

SHARING THE UNSHARABLE: ANCLOSE READING OF HENRIQUETA LISBOA'S
"DO SUPÉRFLUO"

ABSTRACT

Starting from a survey of critical assessments of Henriqueta Lisboa's poetic themes, the paper moves on to a stylistic analysis of the poem "Do Supérfluo", from *Pousada do Ser*, as embodying both the poet's worldview and her artistic credo

RESUMO

Partindo de pronunciamentos críticos sobre a temática poética de Henriqueta Lisboa, o ensaio passa a uma análise estilística do poema "Do Supérfluo", de *Pousada do Ser*, como uma cristalização da cosmovisão e do credo artístico do poeta.

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Também as cousas participam
de nossa vida. Um livro. Uma rosa.
Um trecho musical que nos devolve
a horas inaugurais. O crepúsculo
acaso visto num país
que não sendo da terra
evoca apenas a lembrança
de outra lembrança mais longínqua.
O esboço tão-somente de um gesto
de ferina intenção, a graça
de um retalho de lua
a pervagar num reposteiro.
A mesa sobre a qual me debruço
cada dia mais temerosa
de meus próprios dizeres.
Tais cousas de íntimo domínio
talvez sejam supérfluas.

No entanto
que tenho a ver contigo
se não leste o livro que li
não viste a rosa que plantei
nem contemplaste o pôr-do-sol
ã hora em que o amor se foi?
Que tens a ver comigo
se dentro em ti não prevalecem
as cousas - todavia supérfluas -
do meu intransferível patrimônio?

*Pousada do set*¹

Livia Paulini, who has surveyed research to date on Henriqueta Lisboa's poetry, finds her critics divided in specifying her principal themes.² One could be overwhelmed by the variety of motifs found central to Lisboa's verse. Blanca Lobo Filho, for instance, places love at the top of the list, while Lauro Palú sees life itself as the focal point. João Gaspar Simões

singles out death as her recurring concern - an observation he shares with a number of other critics who labelled Lisboa "the poet of death" following the publication of *Flores da morte* in 1949. Simões maintains, however, that Lisboa's preoccupation with death amounts, paradoxically, to a celebration of life, a manifestation of what he terms "her inebriation with living". One critic, Oscar Mendes, underscores Lisboa's continued, quasi-obsessive search for technical perfection, and calls this zeal her lifelong passion and, hence, the constant in her works. Maria José de Queiroz identifies instead as the leitmotif of Lisboa's verse the poet's mission of capturing for the common man no less than the ineffable, by translating the incomprehensible phenomena that constitute the outer world - the world of the senses - into expressive reality. Finally, Donald Schüller observes that Lisboa uses words like a powerful army to capture her readers and imprison them in a world all her own. This verbal fortress does more than just afford the captives a glimpse of what lies beyond its walls, that is, a look into the unknown. It is so original and autonomous, claims Schüller, that it speaks for itself and tells its own story.³

All of these observations, as diverse as they may seem, hold true for the poem "Do supérfluo", from *Pousada do set* (1982), Lisboa's final collection and, from both a conceptual and technical standpoint, unquestionably her most mature effort. This composition will be studied in detail for the purpose of supporting the notion that the poet utilizes the concept of love, with most of the universal assumptions concerning its nature, as a point of departure for articulating her worldview as well as her poetic credo. A close examination of the composition will show a poetic structure designed to lead the reader to accept love as the dichotomous, contradictory totality of love. More specifically, love is defined as an invisible yet powerful force that gives cohesion and meaning to it all. The poem suggests in fact that even the apparently superfluous and insignificant is actually and integral and important part of the whole idea of everyday reality. Within the framework of the poet's unconventional perception of the cosmos all elements of creation, not the least of which are ordinary objects, have a soul and a life of their own.⁴ We are therefore exhorted to accept this fact and recognize the spiritual bond that holds the universe

together - something that can only be accomplished if we transcend the appearance of all that surrounds us and grasp its vital essence. In the composition the poet is portrayed as one endowed with such special vision and capable of relating in an intimate way to everything, including death itself. The function of the poetic text is implicitly identified: to challenge us as readers to look beyond the superficial lexical, syntactical and phonetic features of the composition and achieve a deeper and more "realistic" understanding of its message.

There are two stanzas to the composition, each related to the other in a dialectical way. In the first part, the longer one, the poetic voice seems to be speaking on her behalf and for others, using the collective "we".⁵ Readers are reminded that even little things play an active role in our lives. She names some of those things: a book, a rose, an early morning tune, a sunset in a faraway land, someone's menacing gesture, a moonbeam floating over a curtain. The list ends with the poet's work table. Changing over to the first-person singular, the poet allies to her intimate rapport with this object. We learn that it is her silent witness, as she leans over it to confess, with increasing apprehension, her innermost feelings and thoughts. In an unexpected volte-face, the speaker suggests that the very things just cited, one's own private domain, may very well be superfluous. We as readers are then left to wonder why.

The composition abruptly changes direction in the second movement. To be sure, the second stanza, which opens with the adverbial form *nevertheless*, announces at once that this second and final portion of the poem stands somehow in opposition to the initial one. The first-person singular voice rebukes an unspecified "tu" for not having shared with her experiences connected with some of the things previously named - things vital to her. In what has all the features of a lover's quarrel, the speaker accuses her would-be lover of not having partaken with her of the reading of a certain book, the planting of a given rose, and the view of a particular sunset at the end of their romance. The composition concludes with the poetic "I" reproaching her interlocutor for not having been able to relate to those very things which, although inconsequential to others, are nonetheless full of meaning to her.

These conjectures, formulated on the basis of a superficial

appraisal of the two segments that comprise the poem, are only preliminary to a close scrutiny of its text and hence to a more accurate understanding of the cryptic, multi-level message conveyed in the poem. The more challenging and vital task facing us at this point is reaching beneath the elaborate network of ambiguities to identify the composition's statement.⁶ For here, as elsewhere in Lisboa's verse, the poet's plan is to exceed the outer configuration of things - an intimation present in the composition's very title, "Do supérfluo", - and to search for what really matters in our lives.

The most relevant clue to the unearthing of the metaphorical level of interpretation is provided by the initial statement: "Também as cousas participam de nossa vida." The adverb "também" establishes an *in medias res* narration that points to the existence of yet another, presumably, previously spoken dimension to the subject under discussion. Faced with the dilemma of having to justify an apparently incoherent or dubious title, ostensibly announcing the treatment of superfluous matters, the reader is then obliged to surmise that the missing dimension, essential though it may be as seen from one perspective, must have been omitted as unimportant and therefore "superfluous" in this case. Conversely, one is led to deduce that the poem will deal with issues that may commonly be dismissed as irrelevant, yet are vital here. Aware of the game played with the word "supérfluo", we must now examine the composition's dualistic structure and the symbolic inferences that the autonomous logic of such a structure presupposes.

The first stanza is composed of two main or independent clauses at each end appearing to form a frame that encloses seven secondary constructions. These are subordinate, directly, to the opening statement ("Também as cousas/participam de nossa vida") and, indirectly, to the end one ("Tais cousas de íntimo do múnio/talvez sejam supérfluas"). A scrutiny of the dependent constructions shows the first two to be the nouns "livro" and "rosa", which are accompanied only by their respective modifiers, the indefinite articles "um" and "uma". This arrangement would hardly qualify the pair as legitimate clauses, given the omission of the additional words necessary to make complete sentences. Yet, owing to their graphic representation in the line, they may not be regarded merely as single oppositional forms. They

do not in fact seem to be linked to the main clause in the usual way, that is, through such conventional punctuation as a colon or a comma. Instead, "Um livro."/"Uma rosa." show capitalization that normally signals beginnings of new concepts, and period marks indicating the completion of each thought. The resulting picture validates the ambivalence embodied in the poem's title - a duality which serves to express the lifeline or "love connection" binding us to our physical world and to each other. This bond is given artistic form in the game of *seeming* and *being* cleverly staged in the first two lines and characteristic of Lig^{ia} boa's poetic constructs. We see the text using the words "livro" and "rosa" in a seemingly inappropriate way - in what look like incomplete constructions. Eventually, however, we realize that each noun performs a double function, one apparent, one real, both artistically feasible. At first glance, as a result of our instinctive or natural reaction to the written word, the two nouns give the *impression* of being loose attributives or appositions to the main thought. Subsequently, however, as soon as we become aware that they are legitimate ellipses, the words' *actual* characteristics emerge and they can be viewed at last as terms with the force of condensed clauses. In this dual role, "livro" and "rosa" serve at once as *signs* and *symbols*. As such, at the most superficial level they refer to sensory perceptions: the joy of reading and the pleasurable reaction to the sight and fragrance of a beautiful flower. Concomitantly, acting in their elliptic capacity, as bona-fide clauses, they would assume symbolic proportions opening the way for new interpretations and disclosing, consequently, additional dimensions to the poem.

Before delving into the metaphorical implications of the words *book* and *rose*, let us consider the various contexts in which the other nouns that make up the remaining five secondary clauses are used. The speculation that "livro" and "rosa" are utilized in the text to intimate at once sensory perceptions is supported when one recognizes the auditory image of "trecho musical", the visual representation evoked by the word "crepúsculo" and the double visual/tactile mental picture created by the phrase "esboço de um gesto de ferina intenção". Closing this chain of sensory images are the phrases "retalho de lua" and "a mesa sobre a qual me debruço", calling to mind mental representations of the visual and tactile types. Viewed in its totality,

this imagery represents the text's effort to enable the reader to achieve a more acute perception of the phenomenological world. The poetic persona is in fact expressing here her "inebriation with living", witness her open reaction to the sights, sounds, fragrances and physical contact with her surroundings. One way to go so far as to conjecture that, from the most immediate or accessible perspective, the seven *secondary* clauses, situated strategically at the center or focal point of the stanza, constitute the poet's primary concern. Herein lies her celebration of life, as the lyric persona rejoices at being able to feel, to be physically aware of, her relationship with the outer world, even if some of the things *sensed* are indeed frightening or conducive to self-doubt and apprehension.

Having captured an overall "picture" of the middle segment of this first strophe from only a survey of its imagery, let us now direct our attention toward the second, complete, clause that serves as the stanza's outer end or "frame". It is to this closing statement that we must look further to perceive the strophe's less accessible dimensions. The last sentence ("Tais cousas de íntimo domínio/talvez sejam supérfluas") would appear to be a perfect match for the opening statement ("Também as cousas participam/de nossa vida"). Although from a structural standpoint it is, since it complements and completes the initial expression, there are numerous and substantive variants. Foremost are the following elements: the addition of the qualifiers "de íntimo domínio" and "supérfluas" describing "cousas", the substitution of the adverb "talvez" for "também" and, finally, the shift from the indicative to the subjunctive mood. Such discrepancies require a reassessment of the meanings being generated. The place to begin is the word *superfluous*, first brought up in the title and now reiterated in a more definitive way. Recalling the ludic context in which this word first appeared, the application of the modifying phrase "de íntimo domínio" to the list of things discussed, dispels at last the apparent incongruity of the title and its textual implications. The reason is that this addition substantiates our original supposition concerning the existence of two dimensions to the subject being discussed: one visible, the other invisible or intangible - the two equally pertinent. We see here, directly referred to for the first time, one of those dimensions. To wit, the text calls attention to the

subjective, spiritual half of human beings, and designates it as "our intimate domain". Then, using *perhaps* to modify or mitigate the word *superfluous*, which describes our spiritual perspective on things, the poem all but spells out with its ambiguity the dualistic structure of the whole composition. The ensuing picture provides clear evidence that the things named in the poem, while they are real and indeed take on an active role in our lives in an *objective*, tangible way - a notion articulated through the present indicative "participam" - also present another side. It is this other manifestation of our physical world, bespeaking the essence of things as convincingly expressed by the present subjunctive "sejam" - the undetectable and therefore inconsequential or "superfluous" - that the composition proposes to explore here. Consequently, given the understanding that by *superfluous* is meant that which transcends the world of the senses, it may be inferred that the text utilizes some of the most common and ordinary sensory experiences only to translate them into expressive or artistic reality. Let us proceed at this point to consider the metaphorical dimensions of the elements that make up the introductory stanza, heedful of their function as universal symbols and, most importantly, as indices of the poet's individuality.

As we now reappraise the words "livro" and "rosa", first as single entities and thereafter as elliptic constructions invested with properties and prerogatives of conventional clauses, we notice at once that they represent concepts diametrically opposed to one another in one way, yet complementary in another sense. To make its point, the text relies first on some basic notions regarding two elements that represent opposite ends of the human spectrum, the rational (books) and the intuitive (rose), then it transcends their ordinary connotations to permit new meanings to be generated. Although books are ordinarily recognized as depositories of time-tested knowledge, the emphasis is not on the content of those books but on their transcendence. The text seems to suggest in fact that if the lessons they impart are to make an impact on our lives, we must capture and preserve the spirit of our learning. This same type of animistic posture which would indicate that books acquire a life of their own in us, is reflected as well in the poem's attitude toward the rose. Traditionally the symbol of the intrinsically beauti-

ful and the sadly ephemeral, in this composition the rose is passionately referred to as an active participant in our lives. By alluding once again to our intimate, transcendental rapport with this delicate flower - a rapport which gives the flower power over us - the text makes a clear statement about the nature of the aesthetic experience. The latter may now be seen as the interaction between the work of art and its admiring beholder.

This metaphor depicting human beings as lovers at once controlled and motivated by our spiritual ties with the outer world, is continued with each additional image provided, individually and collectively, by the rest of the secondary clauses in this stanza. The first construction - the phrase "Um trecho musical que nos envolve/a horas inauguraís" - suggesting that even a simple tune overheard early in the morning can make a difference in our day, contains a number of symbolic meanings of universal sweep. Yet it also manifests variants that validate and reinforce the dualistic structure of the composition while allowing for multiple meanings. We see in fact that music, unanimously held to be man's most universal and direct form of communication, is used here in an allegorical pattern that owes its imagery to the revitalization of a number of dead metaphors, and, inversely, to the text's own mythmaking capacity. To be sure, "trecho musical", ordinarily understood in everyday Portuguese as a musical passage or a simple melody, may here best be interpreted as a rush of melodic sounds sweeping us off as we lie in bed ready to wake up. Given the polisemic nature of the verb "envolver", meaning to *envelop*, *embrace* and *involve*, new imagery surfaces when we appraise this clause against the metaphorical pattern established by the first two. The result projects two prevailing pictures. In one, music appears as a passionate lover awakening us at dawn with an embrace. An even broader interpretation can be made from the implications of the pair "horas inauguraís", now not just early morning or dawn, but as a new auspicious beginning: a time of renovation. Music functions here as a signifier pointing to the essential character of art. We see the latter depicted as an all-encompassing force, similar to love, with the capacity to revitalize us by involving us in its creative process.

Analogous statements concerning the immediate and long-range impact of the aesthetic experience are present in the ensuing

sentence which reads "O crepúsculo acaso visto num país/que não sendo da terra/evoca apenas a lembrança de outra lembrança mais longínqua". The text exploits the preestablished awareness of the nostalgic, romantic effect of the dying rays of the sun at dusk to expand on the universal image by adding an unusual touch of its own. To wit, to the familiar blend of sadness and delight traditionally associated with one's reaction to the spectacle nature provides at the end of the day, the poem adds a new dimension. It is the allusion to the impact of twilight on someone who observes it in an unfamiliar faraway land. The composition suggests that from such a perspective, though one cannot feel but sentimental, the memories that this particular twilight recalls are not the same. They are only approximations of the real thing the latter meaning those recollections evoked in the familiar surroundings of one's home country.

At the most superficial metaphorical level, the text discloses a pattern basically similar to that of the clause containing the reference to dawn. As with the allusion to daybreak, the poem plays here with very faint light and dark tones to intimate a number of symbolic images. While in both references - dawn and dusk - the transparencies of the respective images indicate the transcendence of each vision, particular attention must be paid to some all-important variants. To begin with, the promissory, cheerful mood created by the rising sun at daybreak has been replaced by the bitter-sweet image of sundown. Furthermore, the already tenuous picture of the dying sun is reduced to a mere abstraction, as we observe the adverbial form "acaso" questioning and casting doubt over the past participle "visto", the negative particle "não" denying "sendo" and, finally, "apenas" blurring even further the opaque image delineated by the phrase "evoca... a lembrança de outra lembrança mais longínqua". The ensuing overall image shows twilight filtered down to its bare essence, the result of its having been perceived through our emotional involvement as beholders who internalize what we see and interpret it in terms of what is most familiar and dear to us: our homeland and our past. Interpreted against the composition's animistic perspective, we notice this central image stratifying and developing into a whole chain of images that reinforce previous patterns while adding new dimensions to the principal message. Thus the aesthetic experience, symbolized by the

spectacle of a foreign twilight, may be understood here as an act which, though physical and temporary as an outside phenomenon, owes its immanence and permanence to our sensitivity that gives it meaning. Concomitantly, the text seems to be commenting on the dichotomy of life and art, with the poem serving as self-referring evidence. Looking beyond the surface of the succession of images in this fourth secondary clause, we in fact discover art portrayed as life distilled and preserved through form. The poem then proceeds to illustrate this idea through the performance of its very text. Further inferences about our personal identification and intimate dialogue with the work of art are derived from the symbolism embodied in the imagery depicting the unusual effect of twilight on those of us who wander away from home. It may be deduced from such a depiction that art does not reproduce objective or outer reality but moves away from it to create its own version of reality. The latter represents the artist's personal perception of the world. Like the foreign sun down - the text would indicate - the work of art, originally given life by its creator, receives new life in us the beholders who thus become co-participants in the creative act. As with the poem's implied wanderer, we too can only perceive the aesthetic experience in its essential form, that is, filtered through our own individual emotional reaction to the text. The imagery first used to suggest with the auspicious light tones of dawn the uplifting character of the aesthetic experience, is brought back here by way of the sensory representation of twilight to intimate the redemptive nature of art. Utilizing the universal symbolic implications associated with sunlight in its waning moments - imagistically representing the day at its saddest hour - the poem exhibits by its very form its own redemptive, self-renewing character. This whole process is articulated and given additional cohesion in the prosodic make-up of the five lines that comprise this section of the composition. Herein, an assonantal pattern featuring the combinations [e-a] / [a-a] / [i-a] and the consonantal sound [s], acting in concert with a total absence of punctuation throughout, results in a rhythmic *crescendo* that reproduces, at the most immediate level of reader-awareness, the silent, continuous, self-perpetuating act of artistic creation.

The next secondary clause, wherein one reads: "O esboço tão-somente de um gesto/de ferina intenção", introduces a major

variant in the familiar pattern. The outside stimulus, the source of the memorable and profound impression indicated here, is one with decidedly ugly and ominous overtones: no less than some one's gesture threatening us with brutal bodily harm. The shock ing surprise we first feel at this sudden and unexpected break with previous imagery in the composition soon vanishes, however, as we closely examine the discursive features of the text and recognize the game the latter continues to play with the reader. We notice, for instance, that we are dealing in this case not with a purely concrete situation, as it would at first appear, but with the semblance of one. Interacting in their syntactical environments, the individual forms generate images that, although suggestive for their visual/tactile effect, are tenuous at best. To be sure, by a gesture one does not visualize harm but the si mulation of it, just as an intention does not signify the execu tion of an act or the act itself, but merely its premeditation. The reference to brutal aggression at the core of this portion of the composition is further subverted and virtually nullified by two additional elements, "esboço", understood here as hint or suggestion, and "tão-somente", best rendered as *barely*. The transparency created by such a contrivance makes for a transcen dental reading that, far from being discordant with our assessment of the first four secondary clauses, at once strengthens it and contributes new meanings.

If we consider the poem's dualistic structure with its system of coordinates, we must regard this break in the continuity of bright and reassuring images as a perfectly logical opposition. It is meant in fact to represent the other extreme of the spectrum of human reaction to phenomenological experience which the composition intends to cover from its ironic perspective. Thus viewed, the thought of serious harm, perhaps even death, brought up at this point, does not clash with prior allusions to wisdom, beauty and hope. It serves instead as a counterpoint. What is introduced here is the other side of reality in a construct orchestrated to give artistic form to the contradictory and often incomprehensible totality of life - a totality the poem conceives as our perception and intimate dialogue with the outer world. In this sense the poem is making a statement about life and the antipodal ways in which it affects and shapes human beings. Having already dealt with enlightening and uplifting

experiences, the composition now justifiably switches over to the other, equally significant pole represented by the tragic and the ugly. The implication here would intimate that our natural fear of being harmed and dying could actually produce positive results, provided it be viewed in the proper light. By referring to the coordinates so far evaluated in the stanza, it is possible to conjecture that the poem is exhorting the reader not to be crushed by the inescapable reality of sorrow and tragedy. Conversely, one is encouraged to derive a spiritual benefit from such awareness. In terms of previous speculations bagged on the predictability of the text, the most recent additions would ascribe to the quiet, dignified acceptance of man's tragic legacy greater wisdom and appreciation of the physical world and all its beauty. Broader meanings may be derived if we observe how the text continues to revitalize dead metaphors, thus generating new myths of its own. The most relevant case in point is the play on the word "esboço". First interpreted as gesture or hint, as a result of an instinctive reading, the word opens the way for a host of new meanings when divested of its social connotations and restored to its original, essential significance. Reappraised as *sketch* or *drawing*, it now points to the act of artistic creation - an act of love conceived by its creator to dispell her own apprehensions which she now shares with her audience. As the emotional impact resulting from our intimate involvement with the text shows, the composition reaffirms the redemptive nature of poetry, an art-form with the power to ennoble even death and transmute the transitoriness of life into aesthetic permanence.

The next segment, comprising the clause "A graça/de um retalho de lua a pervagar num reposteiro", perpetuates the game of oppositions and ambiguities. Yet, once again it is the text's performance with its system of constants and variants that continues to intrigue. The original play with light and dark images is reiterated and strengthened with the introduction of new and surprising effects. In sharp contrast to the gripping imagery of the preceding clause, the new representation of an experience with a profound and enduring influence is a tenuous and delicate one. It is the reflection of a moonbeam shining through a curtain. At its most superficial level this image, which relies for its impact on common awareness of the quieting effect

of moonlight, also avails itself of traditional symbolism as a point of departure for a variety of allusions of a transcendental nature. Thus the dark night is used in the beginning to represent our mysterious universe, while the light of the moon functions implicitly as the magic antidote with the power to dispell all mysteries and allay our fears of the unknown. Looking beyond this traditional representation, we find however new and significant imagery intended to expand on the poem's two basic premises: one, that beneath it all there is and invisible and unspoken love-connection enabling humans to communicate with the physical world and with each other, and two, that art is its highest expression.

Three devices open the way for an understanding of the deep structure of this portion of the composition. First, there is the allegorical portrayal of the moon as the silhouette of a lovely creature swaying her way across a luminous path. Subsequently, we find the image of the moon reduced to a mere "shred" and, finally, we come to discover that the reference to the very brightness of the moon is made through metonymy, not directly. As a result of the ambiguity and the ensuing poetic space created by such contrivances, each image is invested with new and independent meanings. Consequently, moonlight stands for more than simple hope. It must be interpreted instead as deep and abiding faith, suggesting that it is through such faith that we become enlightened and are able to discern the truth shining through the barrier the world places in our way. Worth remarking is the image used here to represent objective reality with its pretensions and inconsistencies. It is the picture of an undulating curtain serving merely as ornament or complement to a room.⁷ Even more striking is the implication for this image generated by the word-symbol "graça". Evaluated on the basis of such coordinates as "rosa", "trecho musical" and "crepúsculo" - the most direct indices of the stanza's commentary on aesthetics in general and on this composition in particular - this word would allude to the creative act itself. As such, art would be represented in this segment as a reassuring, albeit tenuous, lightbeam filtered through the person of the artist. The latter would then be understood as one entrusted with falsifying or mythifying outer reality in order to present to us the world devoid at last of its frightening secrets.

The seventh and last secondary clause - "A mesa sobre a qual me debruço/cada dia mais temerosa/de meus próprios dizeres." - manifests structural and conceptual features that set it apart from the others. The most obvious variant is of a referential nature, namely the shift in poetic voice, from the collective "we" expressed only minimally at the very top of the composition ("nossa vida"/"nos envolve"), to the personal "I". From this observation it may be deduced that the poetic persona, who up to this point had remained in the background voicing common universal concerns, has now chosen, for reasons yet unknown to us, to come out of anonymity and state her particular case. Presumably, the statement constitutes the poet's personal and private thoughts expressed through her creation - the lyric "I" - who confesses to being apprehensive over the things she dares tell in her writings.

As we examine the primary imagery of this segment, we are left with the impression that this is the self-portrait of an individual at once fulfilled and troubled who wishes she did not have to expose herself by revealing unspeakable secrets. Particularly effective is the picture of the poet laboring over her desk which has become, by continuous contact, an extension of her and which she now regards as both a source of joy and anxiety.

Having accounted for the most accessible characteristics of this final clause, we must now identify the less obvious but all-important levels of interpretation. Again, we shall look for the metaphorical implications in the poetic space - in the ambiguities and paradoxes that tipify the composition as a whole. The clue is provided this time by the unexpected and puzzling break the segment makes with respect to previous imagery. In contrast to the increasingly diaphonous and suggestive images of the first six parallel clauses, the text now shows a concrete and well defined picture. In the light of the abrupt change of poetic voice, the new contrastive imagery cannot be justified in the conventional way. It can only be comprehended in terms of the composition's internal or autonomous logic presupposing a non-literal interpretation of the text. Transcending therefore the plastic imagery brought about by a crystal-clear language and, mindful of the poem's myth-making capabilities, we must look for the essential message beyond first impressions. Thus the transgression of conventional continuity

must cease to be perplexing to us and should be viewed instead as the gateway or introduction to an archetypal dimension. Herein we see the poetic persona develop into the larger-than-life figure of the poet - a figure presented as preeminent in the order of things. This entity, which up to now had remained implicit, is at last identified and its role consecrated by virtue of the referential characteristics of the first person singular voice - the most authoritative, direct, subjective and intimate form of address.

Within this spectrum, a whole array of symbolic meanings comes to the surface featuring a series of oppositions that validates and lend coherence to the stanza's binary system. We can now capture, in addition to the dualism contrasting the internal poetic persona with the universal figure, the interaction of the implied "eu" with "mesa". The two function reciprocally and emblemize the perfect communion and identification of the poet with her mission. Accordingly, the verb form "me debruço" would articulate the dialectical character of the creative act. The artist is in fact depicted as "toiling over" and yet as "being sustained" by her job which assumes here, through the mythifying power of the text, the properties of a labor of love. In turn, "dizeres", interacting with its qualifier "meus próprios", translates into two basic notions. First, it would signify those very personal secrets best kept to oneself, save for poets whose bitter-sweet task it is to tell them. Secondly, it would allude to the poet's unorthodox vision. The phrase "cada dia mais temerosa" describes the lyric "I" as well as the universal figure of the poet in a way that encompasses at once the person of the artist and the nature of her craft. Poetry is depicted as a continuous process paralleling life, and the poet as one increasingly aware of her arduous mission and of her limitations as a human being. Hence, her mounting fear of having to express the unutterable and of being obliged to put no less than the ineffable into words.

As was pointed out in the introductory remarks, the second and final stanza introduces a metamorphosis that changes the course of the composition. The key-term on which we must look for a close reading of the stanza and, ultimately, for an understanding of the total message of the entire poem, is "no entanto". Again here the text maximizes the flexibility and vitality of

language to engender new ambiguities. This time we are faced with the task of deciding between two possible functions of the aforementioned form, one adverbial, the other conjunctional. Eventually, we realize that both interpretations of "no entanto" are legitimate, thereby understanding the form to mean at once *however* and *in the meantime*, each with implications of its own. This notion leads us to see this second and final portion of the poem as related to the initial one by the [mere] fact that it functions both as an opposition and as a logical complement to it.

Bearing these considerations in mind, let us look at the format of the stanza. It is made up of a single rhetorical question subdivided into two parts whose expected answer is *nothing*. In the first part of the question, composed of a main clause - "que tenho a ver contigo" - and three parallel constructions all dependent on it, the subject is the lyric "I". The subject of the second rhetorical inquiry is instead the second person singular "tu". The division causes one to suspect that this second half of the poem is related to the first one by virtue of the breakdown of the first-person plural "nos" - at the top of the composition - into its original parts "eu"/"tu". We are therefore led to surmise that if in the beginning the poetic persona was speaking on behalf of herself and an anonymous interlocutor, she is now disclosing his identity. It is presumably a lover whom she is now addressing in a direct way only to reject him on the basis of their incompatibility. The parallel clauses that follow represent, individually and collectively, the various grounds for the disagreement and consequent rejection. The metaphorical level of interpretation is opened to us here through the ambiguity generated by the bisemic role of "no entanto". As a conjunction, this form would represent a constant reflecting the symbolism of "livro" at the start of the composition, with the poet depicted as one endowed with knowledge and wisdom. In its capacity as an adverbial form, "no entanto" (*however*) represents a variant, as evidenced by the substitution of an entire relative clause for the single noun up above, by the replacement of the indefinite article with the definite ("um livro" > "o livro") and, finally, by the shift from the affirmative to the negative ("não leste o livro que li"). Appraised against these variables, the question "Que tenho a ver con-

tigo" - *What have I to do with you* - clearly shows the poetic persona setting herself apart not just from her intra-textual addressee, but from all those who do not share in her love for learning and in her passion for capturing the essence of life. Further inferences bring back and reinforce the notion that true wisdom can only be achieved by being at one with all that surrounds us, even the supposedly insignificant things. Since we are to assume that such wisdom is a rare gift, there follows that poets, who can capture the spirit of things and relate to them the way no one else can, are indeed extraordinary people. Then, if by love is meant the ability to identify with someone or something and to establish an intimate relationship with them, poets must be the only perfect lovers in the world. Similar conclusions may be derived from the second parallel clause which reads "Não viste a rosa que plantei". Here the poet is obviously reproaching her friend for not having shared with her the joy of planting a beautiful flower. Owing to the metaphorical context established in the first stanza, it is safe to say that as a coordinate of the previously mentioned rose, this flower epitomizes at once the poet's unusual sensitivity to beauty and the masterpiece which results from the artist's love affair with life. The image of the poet planting a rose provides a variable with significant symbolism. In effect, if we regard the planting of a flower as a way of renewing and prolonging its life, and if the poetic persona is equating herself with a gardener, the allusion is clear. Like gardeners, artists also "borrow" from life those things which time would otherwise destroy and restore them to new life, granting them permanence. This is implicitly understood in the poem as an act of love and sacrifice. The phrase "Não viste" provides a perfect counterpoint for the metaphor "a rosa que plantei", for it opposes to the poet's creative ability the insensitivity of her intra-textual addressee. Extra-textually, the remarks would be directed instead to all those who fail to appreciate artistic creation, considering it unimportant or "superfluous". The love metaphor is carried one step further in the next clause, with the addition of a significant variant. The phrase reads: "Nem contempleste o pôr-do-sol/ã hora que o amor se foi". This statement, understood at its most elementary level, would point to the speaker's break with her onetime sweetheart - an event which supposedly coincided

with the end of a day. As a coordinate of stanza one, this portion of the composition suggests an array of deeper meanings. Recalling in fact the corresponding imagery in the preceding stanza, wherein the poetic persona had likened herself to a wanderer in a foreign land, both saddened and comforted by the sight of a twilight, the present picture appears to reflect a similar experience. It is, however, a much more personal and specific situation, given the substitution of a concrete image - a particular sunset - for the vague representation of a far away twilight. Expanding on the traditional symbolism of dusk as a ritual of death and regeneration, the text reiterates with greater intensity and in more definite terms the animistic posture that serves as the composition's basic premise. As such, we are reminded here once again of the necessity of integrating with the rest of creation by allowing the daily occurrences we often take for granted to become a living part of us. Sundown with its bittersweet imagery is utilized in this instance to reflect on a number of concepts central to the main theme. Once again love is represented as a dialectical, all-encompassing force. Such a representation features a variety of oppositions, the first of which is the unlikely, yet artistically feasible spiritual union of mankind with the physical world. Defined as love, this union is equated with life itself and opposed to death. Thirdly, we see the figure of the artist portrayed as an ideal lover and opposed to the common man. This particular passage seems to imply in fact that if man were able to relate to nature and identify with its moods, then one could derive a feeling of hope from the beautiful sight of the dying sun. As a self-referring text, the passage is a further reminder of the special vision of artists, while providing direct evidence of the redemptive nature of their craft. The underlying implication in the speaker's reproach to her antagonist is that since artists are endowed with the ability to capture the spirit of things and communicate that feeling to others, their works - as the text itself proves - are the greatest gift to most of us who are short-sighted and uncommunicative. We are urged, therefore, to share in the poet's vision. Avoiding the insensitivity, ignorance and lack of wisdom ascribed to the poetic "tu", we are invited to look upon such vision as a way out of disappointments and fears.

The composition concludes with one last opposition expressed in the second portion of the rhetorical question: "Que tens a ver comigo/se dentro em ti não prevalecem/as cousas todavia supêrfluas/do meu intransferível patrimônio?" This clause, an independent one, represents a reiteration of the central thought. It also serves to complete the overall message by bringing together the various semantic planes. At the most elementary level we find the poetic persona's ecumenical, animistic vision contrasted with the narrow-minded attitude of her antagonist in the lover's quarrel. He does not share her deep feelings for the little things which in her view are so vital to our being in unison with our world. As throughout, the key to the subjacent meanings lies in the network of variants and the all-important ambiguities they generate. Assessing this parting comment against the rest of the composition, we observe that, save for four main changes, the last segment is a nearly perfect match for the tail-end of the first stanza and the opening of the second and concluding strophe. The variables on which we shall focus for an interpretation of the metaphorical significance of this final portion consist in the following: 1) the substitution of the definite article ("as cousas") for the adjective *such* ("tais cou sas") which reflected an all the indefinite articles previously used to name things; 2) the replacement of the uncertain "talvez" with "todavia" as a modifier for "supêrfluas"; 3) the use of "intransferível patrimônio" in place of "íntimo domínio" to describe the poet's treasured possessions; and, finally, 4) the referential shift from the first-person singular form "eu" ("que tenho a ver comigo") to the second, familiar voice, "tu" ("Que tens a ver comigo"). The most obvious conclusion we can reach from observations one and two is that the poem has moved from the general and vague to the specific and concrete. This phenomenon, appraised against previous textual evidence, points to the poet's switch from a position of *humility* and *subjectivity* to one of undisputed *authority* based on *strong conviction*. It is the text's way of articulating the dualistic, paradoxical position of the artist who possesses all of those prerogatives in viewing life. After all, art can deal with the most common subjects without being irrelevant, for nothing is unimportant to the the artist who is able to capture the spirit of all things. As the composition suggests, poets have no obligation to see

and express reality in an "acceptable" way. They do not have to make any compromises. This postulate, it would appear, is rooted in a tradition passed on from one generation to another. This is the poet's "intransferível patrimônio" - her inalienable heritage - and she tells us that if what she feels and tries to communicate makes no sense to some, as symbolized by her interlocutor, there is a perfect explanation for it. Art was never meant to imitate life, nor to relate to everyone. It proposed instead to understand life and pass on this awareness to those willing to share in the aesthetic experience with the creator. As this composition proves, poetry is indeed, like love, a process of identification, communication and co-participation. As with life itself, of which love is a manifestation, the work of art is viewed here as a twofold act. It involves joy and sacrifice in which we as beholders must participate equally with the artist. Having established "Do supêrfluo"'s eminent capacity to challenge our own imagination, we are certain that it will go on communicating and delighting us through its text, with every pain we take to make it a living part of us.

NOTES

1. Lisboa, Henriqueta. *Pousada do ser*. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Fronteira, 1982. p. 527-528.
2. Paulini, Livia. *Henriqueta Lisboa e sua mensagem universal*. Belo Horizonte, Imprensa Oficial de Minas Gerais, 1984.
3. _____. Op. cit., p. 23.
4. Fábio Lucas observes that the dramatic tension resulting from Lisboa's many textual oppositions derives from her non-conformist *Weltanschauung*, which causes her to transform conventional reality into a very personal conception: "Sob o ponto de vista conteudístico, podemos dizer que Henriqueta Lisboa se esmera na contemplação intimista do mundo interior: transforma objetos, lembranças, pronunciamentos, em facetas de uma sensibilidade oposta ao universo." "A poesia de Henriqueta Lisboa". *Suplemento Literário do Minas Gerais*. Belo Horizonte, Nov. 30, 1985. p. 14.
5. It is worth noting here that the text, functioning not as a mere speech act but as a literary artifact, sets up an ambiguous communicative situation which unfolds in an imaginary context, with the poetic voice "we" representing an anonymous human/social totality. Keeping in mind Lisboa's practice of transmuting the objective and specific into purely aesthetic experiences of universal sweep, we should surmise that the aforementioned lyric subject may or may not include the figure of the poet. Similarly, we are dealing here with an unspecified interlocutor on the person of the reader. For an enlightening study on the subject, see 'Hablaⁿtes poéticos/Oyentes poéticos'. In Rivero, Eliaⁿa. "Reflexiones para una nueva poética: la lírica hispanoamericana y su estudio". *Actas del Sexto Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas*. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1980), p. 601-605.
6. As in my study "A imagem da mulher em 'Prutescência', de Henriqueta Lisboa", also here the term "ambiguous" follows William Empson's definition that it "may mean an indecision as to what one wishes to say, the intention of meaning various

things, the probability that something has two meanings, and the fact that the same statement has various meanings". (*Seven Types of Ambiguity*. New York: Meridian, 1955), p. 8.

7. Lucas supports our view of Lisboa's animistic posture: "Uma jóia, uma ânfora, o mármore, a rosa, objetos de escala menor, transportáveis ou simplesmente ao alcance de qualquer manipulação, tornam-se foco de uma operação metafísica, ante os olhos de Henriqueta Lisboa". Fabio Lucas, "A poesia de Henriqueta Lisboa". Such is the case of "reposteiro", a word frequently used by the poet in situations ("Depois da opção" from *Mitadouro e outros poemas*, and "Condição" from *Além da imagem*) where she opposes tragedy, gloom, the dark side of human beings, symbolized by the "reposteiro" or door curtain, to everything that is good love, hope, life itself.

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