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THE FOLKLORE OF HUNGER *

Paulo de Carvalho Neto

On April 22nd, 1500, the greatest fleet ever assembled by the Kingdom of Portugal was sailing into the unknow after veering to the West from the Cape Verde Islands, instead of following the spice-trade route to India. "In this day, in the evening hours, we had sight of land!" exulted the royal scrivener Pero Vaz de Caminha, in a personal letter to his King, Dom Manuel. What followed was a long and revealing chronicle detailing the first encounter of the Portuguese sailors with the inhabitants of the land of *Vera Cruz*, later known as Brazil. The writer, a fine observer with an almost scientific eye for detail, inevitably portrayed in his own culture in the mirror provided by the natives he encountered. From all the wondrous shapes and colors of the New World, few things seemed as astonishing to Caminha as the freedom with which the natives exhibited their "shames," the *vergonhas* to which the chronicler would come back time and again. "And their *vergonhas* were so naked and with so much innocence uncovered, that in this there was no shame whatever,"he marvelled. After giving high marks to the *vergonhas* and other well-shaped attributes of native girls, Caminha still retained enough clarity of mind to evaluate their nutrition and health. There was no cultivation,and domesticated animals seemed so unusual that Indian warriors were utterly frightened at the sight of a chicken. "They do not eat but this yam, of which there is so much here, and of seed and fruits provided by the land and the trees. And with this they walk about so upright and well-fed that we are not so ourselves, with as much wheat and legumes that we consume."

Vera Cruz proved to be an Edenic garden, offering the newcomer much more than the humble yam. *Palmito*, the white, soft heart of the palm, was available at the thrust of a machete, and the size of a variety of shrimp was larger than any seen before by the writer. There was no gold or silver, nor was metal used by natives in their artifacts, yet the land itself

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seemed incalculably vast, and its climate comparable to the most amenable that could be found back home.

> *Waters are many, interminable. And in such a manner is (the land) gracious that, if we seek to benefit, everything will grow in it, by the goodness of the waters it possesses. (Emphasis added).* [1]

But the best fruit that could be harvested from Vera Cruz, added the scrivener, would be the salvation of its people, an operation hardly distinguishable from their "taming", which motivated every act of courtesy and kindness on the part of the Portuguese. Cabral and his chronicler continued on to India, where the Moslem population of the port of Calicut, apparently less willing to be tamed and saved, was bombed and cruelly massacred by the European visitors. Caminha perished in the confrontation, merely a few months after signing the only document by which his writing has become known to us. For almost three centuries there was no knowledge of its existence, until it was found in Lisboa, and another copy surfaced in the archives of Rio de Janeiro's Royal Navy, perhaps transported in the baggage of the fleeing Portuguese court in 1808. The text was included at the last minute in historian Aires do Casal's *Corografia Brasileira* as the book went to press in 1817... but haste did not prevent Casal from excising the indecorous observations.

Today Brazilians think affectionately of the letter as the country's "birth certificate," an obligatory point of departure for the study of our history. The task of memorizing its every detail is made less tedious by the author's considerable narrative gifts and genial sexual curiosity. But after the exams are written, the passage that remains indelible in the memory of every educated Brazilian, conditioning his understanding of the country, is that short paean to its fertility. It is the patriotic badge of the demagogue, dragged into every debate, speech and conversation as incontrovertible proof that the country is destined for boundless prosperity and greatness. But how, then, do we explain the malnutrition of millions of Brazilians, the retardation, disease and ultimate death by famine brought about by high prices and shortages of food? How can backwardness and abundance coexist with such ease within the same country? The educated Brazilian's pop sociology (which is itself a kind of folklore) maintains that the land is so plentiful as to induce a stifling langour on the peasantry. Viewing his own people with the eye of the colonizer (but without Caminha's perspicacity) our urban, affluent Brazilian peers not without puzzlement at the enigmatic rural masses crawling beneath him, and generally laments the indiscipline of the folk, who in his view seem to have little incentive for any enterprise but the frolicking of Carnival and other traditional festivities. The unspoken assumption of so many of those who quote Caminha to embellish their arguments is that the hungry millions have no one to blame but themselves. After all, since "a hungry

cat eats even porridge made with needles," how can the hungry man not find ways of feeding himself? His problem, the argument continues, is that he has not experienced the European rigour of the seasons, he cannot plan for tomorrow, he merely waits for the ripe fruit to fall on his lap and for the fish to jump out of the river and into the frying pan. [Gato com fome come farofa de alfinete. Carvalho Neto.] [2]

A country which, like Brazil, emphasizes the cultivations of cash crops for export and even for fuel, at the expense of the nutritional needs of its population, lives permanently with a bad conscience regarding the welfare of its destitute millions. Coffee does not feed a gangly child, but bananas are hailed as a healthy food. And old popular song dispensed the gratuitous advice that "bananas have vitamins, girl," and its gay sarcasm caught on, becoming part of the popular parlance well after the song was forgotten. The lyrics also observed that even banana peels are rich in nutrition, thus adding insult to injury, for the notion of eating banana peels is frequently evoked as the paragon of misery. [Banana tem vitamina, menina.]

Some Ecuadorians, too, are proud of their bananas. More than once I heard the middle and upper classes speak of the abundance which prevent's the citizens of Ecuador from ever experiencing hunger. Bananas, it is said, are found rotting by the roadside. Each is so big that is could fill three bellies, so why complain? That jind of protest is sheer effrontery to the country's honor, and the work of communists.

Here, then, is the key to the folklore of aggression against the hungry: it simply denies the existence of hunger, provided that the idle complainers demonstrate a little ingenuity to fulfill their needs:

El corazón de pulga	The heart of the flea is plenty
sabiéndolo sazonar	If the cook knows how to season;
alcanza para el almuerzo	There is enough for a good lunch
sobra para merendar.	And leftovers for supper.

[Tejada, Ecuador.] [3]

The poor man hears these smirking comments even as he sees the ravages of hunger on those around him. His deeply ironic reply agrees that there is no such thing as death by starvation in this country, for the people suffer an even more painful fate:

Dicen que el hambre mata,	They say that hunger kills
yo digo que eso es mentira;	And that is a lie, I say;
como hay gente en Hatoviejo	Don't you know in Hatoviejo
sin comer toda la vida?	They've not eaten all their lives?

[Rozo Díaz, Colombia.] [4]

The person who so gleefully counsels the poor to live on bananas is most probably the same one who turns his delicate nose at the sight of poor man's food. In Ecuador, one of the "delicacies" of the people is a dish made of corn toasted with sugar and butter, lightly kneaded with honey, and sometimes served with *raspadura*, a sweet made of cooked sugarcane juice. The poor respectfully call this mixture a "poor man's snack," *colación de pobres*, while he who has a more sophisticated palate dismisses it as "dog-shit," *caca de perro*. [Carvalho-Neto.] [5]

Who is the disparaging gourmand? When the common people speak of "the rich," they often have in mind not someone who lives in a luxurious home or drives a fancy car, but the gentleman who sits in a restaurant proudly exhibiting a pot belly, drinking a fragrant cup of coffee after a good meal, and picking his teeth or smoking a cigar while leisurely leafing through the day's paper. Here is a man who is wont to judging and blaming the hungry for their social failure, and who does so at every opportunity. For example, several analogies currently used in the Portuguese language carry a disparaging tone; when Brazilians say that someone is "dead with hunger" they mean to criticize not only the insufficiency of his meals but his low status in society, and therefore his worthlessness as an individual. Similar associations are attached to the expressions, "He has a hunger of the devils," and "He has the hunger of a dog." It is thought that a man may be so painfully thin that "he has his stomach in his back"; and the lifeless gaze of the famished elicits the remark, "He has the eyes of a dead fish." [Ele é um morto de fome; ele tem uma fome dos capetas; ele tem uma fome de cachorro; ele tem a barriga nas costas; ele tem olho de peixe morto.]

In the Brazilian Northeast, one way the highly-placed contain the rising tide of folkloric protest against hunger is through the use of folklore itself as a form of propaganda. When the authorities become the subject of servile eulogies, it becomes obvious that the singer has been bought off, and his singing misused to placate class resentments. Patronage takes over and corrupts broadsheet literature, suddenly filling the open-air markets with copies of songs praising the virtues of presidents, governors, congressmen...and even writers! God, Jesus and the Saints must share their pantheon with the local elites, men who in the dry Northeast are called "rain-makers" or *manda-chuvas*. The high cost of living, a crisis so chronic that it has become a way of live, is said to be valiantly fought by those in power, who are taking every possible measure to find a solution for the social evils afflicting the population. Meanwhile, rich and poor are suffering together, and therefore none is responsible for the hard times:

Porque os governadores	Because the governors struggle
lutam com mil dissabores	Against a thousand sorrows
prá nos salvar dos horrores	To save us from the horrors
que aumentam dia a dia.	That increase every day.
Porém a crise nos cobre	Yet the crisis is affecting us
sofre o médio, sofre o nobre	Suffers the middle class, suffers the nobleman
passa o rico e passa o pobre	It cuts into the rich, it cuts into the poor
no facão da carestia.	The knife of high prices.,

[Carvalho-Neto, Brazil.][6]

Hunger is at the source of many Brazilian myths, such as the bogeyman or *papão*, and the *comelonge*. The *papão* is that sinister figure of the hungry man who will kidnap, kill and eat a child to satisfy his monstrous appetite. The *comelonge*, as the name suggests in Portuguese, "eats at a distance," that is, he is the errant, anemic being who has developed exceptional senses of sight and smell so as to better chase the victims he will devour. But he will gorge on anything he finds, like the vulture which picks at the rotting flesh of a dead animal. When the *comelonge* finds nothing, he becomes wild in the night, digging out the graves of abandoned cemeteries. Both the *papão* and the *comelonge* are nocturnal figures, akin to the wolfman or *lobishomem*, a normal person by day who at night is transformed into the prowling beast.

Instead of dismissing such myths as the product of a feverish folkloric imagination, Arthur Ramos postulated that they exist in reality, as the sub-human victims of malnutrition and poor medical care. "There is a basis of truth in that belief," observed Ramos, who was also, let us remember, a medical doctor. "Ankylostomiasis (or round-worm disease, produced by a parasite which attacks the intestines) brings about a disturbance of the coenesthesis, provoking hallucinatory symptoms in the weaker patients or in those with a mental predisposition, which may even lead to the phenomenon of transformation of the personality."[7]

Another Brazilian myth related to the twin social conditions of hunger and disease is *Saci-Pererê*, one of the most popular and loved mythical figures in the country. Known since the beginning of the 17th Century, Saci is a one-legged goblin whose red beret gives him magical powers. He may be mischievous or malevolent. He enjoys himself putting out the fire, playing nasty tricks on horses and house pets, and otherwise scaring the unaware at home or during a lonely journey. A closer look at Saci reveals that this deformities have much to do with hunger: his head is unusually big, his eyes are wide-open, his arms are long and thin, and this whole body is supported on a single leg that appears as fragile as a twig.

To be sure, these myths may be interpreted not only from the point

of view of social struggles, as the product of hunger, but also through psychoanalysis or even spiritualism. The wolfman, to take one example, may be seen by the spiritualist as a personality that has been overwhelmed by an evil spirit or burdened by negative feelings. And psychoanalysis might say that he is the embodiment of repressed instincts or of a shadowy archetype. I believe that this wealth of interpretations may be preserved through an interdisciplinary approach which adds depth and variety to the analysis of folklore. One point of view does not necessarily challenge the others. I have written about folklore from a Freudian, Marxist and Kardecist point of view, and I have been condemned as an adept of each of those theories; but my goal is humanism and what I seek is the widest possible understanding of that ultimate mystery which is the folkloric phenomenon.

THE OWL HOOTS, THE INDIAN DIES

In the real Latin America, some people eat well, and the rest resign themselves to talking about it. Wrote Bertolt Brecht, "Amongst the highly placed/It is considered low to talk about food./The fact is: they have/Already eaten." [8] Those who have not eaten, who in Latin America number in the millions and constitute the majority in certain regions, produce through folklore an obsessive commentary which laments scarcity and rejoices in real or imaginary abundance.

A desperate Peruvian Indian once told the folklorist Sergio Quijada Lara, "I am eating my hair/And drinking my tears." [Estoy comiendo mi pelo/y bebiendo mi llanto.] Although they may hear many such confessions of hopelessness, poetic and otherwise, many anthropologists seem to have become accustomed and insensitive to the suffering of the subject of their studies. Jean-Christian Spahni, a well-known European Americanist, was honestly amused by the verse collected by Quijada Lara. "Addressing themselves to their horses," remarked Spahni," "the peasants sing songs that are not devoid of humor." [9]

The comical Indian poet might have been suffering of one of two types of hunger. There is an epidemic hunger, that kills quickly and in great quantities due to a natural catastrophe, such as a drought. And there is also a chronic hunger, usually due to social factors such as economic disparities and crises. It is said that chronic hunger does not kill, but it cripples. [Fome que não mata, mas aleija.] It torments a man daily, for years on end, and may span generations to accomplish its gruesome work:

Recuerdo que más de un día	I remember more than once
no encontré qué masticar	I had nothing to chew on
y me tuve que acostar	And I had to go to bed
con la barriga vacía;	On an empty stomach;
hasta el agua que bebía	Even the water I drank
la encontraba más salobre;	Seemed saltier;
así es la vida del pobre	Such is the life of the poor
cuando nadie lo defiende	When nobody defends him
aunque su alma encomienda	Even though he commends his soul
a la Caridad del Cobre.	To the Charity of Money.
	[Cheo Alvarez] [10]
A los ricos le dan mate	The rich are given mate*
hasta que se van llenando.	Until they are filled up
Pero al pobre le dan uno	But the poor are given mate
con los palitos nadando.	With the twigs swimming inside.
Al rico le ponen silla	The rich is given a seat
al pobre le ponen banco,	The poor is given a bench
al rico le sirven bifes,	The rich is served steak
al pobre le sirven sanco.	The poor is served beef blood.
	[Lanuza, Argentina.] [11]

The quip or *réplica* is a rhymed, incisive answer to a certain question, and the reply may double in the service of the hungry and they well-fed. I suspect it occurs more often among the petty bourgeoisie, in a tone of mockery of those who truly have nothing to feed their children:

-Mamá, tengo hambre!	-Mother, I'm hungry!
-Pues coge un mosquito	-So catch a mosquito
Y chupá la sangre	And suck the blood
Y el mondongo	And keep the guts
guarda para mañana.	For tomorrow.

I heard the above quip in Uruguay, in 1951. About fifteen years later I came across a variant in Ecuador, which demonstrates its popularity, from the Atlantic to the Pacific:

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* *mate*: Served in a gourd, a tea made of the dried leaves of an evergreen tree, *Ilex paraguariensis*. In Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay and Southern Brazil.

-Tienes hambre?	-Are you hungry?
-Sí.	-Yes.
-Come calambre.	-Eat a cramp.
Mata um mosquito,	Kill a mosquito,
chupa la sangre	Suck the blood
y guarda el mondongo	And keep the guts
para fiambre.	To make a ham. [12]

Eat a cramp? *Hambre* and *calambre* rhyme in Spanish, which is not enough reason to evoke this apparently nonsensical image. Cramps, in fact, are indissolubly associated with hunger, and constitute a presage of death by starvation:

Después de la fiesta	After the fiesta
el hambre!	Hunger!
Y más tarde	And later,
los calambres!	The cramps!

[Laval, Chile.] [13]

Sometimes hunger does not wait until the fiesta is over, and there is no joy when Carnival knocks at the door:

Carnaval dizque ha llegado	They say Carnival has come,
para mí, pobre, infeliz,	But I am poor and miserable,
sin tener un calecito	And I can't find even a cent
para comprar capulís.	To buy a handful of berries.

[Peñaherrera de Costales, Ecuador.] [14]

Money buys food and food buys good company. Life seems merry and sociable as long as there is *sancocho*, a stew made of manioc, corn, banana and shreds of beef. When the pot is empty, friends "play the eighteen," the military clarion call of retreat:

Mis amigos muchos fueron	My friends were many
cuando tuve harto sancocho;	When I had plenty of *sancocho*
cuando com hambre me vieron	When they saw me hungry
tocaron "un diez y ocho".	They "played the eighteen."

[Guevara, Ecuador.] [15]

The hungry man, often abandoned by his friends, may choose a different sort of company, and feel justified in turning his own back on society:

Si la justicia me encuentra	If justice catches me
jugando con los ladrones	Playing around with thieves
le digo al seor alcalde	I will have to tell the mayor,
que quien no roba no come.	He who doesn't steal, doesn't eat.

[Rozo Díaz, Colombia.] [16]

Although the hungry is in no position to reject the clarity he is given, not even the most dire need will force him to trade the gift for his dignity. The number and vehemence of the verses collected underline the sensitivity of the poor man on this issue. He deeply resents those who come to his aid merely to comply with social obligations, and those who impose conditions, insisting on knowing exactly who will eat the bread they so graciously provide. The popular poets retort with a principle deeply embedded in the Christian tradition: true charity, if it is to reward its author, must be blind heartfelt.

Si quieres que Dios te ayude	If you want God to help you
cuando al pobre das tu pan,	When you give bread to the poor,
cierra tus ojos al darlo,	Close your eyes as you give it,
ni mires a quien lo das.	Don't look to see who takes it.

Much too often, the poor man swallows his pride along with the nourishment he is given. Then, no matter how needed, bread sours into vinegar mingled with gall, the drink Roman soldiers spitefully offered Jesus at Golgotha, which here is the symbol of disaffection between classes:

Al pan que botan al pobre	The bread thrown to the poor man
los que le dan caridad,	By those who give him charity
le ponen hiel y vinagre	Tastes of gall and vinegar
con la mala voluntad.	Because of their ill-will.
No envidies al poderoso	You need not envy the mogul
que come ricos manjares,	Who feasts on sumptuous fare,
porque con estos mezclados	Because with it he swallows
se traga hiel y vinagre.	The most bitter gall and vinegar.

When juxtaposed, the two verses recorded above constitute a striking example of how the unjust distribution of food poisons the humble supper of the poor *and* the rich man's feast. In a class society, where the rich will maintain their opulence by armed brutality if necessary, they are betrayed by their staunchest allies, their own stomachs, for it becomes difficult to digest peacefully the bitter fruit of privilege. As usual, there is consolation in the promised abundance of paradise, perhaps with the added pleasure of seeing Saint Peter turn away, at the gates of Heaven, those who in life were guilty of the capital sin of social callousness:

Los pobres comen muyelo,	The poor people eat bran bread,
y los ricos comen ave;	While the rich eat fowl;
para los pobres hay cielo,	Heaven awaits the poor,
para los ricos, quién sabe!	But for the rich, who knows!

[León Mera, Ecuador.] [17]

There is little Christian love in the class societies of Latin America which trumpet Christian values, and which in their name persecute those who have risen in protest against false charity. Yet life goes on and the destitute live one more day on the bones cast at them by those who have had their fill. An Ecuadorian legend sees such charity as another proof of God's infinite wisdom, and as a confirmation of the indifference of the givers:

> *There was a time when the dog had the set of teeth that man has today, and man had those of the dog. So humans ate the animals they hunted, and did not even leave the bones to the poor dogs. Hungry and craving the food, the dogs licked their lips while sniffing the smells of the barbecue. But the Maker of Justice wished to repair such unfairness. He thought that at least the bones should be given to the loyal guardians of the home.* And he acted *immediately, placing the dog's teeth in man's jaw, and those of man in the dog's mouth. Since then, dogs have the right to gnaw on the bones which their good and kindly masters throw at them after the meal.*
>
> *[Darío Guevara.]* [18]

Chronic hunger stalks a man relentlessly, sapping his energies until he succumbs. A drought, a flood or simply a bad harvest bring on the far more fearsome epidemic hunger, the *hambruna* in the Andes, which strikes from time to time, suddenly galloping with apocaliptic fury against the helpless peasants. They cry out in despair and join a massive migration, on a road littered by the bodies of those who have collapsed in the exodus. Travelling by bus across the Andes, I once witnessed one such scene for the briefest moment, as we rolled at high speed through a wave of refugees from hunger. Some of the Indians vainly kneeled by the road-side and clasped their hands as if in prayer, to beg our assistance.

An old custom among the Andes Indians stipulates that funerals should have professional weepers or *plañideras*. They are generally old women, themselves widowed, who make an art out of a loud and almost musical wailing with lacerating lamentations which help to induce a collective outpouring of sorrow. The words uttered in this state always contain references to hunger:

Oh, you used to tell me, daddy,
"My little daughter, I have no food to give you."

Ay, nicurcanguica, taitícu
Ay, "mana micuyuj kanichu, huahua."
[Viteri, Ecuador.] [19]

The songs and poems of the Andean Indians, be they in Quechua ou Spanish, raise the specter of death by hunger as an ever-present theme. The reader may be so far removed from the meaning of these verses, that reciting them out loud may help to conjure that universe shaped by the unremitting threat of starvation. Then he will see that they are cries of pain of undoutable authenticity, and they will help him to believe that, even as his eyes scan through these lines, another Indian perishes in the highlands of the Andes:

Yo me muero de hambre y sed	I'm dying of hunger and thirst,
Y no tengo agua ni pan;	I have neither bread nor water,
Yo me encanijo de frío,	I am weakened by the cold
Y nadie un trapo me da.	And nobody gives me a rag.
La mujer enferma en cama,	My wife is sick in bed,
los hijos llorando de hambre,	The children are crying with hunger.
Yo sin calé en el bosillo:	I can't find a cent in my pocket;
Que suerte tan invidiable!	Such is my enviable fate!
Yo me estoy muriendo de hambre:	I am dying of hunger:
Una limosna, por Dios!	Your alms, by God!
Como este mal es de todos,	Since this is everyone's evil
no hay quien escuche mi voz.	No one listens to my voice.
Tucuycuna chignin mi,	I am avoided by everyone
Tucuycuna macanmi;	And everyone mistreats me;
Cullmapish a llliquin mi,	My ragged shirt is useless,
Chiripish a atipanmi.	The cruel cold exhausts me.
Na mashca shicrahuaca	My little supper bag
Cainamanta chushagmi;	Has been empty since yesterday.
Cunanca yaricayhuan	I am dying,
Huañush purisha chari.	I wander away driven by hunger
Cay huagcha runataca	And finally, carried by the wind,
Huaira apashpa ringami;	A prisoner of disgrace
Allcucuna michchun	I will be food for the dogs
Mayma npas shitangami.	Wherever I fall.

[León Mera, Ecuador.] [20]

When a man dies in an Andean village of Ecuador, his funeral's central event may be a lavish banquet attended by the family and friends.

But the joy of a good meal does not mask the grimness of the occasion, which is presided by the owl, that omen of tragedy. As the illustrious French anthropologist Paul Rivet describes it, in 1926, when evening falls friends arrive to the house of the deceased and "some climb to the roof, making it shake and imitating the hooting of the owl and other night birds, while others, standing around the house, bark, roar and meow." Four or six friends of the family "mask their faces with burned straw or grease, and fit on them enormous noses made of cloth stuffed with wool." In this attire, and tightly wrapped in their ponchos, they wander through the town form midnight until the early morning, imitating the owl's hooting. Some of them shout:

"Owl, who will die?" and others reply, "You, you!" [Cuscungu, pita huañunga?/Can! Can!] They stop before every home, demanding eggs and guinea pigs for the funeral supper.

The inhabitants promptly give what is asked of them, but if they run away in fear, the wandering owls take all the food they find, including chickens and other animals, which are delivered to the widow or widower, to be prepared for the celebration.

The owl men's house-to-house search for food and the custom of the funeral feast reflect, I believe, the ever-present fear of starvation endured by the community. As one of them dies, the others gather to consume enormous quantities of food and drink, as if seeking new energies in the struggle for existence. For a few hours, they escape the specter of hunger which will strike again after a bad harvest. One saying observes that "the hooting of the owl over the home is a sure omen of death," but since such hooting is constant, surely it announces those seasons of despair in which scores of Indians are stricken by epidemic hunger. [El graznido del buho sobre la casa es anuncio seguro de muerte.] The Andean Indian's fatalism is shared by other peoples of the Pacific, crystallizing everywhere in many variants of the same somber prediction:

Grazna el cuscungo
y el indio muere;
parece chanza,
pero sucede.

The owl hoots
And the Indian dies;
A joke it seems
But it does happen.
[Paul Rivet, Ecuador.] 21

El chuncho canta,
el indio muere;
no será cierto,
pero sucede.

The owl hoots,
The Indian dies;
It may not be true
But it does happen.

[Vicuña Cifuentes, Chile.] 22

When Vicuña Cifuentes recorded the above variant in 1911, he did not raise the prospect of its relationship with hunger. Perhaps the folklorist neglected such a possibility because he was not interested, at that moment, in explaining folklore as a product of the material conditions of the people. A staunch Catholic, the Chilean author saw the idea contained in the verse as the result of insufficient religious faith. In so doing, he proceeded like the folklorist's informants, who frequently gloss over the surface of their own poetry, seemingly unaware of possible reverberations. But a Marxist interpretation, not unlike psychoanalysis, imaginatively sounds the depths of analogic language, seeking meanings that lie beneath the ostensive content of images and symbols.

Even while fighting amongst themselves, the poor in the Northeast of Brazil threaten to carry out the most odious form of aggression. In a fit of rage, a man may announce that he will kill his adversary...by hunger. In the Portuguese language, no other possible form of aggression, such as killing with a revolver or with a knife, has crystallized as a proverbial phrase with the same intensity of meaning. Only the hungry would fully appreciate the sinister tone of this expression, which would seem hollow in a rich society:

Caboclo, se eu te pegá	Caboclo, if I catch you
te dêxo morto de fome.	I'll let you die of hunger.

[Caldeira, Brazil.] [23]

During the harshest days of the drought the sun fills the sky and bodies collapse, one after another, on the dusty earth. The theme, shamefully naked and artless in reality, is splendidly portrayed in the paintings of Portinary, described with heightened realism in the novels of Graciliano Ramos, and invoked with a touch of romanticism in the works of Jorge Amado. Yet none of these artists is a close to the experience of seasonal hunger as the popular poets, those descendants of feudal minstrels who embody the living memory of generations. The *cantadores* roam from one open-air market to another, narrating the recurring tragedy of the drought to the sound of their guitars. And the songs blame not only the harsh climate of the Northeast, but the policemen who harass the migrants, the authorities which are forever out of reach, the farm owners who withhold their salaries, and the tradesmen who demand payment. They denounce, in sum a life which punishes them and a God who promises what shall not be granted. From North to South travel the refugees, with two bowls of flour...

Duas cuias de farinha	Two bowls of flour
E dois quilos de jabá	And two kilos of salted meat.
Três ou quatro rapaduras	Three or four *rapaduras**
Para se alimentar	To fee themselves,
Mas no meio da viagem	Yet half-away through the journey
Ver a bóia se acabar.	The grub will come to an end.

* *Rapadura* - A sweet made of the cooked juice of sugar cane.

Those who survive the long journey to the rich state of São Paulo seek employment in the farms, and soon realize that they have escaped the hunger of the North to become prey to the exploitation of the South:

Em São Paulo ou Paraná	In São Paulo or Paraná
Procura um fazendeiro	The farmers he meets all say
Porém este não precisa	They can do without his work.
Diz para o forasteiro	And the foreigner is told,
-Eu não tenho precisão	"Since I'm in no great need of you
Pago por pouco dinheiro.	I pay very little money."
	[Carvalho-Neto, Brazil.] [24]

The people grieve for their shattered lives, but the mind cannot dwell on such misery too long. Laments and intimations of death, however relevant as chronicles of their suffering, would be unbearable without the poet's message of hope. In the Ecuadorian highlands, the bleakest hour is less burdensome with a nostalgic song to happier days, which seem idyllic in comparison to the present.

Hecho trapo mi vestido	With my clothing in shreds,
muerto de hambre y de congoja	Dying of hunger and sorrow,
triste proscrito, recuerdo	A sad outlaw, I remember
las dulzuras de mi choza.	The sweetness of my hut.
	[León Mera, Ecuador.] [25]

A sense of well-being is quickly restored with the simple yet invaluable pleasure of a good meal. One Indian from the region of Nayón told a priest, in Quechua,

> When I walk about on an empty stomach I sing sadly on my way. But when I'm full, my heart brims with hapiness and I cannot even bend forward.
>
> [Mallai shungu purishpa, llaqui llaquilla yarahvicungrini; huicsa jundacpica, cushiimanta shungu timbunmi, manapish cumurinata pudinichu. Rodriguez Sandoval, Ecuador.] [26]

When the *hambruna* and the drought cease, the survivors return home and seek to heal body and soul. In due time, there will be another fiesta. A full meal will make life seem appealing again, and worthy of a joyous song:

Ay, ay, ay viva el gusto!
Olga! Que viva!
Una malta de amarilla,
papas y cuy con ají,
yo rasgueando la guitarra
tú cantando junto a mí.
Ay, ay, ay, mi seora,
Qué rica vida!

Ay, ay, ay, long live the pleasure!
Listen, may it last long!
A good brew, boiled potatoes,
A guinea pig in hot peppers,
And I strum my guitar
While you sing beside me.
Ay ay ay my lady,
This life is a great delight!
[León Mera, Ecuador.] [27]

UTOPIA AND CORNUCOPIA

Blacks sing the praises of their race, and Indians exalt Indians. But of course there is no defense in which the hungry speak admiringly of hunger. Instead, they sing to the hunger that is satiated, and suggest that they have eaten as heartily as the master and the wealthy - even if only in flights of fancy. Since an abundance of food is frequently viewed as the most expressive proof of wealth, it is also thought that a gargantuan appetite will somehow bring prosperity. Many Brazilians believe that "it is a promise of richness to dream of eating a lion." [É promessa de riqueza sonhar comendo um leão. Carneiro Campos.] [28]

The curious phenomenon of the folklore of satisfied hunger is based on the impossible, the stuff of dreams in which the unreachable object of desire is made readily available and plentiful. The hungry man feasts on tasty meals provided by a magic wand, a ring, a tablecloth, a burro - any talisman that answers to the wishes of its owner. The "object of virtue" serves a table replete with the most appetizing fare, and everyone eats until he strokes his belly contentedly. "There was everything. Broiled Turkey, beans, rice, mutton, fine drinks and sweets...they ate and ate and ate and ate...Ah, and then they burped..."

Hungry Chileans are served such sumptuous dinners as they listen "The Doll" [La Muñequita], a folkloric tale from the province of Colchagua. In another Chilean story, The Hairy Idiot [La Tonta Pelu'a,] the good old lady (i.e., the fairy godmother) gives the little girl a tablecloth

> *...which when spread open seemed like a dining room where nothing was lacking, where there were the most delicious dishes in the whole world...When she felt hungry she would spread open her little tablecloth and sit down to a fine meal...*
>
> *[Dufourcq.]* [29]

In Chilean *memorata* (which are short, embryonic tales) it is said

that a certain Betanzo, fisherman from the region of Cautín, was magically transported to a *rení*, the meeting place of sorcerers. Suddenly, "he found himself in the middle of an elegant salon where several tables were presented with plentiful tidbits...He was invited to dinner and he accepted, since he was more dead than alive..."

Dead of hunger, that is. [Manríquez.] [30]

In Brazilian folklore the tablecloth is given to a lumberman by a mysterious voice which says,

> *This tablecloth is enchanted. When you want food all you have to do is to say, "Prepare, tablecloth." Before you will appear a table filled with tasty foods, the best you could possible imagine.*
>
> *[Carvalho-Neto.]* [31]

The narrator must ask of his listeners that they *imagine* the scene, in a collective effort to free themselves from their surroundings and to travel, in a long moment of suspended disbelief, to that kingdom where reality is shaped by man's desires. He swears he too was invited to the sumptuous banquet held in honor of the story's heroes, and there he personally relished every dish of which he speaks, rubbed elbows with the rich and drank their wine in the company of beautiful women. As the tale comes to an end, however, the teller ingeniously leads his audience back to the real world. He explains that as he feasted in the banquet, he did not forget his people and took with him a last piece of cake which he intended to distribute among them upon his return. But the journey home was long, and he became hungry on the way...

The imaginary realization of these impossible desires becomes a form of protest, an aggressive lament and counter-attack, when a rich man joins the guests at the banquet and his food is transformed into ...excrement. Who can avoid seeing here the wounded spite of the hungry? As long as it is the poor who savors the food, all is well. But if the envious rich *compadre*, the godfather of his child, steals the magic wand and orders it "to prepare," there will be a plentiful dinner of dung. The same occurs with the donkey which defecates gold for the poor and dung for the rich. The theme is known troughout the world, but seldom has it been pointed out that there is a concealed protest and class conflict in the dualism of gold and excrement, so contrary to real-life situations in which it is the poor man who most often sinks helplessly into a fetid cesspool.

In the Chilean tale of "The Doll," mentioned above, an old man, the personification of God, appears before a poor little girl and gives her a magical doll as a present. It is a "doll of virtue" on which there is a spell, for it defecates pure gold. The girl lays the doll on the bed and is surprised, when she comes back, minutes later, to find gold spread all

over her bed. The news spreads quickly, and an envious comadre, her neighbor, switches the charmed doll for another. The comadre prepares "four very elegant beds" and places the stolen doll on one of them. "As soon as she laid down the doll, all four beds were entirely fouled."The old lady is so enraged that she throws out the doll in the middle of the street. [Román Guerrero, Chile] [32]

But it is not always the rich or evil character who is punished with the transformation of gold into excrement, so these examples hardly constitute rules. In one exception, Betanzo, the Chilean fisherman, "accidentally put man things is his pockets, stuffing them with as much he could" while visiting the abode of the sorcerers in the sky. "At dawn of the following day he found himself sleeping in the middle of an island; at first he thought he had been to the *reni* in his dreams only, but he was convinced of the contrary when he found in his pocket pieces of horse dung, sugar cubes and pebbles instead of the sweets he had put away." Since rich and poor are randomly presented with excrement in many versions of folkloric tales, psychoanalysis feels comfortable in its interpretation of the gold / dung phenomenon as the expression of anal libido. Traditional Freudian theory argues that the appearance of excrement in folkloric tales is a symptom of repressed anal-erotic impulses. Since there are inflexible rules to interpretation, one must pause before every case to determine the true nature of the characters' motivations--whether sexual appetites or desires for personal wealth and social justice. Betanzo's tale is better placed in this second group and here the transformation of gold into excrement signifies a harsh return to reality after experiencing the many comforts of the *reni*. [33]

Since the cornucopia described by folklore is after all nothing more than a pleasant artifice, there is always the more convincing Christian promise of life is the thereafter, so that this vale of tears is seen as no more than a moment of purgation on the journey to the eternal joys of paradise. *Cariucho*, among the Ecuadorian Indians, is in the widest sense of the word any ordinary meal prepared with hot peppers. Says the proverb, "In this life, *cariucho*, and is the next, whole potatoes." [En esta vida, cariucho, y en la otra, papas enteras. José Hidalgo, Costales Samaniego.] [34] In the absence of social awareness, it is satisfying to dream of fulfillment beyond the grave, even though this perspective on life directly benefits the exploiters of the people. Justifiably, it elicits among Marxists the old dictum that religion is the opium of the people, manipulating the concept of eternal life to produce an absurd resignation among the poor, and peace of mind for the bourgeois.

Since death is a high price to pay for paradise, many folkloric stories and songs conjure the earthly bountifulness of Utopia. It is possible that the erudite conceptions of Utopia as postulated by Plato, Sir Thomas More and many others were inspired from ideas circulated in the folkloric culture, and in turn the learned versions spurred folk poets to

develop new Utopias of their own, following a well-known universal pattern of interaction between "higher" and "lower" cultures. Marx and Engels in particular, studied Utopias assiduously and wrote favorably of early 19th Century Utopian socialists such as Saint-Simon, François Fourier and Robert Owen. Some researchers of Utopian literature postulate that it is reflected in the known Marxian formulation, "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," and in the idea of a "realm of freedom" that would emerge after basic human needs are satisfied in a socialist context. [35]

But both the minstrel and the revolutionary establish an equivocal relationship with Utopia. The Marxist turns to it to feed his hopes for a better future, and then steps back disillusioned, condemning what seems unrealistic in the conception of each author. The folk-poet's approach is considerably more light-hearted, for he generally intends to provide no more than escapism and momentary relief, rather than a plausible social alternative, and he indulges in his vision with such excess as to mock the very yearnings it arouses. Here is a Chilean song that proposes a delightful ideal that is as desirable as it is clearly unattainable, at once naively hopeful and gently satirical of such hopes. *There Is a City Far Away* constitutes a sui generis song of protest to the degree that it invites the listener to contemplate; even for the briefest moment of delusion, an existence spent at play and marked by abundance, the abolition of commerce, and the consequent absence of toil and social strife.

THERE IS A CITY FAR AWAY
(The delightful city)

Hay una muy lejos	There is a city far away,
allá los pobres se van	The poor people's destination.
las murallas son de pan	Bread is the stuff of walls
y los pilares de queso	And pillars are made of cheese.
llevada de su pretexto	Rising for such a purpose,
la ciudad tiene ese honor	It's the quality of that city,
y por este bello don	The handsome gift it wields
que su poder le origina	Which is granted by its power
la tejas de "sopaipillas"	That roof-tiles are *sopaipillas*
y los ladrillos "alfajor".	And the bricks are *alfajor*
La de Cofralande	The city of Cofralande
es muy buena con los pobres	Is very good to the poor.
allí no se gasta un cobre	There one spends not a penny,
los comercios son de balde	Stores are useless,
es cosa muy admirable	it's an admirable thing.
los vivientes bien lo dicen	The residents say it so well:
por hambre nadie se aflije	Nobody is afflicted by hunger,
ni aunque la quieran pasar	Not even if he wants to be.
para el que quiera fumar	And for those who wish to smoke

hay cigarros de tabique

Hay un estero de vino
que atraviesa la
y son de harina "tostá"
los arenales que vimos
los que pasan por camino
dicen aquí está lo bueno
y se atracan sin recelo
del poder que los anima
agarran vino y harina
se ponen a hacer pigüelo.

Río de aguardiente habrá
porque allá no habitan truchas
hay un morrito de azúcar
donde pegan la top'á
y mas abajito habrá
ponche bien alcanforado
de azúcar bien sazonado
todo este licor se junta
donde se clavan de punta
todos los aficionados.

There are cigars of *tabique.*

There is a stream of wine
Meandering through the city,
And made of toasted flour
Are the sand-dunes that we saw.
Those who pass by
Say, "here is something tasty,"
And they gorge without misgivings.
There is a power that drives them
To pour flour in the wine
And to start making *pigüelo.*

Liquor must flow in the river
Since there are no trout in it.
There is a little hill of sugar
Where they play the *top'á,*
And further down there might be
A strongly-spiked punch,
Well-seasoned with sugar.
All of this liquor flows
By the banks where swimmers
Jumpe head-first into the river.

[Violeta Parra, Chile] [36]

sopaipillas, fried pumpkin and flour cakes.
alfajor, two thin, round flour cakes held together with sweetpotato jam.
pigüelo, a thick drink of wine and toasted flour, generally ingested in the morning to recuperate from heavy drinking the night before.
top'á, a test of strength where two men on horseback try to push one another out of a certain area.
cigarro de tabique, a hand-rolled cigarette, probably using corn husks instead of paper.

An attempt to find a place for Cofralande in the long historical quest of the perfect society would run into considerable difficulty. The innumerable ideal cities conceived by social visionaries of all ages, from Plato Republic to Sir Thomas More's Utopia and to Robert Owen's New Harmony, depended on rigid social controls which men under the influence of spiked punch would hardly be inclined to obey. Nor are there sings of Christian influence, for it does not evoked a Biblical Paradise or images related to the Christian myth of the Millenium. Cofralande, though sweet and humorous, is a pagan dream of playfulness and pleasure that stands as a radical rejection of both religious and social constraints. It espouses freedom from want and from all regimentation. It does not look back nostalgically to a bucolic Arcadian past, but instead seems to look

ahead to a Golden Age in which man has succeeded in totally subduing and transforming the natural world to suit his fancy.

Still in Chile, there is a wonderland "lost in the midst of a thick jungle in the cordillera of Nahuelbuta." In the sweet image of this ideal city, the poor have no need to toil, since nature is perfectly suited to the most extravagant desires. Rivers of firewater cross the land, while the doves sing *cuecas*, Chile's most popular folkloric songs. The climate is neither hot nor cold, and it never rains, although every morning pear syrup drizzles down from the sky. Trees bear magnificent fruit: shoes and ready-made clothes of the best quality. Buildings have walls made of cheese, pillars of candy, roof tiles of biscuits and roof ridges of sugar-paste. Gardens produce salads that are mixed and dressed. Chocolate milk and milk-punch flow from the cows' udders, according to one's choice. When a man shoots down a bird, it is marinated by the time it reaches the ground. And hogs walk about already cooked, dressed with pepper and garlic, oinking, "Who will eat me?, Who will eat me?" Of course, in the midst of such abundance, the *rotos* or raggedy poor people of Chile need not work to indulge their every desire. [Vicuña Cifuentes.] [37]

The social hope and hopelessness of the people of Latin America, expressed in folklore with such an enviable wealth of creative talent, is one source of its erudite equivalent, the "magical realism" of the Latin American literary boom which has won international recognition since the nineteen sixties. One Brazilian folklorist, Carlos Alberto Azevedo, points out the unmistakably popular origins of this new literature, stating that its novelists have been nurtured by visionary folkloric poetry such as this ode to the Utopian city of São Saruê, where wealth and poverty, youth and age are no longer inextricable hallmarks of the human condition:

Mais adiante uma cidade	Before me there was a city
como nunca vi igual	Such as I had never seen,
toda coberta de ouro	All covered with gold
e forrada de cristal	And lined with crystal.
ali não existe pobre	And poverty was unknown,
é tudo rico, afinal.	All were wealthy in São Saruê.
Lá eu vi rios de leite	I beheld rivers of milk,
barreiras de carne assada,	Rows of meats broiling in spits,
lagoas de mel de abelha,	Lakes of bee honey,
atoleiros de coalhadas,	Bogs of curdled milk,
açude de vinho quinado.	Reservoirs of wine with quinine.
As pedras em São Saruê	The stones in São Saruê
são de queijo e rapadura.	Are made of cheese and *rapadura.*
As cacimbas são de café já	Coffee is brewed in every well,
coado e quente. Feijão	Kept filtered and hot. Beans
nasce logo maduro e cozinhado,	Sprout ripe and cooked

que é para não dar trabalho.
Galinha põe capão em vez
de ovos...
E manteiga por lá, nestes tempos
difíceis, cai das nuvens e faz
rumas pelo chão.

Sítios de pés de dinheiro
que faz chamar atenção
Os cachos de notas grandes
chegam arrastam pelo chão
as moitas de prata e níquel
são mesmo que algodão.

Lá tem um rio chamado
o banho da mocidade,
onde um velho de cem anos
tomando banho à vontade,
quando sai fora parece
ter vinte anos de idade.

To save us all the trouble.
Chicken lay cocks instead of
Eggs...
And butter, in these hard times,
Falls from the clouds
And piles up on the ground.

There are groves of money trees
Alluring to every man.
Clusters of big bills
Droop down to the earth.
Bushes of silver and nickel
Grow with the white bloom of cotton.

There is a river called
The Bath of Youth
Where a hundred-year-old man
Bathes at his leisure,
And he comes out of the river
Not a day older than twenty.

[Azevedo, Brazil.] [38]

NOTES

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4.ROZO DÍAZ, Vidal Antonio."Algunas coplas del Departamento de Bolívar"*Revista Colombiana de Folclore* 3, Bogotá, Instituto Colombiano de Folclore, n.8, p. 131, 1963.

5.CARVALHO NETO,*Diccionario del Folklore Ecuatoriano* Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1964, p. 106.

6.Idem,*Folclore Sergipiano*, p. 51.

7.Idem,*Folklore and Psychoanalysis* Translated by Jacques M.P. Wilson Florida: University of Miami Press, 1972, pp. 156, 177.

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16.ROZO DÍAZ, "Algunas coplas," p. 131.

17.MERA, Juan León. *Cantares del pueblo ecuatoriano.* Quito: Academia Ecuatoriana, Imprenta de la Universidad Central del Ecuador, 1982, pp. 44, xv, 41.

18.Quoted in CARVALHO NETO, *Diccionario,* p. 187.

19.VITERI, Oswaldo. "Lamentaciones de una plaidera de Otavalo," *Revista del Folklore Ecuatoriano* 1 Quito: Instituto del Folklore Ecuatoriano, 1965), p. 118.

20.MERA, León. *Cantares,* pp. 42, 175, 182, 197.

21.RIVET, Paul. "Costumbres funerarias de los indios del Ecuador," *Revista del Colegio Nacional Bolívar* 5-6 Tulcán, December 1951, pp. 80-81, 85. Quoted in Carvalho Neto, *Diccionario,* pp. 152-153.

22.CIFUENTES, Julio Vicua. "Qué es el Folk-lore y para qué sierve," *Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía 3* Santiago; Editorial Nascimento, 1911, p. 443.

23.CALDEIRA, Clóvis. *Mutirão.* Rio de Janeiro: Cia Editora Nacional, 1956, p. 110.

24.CARVALHO NETO, "Cinco regiones y un país," *Cuadernos Americanos* 92, Mexico, n.5, p. 24-26, 1970.

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26.SANDOVAL, Leonidas Rodriguez. *Vida económico-social del indio libre de la sierra ecuatoriana,* Washington: The Catholic University of

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28. CAMPOS, Renato Carneiro. *Ideologia dos poetas populares do Nordeste*. Recife: Centro Regional de Pesquisas Educacionais do Recife, 1959, pp. 46, 47.

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30. MANRÍQUEZ, Cremilda. "Contribución al estudio del folklore de Cautín," *Anales* 3, p. 128.

31. CARVALHO NETO, *Folklore and Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Jacques M. P. Wilson. Florida: University of Miami Press, 1972, p. 104.

32. GUERRERO, Rebeca Román. *Folklore de la antigua provincia de Colchagua*. Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes, 1929, pp. 225-226. Notice that tales in which a character is punished with filth instead of gold, or in which excrement becomes gold as a reward, are strinkingly similar to children's dreams which express the desire to have the means to solve difficult situations, and to satisfy hunger, in particular. The girl in "The doll,"for instance, "bought sugar, herbs and bread,"the typical immediate needs of the poor.

33. For an application of Freudian and Jungian analytic theory to folklore, see my *Folklore and Psychoanalysis*, translated by Jacques M. P. Wilson. Florida: University of Miami Press, 1972.

34. Quoted in CARVALHO NETO, *Diccionario*, p. 118.

35. For a discussion of Marxism and Utopia, see Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979.

36. PARRA, Violeta. *Cantos folklóricos chilenos*. Santiago: Editorial Nascimento, 1979, pp. 18-19.
Violeta Parra, the famous folk singer who became a symbol of social revolt to her followers in the early 1960's, embarked on more than one expedition in which she attempted to work, as a folklorist, recording songs from the small towns and the small farms of Chile. Since I have found no way to guarantee her methodology, if there was any, I may suppose that *There Is a City Far Away* might have been edited or perhaps reworked by Parra, as has been the case with other folk singers who take it upon themselves to act as folklorists. The city's name–Cofralandia–suggests an erudite source. *Cofrade* is Latin for brother, thus "land of brotherhood," which may have been Parra's invention but conceivably could also derive from an erudite conception appropriated in centuries past by folkloric song.

37.CIFUENTES, Julio Vicua. *Mitos y Supersticiones.* (Estudios del folklore chileno recogidos de la tradición oral.) 3rd ed. (Santiago: Editorial Nascimento, 1947), pp. 47-48.

38.AZEVEDO, Carlos Alberto. *O heróico e o messiânico na literatura de cordel.* Recife: Editorial Edições, 1972, pp. 26-28.