

## **A Cabeça Calva de Deus by Corsino Fortes: Litany & Music in Praise of Cape Verde**

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**Abstract.** This article sums up some of the major features of the three books of poetry by Corsino Fortes, which were collected in one volume entitled *A Cabeça Calva de Deus*. It emphasizes (a) the way the author's work can be seen as a continuation of the Cape Verdean literary tradition, (b) the innovative nature of his poetic language, and (c) his vocation for a kind of writing that is epic, rhetorical and sacral. It further describes the pictographic transfiguration achieved by Fortes in his poetic rendering of the cultural and historical universe that is Cape Verde.

*A Cabeça Calva de Deus* [*God's Bald Head*] is the name of a poetic trilogy that was begun in 1973 with the publication of *Pão & Fonema* [*Bread & Phoneme*], followed by *Árvore & Tambor* [*Tree & Drum*] in 1986, and concluded with *Pedras de Sol & Substância* [*Stones of Sun & Substance*], published in 2001. The trilogy can be read as a journey, one that begins by announcing the liberation of the country, rejoices at this newfound liberation through the sounds of celebration and rejoicing, and, finally, renders Cape Verde's sun-drenched culture into something worthy of dignity. *God's Bald Head* is a condensed image for the potential for growth of the Cape Verdean world, and also for the regeneration that must begin from the limitations of its geography, climate and soil. Forsaken by the gods in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, the ten islands of Cape Verde, halfway between Africa, Europe and America, with the mineral nakedness of the drought, have in them that

poetic and rhythmic strength of which Corsino Fortes's inaugural poetry sings in an epic and sacred tone.

The first book, *Pão & Fonema*, presents us, first of all, with a poem that functions as an initial proposition, prologue or plan of intention; this is followed by three cantos. The title functions as the synthesis or alliance of two fundamental and concrete symbols which the poet conceived of in order to reformulate the Cape Verdean universe in poetic terms. These two elements carry in them various meanings—which are developed throughout the text—and they are revealing of the main characteristics of the islands of Cape Verde.

Thus, the first element—bread—is the result of the positive combination of *rain* and *corn*, those essential components that offer a solution or way-out for a country traditionally subject to drought and hunger, and, as a result of these things, to immigration. To this initial element of growth and regeneration can be added the second element—the phoneme—which implies an access to the voice, to the word, to literacy, to culture, or, better still, to the creation of an autonomous cultural world. Phoneme is also a way of reclaiming the very act of writing and of poetic creation—*poiesis*—as a new aesthetic-cultural act within the Cape Verdean literary tradition. The two symbols that have been united (and the sign that joins them—&—makes the association clear) represent physical and spiritual food, bread for the body, a voice for the mind, food that will rescue Cape Verdeans from their worldly misfortunes. An epic poem of bread and the word, the poem can be interpreted as an offering of renewal and it is invested with the ritual force of a symbolic Eucharist.

The poetic output of those in the *Claridade* movement, which was innovative in its description of Cape Verdean themes such as the flight from the land, the diaspora, homesickness, the drought and hunger, came to be enlarged upon with newer thematic and ideological perspectives by those Cape Verdean poets writing between 1962 and 1974. This is evident, and we are citing merely a few examples, in the work of Ovídio Martins, who played an important role in developing a critique of “the flight from the country” theme, in the reappropriation of African cultural elements in the poetry of António Nunes and Onésimo da Silveira, or in Gabriel Mariano's reappraisal of traditional culture in his struggle poetry. But the kind of poetry that breaks with the past and introduces an element of renewal in Cape Verdean poetry appears, in fact, only with the poetry of Arménio Vieira, T. T. Thiofe and, essentially, with the initial publication of *Pão & Fonema* in 1974. This col-

lection is technically innovative and its content reveals it to operate according to an altogether different ideological-thematic paradigm.

The reappraisal of the theme of “the flight from the land” takes up the second canto of this book, “Mar & Matrimónio” [“Sea & Marriage”]. The flight from the islands is seen, not as a misfortune, but rather as an attitude of searching, as a search for knowledge, as a way of achieving inner growth. In this sense it is like a rite of initiation; the intentions that lie behind this act are well suggested by the poem “De pé nú sobre o pão de amanhã” [“Barefoot over Tomorrow’s Bread”]. This is the point Mesquitela Lima makes in his foreword to the work: “*O caboverdiano ao sair da terra (para assumir a atitude dinâmica) vai nu, sem nada, e caminha para o pão do futuro*” [“When Cape Verdeans leave the land (in this active and dynamic stand) they go barefoot, without anything at all, and they walk in the direction of the bread of the future”] (1974, 78). Journey and exile are things that allow the islanders, both as a community and as a nation, to see themselves in an altogether different dimension: “*Que toda a partida é alfabeto que nasce / todo o regresso é nação que soletra*” [“For every time someone leaves it’s an alphabet that’s reborn / every time someone returns it’s the entire nation that spells out the letters”] (70).

The first canto heralds this change and newfound maturity. We witness how this change, born out of the impatience, the accumulated energy, and the strength that stirs within the breast of each Cape Verdean citizen, is ready to reveal itself like the volcano on the island of Fogo: “*Tchon de povo tchon de pedra! C’ma fogo ma pedra na vulcon de D’jar-Fogo*” (36). This potential movement—germinated of itself, and in empathy with the mineral wisdom of the islands—is precisely that silent movement that stirs both interior and exterior, the islands and the islander, intimately connected.

“Pão & Património” [“Bread & Patrimony”], the third and last canto of *Pão & Fonema*, traces a circle around the topographical features of Cape Verde. After calling upon the systolic and diastolic movements—which reveal that the aspirations at the heart of the islanders beat to the rhythm of their insularity—there is, once again, the contraction, the return, the point of departure. This return, emphasized through the presence of the adverb “agora,” “*Agora povo pulso / agora pão agora poema*” [“People pulse now / bread now poem now”] (76), representing, as it does, the future liberation from colonial domination that has come **now**, this return is at the origin of the discovery of the “*nova terra dentro da terra*” [“new land inside the land”] and of a new dawn, something that is made quite explicit in the poem “Konde Palmanhã Manchê”

["When Morning Dawns"]. The return implies a re-encounter: "*Não a terra das cicatrizes / Mas a terra que cicatriza*" ["Not the land that has been scarred / But the land that heals itself"] (80)—which means that the scar on the islander, who is a symbolic kind of Ulysses, needs to be accepted or recognized as such by his beloved/the island. The island, feminine, a space that is turned back on itself, provides the sense of closure necessary for the simultaneous birth and creation of the new cosmos and, also, of the poem that it celebrates by naming: "*Oh verso livre / oh semente / oh sangue de violas & viola Não consintam / Que o tempo / Roube à minha fome / O ovo do sol que nasce / e a tábua / Do meu tabernáculo*" ["O free verse (O liberated verse) / o seed / o blood of guitars & guitar Don't permit / That time / Should steal from my hunger / The egg of the sun that's born / And the tablet / Of my tabernacle"] (93).

Thus, what we have here is the convergence between a utopian, imaginary space—one that has always been sought and sung about in Cape Verdean poetry—and the geography of the country, and also the nation. Since the days of its inception Cape Verdean literature has mapped out a mythical scenario for itself, one that Manuel Ferreira has referred to as the "*mito hesperitano ou a nostalgia do paraíso perdido*" ["Hesperidian myth or the nostalgia for the lost paradise"] (1985) and that one encounters, especially, in the works of José Lopes, Eugénio Tavares and Pedro Cardoso; that myth revolves around the idea of a legendary or magical origin for the islands (the Hesperides, Atlantis) *in illo tempore*, one that evokes the gardens of Paradise (the gardens of the Hesperides), the nostalgia for a lost paradise and a golden age. A subsequent myth that was incorporated into this earlier myth by the poets of the *Claridade* movement is the myth of "Pasárgada," fundamentally a "flight from the country" myth; this myth gives continuation to that search for an ideal space by expanding the search for a space of happiness that is evident in the first myth, a space the islands cannot provide. What *Pão & Fonema* does is to summon that mythical space/time so that it coincides with the real space/time; this other mythical country of origin—of flight, of escape—is returned to the center of the islands, and, for the first time, the space of fertilization and blessedness, the *locus-amoenus*, coincides with the motif of the nation, which has been rediscovered by the foundational myth.

*Árvore & Tambor* [Tree & Drum], the second collection, published in 1986, was the promise, "the Promised Land" of Corsino Fortes's first book, *Pão & Fonema* (1973). The first poem of the third canto in this collection explains the title in the following manner: "*Que as colinas nascem / na omo-*

*plata dos homens / com um cântico na aorta / árvore & tambor & sangue*” [“May the hills be born / In the shoulder-blades of men / with a canticle in the aorta / tree & drum & blood”] (75).

Thus we see that the first book already contained the second collection in gestation; and we see the obvious thread that links the first to the second. The historical imperative of re-inventing Cape Verde in epic and mythical terms remains and it is further expanded upon. The title *Árvore & Tambor* retakes the proposal of *Pão & Fonema* and enlarges on it. Out of the fragmented phoneme that reclaimed the freedom to be both word and voice comes the full sound of the drum; because it belongs within an African tradition the drum introduces a new language of identification with Africa, a language of celebratory rhythms and solidarity: “*Os homens que nasceram da Estrela da manhã / assim foram / Árvore & Tambor pela alvorada / plantar no lábio da tua porta / África: / mais uma espiga mais um livro mais uma rocha*” [“The men born out of the Morning Star / were thus formed / Tree & Drum at dawn / so as to plant on the lips of your door / Africa: / one more corn cob one more book one more rock”] (102).

The African connotations of the word “drum” are deliberately appropriated by the poet; it is a word that harkens back to the work of many other poets, the most significant one being José Craveirinha, the Mozambican poet (“*Quero ser tambor*”—“I want to be a drum”). The concept of “tree” also suggests “bread”; it is a way of using the action in order to make concrete the act: planting, building, renewing the body, the spirit, the land, the nation: “*E o espírito é árvore*” [“And the spirit is a tree”]; “*ó velho arbusto! Que foi colónia*” [“O old shrub! That was a colony once”]; “*Vem! E ergue a tua árvore / Aqui*” [“Come! And raise your tree / Here”]. (105, 106, 193)

*Árvore & Tambor* also works around the important symbolism of rounded forms, where the circularity of the universe that it is being created, when it acquires its own momentum, acquires also the spherical form of a cosmos. If we consider, for example, the structure of the poem, the initial “Proposição & Prólogo” [“Proposition & Prologue”] and the five cantos that follow, which together constitute the text (and the organization of this material, once again, reveals the author’s vocation for epic poetry), we notice how the text ends with a final “Proposição & Prólogo” that takes up the material developed in the beginning. Any reading of the poem (and of its intentions) thus becomes circular; there has been a necessary closing off of that which has grown within the poem and of the world that it has concentrically conquered.



But the semantic field around these words and around the title does not exhaust itself with these observations we have made. One of the characteristic features of Corsino Fortes's poetry is the use of a same word in different contexts, never as mere repetition, but rather for the sake of recurrence; this, in turn, allows for the generation of new metaphors, which, as we know, revolve around an axis of equivalence. It is this axis of equivalence that throughout the poem establishes the likeness that exists between a group of words suggested by "*tambor*" ["drum"], words such as "*esfera*" ["sphere"], "*roda*" ["wheel"], "*rosto*" ["face"], "*ovo*" ["egg"], "*ventre*" ["womb"], "*útero*" ["uterus" or "womb"], "*umbigo*" ["navel"], or between those words suggested by "*árvore*" ["tree"], words such as "*raiz*" ["root"], "*hélice*" ["coil"], "*arbusto*" ["shrub"], "*semente*" ["seed"], "*seiva*" ["sap"], "*sangue*" ["blood"]. These semantic clusters, of which we have mentioned but a few, tend to group and regroup in the most varied of combinations, which results in the constant appearance of new images, all based around these condensed groups of symbolically-charged words. A similar umbilical growth—which coheres around the energy source of sound, which is also the source of meaning (and note how alliteration, which creates meaning through sound, is also one of the characteristic features of this poetic universe)—is revealed at the rhetorical level; it duplicates the theme of "genesis," which is developed at the level of content. Take, for instance, the poem "Ilha" ["Island"], included in "Proposição & Prólogo":

Sol & semente: raiz & relâmpago  
 Tambor de som  
 que floresce  
*A cabeça calva de Deus. (10)*

[Sun & seed: root & lightning  
 Sound-creating drum  
 That flowers  
*God's bald head.*]

If we exclude those words that are used to connect the elements in the sentence, we find that the poet uses merely ten words: he is thus formally drawing the map of the ten Cape Verdean islands. The first terms are terms pertaining to gestation or genesis *par excellence*, and this sense is suggested also by alliteration: "*Sol & semente*" ["Sun & seed"]. These terms are the

source of the terms that follow, which continue with the gestation cycle: “raiz & relâmpago” [“root & lightning”]. These images, in turn, unleash an image that stands for sound, but instead of the word “thunder,” which is what we would expect, what we have instead is the symbolic “*Tambor*” [“Drum”], the circular form of rhythm, fertilizing strength, energy. The only verb in the poem, “*floresce*” [“flowers” or “flourishes”], gives momentum to this process that has been set in motion, and which transforms and recreates the dryness and nakedness of the islands, itself conveyed through the alliterative image: “*A cabeça calva de Deus*” [“God’s bald head”]. Thus we see how the work of renewing the face of God’s earth has been initiated by human beings; but then humans are also a kind of God.

Borrowing directly from the divine gesture in Genesis, the first canto, “*De manhã! Os Tambores Amam A Chama Da Palavra Mão*” [“In the morning! The Drums Love the Flame of the Word Hand”] re-invents the creation of the islands, its mythical birth, not in some distant past, but in a time that renews itself and begins all over again. Thus the phrase “*De manhã!*,” which is repeated in the form of a litany throughout the text, almost as though it were a magical incantation, establishes this idea of something that was founded, of leaving the chaos in the direction of the light and of a new order: “*De Manhã! as ilhas / da minha pátria nascem grávidas / com o arco-íris / na menina do olho*” (111) [“In the morning! the islands / of my mother-country are born pregnant / with the rainbow / in the gleam of the eye (or in the beloved)”].

Still in this same poem, the author continues to work around the anti-“flight from the country” theme that he had first rehearsed in *Pão & Fonema*, but now the call for people to return to the country is formulated as a constant and continuous appeal. This is because they would be participating in the reconstruction of the new nation, something that demands of all the children of the islands the repetition of that same mythical gesture of Genesis:

Vem! simples & Redondo  
 pelo sol pela gema  
 E pela dor do ovo que o povo fecundou  
 As colinas aguardam pela mão  
 o gomo da tua herança  
 E pelo ventre de Bia  
 A Cimboa  
 dará

terra  
 terra nua  
 terra virgem  
 À árvore da tua parábola. (190)

[Come! simple & rounded  
 through the sun through the yolk  
 And through the agonies of the egg that people had fertilized  
 The hillsides await your hand  
 the bud of your inheritance  
 And through Bia's womb  
 Cimboa  
 will give  
 land  
 naked land  
 virgin land  
 To the tree of your parable.]

The birth ritual is thus accomplished, and it all begins at "*uma hora zero*" ["a zero hour"], the moment when the old colony becomes this new nation, this eminently sun-drenched land; this first canto suggests all the colors of this new sunscape, beginning with yellow and going through to the colors of the rainbow; these colors are combined and recombined as though he were an alchemist: everything is transmuted, the furrowed nature of the islands and even those features that suggest shortage and hunger, such as, for example, the goat and the volcano: "*o vulcão é força / a ilha é semente / o mar é músculo / a cabra é ouro*" ["the volcano is strength / the island is a seed / the sea is a muscle / the goat is golden"]. Gestation, in turns, acquires feminine attributes, and the poem is literally dotted with multiple references of this kind: "*os sons uterinos da ilha que nasce*" ["the womb-like sounds of an island that's born"] (111); "*o sol desce / velho & jovem / E ajoelha-se à porta das maternidades*" ["the sun comes down / ancient & young / And kneels at the door of maternity hospitals"] (116).

The poem reveals itself to be an "*acto de cultura*" ["act of culture"]—an allusion to the title of one of the other poems (a title that, in turn, suggests the famous sentence by Amílcar Cabral, "*Toda a revolução é um acto de cultura*" ["Every revolution is an act of culture"])—insofar as it suggests change



through renewal and fulfils its role of being “*a expressão dinâmica de um caos inicial*” [“the dynamic expression of an original chaos”] because it transforms the island, language, love and the human being into things that exists within a cosmic order: “*Como o som cresce na fruta! na árvore está o tambor / E contra a erosão: a política de sedução*” [“Like sound growing within the fruit! the tree is within the drum / And against soil erosion: the politics of seduction”] (179).

“Hoje Chovia A Chuva Que Não Chove” [“Today it Rained the Rain that Doesn’t Rain”], a poem from Canto III, suggests that after genesis comes fertility. It does not cease to rain in the poem, the entire alphabet, from A to Z, rains down on the poem—so that it will rain, too, in Cape Verde, a land where the drought driven in from the Sahel is what is most natural to the country and, consequently, the great poetic theme in the literature of that country. This symbolic “deluge” is a blessing of renewal (thus inverting the Biblical meaning of the term, where the deluge was brought on as a punishment) and the promise that the islands will fulfill their “tree” [“*árvore*”]: “*O povo / chove no povoado a sua chuva de séculos / E a goela das ribeiras / incha-se De aplausos / Que a chuva / é podium / na maratona das nossas artérias*” [“People / Rain down their centuries-old rain on the town / And the throat of the riversides / swells up in applause / For the rain / is the podium / in the marathon of our arteries”] (128). The entire Canto III is a delirium of poetic word-play and rhetorical joy. The scarce rain—“*Chove pulga & ponto: sangue & vírgula*” [“It rains down fleas and periods (full stops): blood & commas”] (133)—acquires, by means of the rhetorical tropes of hyperbole and synecdoche, the dimension of a gigantic raindrop through which we can see, as though through a microscope, the islands in miniature: this glass dome full of water that was so often dreamed about. The world is reinvented in an inverse order, and the magnitude of the hyperbole is associated with the pregnancy of the world that is to be born: “*Mas no olho vítreo da gota / uma cabra dança e outra coxeia / Ambas arrastam Entre as patas / Um eclipse de sol / No rosto oblongo da gota / As ilhas são cabras / as cabras são ilhas / com úberes na Via Láctea*” [“But in the glassy eye of the raindrop / a goat dances and another one limps / Both drag between their paws / An eclipse of the sun / In the oblong countenance of the raindrop / The islands are goats / the goats are islands / with udders in the Milky Way”]. In this universe the roles are reversed, they are subject to change, and the elements are rendered equivalent to each other: an island for a goat, a goat for an island. The real is continually subject to change, and metamorphosis leads directly to personification:

what is abstract acquires life, and what is inanimate acquires a form that is concrete. In this world that is about to be born, a world that is both placenta and the mother's womb, everything is pulsating and works towards acquiring multiple and unexpected dimension: "*E de pé o arquipélago ganha vela / porto & terra / De hélices nas raízes*" ["As it arises the archipelago acquires sail / harbour & land / Coils on the roots"]; "*Por vezes o deserto chocalha nos ossos o seu esqueleto de gotas*" ["At times the desert jingles in the bones of its skeleton made of raindrops"]; "*E as ilhas soerguem-se / pelo arquipélago das patas / E vão / De cratera em cratera / Erguer / na boca das sementes / A força contida nos vulcões*" ["And the islands are lifted up / By the archipelago of the paws / And they go / From crater to crater / Raising / in the mouth of seeds / The strength that's inside volcanoes"] (131, 132).

Canto III, "O Pescador O Peixe E A Sua Península" ["The Fisherman the Fish and His Peninsula"], presents us with the first anonymous heroes who inhabit and work in this newly created world. Now that the island has been re-created, regenerated by the symbolic deluge, it is time to portray humans and their labor. In the sea "*a terra é arável*" ["the land can also be ploughed"] and the fisherman's toil is an often-forgotten daily epic struggle of awesome dimensions. Land and sea combine in preparing terrain favorable for work: "*Além! no podium do mar largo / os cetáceos são olhos que saltam saltos de solidão / E se apaixonam / Ao longo da costa / Pelo ombro da ilha Que de longe balouça*" ["Beyond! in the podium of the wide sea / the cetaceans are eyes that leap at the leaps in solitude / And they fall in love / all along the coastline / With the shoulder of the island that swirls in the distance"] (145). Sacred and ritual, the fisherman's trade unites the island with its natural environment, the sea; they are brought together fraternally, and bound in a relationship of mutual dependence and respect: "*Quando a ilha é sacerdote / E o mar é catedral / E o poente! oração / Que se ergue / Entre o mar E o seu cardume / O anzol aproxima-se do ofício / Como o céu da boca / Entre a hóstia e a comunhão*" ["When the island is a priest / And the sea is a cathedral / And the sunset! a prayer / That rises up / Between the sea and its shoal / The fishhook is like a trade / Like the roof of the mouth / That's between the host and the Eucharist"] (146).

The second poem of Canto III, "*Onde Mora A Viola Do Artesão*" ["Where the Guitar of the Artisan Resides"], explores the regenerative processes of memory and narrates those historical events that have paved the way for this present cosmogony. It is necessarily retrospective and pedagogic: "*Ali! as narinas de meu pai / Sofreram o sopro / E a forja redonda / Do carvão de cruz &*

*caos*” [“There! my father’s nostrils / They suffered the breath / And the rounded forge / Of the Cross of coal & chaos”]; “*Além! sob o silêncio do tambor de Deus / Dentes d’Europa / vendiam o pão d’África à fome das Américas*” [“Beyond! under the silence of God’s drum / The teeth of Europe / Sold the bread of Africa to the hunger of the Americas”] (154). In a similar account, the artisan who forges a new world from the same rock—“*Quando as rochas / dão tempera & aço / Ao corpo da vida*” [“When the rocks / give temper & steel / To life’s body”] (153)—redeems the time and space that had existed before with his word/fire, and he re-inscribes them in the poem. The powerful hand of this descendant of that mythological blacksmith produces a new weapon, a new shield, the incandescent word—“*E da cicatriz da mão / brotam raízes / Que vicejam a memória dos séculos*” [“And from the scar on his hand / Spring up roots / That germinate with the memory of centuries”] (131)—one that carries within itself the map of History: slavery, forced labor, deportation, poverty, etc.

The predominant emphasis of the last canto is an appeal for Cape Verdeans to return and to help reconstruct their country. As we have mentioned above, the poem “Tempo De Ser Ovo Ovo De Ser Tempo” [“Time To Be an Egg Egg To Be Time”] presents itself as a space that is ready to be inhabited; it brings the call for people to return back to the inaugural time. The island is female, given that it is she who bears this new cosmos, and it is she who, seductively, incites her lover to return—consider in this regard the poem “*Cantiga de Amigo*” [lit. “A Song to a Friend,” a medieval verse form]: “*Já te sinto! aqui / Como um coração que bate à porta da sua morada / Mas vem! / pelos afluentes de ti / pela nascente & nascentes / Do teu corpo inteiro / E inunda-me! meu território*” [“I can feel you already! here / Like a heart that knocks on the door of where it resides / But come! / through the tributaries of your self / through the spring & springs / With your whole body / And flood me! my territory”] (198, 199)—her lover who is the emigrant, an imaginary Ulysses. The first poems portrays, then, the figure of a man and the figure of a woman: they stand in for that original couple that populated and nourished the world. “*Mestiço & mestiça*” [“Mulatto & Mulatta”], the poem that follows, takes this idea a step further, towards marriage and the birth of those cultural signs that are so specific to the archipelago.

Thus, the idea of the nation that awaits the return of the prodigal son is reworked in “A Fome de Ambrósio” [“Ambrósio’s Hunger”]. The allusion to the well-known poem by Gabriel Mariano, “Capitão Ambrósio” [“Captain

Ambrósio”), is used to re-inscribe a new motif, that of “*a bandeira negra da fome*” [“the black flag of hunger”] (187), and transforms it into “*pão sobre o forno*” [“bread on the oven”]. This intertextual dialogue allows the Captain to be reborn for a future of plenty that is prepared for him, one when the Promised Land will flourish. There is also the poem “Lestada De Lés A Lés” [“The East Wind from One Side to Other”], which is a re-reading of Ovídio Martins’s “Flagelados do Vento Leste” [“Flagellated by the East Wind”]—a poem whose title and theme were themselves borrowed from a novel by Manuel Lopes, one of the key works by that Cape Verdean novelist who was so much part of the *Claridade* movement. The poem by Corsino Fortes alludes to the previous poem, in order to negate it: “*Mesmo sendo! Já não somos / Os flagelados do vento leste / [...] / Que o digam / os braços do povo no povoado / E os tambores de pão / de pedra & pólen*” [“Even if we are! We no longer are / Those flagellated by the east wind / [...] / Let the arms / of people in town say it out / And the drums of bread / Of stone & pollen”] (202). An important reformulation of the great themes of Cape Verdean poetry is thus introduced, not only insofar as it is critical of those who mourn the “flight from the country,” but because it suggests that “Pasárgada” can be discovered within the archipelago; also, it takes cognisance of the fact that people can fight back despite the “flagellations” of natural phenomena, and credit should be given to the possibility of transformation: “*Aqui! onde / A seca é arma E a fome! desafio / A ilha é vida e a segura! vivência / E alta / negra! a estrela traga / A bandeira branca / Da nossa guerra / Entre céu & terra*” [“Here! where / The drought is a weapon and hunger! a challenge / The island is life and the dry season! existence / It is high / black! let the star bring / The white flag / Of our battle / Between land & sky”] (201, 204).

It is in the sequence of this new proposition that the tribute to António Nunes can be read as a necessary homage. In “Bom-Dia! António Nunes” [“Good Morning! António Nunes”] Corsino Fortes invites the said person to participate in the joy of the change that has been carried out. António Nunes also symbolizes that “tomorrow” that has become today, the day when the land has come into the inheritance of its own people: “*É teu António! o umbigo do mundo / onde / a força do teu suor desagua / E da ilha! / o cristal do tempo*” [“It’s yours, António! the navel of the world / where / the strength of your sweat finds its outlet / And the island! / the crystal of time”] (194). We cannot but refer to that beautiful poem in Creole, “Golpe D’Estode Na Paraise.” And even though it is the only poem in the book that is written

entirely in Creole, there are also stanzas or parts of stanzas that are written in this language. This is evidence of the author's poetic bilingualism; he is an innovator in the one language as much as he is in the other.

The third collection, *Pedras de Sol & Substância* [*Stones of Sun & Substance*], ends the trilogy that had been announced by the very first poem and, like the other two collections, it is organized around three cantos that are preceded by a Proposition. Here we read of a insular landscape that has been forgotten and left to its own devices; it is described in figurative terms: “*Uma pedra no deserto + um dragoeiro / Um anjo da guarda ! no útero da paisagem / Não ! na ilha*” [“A stone in the desert + a dragon tree / A guardian angel! in the womb of the landscape / No! on the island”] (207).

The title calls upon the irradiating strength of the sun-baked stone, which is on fire—“*o olho da cabra sobre o olho da terra / Como é belo o fogo! da flor da secura*” [“the eye of the goat over the eye of the land / How beautiful is the fire! of the flower of the dry season”]—and subject to transformation, as though through alchemy; all the different versions of the myth of Sisyphus are reworked in this patient and mineral vigor that makes human beings equal in nature to the land and allows them to overcome the limitations of their soil-based inheritance:

Toda palavra é útero de sete pedras  
E  
Toda a pedra é um poeta bissexto  
Leva quatro anos de pudor  
E quarenta & tantos de paixão  
Para inundar o deserto da estiagem  
Com o dilúvio de chama que bebe  
Nas crateras do jazz & batuque da esperança. (207)

[Every word is a womb with seven stones  
And  
Every stone is a leap-year poet  
He gets four years for *pudeur*  
And forty or so for passion  
So he can flood the desert of the drought  
With the deluge of flame that he drinks from  
In the craters of jazz & the *batuque* of hope.]



The poem "Rotcha Scribida" ["Rock Written On"], about a rock with markings thousands of years old, is almost an archaeological study of the primeval origins of the archipelago; the words registered on the stones of the enigmatic rocks of São Nicolau acquire poetic force of a sacred tablet of commandments, or of a heritage. The sacred character of these markings invites the narrator of this poem to give continuation to the prophetic and sacred writing by a hand and head that engender and regenerate its cosmos, an image that coheres around the image of *God's Bald Head*: "*Ó bíblia de murmúrio / na tua semântica / De sal! sangue & paradoxo / Ó universo de mil sons / Que circulam / Pela maternidade / Do versículo que nos une / Na tua chama / Na tua lava / No teu tambor inanarrável*" ["O Bible of whisperings / in your semantics / Of salt! blood & paradox / O universe of a thousand sounds / That circle around / Maternity hospitals / Of the stanza that unites us / In your flame / In your lava / In your inexpressible drum"] (223).

The first canto, "Sol & Substância" ["Sun & Substance"], also includes the poem "A Cesariana dos Três Continentes" ["The Cesarean Operation Performed on Three Continents"], where the geographical and cultural origins of the archipelago are narrated, the ten "*umbigos de pedra*" ["belly-buttons of stone"] (222) that arose out of the merging of many cultures. Turning his attention to roots, and the symbols of resistance and the historical inheritance, he further dedicates a poem to the dragon tree [*Dracaena draco*]: it is a tree that confirms that drought on the island can also be fertile, it suggests a kind of survival that has lasted thousands of years: the singular destiny with which the islander can identify: "*Da rocha ao rosto que me deste / Do rosto à raiz que te dou / Florescem no teu tronco / O crâneo de Deus + o fogo do povo / Que nos abraça! Como / Se o arquipélago já não fosse / A tua Ordem / E as ilhas + ilheus! A tua Regra*" ["From the rock to the face you have given me / From the face to the root I give you / Sprout from your trunk / The skull of God + the fire of people / That embrace us! As though / The archipelago were no longer / your monastic Order / And the islands + islanders! Your Rule"] (227).

The poem "*Na Morna! Na Mazurca O Trompete da Evasão*" ["In the Morna! In the Mazurka the Trumpet of Those Who Flee the Land"] a historical roll-call is made of the various musical traditions that the country inherited and reformulated; different dance rhythms are named, and traditional Cape Verdean musical customs are poetically acted out in a choreography of lines of verses spread over the page, conveyed in a sinuous, mobile and broken rhythm:

A morna! o *finançon* nos conduz  
 ao frigorífico da cultura  
 das terras do fim do mundo  
 À guerra da pobreza  
 No metrónomo do batuque  
 E ao dente de ouro da tabanca  
 No mestruo das salinas  
 À coladeira & *funaná*  
 na erupção do *funacol*  
 E ao *rondô* que renova o passo  
 como quem baila o *landum*  
 E ao *kolá kolá*  
 da morança e da melancolia  
 que salte & bate  
 bate & une  
 As coxas d'Africa às ancas da Macaronésia. (239)

[The *morna*! the *finançon* leads us  
 to the refrigerator of the culture  
 of lands at the end of the earth  
 To war against poverty  
 In the metronome of the *batuque*  
 And the *tabanca's* gold tooth  
 In the *mestruo* of the salt-pans  
 To the *coladeira* & *funaná*  
 that erupt in the *funacol*  
 And to the *rondô* that renews the step  
 for those who dance the *landum*  
 And to the *kolá kolá*  
 of the hamlet and so the melancholy  
 leap & beat  
 beat & unite  
 The thighs of Africa to the buttocks of Macaronesia.]

The cultural rainbow of the archipelago is revealed throughout this collection. This is also done by means of the pictorial chromaticity of the lithographs of São Filipe, where the painters Luisa Queirós Figueira and Manuel

Figueira are an integral part of the images in those poems written about the traditional festivals of the city of São Filipe on the Island of Fogo; further on still, in another set of poems, the same sort of thing is done with the work of the painter Tchalé Figueira. The lithographs, made over a period of seven days, the number of days of the creation, celebrate the vigor of the horse races and of the festival customs; this is done by evoking the different kinds of pomp and celebration used during each of the days of the festival: "*À frente da bandeira / Parlamentavam os cavalos / E só depois os cavaleiros / E os festeiros / Abriam no coração da ilha / 'O vulcão da festa que se festeja'*" ["The horses parleyed / In front of the flag / And it was only then that the horse-riders / And the festival-goers / Opened that *volcano of the festivities that are celebrated* / inside the heart of the island"] (245)

The figure of the writer Ant3nio Aur3lio Gonalves is granted another set of poems, poems that in the manner of an elegy or ode reconstruct his human and intellectual trajectory, and where references to the stories and novellas of this distinguished Cape Verdean writer are not lacking: "*Do Liceu Velho as li3es do mestre continuam: ano & dia / Lembro-me. O oceano da voz baloua v3rios mundos nas / nossas cabeas; isto 3, o verbo desloca nos nossos / cr3neos um navio de longo curso. E n3s: o arco-3ris do / casco, a proa dos mastros & bandeira dos tripulantes em / viagem*" ["The lessons by the master in the *Liceu Velho* (Old Lyceum or Old Secondary School) still continue: year & day / I recall. The ocean's voice made several worlds dangle over / our heads; that is, the word brings to our / skulls voyaging ships. And we: the rainbow of the / cranium, the prow of the masts & flag of the crew on / a voyage"] (301). Another figure that is present in these poems is Germano de Almeida, not only on account of his literary qualities, but also as a public and political figure.

The different threads that constitute the political history of the country are also suggested in several poems. One of the texts, "*Uma Espiga de Milho na Boca do Parlamento*" ["A Corn Cob in Parliament's Mouth"] evokes the important figure of Ab3lio Duarte. The names of others singers, poets and composers of the *morna*, names such those of Eug3nio Tavares, Manuel de Novas, Ana Proc3pio, B. L3za, wisely make the link between traditional and literary cultures; the work of these people invades the poems with the rhythms derived from a Creole tradition, one where the merging of forms, and where poetry's close involvement with music resulted in that marriage that gave birth to that unique musical form that is the *morna*: "*O hino! como morna / E o funaná! como bandeira / E das trovas d'Eug3nio / E das noveletas*

*d'Aurélío / Pedras caíam / Pedras batiam na B. Lêza da pátria* ["O hymn! like a *morna* / And the *funaná* like a flag / And the songs of Eugénio / And the romances of Aurélío / Stone would fall / Stones would beat to the B. Lêza (a homophone of "beauty") of the nation"] (282).

It is worth pointing out that in the poetry of Corsino Fortes there are always two levels of "appeal." One consists in "naming," the other in "invoking," and this second one reveals a trajectory that is one of action. At the same time that the cosmos is getting "named," created, it is also "invoked." The main vocative forms employed in this poetic universe are those of invocation and exclamation:

E na verdade! na verdade vos digo  
 Se a ilha é menor  
 que a palma da mão do habitante  
 Se o arquipélago é menor  
 que a planta do pé da multidão  
 A boca alarga & engendra colinas  
 na terra primitiva  
 A língua ergue & engorda planaltos  
 nas salinas de massapé  
 E o espírito multiplica os oceanos do interior  
 Ao encontro do ovo & ovação d'aldeia olímpica  
 E dos corpos que cosem  
 os bocados dispersos  
 Do continente redondo da alma. (272)

[And in truth! in truth I tell you  
 If the island is smaller  
 than the palm of the hand of the one who resides in it  
 If the archipelago is smaller  
 than the sole of the foot of the crowd  
 A mouth enlarges upon & engenders hills  
 over the primitive land  
 Language raises up & it fattens plateaux  
 on the salt pans of the black soil  
 And the spirit multiplies the oceans within  
 When it finds the egg & ovation of the Olympic village

And the bodies that stitch together  
 those scattered bits  
 Of the rounded continent of the soul.]

Invocation, the first, the more direct form of the vocative, is the privileged mode of appeal. In the classical sense of the term it is a type of oration, such as the poets of old composed when they entreated the muse to aid them, and it is this that gives the text an epic grandeur. Exclamation is content to call up, in a much more discreet manner, an emotion. At any rate, in the case of one as much as in the other, their importance for the poetry of *God's Bald Head* resides, on the one hand, in the demarcation of the rhythm and scansion within the text, and, on the other hand, insofar as it is a homage to the human voice and to recitation, it can be received as something of an auditory nature, something that is imbued with the persuasive and rhetorical strength contained in the poem. The force and the capacity of conviction of the poetic word are thus rendered unmistakable and strangely suggestive.

The sun-driven substance of this most recent book—*Pedras de Sol & Substância*—translates itself into the persistence of the symbol of the stone, the stone of identity, recognizable in the bloom and splendor of the multiple cultural creations of the country, and the recognition that the origins of the country are African-American and Western, diversified, subject to the successive layers that have created Creole culture.

*God's Bald Head* is offered up to the reader/listener as a trilogy about the origins of the country and as an epic poem of the country's history; what Corsino Fortes's most recent book in essence reveals are archaeological and cultural facets to these origins; he does this by singing, over three cantos, the sun-drenched substance of creativity in all its varied manifestations, musical, pictorial, literary, political, that makes ductile the mineral hardness of the islands through the gentle and nostalgic movements of the *morna*, or the measured beat of the *rondó*, or the agitated and harmonious rhythms of the ancient mazurka or the *funaná*.



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