

**Lúcia Cechin. *A Imagem Poética em Vitorino Nemésio*.
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A Imagem Poética em Vitorino Nemésio (1983) by Lúcia Cechin constitutes a useful, albeit somewhat outdated, psychoanalytic study of imagery in the poetry of Vitorino Nemésio. Cechin's theoretical framework, not surprisingly, is based on the dual Freudian/Jungian notions of an individual as well as collective unconscious, and presupposes that poetic imagery, in the form of archetypes and myths, frequently originates in these particular spheres of the human psyche. More specifically, Cechin's methodology is guided by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's consideration of the elements—air, water, earth, and fire—as archetypal keys to unlocking underlying meanings and unifying myths in poetic imagery. According to Bachelard, to “imagine” is, for the poet, a psychic state that transcends mere “perception” and is capable of creating a new reality, one that is ultimately more “real” than the reality stemming from sensory experience: “I dream of the world, therefore, the world exists as I have dreamt it” (46-47).

Building upon Bachelard's understanding of the creative imagination, Cechin traces imagery pertaining to the four elements that has emerged broadly in more than ten works of poetry by Nemésio, including *Canto Matinal* (1916), *Nem Toda a Noite a Vida* (1952), *O Pão e a Culpa* (1955), and *Limite de Idade* (1972), among others. Seemingly disparate expressions of elemental imagery in these works are, at the moment of poetic creation or “poiésis,” bound by a common sentiment of “loss.” This loss manifests itself on both a temporal and a spatial level for Nemésio, whose imagery, in the poet's own words, stems from a constant “busca do sentido da existência pela representação do passado” (87). For example, Cechin demonstrates how images of the earth, or land, consistently point to Nemésio's birthplace in Praia da Vitória on the island of Terceira, and a family environment portrayed affectionately as both poor and nurturing. Air is linked to time, Cechin suggests, and the predomi-

nant sensibility evoked by this element is that of lost youth, an idyllic and care-free time spent as a child in his homeland of Terceira. Images relating to fire correspond to artistic inspiration and the impulse to create poetry. When sparked by *saudades*, or the imaginative reconstruction of his lost youth, the fire burns intensely; however, when confronted with the reality of the present, this element flickers out and becomes a metaphor for diminished artistic passion.

The longest section of Cechin's study addresses the element of water, which she argues constitutes the primordial image *par excellence* in Nemésio's poetry. The ocean forever embracing Terceira is simultaneously the poet's place of origin (as symbolized by the mother figure and the rocking cradle) and a reflection of an idealized earlier self (as symbolized by Narcissus's mirror). Both images stem from Nemésio's childhood years in Terceira, a time the poet longs for as an adult living and working in Lisbon. The ocean is also the poet's final resting place, the desired tomb for a man who wishes to reunite with his true self through death, as in this poem from *Eu, Comovido a Oeste*:

Quando eu morrer, a terra aberta
 Me beba de um só trago e esqueça.
 [... ..]
 Dizem: "a terra que nos come":
 Eu digo: "a que nos bebe"—e basta.
 Somos só água que se some:
 Choveu e fomos
 na vida gasta. (*Imagem Poética* 215)

The confluence of these elemental images, according to Cechin, takes the form of a unifying grand-archetype in Nemésio's poetry, which she has identified as the "Lost Island." The myth of the "Lost Island" extends far back into Western literature. From the many islands that Odysseus visits in the *Odyssey*, to Plato's submerged Atlantis and Prospero's isle of exile in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the lost island has long been associated with utopia in the Western imagination, a sentiment best crystallized in Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516. The Portuguese literary tradition maintains a special place for this particular *topos*, as exemplified by Camões's utopian description of Venus's island of love in canto nine of *Os Lusíadas*, and Fernando Pessoa's treatment, in his modern epic *Mensagem*, of the "Ilhas Afortunadas," that shrouded, misty isle of the imagination where the hidden king D. Sebastião resides, the

personification of a latent Portuguese (and human) soul.

Cechin concludes that the sum total of losses evoked by the elemental imagery present in Nemésio's poetry points to Terceira, and more poignantly the poet's childhood, as the utopian "lost island" of his unconscious self. Just as for Jung the island represents a refuge against the assault of the tempestuous unconscious, for the poet it becomes a refuge of the imagination. According to Cechin:

Vitorino Nemésio é açoriano da Ilha Terceira. A tónica dominante de seus versos é a mágoa que o Poeta extravasa pela sua Ilha natal, que ele abandonou na juventude, para fixar-se no continente. Liricamente, Nemésio revive os seus tempos de menino na Ilha. Geograficamente, a região dos Açores corresponde à lendária Atlântida descrita por Platão... O Mito que subjaz, portanto, às imagens da água, é o mito ou complexo da Ilha Perdida. Se voltado para um direccionamento futuro, a Ilha Perdida, mais do que uma constatação nostálgica, representa uma solução de re-surgimento interior, pelo reconhecimento de ser que co-participa da eternidade de Deus, e que o Poeta aponta ao leitor atento. Nemésio constrói sua utopia, como vimos, nestes dois sentidos: em direcção ao passado, numa tentativa de repensar, tornar consciente e preencher o "temps perdu" de uma vida pregressa; em direcção ao futuro, numa busca de alimento à esperança. (243)

Cechin suggests in chapter one that the number of in-depth studies of Nemésio's work remains relatively scarce, though brief reference is made to previous critical texts by Maria Lúcia Lepecki, João Gaspar Simões, José Martins Garcia, David Mourão-Ferreira, and, notably, Eduardo Lourenço who, in his essay entitled "Vitorino Nemésio ou da livre navegação," establishes a parallel between the ocean as geographic space surrounding Terceira and the ocean as interior space in Nemésio's poetic imagination (30). Given the close links to her own reading of water as elemental imagery in Nemésio's poetry, it is peculiar that Cechin does not extend greater recognition to Lourenço's earlier contribution to this topic. Nevertheless, despite more recent progress made by António Valdemar, Eduardo Ferraz da Rosa, Maria Margarida Maia Gouveia and others to fill the critical lacuna regarding Nemésio's work, Cechin's study still offers readers an insightful window into this particular Azorean writer's poetic recovery of an idealized past.

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