

Tom Jobim and the music of the Murdered House

Tom Jobim e a música da Casa Assassinada

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In 1959 Lucio Cardoso's *Chronicle of the Murdered House* was published, dividing critics and readers between acceptance and outrage. The detractors were disturbed by the atmosphere of guilt, sin and incest and the admirers were overwhelmed by the passionate and intense writing. Sixty years after its release, there is no doubt that the *Chronicle* is one of the greatest novels in Brazilian literature and it is impossible to remain indifferent to it.

Lucio Cardoso has always been controversial. When he launched *Maleita* in 1934 and *Salgueiro* in 1935, the two books were still in line with the regional and social themes that dominated Brazilian literature. The next book, *Luz no Subsolo*, represented a rupture from realistic novels and a plunge by the writer into the themes of interiority, questions about life and death and the relationship between man and Mystery. This book bewildered the criticism to the point that Mario de Andrade, in a letter sent to the author, although claiming that he did not like the book, admitted that there was something in it that disturbed him and to which he attributed value.

(...) What a strange and haunted novel you wrote! (...) It punched me in the stomach, I ran out of breath, I read it, reading, the situation gripped me, the characters didn't interest me, sometimes the analyzes fatigued me a lot, sometimes they illuminated me, I didn't know in what world I was, completely out of my element. (...) I thought your book was absurd because its characters seemed absurd to me. Both in Brazil and in any part of the world. And they didn't seem, I didn't get to feel them as characters from another world. Crazy? Far from any reality already perceived by me? Or rather creatures created exclusively by the author to demonstrate his subtle and for me a little confused (I didn't quite understand) perception of light in the underground? I had the feeling that it was the latter case. (...) Your book is a strong book. Artistically, it seems bad to me. Socially, it seemed hateful. But I fully understood your aim (in the book) of restoring the spiritual within the materialistic romance literature that we are now doing in Brazil. God moved again on the face of the waters. Anyway. (CARELLI, 1988, p. 34)

From then on, Lucio Cardoso established his literature on this path. He published romances and novels, wrote for the theater, made scripts for the movies and in 1949 directed *A Mulher de Longe*, which he was unable to finish. The filmed material was lost until a few years ago filmmaker Luiz Carlos Lacerda managed to find excerpts from the original copy. The images, with their expressionist and gothic atmosphere, are rare in Brazilian cinema.

Lucio wrote a lot. Recently, researcher Valeria Lamego organized an edition of short stories published in newspapers and which were dispersed. She immersed herself in the archives and confessed her astonishment at the quantity and quality of the material found. Ézio Macedo Ribeiro managed to gather all of Lucio's poetry and published a volume of over a thousand pages, in addition to the new edition of the now complete Diary.

Anyone who has read his novels, novelettes and short stories often has the impression that everything seems to be a preparation, a trodden path, which converged on the powerful masterpiece that is the Chronicle of the Murdered House.

In 1971 Paulo Cesar Saraceni directed the film *Casa Assassinada* (The Murdered House), an adaptation of the novel, with the script written by him ten years earlier and approved by Lucio Cardoso. Paulo resumed the Porto das Caixas partnership, filmed in 1962: script by Lucio, photography by Mario Carneiro and music by Tom Jobim.

To express the emotional intensity of the novel and its adaptation to the cinema, Tom Jobim worked on variations of a melody that has a very Brazilian lyricism, perhaps lost today, but that well expresses the emotional pathos that runs through the book and the film.

Tom started with the theme of *schottisch lara*, a type of slower polka to dance to, composed by conductor Anacleto de Medeiros. Anacleto was a notable Brazilian popular musician, composer of waltzes, *choro* music, polka and symphonic pieces for the band of the Fire Department of Rio de Janeiro, organized and directed by him. The song was composed to pay homage to the trim of the boat lara, winner of a race at the São Roque regatta, in Paquetá, on November 15, 1896¹. Years later mannered and ultra-romantic lyrics were added to the melody by Catulo da Paixão Cearense, recorded by several singers in the first half of the last century and became known as *Rasga Coração*.

If you want to see the immensity of the sky and the sea
Reflecting the prismaticization of sunlight
Tear your heart out, come dwell
On the vastness of my grief

¹ lara, by Anacleto de Medeiros, pianist Roberto Szidon. From 00:00 to 00:29. Accessed on YouTubeube on Nov 07, 2019.

Tear it apart, you will see the pain inside sobbing
Under the weight of a cross of tears crying
Angels singing divine prayers
God pacing his poor laments

The melody is simple and beautiful, with a line of quick apprehension. It is as luminous as the blue of the sky and of the then clear waters of the Guanabara Bay, in the background the majestic Serra dos Órgãos mountain range and its emerald forests. Its intense lyricism captures an atmosphere present in the Brazilian soul.

Years later Heitor Villa Lobos used the main theme of *Iara/Rasga Coração* to sew the exuberant orchestra of Choro nº 10 for orchestra and choir. The sound result obtained with Anacleto's simple melody strolling between the masses of sound and the pulsating rhythm is intensely beautiful. Once again Villa Lobos reveals his ability to represent something untranslatable in words, something that we could call the soul of deep Brazil, or what the researcher Irineu Guerrini Junior, called “the sound allegory of the Motherland”, commenting on the use of music of Villa in the *Cinema Novo* (New Cinema) films².

The Brazilian landscape is in the music of Villa Lobos, especially in the nine Brazilian *Bachianas*, whose excerpts were widely used in the *Cinema Novo* films, mainly by Glauber Rocha, serving to manifest Brazil's attempt at expressing its identity.

Villa was not immune to the mystery of Iara's theme composed by Anacleto. In the sweetness and light of the melody, deep Brazil resonates. In Choro nº10 Villa Lobos monumentalizes the simplicity of the theme and achieves a sound that is both tender and majestic, and what could seem like a cacophonous paradox turns out to be an impactful song.

In *Casa Assassinada*, Tom Jobim started out with the theme of Anacleto and worked on variations and developments. The music is soon presented in the opening credits of the film, but in a different version from that in 1973, with lyrics by Vinicius de Moraes, Tom Jobim recorded in the United States, maintaining emotional fidelity to Lucio Cardoso's text and Saraceni's film.

What is the mystery of this melody, capable of expressing complex and diffuse feelings and continuing to be something, at the same time, so intimate and Brazilian?

² Choro nº10 for orchestra and choir, by Heitor Villa Lobos. OFESP, conducted by John Neschling, from 4':17" to 5':25", accessed on YouTubeube on Nov 07, 2019.

It is the Brazil of the small towns embedded in the mountains of Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, with their bare hills, shaped like half an orange, where there was forest and now there is grass; it is the Brazil of landscapes seen from the train window and now from the fast car. The birds perched on the wiring stretched between wooden posts, the red thatch, the lone imperial palm tree, loose in the landscape as a silent witness of something that has been lost and will never return. The oxen grazing in the distance and the grass that hides the abandoned railway line. The mist that dissipates and unveils the landscape after the summer rain in the middle of the afternoon. The theme comes from these landscapes where lonely men and women purge their pain from dreams and lost loves. The present time and the past time projecting a future that will not exist.

What is the mystery of this theme?

Saraceni recalls the emotion that overwhelmed everyone when Tom showed the song he composed for the film. He played and commented on the sequences while people on the crew and the cast were moved to tears.

The theme presented in the opening credits prepares the poetic and emotional environment of the film that begins with André, before the beginning of the wake, observing Nina's dead body at a table in the Menezes farm room. He is alone and remembers everything that happened between them.

At 8'32" there is an image of a train arriving in Vila Velha, a fictional city where the story takes place, and we hear the section of the suite that Tom calls *Trem para Cordisburgo* (the Train to Cordisburgo). In the song and in the title, there are several references. The most evident is the allusion to *Trenzinho Caipira, 4º Movimento da Bachiana nº 2* by Heitor Villa Lobos, with the same lyricism of the theme, the rhythmic tempo, and orchestration present; the other reference is Cordisburgo, city where Guimarães Rosa was born, an admiration of both Tom and Lucio Cardoso. In the film, Nina is arriving in Vila Velha married to Valdo Meneses; when she steps off the carriage there is a short section of *Trem*, almost a fragment, which will then no longer be heard in the film³.

At 35'20", based on a talk by Ana, "the fire where I burn", Tom re-presents the theme. Several important characters and situations are shown in the following scenes. Nina sees gardener Alberto at the Pavilion and slaps him. The scene is perceived from afar by Demétrio and, soon after, Ana approaches. Alberto is stunned by Nina's reaction and tries to explain the story of the violets⁴.

³ Matita Perê CD, by Tom Jobim, from 25'18" to 26'30".

⁴ Matita Perê CD, by Tom Jobim, from 28'51" to 29'51".

At 42'41" comes the first of Debussy's variations. Timóteo, sneaky, is going to steal the violets that Alberto put in Nina's window. The main theme is entangled with harmonies and sounds that refer to the impressionist music of Claude Debussy, an influence present in several songs by Tom Jobim⁵. This atmosphere resurfaces at 54'32" when Nina privately explains the case of exchanging babies in the maternity ward and in the scene with her and André in the pavilion, the place of her loves and of great importance in the plot of the novel, acting almost as a counterpoint. It is a space of passion and life, far from the dark and decadent atmosphere of the house. In some scenes there is a tension between the musical impressionism of the track and the radical and passionate romanticism of the images. There is a passage in which the piano prepares for the reintroduction of the theme and the sound resembles that of Rachmaninoff's No. 2 and 3 concerts for piano and orchestra, which many commentators call late romanticism, which Lucio Cardoso always assumed it was, an intense and exalted romantic almost like a German expressionist and such an atmosphere is present in many of his texts⁶.

I am not, I was never a *fin de siècle*, mixed with romantic remnants and ancestral inheritances. I am totally a romantic, with bad inheritances of my own and with no responsibility from anyone. This is what I am, if it is possible to reduce a living person to a scheme. (CARDOSO, 1970, p. 138)

In the sequence, at 1.01:46, Demétrio plays an old Brazilian waltz on the piano. All the Meneses are gathered in the room and Nina takes André out to dance. Suddenly, she lets go of her hair and promptly becomes sensual. The music is now a theme that seems to come out of the American albums of Tom, Wave and Tide. These two excerpts are incidental songs and are not part of the suite. In the film, we heard Tom's music and the waltz mixed up, until, annoyed, Demétrio stops playing it.

The romantic sound environment is heard in the film again at 1:26:16 when the piano, sounding like Rachmaninoff, prepares the return of the main theme and at the end of the film when Timóteo, at Nina's funeral, asks God for a miracle and André enters the room.

Although the soundtrack is the same as the suite recorded by Tom, there are minor changes in the orchestration. For the film, the arrangements are by Dori Caymmi and sometimes the main theme played by a violin, with a guitar in the background, sounds sadder and filled with melancholy.

⁵ Matita Perê CD, by Tom Jobim, from 29'58" to 31'10".

⁶ Matita Perê CD, by Tom Jobim, from 33'10" to 34'31".

The orchestration of the 1973 recording, by Claus Ogermann, is more symphonic and freer from the need for functionality that the cinema sometimes forces the composer to adopt.

The main theme is almost a leitmotiv. At the end of the film, he reappears at Nina's wake when Timóteo, carried by three employees, enters the room lying in a hammock, dressed in an extravagant way, with the luxury of his mother's clothes and jewelry. There is an atmosphere of general amazement. He approaches the body and spreads the violets he had with him. He picks up another bunch that someone had placed with Nina and asks God for a miracle. André also enters the room with a bouquet of violets and Timóteo sees the resurrected gardener. The vision disturbs him, he rolls around the room and collapses on the floor. At that moment, the flutes receive the theme and pass it on to the orchestra, which exposes it in its entirety until the end of the film.

Things, to be seen by me, need to exist, latent, in my heart - that a tree or lake resembles things already seen or felt - or that awaken others not seen or felt yet, but that extend their secret roots in my spirit. (CARDOSO, 1970. p. 263-264)

In 1958 the album *Canção do Amor Demais* was released, with Elizeth Cardoso singing songs by Tom and Vinicius de Moraes. The album became famous because João Gilberto was accompanying Elizeth on the guitar. The song was *Chega de Saudade* and this recording was marked as the beginning of Bossa Nova. It was and it wasn't. There was, of course, João's guitar, the beat, the chords, the division, but the album also had a set of songs that took some time to be forgotten given the subsequent success of Bossa Nova and everything that happened afterwards. They were songs that differed from the evolutionary line of urban samba, almost like chamber music, in the lyrical tradition of the *modinha*. Three of them, *As Praias Desertas*, *Caminho de Pedra*⁷ and *Estrada Branca* have the atmosphere of the beaches and mountains of Rio de Janeiro, the silences, the solitude, the wilderness, so similar to the landscapes that Lucio Cardoso described in his stories and which he liked to visit when he left Rio.

Brazil is that same poverty. Brazil is the interior, with its slowness, its vast open spaces, its suffering and obscure people. They are the ones who forge us, the permanent country, and not this scum of the city, futile and rude. The more I think of the hard and uncertain backlands, the more I see the effort of what we will be; there, suffering has an opportunity to create a national face. And not here, where everything is foreign and without character. (CARDOSO, 1970, p. 236)

The deserted beaches of deep blues, fine and singing sands, the paths of stone and mud on the forgotten roads, with the red thatch ravines, the remains of fallen trees in the summer storms.

⁷ *Caminho de Pedra*, in *Canção do Amor Demais*, by Elizeth Cardoso, accessed on YouTube on Feb. 09, 2020.

Stick and stone at the end of the path, Tom knew these landscapes. His family had a farm in Poço Fundo, a village in the district of Petrópolis, where he composed many of his best known songs, far from the sea. Tom was sensitive to these landscapes and atmospheres. The sky, the splendid woods, the decayed or abandoned railways, the silence of forgotten cities. It is good to remember that some of these images and atmospheres are present in *Limite*, by Mario Peixoto, with the characters walking through the sands, roads and streets of a Mangaratiba that no longer exists, the wind in the palm trees and the search for something you never really know. Certainly Lucio saw the film, as he mentions it in an article published in the magazine *Cultura Política* in June 1941.

We are certainly not here demanding that our filmmakers follow in the footsteps of *Limite*, which is a separate film, from the class of those who remain apart even in the most advanced European centers. Edgard Brasil's photography was extraordinarily beautiful, the interpretation good, the argument exceptional. (CARDOSO, June 1941, p. 280)

Landscapes. Landscapes. They rise from me, impetuous, whether I am asleep or awake - and they are real landscapes, landscapes of dreams, but all touched by poignant nostalgia - landscapes of a life I missed. (CARDOSO, 1970, p. 241)

It is probable, possible, that Tom and Lucio met, but there is no record that they were close even though they had a great mutual friend, Vinicius de Moraes, very close to Lucio in the 30s and 40s and then to Tom and the musicians from [the play] *Orfeu da Conceição* in 1956. Tom may have gone to one of the parties offered by Lucio in his apartment in Ipanema, or had a beer with him and Vinicius at Jangadeiros or Veloso. It may be that they talked about the landscapes of the interior of Minas Gerais, the beaches and the mountains of the State of Rio. It is difficult to say.

The music written by Tom Jobim for *Casa Assassinada* goes beyond the functionality of film music. The main theme is much more than the commentary of scenes or characters. It is a miracle, like the bed of violets amid the fire of passions that consume the house and the characters and the delicacy of the perfume of the flowers in the abandoned garden.

I still see it, with its enormous stone foundations, simple and majestic as a monument in the middle of the clutter of the garden. The cobblestone had almost completely fallen from its walls, the windows, collapsed, off the hinges, the weeds frankly invaded the areas that were once clean and climbed up the already eroded steps - and yet, for those who knew the chronicle of *Vila Velha*, life still resurfaced, through open cracks, exposed beams, fallen tiles, everything that constituted its immobile skeleton, touched by such recent vibrations. (CARDOSO, 2009, p. 523)

In his diary, Lucio comments on the astonishment of someone who found it bizarre that he said he was an atmosphere and not a writer. It was this atmosphere that Tom noticed and transformed into music.

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Abstract

The article seeks the origin of beauty and remains of the main theme of movie soundtrack composed by Antonio Carlos Jobim for the film The Murdered House, directed by Paulo Cesar Saraceni and its relation with Brazilian music and landscape.

Keywords: Music. Film. Literature.

Resumo

O artigo busca a origem da beleza e permanência do tema principal da trilha composta por Tom Jobim para o filme A Casa Assassinada, dirigido por Paulo Cesar Saraceni, e as suas relações com a música e a paisagem brasileira.

Palavras-chave: Música. Cinema. Literatura.

Resumen

El artículo busca el origen de la belleza y la permanencia del tema principal de la partitura compuesta por Tom Jobim para la película La Casa Asesinada, dirigida por Paulo César Saraceni, y sus relaciones con la música y el paisaje brasileños.

Palabras clave: Música. Cine. Literatura.