myth and its reception



1 Introduction

A significant number of re-writings of the Antigone myth (over thirty) have been published in Brazil since Carlos Maul's *Antígona* appeared in 1916.¹ *Maria das Almas* (Mary of the Souls, 2014),² a free adaptation of Sophocles'

- 1 Carlos Nejar's 2018 play *Antígona. Poema dramático* (Antigone. Dramatic Poem) is the most recent re-reading of the Antigone myth. Before this latest re-creation, a significant number of original versions were brought to the stage in Brazil since the beginning of the twentieth century – namely, the above-mentioned *Antígona* (Antigone, 1916/1949), by Carlos Maul; the three versions of *Pedreira das Almas* (Quarry of the Souls, 1958, 1960 and 1970) and Jorge Andrade's *As Confrarias* (The *Fraternities*, 1969); *Antígona América* (Antigone America, 1962), by Carlos Henrique Escobar; *Romanceiro de Antígona: Poema Dramático* (Romance of Antigone: A Dramatic Poem, 1995), by H. Haydt de S. Mello; Pedro de Senna's *A tragédia de Ismene, Princesa de Tebas* (The Tragedy of Ismene, Princess of Thebes, 2006); *Antígona: Reduzida e Ampliada* (Antigone: Reduced and Enlarged, 2007), by Sueli Araújo; and *Antígona Recortada – Contos que Cantam Sobre Pousopássaros* (Antigone Cropped – Tales Singing on Pausebirds, 2012), by Cláudia Schapira. On the Antigone myth in Brazilian theatre, see above, pp. 43–75.
- 2 Maria da Almas is the name of a *Pombagira* in the Umbanda religion. This religion, born in Rio de Janeiro at the end of the 19th century, blends spiritism with Bantu elements. Bartol Sánchez (2009) 133–4 argues that Pombagira is a common deity in rituals of seduction and sex. It engages with women who have lived passionately, who have loved and fallen out of love, women who fill the imagination. Apart from Maria das Almas, there are, among others, Maria Padilha, Maria Mulambo, Maria Quitêria, Maria Lixeira (Garbage Maria), Maria

*Antigone*³ – whose title sets up a suggestive interplay with the title of Jorge Andrade’s famous play *Pedreira das Almas* (Quarry of the Souls)⁴ – is one of the most recent. It was Rodrigo Estramanho de Almeida’s first incursion into drama. The author was born in S. Paulo in 1982, where he studied Social Sciences (Sociology and Politics).⁵ This academic background inevitably informs his re-reading of the myth, and can be detected in the play’s undeniable, albeit subtle, political message. Resorting to characters, situations and dilemmas of a text from the fifth-century BC, Estramanho de Almeida, for whom “almost everything is politics” (10), takes us back, like Jorge Andrade, in *Pedreira das Almas* (Quarry of the Souls), to Brazil’s complex and traumatic colonial past. As he puts it in the play’s introductory note, he recounts a story and recreates a time in order to “talk about Brazil without actually speaking about it”, to “deal with the new colonized peoples without mentioning them” (9), and ultimately to denounce the “liberdade abafada” (stifled freedom, 56) of his and our own times.

The author innovatively combines the Greek myth of Antigone with an interesting reworking of the Portuguese myth of King Sebastian in the conception of this remote and imaginary universe and of its inhabitants. He transforms the well-known characters of Sophoclean tragedy into types of the fictitious kingdom of Teobá⁶ – ruled by Dom Creontino, a descendant of King Sebastian – and of a hypothetical civilization where African and Christian worship coexist in perfect religious syncretism, located in the tropics, in the 1500s, during the first colonial period. The historical frame of the tragedy and its spatial and temporal context are presented at the very beginning, in a narrative speech by the Prologue (13):

Mirongueira, Maria da Praia (Beach Maria), Maria Cigana (Gipsy Maria), Maria Túnica (Tunic Maria), Maria Rosa (Rose Maria), Maria Colodina, Maria Farrapos (Rags Maria), Maria Alagoana, Maria Bahiaza e Maria Navalha (Razor Maria).

- 3 For this re-creation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Almeida used Spanish and Brazilian translations, particularly Donaldo Schullers’s 1999 version. Cf. Cuccoro (2018) 202.
- 4 On this play, see above, pp. 90–112.
- 5 According to the book’s biographical note (85), when this re-reading of Sophocles’ *Antigone* was published Estramanho de Almeida was teaching at the Foundation School of Sociology and Politics of São Paulo (FESPSP) as well as a researcher at the Centre for Studies in Art, Media and Politics (NEAMP). By then, and aside from *Maria das Almas* and some articles and essays, he had published *Aprendendo sobre as diferenças* (Learning about Differences, 2005) and *A Realidade da Ficção* (The Reality of Fiction, 2013).
- 6 There is a hint of irony in the author’s choice of this fictitious name, an allusion to Jehovah and Jehovah’s witnesses, but also a possible connection to the Teleboans of the Amphitryon myth.

Diz-se que um rei expurgado do velho mundo, deixou família em terra próspera dos trópicos.

Era remota etapa da civilização cristã e rezava o mito de que seus familiares não podiam se estabelecer na Europa, sem que se despertasse a desconfiança da longa sucessão e o medo da desgraça que rondava a sua dinastia – já que o próprio rei havia desaparecido em batalha.

Esse rei que tinha a alcunha de “pai de nenhum filho” na verdade teve quatro rebentos: Francisco, Felinto, Ismênia e Maria. Estes, depois de longa estadia em terras africanas, foram destinados em grande esquadra para uma nova terra ao sul do Equador.

Nascia assim, em meio ao que se chamava de paraíso terrestre, o reino de Teobá.

It is said that a king, expunged from the old world, once lived in a prosperous tropical land, and there left offspring.

In those remote days of the Christian civilization, legend had it that his progeny could not go to Europe without raising fears of long succession disputes and of the misfortunes attached to his dynasty, given that the king himself had disappeared while in battle.

Although referred to as “childless father”, this king actually fathered four children – Francisco, Felinto, Ismênia and Maria – who, after a long stay in African lands, moved to a new land, south of the Equator, on a large fleet.

And thus, amongst what was known as the earthly paradise, the kingdom of Teobá was born.

According to the myth, King Sebastian disappeared in Northern Africa in a military expedition, leaving the throne without an heir and hence putting national sovereignty at risk; in the present case the Portuguese king – like Oedipus, king of Thebes – has four children, all of the “dinastia vil” (vile dynasty, 28) of Avis,⁷ which, like the House of the Labdacids, causes “desgraças mil” (a thousand miseries, 18) and “traz no seu sangue a guerra” (carries war in its blood, 38). Unable to return to Europe without raising suspicions of designs on the succession, they leave for the new world south of the Equator, where they found the kingdom of Teobá.

⁷ The House of Avis, or Joanian Dynasty, was Portugal's second reigning dynasty. It began with the reign of João I (1385) and ended in 1580, with the death of King Sebastian's successor, King Henrique – who also died without issue.

From the Greek myth into the renovated Portuguese myth, in this three-act play with a prologue and an epilogue the characters of *Antigone* are transformed into types of this new and hypothetical civilization (9) lodged in the midst of the earthly paradise (13). Antigone becomes Maria Avis das Almas, the heroine of this re-reading of the tragedy; her brothers Eteocles and Polynices become Felinto⁸ and Francisco, respectively; Creon is Dom Creontino, the king and descendant of King Sebastian, corresponding to Oedipus, in the hypotext; Haemon becomes Hermógenes,⁹ the king's son; Eurydice, Joana, the king's wife; Tiresias, João de Ifá, the kingdom's prophet. Ismene, sister to Antigone and the two siblings dead at each other's hands, receives the same name, Ismênia, as do the Guard, the Chorus/Coryphaeus and the Messenger. Finally, the Prologue and the Narrator, both of which are not mentioned in the play's cast.¹⁰

As we will see, Toni d'Agostinho's illustrations¹¹ engage in a dynamic and productive dialogue with the dramatic text, highlighting both this process of temporal and spatial transmutation and the depiction of characters as social types that distinguishes Gil Vicente's theatre.¹² Equally relevant, in this context, is the play's epigraph, a quotation of the first great Portuguese playwright:

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- 8 There is a possible connection between this unusual name and the Northern composer Felinto Lúcio Dantas (1898–1986). Besides waltzes, mazurkas and church music, Dantas composed “dobrados”, a word used in Brazil for a certain type of military march.
- 9 Hermógenes is an important character of *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (The Devil to Pay in the Backlands, 1956), a novel by João Guimarães Rosa (1908–1967), considered one of the best Brazilian writers of all times. In this novel, Hermógenes is the devil incarnate and is associated with Hermes.
- 10 These two characters do not speak in verse, but in prose. While the Prologue has one single speech at the opening of the play (39), the Narrator utters two short texts, in Act III (63) and in the Epilogue (79).
- 11 Toni d'Agostinho (1974–) is an artist and a sociologist from the School of Sociology and Politics of São Paulo. The book's biographical note refers (86) that he has held several exhibitions in Brazil and abroad and participated in several comic performances. He published *Edgar Poe para pequenos* (Edgar Poe for the young) and several works in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*. In 2009 he won the HQMIX award for the best book of caricatures with *50 razões para rir* (50 reasons to laugh).
- 12 Gil Vicente (1465–1536), the first great Portuguese playwright, has a vast and important body of dramatic work. According to Ferré (1996) 498, “contemporary criticism tends to divide his work into morality plays, farces (allegorical and non-allegorical) and allegorical and romantic comedies”. Ferré notes that Gil Vicente's characters embody the collective traits of a group, as types rather than individual heroes. This stereotyping is in line with the medieval preference for the general over the particular (cf. Teyssier (1982) 118–21). The *Auto da Barca do Inferno* (The Boat to Hell), quoted in the epigraph of *Maria das Almas* (Mary of the Souls) and one of Gil Vicente's most famous plays, is an example of this character stereotyping. For a more detailed study of his life and work, see Bernardes (2008) 15–84.

Vigiai-vos, pecadores,
 que, depois da sepultura,
 neste rio está a ventura
 de prazeres ou dolores!
 À barca, à barca, senhores,
 barca mui nobrecida,
 à barca, à barca da vida!

Pay heed, you sinners
 For, beyond death, at close of day
 In this river lies the way
 To pleasures or sorrows!
 To the ship, to the ship, my Lords,
 A most noble ship
 To the ship, the ship of life!

Taken from the last scene of *Auto da Barca do Inferno* (The Boat to Hell, scene XI, 842–8),¹³ this passage, in which the virtues of the four knights (as four are the children of King Sebastian) are being assessed by the Devil, serves as inspiration for the conception of the characters of *Maria das Almas*. Moreover, it provides links to the themes of death and redemption that underlie the play and prepares the reader/spectator for a better understanding of the dramatic text's rhythmic structure and of the poetic artifices and linguistic options which, typical of Gil Vicente, are here adopted by Estramanho de Almeida. Finally, it prompts the reader to understand the aesthetics of this Brazilian re-creation of the Antigone myth.

2 Textual Aesthetics: Imitating Gil Vicente

2.1 *The Rhythm and the Rhyme*

In *Maria das Almas* the heptasyllable with a predominantly binary cadence that characterizes Gil Vicente's plays, as well as popular songs and romance

13 According to the great Gil Vicente scholar, Paul Teyssier (1982) 46–7, “the *Barca do Inferno* (Boat to Hell) is an exceptionally rich text; it develops on several planes and it expands in various dimensions. It introduces a wide range of social types of fifteenth-century Portuguese society. Furthermore, it is a ferocious satire of the great and the powerful – the proud nobleman, the dissolute friar, the corrupt judge – without showing mercy for more modest sinners. It is both a terrible meditation on the mysteries of the «Hereafter» and a remarkable comedy. The *Barca do Inferno* is an undeniable masterpiece”.

collections, replace the rhythmic structures commonly found in Greek tragedy – the iambic trimeter used in the spoken parts and the different kinds of lyric verses of the choral parts. With this choice of rhythmic sequence, the author intended “to emulate an old form so as to preserve something of the times in which the story develops”.¹⁴

Also known as “redondilha maior”, this kind of line does not have a fixed stress pattern, making it flexible and well adapted to all kinds of emotional expression and a wide range of subjects.¹⁵ Whereas in the choral parts the lines are always grouped in quatrains with a predominant alternate rhyme scheme (with *-a-a; abab* rhyme patterns),¹⁶ in the spoken parts they are usually organized in quatrains, also with an alternate rhyme pattern (*-a-a; abab*), as well as in tercets or couplets, although more rarely – even if occasionally they appear as sestets or as nine-line stanzas, or even isolated and without any kind of rhyme arrangement, especially in moments of excitement and emotional tension.¹⁷ In terms of their rhyme pattern, most couplets and tercets are joined in pairs of stanzas, forming alternate rhyme (*-a-a*) quatrains, and sestets or nine-line stanzas, in which each tercet’s first two lines have a coupled rhyme and the two last lines have an enclosed rhyme (*aab ccb; aab ccb aab* or *aab ccb ddb*), as seen in the following two examples (44 and 18):

Maria das Almas	Logo te faltou coragem.	–
	Não há mais uma desculpa.	<i>a</i>
	Uma só deve morrer	–
	Com a pena e a culpa.	<i>a</i>
Maria das Almas	No bravery in you.	–
	You are no hero.	<i>a</i>
	Only one must die	–
	With the guilt and the sorrow.	<i>a</i>

.....

14 From a written interview to Cuccoro (2018) 201.

15 Carvalho (1987) 67.

16 See 16, 27, 33, 64. However, the chorus intervention on p. 50 adopts irregular coupled rhymes.

17 See, for example, 35, 37, 59.

Ismênia	Mana, isso não sabia ,	<i>a</i>
	Mas é só a tirania	<i>a</i>
	Com sua lei e seu sermão .	<i>b</i>
	Quando deu fim a batalha ,	<i>c</i>
	Eu sabia que a mortalha	<i>c</i>
	Viria pra revolução .	<i>b</i>
	Fora isso nada sabia	<i>a</i>
	Que me pudesse, Maria ,	<i>a</i>
	Maltratar o coração .	<i>b</i>
Ismênia	Sister I didn't know ,	<i>a</i>
	It is but a tyrant's blow	<i>a</i>
	With his law and coercion .	<i>b</i>
	When the battle was over ,	<i>c</i>
	I knew the shroud would cover	<i>c</i>
	The revolution .	<i>b</i>
	Nothing else did I know	<i>a</i>
	That could, somehow ,	<i>a</i>
	Crush my affection .	<i>b</i>

Borrowing Teyssier' comments on Gil Vicente's rhyme, we could say of Estramanho de Almeida's technique in *Maria das Almas* that the Brazilian writer is also "a hasty rhymer, and that all of [his] poetic work – the structure of the stanzas, the number of syllables or the rhyme – is remarkably light and free".¹⁸ Many of his rhymes are imperfect, incomplete and unrhyming, proving that the author, like Gil Vicente, did not submit to the "superstition of the rhyme".¹⁹

2.2 Poetic Artifices

Regarding poetic artifices, Estramanho de Almeida also tends to adopt a style that mimics Gil Vicente. Notwithstanding his feeling for scenic movement and for the rhythm of dialogues, Gil Vicente used the different kinds of lyric poetry that were typical of medieval *cancioneiros*; and, as Teyssier remarks in *A língua de Gil Vicente* (The Language of Gil Vicente (2005) 549), he followed the poetic rules established by Juan del Encina in *Arte de trobar* (The Poetic Art).

18 Teyssier (2005) 371.

19 Teyssier (2005) 371.

Estramanho de Almeida adopts several strategies to lend a late-medieval feeling to his text – yet another literary strategy aimed at placing the play in the dramatic and poetic context of the 1500s, the temporal framework of *Maria das Almas*. These will be examined in the order suggested by Teyssier.²⁰

2.2.1 *The Leixa-prende*

This poetic artifice, whereby the words of the last line or even the whole line of the previous stanza are repeated at the beginning of the next stanza,²¹ occurs mostly in dialogues between Dom Creontino and other characters:

Dom Creontino No reinado há leis próprias,
Leis são feitas por humanos.

Maria das Almas **Leis são feitas por caretas!**
Leis são feitas por tiranos! (42)

Dom Creontino The kingdom has specific laws,
Laws are made by humans.

Maria das Almas **Laws are made by squares!**
Laws are made by tyrants!

.....

Hermógenes Pai, sei do vosso decreto
Por isso vim **de repente**.

Dom Creontino **De repente** e de rompante
E já queres que eu desmande
O que bem eu ordenei? (52)

Hermógenes Father, I've heard of your decree
That is why I came **suddenly**

Dom Creontino **Suddenly** and promptly
And you wish me so swiftly
To revoke my wise commands?

²⁰ Teyssier (2005) 549–64.

²¹ Teyssier (2005) 550–1.

Dom Creontino	Aliou-se a Maria Por isso veio até aqui Acusar de tirania!
Hermógenes	Acuso-vos de tirano Um tirano de si próprio Que utiliza seu poder Como viciado em ópio. (58)
Dom Creontino	United with Maria You came up here Accuse me of tyranny!
Hermógenes	I accuse you of tyranny A tyrant, addicted, Power is your drug Like opium to the addicted.

2.2.2 The *Encadenado*

The second poetic artifice listed by Teyssier (2005: 551–2) is not recurrent in *Maria das Almas*. The *encadenado* is the repetition, at the beginning of a line, of the last word of the previous line, as in the following example:

Dom Creontino	Um reino tem um só dono Este dono é o seu Rei. (57)
Dom Creontino	A kingdom has one single lord This lord is its King.

2.2.3 The *Multiplicado* (Internal Rhyme)

Characteristic of popular and spontaneous speech, this Vicentian technique whereby “words with the same ending are paired”²² is widely used in this play. For example:

22 Teyssier (2005) 552–4.

Guarda Mas parava e pensava,
Parava com medo de mim ... (30)

Que chorando e xingando,
Segurava a enxada. (36)

Guard But I paused and pondered,
Paused afraid of myself ... (30)

Who, weeping and chiding,
Kept holding the hoe. (36)

.....
Dom Creontino Ora, veja, também quer
Me ensinar a governar? (57)

O coitado, enganado,
No desejo vil do coito. (61)

Meu filho, meu Martim!
Ai de mim, pobre de mim! (74)

Dom Creontino Look at you, now you wish
to have a say on how to sway? (57)

The poor guy, led, misled,
In his vile desire for her. (61)

My son, my Martim!
Woe is me, poor me! (74)

2.2.4 The *Redoblado* (Alliterative Repetition)

This is the repetition of a word in the same or in different forms. Teyssier suggests (2005: 554) that if used extensively, this process can even lead to “alliterative repetition, that is, the use, next to each other, of words sharing a common root”. The following are examples of this in *Maria das Almas*:

Coro Em Teobá acaba a guerra
Todo sangue será usado

Pra semear a **nova** terra:
Novo povo, **novo** arado. (27)

Chorus War is over in Teobá
 All the blood will be used now
 To sow the **new** land:
New people, **new** plough.

.....

Dom Creontino A lei clara como água,
 Será **feita** forte, dura.
 E não há lei que eu **faça**
 Que é **feita** na loucura. (28)

Dom Creontino Clear as water, the law
 Will be **enforced**, hard and tough.
 And no law that I **enforce**
 Will be **forged** in madness.

.....

Guarda Dom Creontino, meu Rei:
Vinha pra cá e **vindo vim**,
 Parava com medo de mim
 E da notícia que **vim** dar.
 E pra cá, pela estrada,
Vinha pra cá e **vindo vim**,
 Mas **parava** e pensava,
Parava com medo de mim
 E da notícia que **vim** dar. (29–30)

Guard Dom Creontino, my King:
Walking here and **while** I **walked**
 I halted afraid of myself
 And of the news I brought.
 And on the way, along the road,
Walking here and **while** I **walked**,
 I **halted** and thought,
 I **halted** afraid of myself
 And of the news I brought.

2.2.5 The *Retrocado* (Repetition of Terms in Reverse Order)

The repetition of a line with a reversal of the word order is very common in Gil Vicente's plays,²³ but it occurs only once in *Maria das Almas*:

Corifeu	Um erro leva a outro. Um erro a outro leva. (79)
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Coryphaeus	A mistake leads to another. To another leads a mistake.
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2.2.6 The *Reiterado* (Oratorical Repetition)

Used frequently in *Maria das Almas*, this poetic artifice “consists of the repetition of the same word before various symmetrical terms”, according to Teyssier (2005) 557. He maintains that while it occurs naturally in everyday language, “it produces a certain oratorical redundancy, when used systematically”, as seen in the following examples:

Coro	Ambos são vitoriosos. Ambos saem derrotados. (16)
------	--

Chorus	They are both victorious. They are both defeated.
--------	--

.....

Dom Creontino	Não me importam os amigos. Não me importa a família. Importa-me a cidade, Pois não tenho camarilha. (28)
---------------	--

Dom Creontino	I don't care for friends. I don't care for family. I care for the city, For I have no favourites.
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.....

Guarda	Dom Creontino, meu Rei: Vinha pra cá e vindo vim,
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²³ Teyssier (2005) 556.

Parava com medo de mim
E da notícia que vim dar. (29)

Guard Dom Creontino, my King:
Walking here and **while I walked**
I halted afraid of myself
And of the news I brought.

.....

Maria das Almas A tua **lei**, Creontino,
É a **lei** de um cretino.
Não é a **lei** de Oxalá. (37)

Maria das Almas Your **law**, Creontino,
Is the **law** of a cretin.
Not the **law** of Oxalá.

2.3 *The Language*

Maria das Almas also displays Gil Vicente's preference for slang and rough and colloquial language, as well as allusions to local religious practices. Such expressions, in the mouth of all the characters, confer a popular and tropical feel to the play.

In his angry outbursts and when under great emotional stress, Dom Creontino uses insulting words and vernacular and obscene language, which underlines his power over his subjects and next of kin when they question him or his decisions. He addresses Maria das Almas as “cadela” (“bitch”, 46, 66), “cadelinha” (61),²⁴ and “estropício” (47)²⁵ and accuses her of wishing to be the “colonel” – the term for the local political chief in the Brazilian hinterland – although she only “[reigns] out there/ in the streets, in the brothel” (“[reinar] por aí, / Na esquina, no bordel”, 38).

He addresses his son Hermógenes as “pirralho” (60).²⁶ This term rhymes with “carvalho” (oak), often used in a popular wordplay with “caralho”, the male sexual organ. He is thus making the insinuation that Hermógenes' actions are dictated by carnal desire, rather than by reason:

24 “Cadelinha” (little bitch) is an offensive word, meaning shameless, licentious woman – a prostitute, in Brazilian Portuguese.

25 Derogatory term for “a person who stands in the way, who upsets one's purpose”.

26 Derogatory term for “little boy”, “child” or “brat”.

Dom Creontino Cala boca, seu pirralho!
Pensas tal como um carvalho. (60)

Dom Creontino Shut up, you brat!
You think like a wildcat.

.....

Dom Creontino Tragam já a cadelinha,
Pra que a veja bem seu noivo.
O coitado, enganado,
No desejo vil do coito. (61)

Dom Creontino Bring over the little bitch,
That her betrothed may see her.
The poor man, led, misled,
In his vile desire for her.

Dom Creontino adopts the same insulting manner for the as-yet unknown transgressor of this edict, calling him “fariseu” (31)²⁷ and “xereta” (32).²⁸ He addresses the Choryphaeus as “velho-zuza” (73),²⁹ and the Guard as “fedido” (32),³⁰ warning him that he will have his “pinto” chopped off (32)³¹ if he does not shorten his account of the events or if the news he brings, about someone having buried Francisco, is untrue.

In her turn, Maria das Almas addresses her brothers in a familiar and affectionate fashion, using the hypocoristic “Chico” and “Linto” (41)³² which also reveal her regard for them. Other Brazilian Portuguese familial terms in the same trend are, for example, “inhá” (used by Coryphaeus to address Maria das Almas, 47)³³ or “caçula” (used by the Messenger to address Dom Creontino’s younger son, 73).³⁴ But Maria das Almas has nothing but harsh and derogatory

27 “Pharisee”, derogatory term for a hypocritical or self-righteous person.

28 Vernacular term for “busybody”, “meddlesome person”.

29 Derogatory expression, meaning “old fool”, “old geezer”.

30 Brazilian Portuguese word for “stinking”, “smelly” and, by semantic extension, “meddlesome”.

31 Brazilian popular term for the male sexual organ.

32 Affectionate words used in familiar contexts. Chico and Linto are hypocoristic versions of Francisco and Felinto, respectively.

33 “Inhá” is the same as “sinhá”, a familiar way to address a maiden in Brazil.

34 Familiar term for the younger son in Brazilian Portuguese. It derives from *kasule*, meaning “last son” in Kimbundu, one of the Angolan Bantu languages.

words for her uncle. She calls him “cretino” (37)³⁵ and “careta” (42)³⁶ saying “that she wants nothing do with [his] kind (39).”³⁷ And to show her contempt for the arbitrary and overbearing law the king has imposed on the *polis*, she uses a slang pun, referring to it as “lei da luta que o pariu” (18).³⁸

Another example of the use of popular language in the manner of Gil Vicente comes from João de Ifá, whose surname is suggestive of his role as soothsayer, given that “ifá” means “oracle”, “deity of divination” in the Yoruba language.³⁹ In his predictions he uses the popular word “tripa” (72)⁴⁰ to allude to someone who came from Dom Creontino’s entrails, someone whom “the gods claim”, thereby bringing death to the family (72). Soon we will know, through the Messenger (73), that he is referring to Martim, the king’s younger son – probably a counterpart to Menoecus in Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*.⁴¹ In this process of divination, the seer does not follow the rites of Ancient Greece, opting for the more common rituals of Afro-Brazilian religions, such as the sacrifice of the rooster (70):⁴²

João de Ifá No sacrificio do galo
 Veio à tona a verdade,
 O mal todo que cairá
 Nas muralhas da cidade.

João de Ifá At the rooster sacrifice
 All the truth did come to light,

35 “Cretin”, “idiot”.

36 “Narrow-minded”, “traditional”, “square”, “unyielding”, “limited”.

37 Of obscure origin, “laia” translates as “ilk”, “class”, “type”, “sort”.

38 The exact translation of the sentence – “law of the son of a fight” – is a pun with the words “luta” (fight, combat) and “puta” (whore/bitch), which somewhat mitigates the offensive Portuguese expression “puta que o pariu” (“son of a bitch”, in English).

39 Houaiss defines “ifá” (2015) 2147 as a religious term used in Brazil to refer “the orisha of divination and destiny, the mouthpiece of Orumila (the ‘Saviour’, one of titles of the supreme God); there is no organized cult but the Ifa is consulted within the religious practice of *candomblé* to inquire about one’s obligations to some other orisha”. This lexicographer sustains (2015) 2845 that “orisha” is “the generic designation for the Yoruba divinities worshipped in the south-west of present-day Nigeria, Benin and northern Togo, brought over by the slaves and incorporated into other religious sects”. For a more detailed study of this subject see Cascudo (2001) 448–9.

40 A popular term for the human intestines – “gut”, in English.

41 On this innovation regarding the hypotext, see Cuccoro (2018) 200.

42 This ritual, very common in *candomblé*, seems to have been practised in some form in certain cults of Ancient Greece such as that of Asclepius. It is mentioned at the end of Plato’s *Phaedo* (118a 7–8). See Cuccoro (2018) 199, n. 444.

All the evil that will fall
Upon the city from spite.

This and other allusions to popular cults in Brazil – such as the “Oxalá” (40),⁴³ “lei de Oxalá” (the law of Oxalá, 20, 37), “verdade de Ifá” (Ifa’s truth, 39) and “mensagens de Ifá” (Ifa’s messages, 71),⁴⁴ are interwoven with Christian expressions, such as “lei suprema de Cristo” (the supreme law of Christ, 21), “Deus lá no céu” (God in heaven, 32) “enter[rar Francisco] com a bênção de um santo” (bury [Francis] with the blessing of a saint, 23), “honrar a Deus e os santos” (honour God and the saints, 66), “meus princípios / são benquistos pelos santos” (my principles/ are well-liked by the saints, 67), “obriga os santos a quererem / novos mortos para o altar” (compels the saints will to desire/ new sacrifices for the altar, 71) and “todos esses santos” (all those saints, 77). As seen above, all these expressions convey the play’s religious, ethnic and cultural syncretism⁴⁵ – as a mirror of Brazilian reality, equally represented by the various allusions to the region’s natural elements, such as “urubus” (27),⁴⁶ “bico do carcará” (50),⁴⁷ and the “plantas de café” (coffee plants, 36) mentioned by the Guard.

While showing similar traits to his Sophoclean model, the Guard, portrayed as a burlesque figure, is the character who most resembles the rustic types of Gil Vicente’s theatre, particularly the fool.⁴⁸ His repetitive, simple and incoherent speech also betrays his anxiety over the news he brings:

43 In the Yoruba language, “Oxalá” comes from orixaala, itself deriving from Orixá-n-la, “the great Orisha”. According to Houaiss (2015) 2864, “He is the orisha of creation, of procreation, syncretised with Jesus Christ”. For a more detailed study of the concepts of “Oxalá” and “Orisha”, see Cascudo (2001) 645–7 e 651–2.

44 See above, note 39.

45 In a written interview with Cuccoro (2018) 201, R. Estremanho de Almeida explains that “[he] was aiming at syncretism, giving African culture a role in the formation of the kingdom of Teobá. So there is a spiritual undercurrent running through the drama that continually interrelates with the political surface. My aim was to forge a political plot in which the spiritual and the religious would mingle not only on a spiritual level, of entities – saints and orishas – but also on the plane of politics and ‘reality’, of its possibilities and impossibilities”. It should be noted that this syncretism is patent in Toni d’Agostinho’s drawings, especially those of pages 16, 51 and 69.

46 “Urubu” is another name for the vulture, a very common bird of prey in Brazil that feeds on the carcasses of dead animals.

47 A common name for the southern crested “carcará”, a bird of prey from the *Falconidae* family, very common in Brazil.

48 According to Teyssier (2005) 91, in Gil Vicente’s plays the fool is “a popular traditional character. A moron, a simpleton, he is often called Joane and is often represented as a young servant who carries messages”. On this matter, see also Teyssier (1982) 118–21.

Guarda Dom Creontino, meu Rei:
 Vinha pra cá e vindo vim,
 Parava com medo de mim
 E da notícia que vim dar.
 E pra cá, pela estrada,
 Vinha pra cá e vindo vim,
 Mas parava e pensava,
 Parava com medo de mim
 E da notícia que vim dar. (29–30)

Guard Dom Creontino, my King:
 Walking here and while I walked
 I halted afraid of myself
 And of the news I brought.
 And on the way, along the road,
 Walking here and while I walked,
 I halted and thought,
 I halted afraid of what I brought.

Both at this moment, when he reports that someone has buried Francisco, and delivers Maria das Almas to the king, the Guard employs Brazilian slang terms like “pinto” (31),⁴⁹ “capado” (36)⁵⁰ or “xingar” (36),⁵¹ and sayings and popular expressions like “pobre só se ferra mesmo” (32)⁵² and “sabia qu’ia dar merda” (32),⁵³ much in the manner of Gil Vicente.

Against this Vicentian background with tropical touches – highlighted on a parallel additional plane by Toni d’Agostinho’s Chinese ink drawings – the characters evolve on stage, each in his or her own expressive register, according to their *ethos*⁵⁴ in a finely conceived crossing between the Greek myth of Antigone and the Portuguese myth of King Sebastian.

49 See above, note 31.

50 “Castrated”.

51 Brazilian Portuguese includes many words of African origin, brought over by slaves during colonization. The word “xingar” is originally from Kimbundu, a Bantu language spoken in Angola. It means “to insult”, “to offend”.

52 “The poor man is always screwed”, meaning that given his condition, the poor man will always find himself in trouble.

53 “I knew this shit was gonna happen”.

54 See Cuccoro (2018) 198.

3 A Mythical Re-reading in a Tropical and Vicentian Set

The foundation of the kingdom of Teobá “sob o sol e o signo de deuses africanos e cristãos” (under the sun and the blessings of African and Christian gods, 13) was agreed upon by the two sons of the Portuguese king, Francisco and Felinto, in such terms as they would rule alternately for five-year terms. But Felinto, like *Antigone’s* Eteocles, refuses to surrender the throne to his brother, thus provoking a civil war narrated by the Chorus in two crossed rhyme stanzas at the opening of Act 1. The play therefore diverges from its model, since in Sophocles’ play that information is given in the spoken prologue (16):

Coro	Dois irmãos, dois capitães,	<i>a</i>
	Cada um de um só lado.	<i>b</i>
	E lutaram feito cães,	<i>a</i>
	Até que se hão matado.	<i>b</i>
	Ambos são vitoriosos.	<i>a</i>
	Ambos são derrotados.	<i>b</i>
	Quase todos gloriosos,	<i>a</i>
	Mas nem todos enterrados.	<i>b</i>
Chorus	Two brothers, both captains	<i>a</i>
	Each on his own separate side.	<i>b</i>
	Like dogs they fought, spared no pains,	<i>a</i>
	Until side by side they lie.	<i>b</i>
	Both of them are victorious.	<i>a</i>
	Both of them are subdued.	<i>b</i>
	Nearly all are glorious	<i>a</i>
	Though not all are entombed.	<i>b</i>

Toni d’Agostinho’s first two drawings (12 and 17) depict this fratricide struggle, reinforcing the background atmosphere of this mystical re-reading. Inspired by “cordel” literature,⁵⁵ photographs of the War of Canudos,⁵⁶ the most common emblems of *cangaço*,⁵⁷ and the traditional costumes of the North East, he

55 Literally, string literature.

56 The War of Canudos was an armed conflict between the Brazilian army and a popular socio-religious movement led by Antônio Conselheiro. It developed between 1896 and 1897, in the North-Eastern state of Bahia, and ended with the massacre of the community of Canudos.

57 The *cangaço* is a social phenomenon typical of Brazilian North-Eastern rural society. It dates back to the 18th century, when José Gomes, known as “Cabeleira”, spread terror



FIGURE 5.1
(12), by Toni d'Agostinho

creates a parallel graphic narrative in which the characters are typically in tune with the dramatic text.

In the lower part of this image, chosen for the book cover, Felinto is depicted with the *cangaceiro*'s hat and cape. The leather half-moon shaped hat, with a star in the centre, became known as a North-Eastern symbol. Francisco is on his right, dressed in the hinterland cowman's leather doublet, chaps and hat. Above them, Maria das Almas' suffering face stands out in the foreground; the timorous Ismênia is in her shadow, and behind them all is Dom Creontino, his face harsh, stern. The whole picture is enclosed in elements of the hinterland culture (the mandalas and the eight-point stars of Salomon) against the background of the Brazilian North East, with the "urubus" (vultures), the typical necrophagous birds of the region often associated with death,⁵⁸ which is here represented by the skulls.

through the rural communities of Pernambuco. The movement lasted throughout the 19th century, and ended on the 25th of May 1940, with the death of Corisco, Lampião's successor and first lieutenant. On this matter, see, among others, Rego (2007), Pericás (2010) and Santos (2014).

58 On the illustration of p. 51, at the beginning of Act III, the shadow of death that hangs over the whole final Act is represented by another of the region's birds of prey, known as "carcará", and by the graves, enclosing the suffering Maria das Almas.



FIGURE 5.2 (17), by Toni d'Agostinho

The second image depicts Death. Frequently mentioned throughout this free adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, in this figure (17) death is personified and associated with Christian symbols.

This drawing illustrates the Chorus's initial intervention, announcing the death of the two brothers in the fratricidal conflict. The two cows' heads that stand out on the lateral sides of the frame are symbols of the animals killed in the northeast hinterland due to cyclical droughts.⁵⁹ As the artist remarked,

59 The illustration on p. 34 depicts goats. It is worth noting that an animal with such significance for the hinterland is also associated with the origin of Greek tragedy.

in our written exchanges, “under the shadow of death, there is no distinction between cattle and the human race”.⁶⁰

As in the hypotext, in Act I (which corresponds to the original play’s prologue) the two sisters talk about their brothers’ deaths and in particular about the edict issued by Dom Creontino – “governante repentino do reino” (the unexpected ruler of the kingdom, 18) – using verses in the manner of Gil Vicente:

Maria das Almas Felinto, querido irmão,
Terá reza e bom caixão
Até o bem amanhecer.

Já Francisco, injustiçado,
Não será nem enterrado
Vai a esmo apodrecer.

Assim decretou Creontino.
E de modo repentino
Um rei nunca volta atrás.

Quem for enterrar Francisco
Será entregue ao destino
E à força do capataz. (19)

Maria das Almas Felinto, the favourite brother
Will have prayers and a fine coffin
Until good does rise one day.

But Francisco, who’s been wronged,
Will not even be entombed,
He’ll be left to rot away.

This Creontino decreed.
And never does suddenly
A king take back his word.

60 I would like to thank Toni d’Agostinho for allowing me the use of these pictures for academic purposes, and for all the information about the way this graphic narrative was conceived in harmony with the text, inserting the images in the realities of the Brazilian North East.

Whoever buries Francisco
 Will be condemned directly
 To face the executioner.

While Maria das Almas is determined to “enterrar o revoltado, / o traído, desterrado, / pela lei de Oxalá” (bury her rebellious brother / betrayed, banished, / according to the law of Orisha, 20) without the help of the timorous Ismênia, the people, represented by the Chorus, exult with the end of the war in Teobá and acclaim Creontino, “Coronel tão bem amado” (the beloved Colonel), calling for “a holiday”, now that peace has been achieved and the enemy, defeated (27).

This Chorus intervention, opening Act II (a counterpart to the Sophoclean *parodos*), is made in three crossed rhyme quatrains and illustrated by another of Agostinho’s images, this one inspired by Olinda’s carnival. In the religious and profane festivities of this region of Brazil, originally from medieval Europe, the people march with *cabeçudos* (“big heads”) and giant figures, usually mocking with satirical representations of public personalities of Brazilian society.



FIGURE 5.3
 (26), by Toni d'Agostinho

This picture depicts Dom Creontino's giant doll accompanied by other, unknown, figures inside the city walls, hinting at the new power in the kingdom of Teobá, while outside the city walls the people, here represented by the Chorus, applaud and cheer.

Unlike many modern recreations of the Antigone myth, in this Brazilian re-reading with a plot largely modelled on its Greek model, the Chorus takes on an active role. Its interventions display a thematic correspondence to almost all Sophoclean choral odes, shaping its opinion according to the moment and the circumstances. Apart from the emotionally charged fifth stasimon in honour of Dionysus (*S. Ant.* 1115–54), replaced by a short admonition by Coryphaeus on “o destino [que] é bem certo” (the more than likely fate, 73), the remaining odes, while brief and loosely replicated, can be found in Estramanho de Almeida's play: the second stasimon, on the hereditary curse, in which the Chorus, echoing the initial lines of the Sophoclean lyric text, chants “feliz é quem não amarga / seja doença ou desgraça” (happy he who does not suffer/ neither illness nor affliction, 50); the well-known “Ode to Love”, “um bem humano / que ao coração dá alegria” (a human good/ that brings joy to the heart, 64), preceded by an innovative prose intervention by the Narrator, underlining, in tune with the choral intervention, the important, if disturbing, role of passion and desire in the plot;⁶¹ and the famous “Ode to Man”, the “nobre animal, / [que] bem conhece a natureza” (noble animal/ [who] knows nature, 33), placing it at his service, and who was able to create “saber, leis, filosofia, / o governo e a nação” (knowledge, the laws, philosophy/ the government and the nation, 33) and “teme a fome e a doença” (fears famine and disease, 33).

In this intervention (its longest, in six crossed rhyme quatrains), the Chorus brings up one of the play's main themes: the hated tyrant, who acts as if the town was deserted, ignoring the feelings of the people – a warning Creontino will disregard:

Coro Só aceita um tirano,
 Se é temido ou amado.
 Não ocupa bem o trono
 Quando o tal é odiado. (33)

61 In a short and original speech, the Narrator says that “love is definitively not a good venture, for subjects or for tyrants” (63). On this passage, see Cuccoro (2018) 200.

Chorus Only accept a tyrant
 if he's feared or loved
 For he fits not the throne well
 A tyrant who is hated.

Along the same line of thought, Maria das Almas, made not only for love, like Sophocles' *Antigone*, but for relentless fight (40, 42),⁶² accuses her uncle of being devoid of common sense and of “[controlar] a boca / de todos em Teobá” ([controlling] the voices/ of all the people in Teobá, 40). She challenges him, claiming that the citizens do not want him, they just fear him, and that they all hope he will stumble and fall (40). Maintaining that to bury her dead brother is not a crime (40), she claims that Creontino's human law “é a lei de um cretino, / não é lei de Oxalá / [...] é convenção / e não passa de invenção / pro povo de Teobá” (is a cretin's law,⁶³ / not the law of Oxalá⁶⁴ / [...] it is a convention / nothing but an invention / for the people of Teobá, 37–8).

Regarding this opposition between public and private law, divine and human law, Creontino does not waver, claiming that “governa a cidade / bem acima da família” (he acts for the good of the city/ well above the family, 53). He accuses Maria das Almas of representing the disorder, dishonour, arrogance and anarchy that place the monarchy at risk (53), and condemns her to death.

Hermógenes opposes this decision and, as in the original play, he enters on stage to try to reverse the situation. He believes the heroine, his beloved, “agiu só pela família, / pela honra e pela fé” (acted only out of love for the family/ for honour and faith, 54), and accuses his father of being a tyrant and of wanting to smother freedom (56). He warns him that by condemning Maria das Almas, he is acting against the city (58), and that he will have to face the “scorn of most people”, who do not share his views (55) and who are ready to “lutar / por real novo governo / e por paz em Teobá” (fight/ for a genuine new government / and for peace in Teobá, 56).

62 On her way to death, “devoid of tears, of friends, of fields to gaze at” (66), Maria das Almas displays unyielding tenacity: “acima das leis do Rei / fiz sem trégua minha luta” (against the King's laws/ was my relentless fight, 67). The introduction of the will to fight is a significant *amplificatio* of the famous lines in Sophocles' *Antigone*: Οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν / “I was not born to hate, but to love” (523). On this matter, see Cuccoro (2018) 199, n. 446.

63 There is a suggestive wordplay between Creontino and cretin. Later, the heroine defies the king, saying that the law was made by a “careta” (popular term for a traditional, conservative, conventional person), by a tyrant (42).

64 In other words, it is not a divine law, it is a human law. On “Oxalá”, see above, note 43.

Blinded by the madness of power (61), Creontino does not heed his son's appeals and warnings because "não se pode governar / com a opinião de vários [...] / o poder é solitário" (one cannot rule / when many have a say [...] / the man in power is a lonely man, 57). He sticks to his decision, isolated and inflexible, as if the city were deserted and his alone (57):

Dom Creontino Jogada numa caverna,
 Bem viva e tão disposta,
 Contará água e comida
 E cadáveres em postas.

Sozinha em vários dias
 A conversar com a morte
 Jamais será libertada
 Até acabar sua sorte. (63)

Dom Creontino She shall be thrown in a cave
 Well alive and in good health
 She will have her food and water
 And pieces of bodies dead.

All alone for several days
 With death she will be communing
 She shall never be released
 Till her time arrives a-loomng.

As in the hypotext, he also does not heed the ever more insistent Chorus' warnings nor the previsions and advice of João de Ifá, who insists that he should bury Francisco and release Maria das Almas. Faced with the tyrant's reticence induced by his "ira sem juízo" (senseless wrath, 72), the seer predicts, before he retires:

João de Ifá Só te digo a verdade
 Pelo bem desta cidade.

Se não escutas, vou calar.
 Não sem mais assim dizer:
 Que o cadáver insepulto,
 Obriga os santos a quererem

Novos mortos para o altar.
 Tua ira sem juízo
 Far-te-á muito sofrer,
 Pois um ser de tua tripa
 É que os deuses vão querer.
 A guerra acabará
 Só no campo de batalha,
 Pois o seio da família
 Cobrir-se-á com a mortalha.

Já é tarde Creontino.
 Nada podes mais fazer,
 A morte imita a vida,
 Lá vem ela apodrecer. (71–2)

João de Ifá

I am telling you the truth
 Only for this city's good.

If you won't listen I'll be quiet.
 But I offer this advice:
 That the unburied body
 The saints will want
 New sacrifices require.
 Your senseless anger will bring
 Much pain to you and much grief,
 It is in one of your blood
 That the gods will find relief.
 And the war it will be over
 Only on the battleground
 For the family will be
 Covered with a mournful shroud.

It is too late, Creontino.
 There is nothing you can try
 Because death imitates life
 Here it comes to putrefy.

Only the Messenger's news – an innovative feature regarding the original – of the death in the battlefield of his younger son, Dom Martim, will make him

step back and leave the stage, in total disarray, in order to bury Francisco, in a desperate attempt to avoid further adversity. But it is too late. A series of misfortunes will soon cover his family with a mournful shroud. He finds Maria das Almas dead, and Hermógenes commits suicide in front of him, without giving him the chance to beg his forgiveness. And when, torn with sorrow, he returns to the stage with his son in his arms, he receives the news of the death of his wife, Joana.

The world collapses around Dom Creontino. He admits his guilt and begs to be removed before he brings total ruin to the *polis*.⁶⁵ His desperate and mournful speech is full of woeful exclamations, commands and repetitions, in a sobbing, irregular cadence:

Dom Creontino Miserável! Desgraçado!
 Eu sou mesmo o culpado.
 De tudo ...
 Os guardas que me carreguem
 Pois sou mesmo o culpado
 De tudo ...
 Me levem!
 Antes que eu leve
 Toda a cidade à morte
 Antes que eu leve
 Teobá ao fim
 Me levem!
 Para longe de mim ... (77–8)

Dom Creontino: O wretched! O maledict!
 I am indeed the true culprit
 Of it all ...
 Let the guards take me.
 For I am indeed the culprit
 Of it all ...
 Lead me away!
 Before I lead

65 As observed by Cuccoro (2018) 200, Dom Creontino's distress echoes the exodus of Seneca's *Oedipus* (975 sqq.).

The whole city to its death
 Before I lead
 Teobá to its final day
 Take me!
 Far from myself lead me away ...

The progressive breach of rhythm in this speech, the tyrant's last intervention, also eases the transition to the final narrative text, the sentence pronounced by the Narrator:

O poder é inimigo da liberdade e a morte, inimiga da vida. Complementam-se porque um sem o outro é pura ilusão. Ser livre é, em alguma medida, ter poder e estar vivo é, quase sempre, escapar da morte. (79)

Power is the enemy of freedom, and death, the enemy of life. They complement each other, because it is pure illusion to think that one could live without the other. To be free is, to some extent, to have power, and to be alive is, almost always, an escape from death.

4 Conclusion

In this recreation of a remote and imaginary universe (a mixture of fantasy and history), situated in the tropics in the early colonial period – in which the playwright interweaves the Portuguese myth of King Sebastian and the Greek myth of Antigone and resorts to the rhythms, language and poetic artifice of Gil Vicente's theatre – Rodrigo Estramanho de Almeida looks at the modern world, a world in which freedom is stifled by powers that view it as the enemy. He thus shows the pertinence of Marguerite Yourcenar's claim, in "Antigone ou le choix" – also hinted at in Agostinho's final illustration (80) – that "Antigone's heart is the pendulum of the world".⁶⁶

66 As Agostinho explained to me, although he did not have Yourcenar's comment (1982) 1110 in mind, his final illustration for this play depicts fading rose blooms sprouting from a bleeding heart (80).

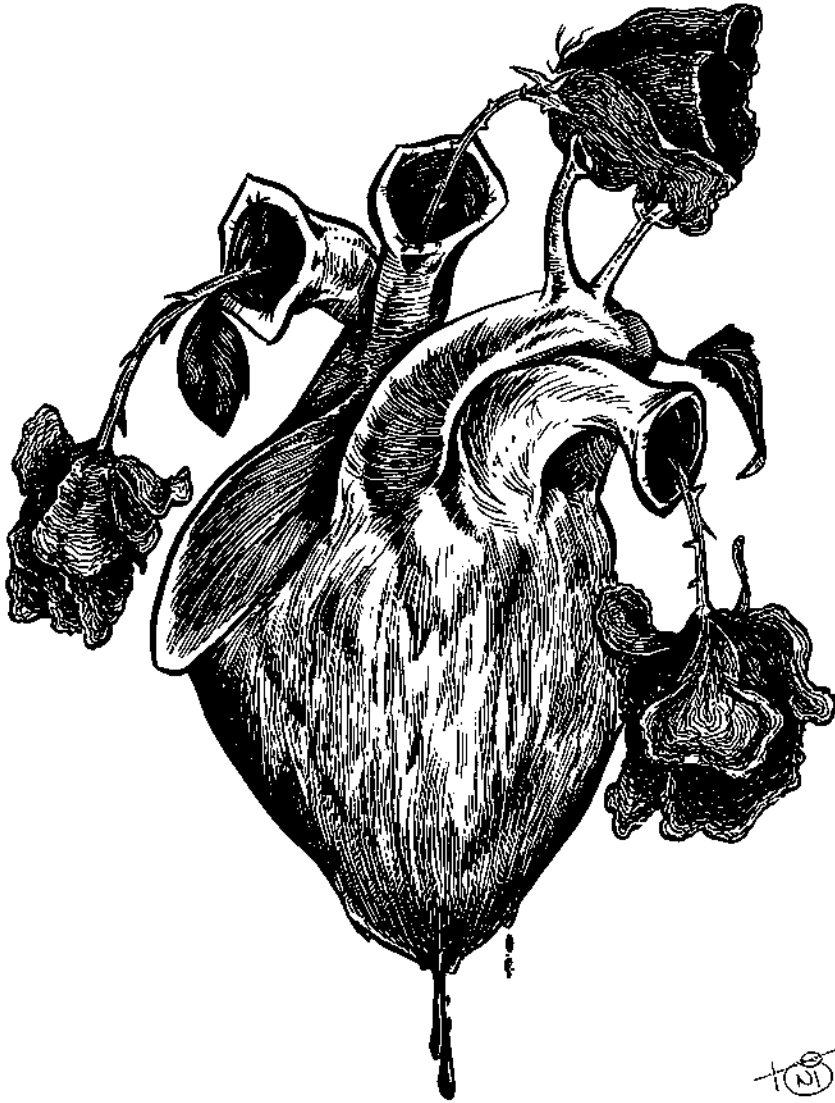


FIGURE 5.4 (80), by Toni d'Agostinho