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**The Gaticanea (Cattydoggymachia), by
João Jorge de Carvalho, a Portuguese
Mock-heroic Narrative Poem of the 18th
Century: Between Intertextuality,
Pastiche and Parody**

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The Gaticanea (Cattydoggymachia), by João Jorge de Carvalho, a Portuguese Mock-heroic Narrative Poem of the 18th Century: Between Intertextuality, Pastiche and Parody

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Abstract

The mock-heroic narrative poem, following the track of the *Batrachomyomachia*, sometimes regarded with prejudice and considered a minor literary gender, for sure due to its jocular, ironic, satiric, comic or even grotesque component, can be seen as the result of a successful process of deconstruction of the most canonic epic paradigm. Of course, this act of deconstruction must be understood as a strategy of reflection, of release of hypotheses, of detachment, and at the same time of identification or association of ideas or models, in a continuous questioning of the codes established by the epic tradition, most particularly of Homeric, Virgilian or Camonian imprint. But also in a dialectic that follows a multidirectional logic of interdisciplinary nature and in a constant challenge that the rewriting of heroic texts means, as it privileges humble subjects. In this way, it becomes the ideal space of research, in order to analyze the contamination of history and literary theory with the textual immanent analysis, in a game of continuities and ruptures, of subjectivity and tradition. It is in this sense that the *Gaticanea (Cattydoggymachia)*, from 1781, by João Jorge de Carvalho, will be examined: on the one hand, privileging the classic models of reference above mentioned; on the other, aiming the constant updating of the Portuguese heroic-comic tradition and its adaptation to the treated subject (a very popular tale, the fight between dogs and cats) and the context in which it was composed, the Neoclassicism, and its values.

Keywords: Mock-heroic narrative poetry; João Jorge de Carvalho; The fight between dogs and cats.

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Being immediately a success in the time it was published, *Gaticanea* (*Cattydoggymania*), from 1781, written by João Jorge de Carvalho, a Portuguese writer of whom very little can be said as it was not very considered by contemporary criticism, counted with two more editions, one from 1817 and another one from 1828 (Carvalho, 1781). Perhaps its success may be explained due to the subject, a very popular one indeed, based on the tales about the fights between cats and dogs that can be found in every popular tradition around the world, expressed in folk tales or oral stories. As a matter of fact, taking this remark into account, we must not forget that, at the time, one of the most read and well accepted literary genres was the fable, in which the heroes and protagonists are animals and that can explain at least a part of its success. Regarded from another point of view, this poem aims to be inserted too in the tradition of the classic mock-heroic narrative poetry, taking as reference remarkable epic works that were considered as models to be followed and, at the same time, objects of parody. In such a way, it is not only the sublime epic tradition that is taken as a reference to be mocked, but also the other mock-heroic poems that inspired the author inserted in the tradition started, then, with the *Batrachomyomachia* (Pseudo-Homero, 2008).

In this way, the mock-heroic narrative poem, regarded as a canonic literary genre, is sometimes regarded with prejudice. Considered a minor literary product, for sure due to its jocular, ironic, satiric, comic or even grotesque component, can be seen as the result of a successful process of deconstruction of the most canonic epic paradigm. Of course, this act of deconstruction must be understood as a strategy of reflection, of release of hypotheses, of detachment, and at the same time of identification or association of ideas or models, in a continuous questioning of the codes established by the epic tradition, most particularly of Homeric, Virgilian or Camonian imprint. But also in a dialectic that follows a multidirectional logic of interdisciplinary nature and in a constant challenge that the rewriting of heroic texts means, as it privileges humble subjects. In this way, it becomes the ideal space of research, in order to analyze the contamination of history and literary theory with the textual immanent analysis, in a game of continuities and ruptures, of subjectivity and tradition (Cf. Ferro, 2011). It is in this sense that the *Gaticanea* (*Cattydoggymania*), by João Jorge de Carvalho, can be examined: on the one hand, privileging the classic models of reference above mentioned; on the other, aiming the constant updating of the Portuguese heroic-comic tradition and its adaptation to the treated subject (the fight between dogs and cats inspired in previous popular tales) and the context in which it was composed, the Neoclassicism, a period in which Classical tradition was critically considered and evaluated.

Formally composed in heroic stanzas, the poem counts with four Cantos, organized in a very symmetrical disposition, regarding the subject, as the first one is a kind of introduction to the poem, even though it includes yet the canonic parts of such poems, such as the proposition, the invocation to the muse, the dedicatory and beginning of the narration. There, it is explained how

the honor of a dog, Carroça (Cart), was injured by the unexpected attack of a humble cat, his diligences towards revenge, the protection he asks to Maluco (Crazy), the chief dog of the region, famous for its size and social statute of his owner, and the declaration of war to the cats. The second Canto deals with the preparations of the war, mainly regarding the attitude taken by the cats to get allies from all over the world, especially taking into account the expedition of ambassadors to different reigns and empires to call for arms other followers of the species in defense of their honor. In a parallel way, the next Canto is focused on the same diligences taken by the dogs, and the adventures some of them experiment, not forgetting the love affairs from one of them called Tejo (Tagus) for a nice female in Cairo, which is an episode that can be considered a remarkable parody of the Virgilian Dido. Finally, the last Canto is the ferocious fight, the victory of the dogs and the apotheosis of Maluco (Crazy), the commandant dog.

Of course, today, as every fable implies more than the immediate meaning of the story, the common reader faces the challenge of identifying the historical subject to which the plot may correspond, even though it becomes more and more difficult to determine which is the military or the political conflict to which it is making direct reference. Indeed, during the second half of the 18.th century, few were the wars in which Portugal was involved¹. And perhaps, the reason for the composition of the poem was, indeed, nothing more than the *rocambolésque* episode the author tells in the introduction to the poem, that, in its turn, was told by a friend of him, in which a dog and a cat were fighting in a kitchen to steal some food and, for that purpose, some other cats got involved (Carvalho, 1781, i-vii).

Under a stricter literary point of view, we must admit yet that the tradition of the mock-heroic poetry in Portugal counted already at the time with some important titles. The work of reference, as above is told, was always the Pseudo-homeric *Batrachomyomachia* (Pseudo-Homero, 2008), but at the time the Portuguese reader had become acquainted with some other poems that meanwhile had been composed, such as, for instance, *La Secchia rapita* (*The Stolen Pail* / 1624), by Alessandro Tassoni, which soon was understood as a sharp parody to the tradition of the Italian chivalrous poetry represented by Luigi Pulci, Matteo Maria Boiardo and Ludovico Ariosto (Tassoni, 1992); *Le Lutrin* (*The Choir Bookshelf* / 1674), by Boileau, which played with a new kind and a new conception of heroism within the genre (Boileau, [1933]); and *The Rape of the Lock* (1712-1714), by Alexander Pope, where a fierce critique towards the bourgeois values of the English society of the 17.th century is to be

¹During the whole 18.th century, Portugal was really affected by several wars, even though not of large extent. Within the Empire, if in Brazil it is to remark the War of the “Emboabas” (1708-1709) and, later on, the Guaranitic War (1753-1756); in India, there was continued small local fights to enlarge the territory; and in Timor there was the War of the “Crazy” (1779-1785). However, the European kingdom of Portugal was not largely affected after the War of the Succession of Spain (1701-1713), which caused the invasion of almost the whole country by the Spanish army, and afterwards the “Fantastic War” (1762), of little impact, except in the border with Spain, which consisted more of military campaigns. In 1801, still took place the Oranges War that ended with the occupation of Olivenza up to our time.

found (Pope, 1990). Some of these poems were taken into account to compose some others from the Renaissance to this period, such as the first parody to *The Lusíads*, of 1589, by four students who attended the University of Évora, in which the goliardic standard of living is exalted (*Paródia...*, 1880); and *Zamperineida* (second half of the 18.th century), a parody to the 4.th Canto of the Camonian poem, presumably by José Basílio da Gama, dealing with a social scandal of the Portuguese Enlightenment involving a gorgeous opera singer called Anna Zamperini (Pimentel, 1907). The maturity of the genre, however, is attested by other titles: *O Foguetário* (*The Stoker* / 1729-1742), by Pedro de Azevedo Tojal, that deals with royal feasts during the Ancient Regime and is dedicated mainly to the fireworks, so admired at the time to celebrate weddings (Tojal, 1904); overall, *O Hissope* (*The Sprinkler* / 1776-1802), by António Dinis da Cruz e Silva is looked as the most perfect mock-heroic poem in the Portuguese literary panorama, where the small social fights within the clergy of province are denounced (Silva, 2006). It was in this atmosphere that the *Gaticanea* was composed, establishing a fruitful dialog with *O Desertor* (*The Deserter* / 1774), by Manuel Inácio da Silva Alvarenga (Alvarenga, 2003), which, together with the *O Reino da Estupidez* (*The Kingdom of Stupidity* / 1819), by Francisco de Melo Franco, express in a direct way an open satire to the crises of the University of Coimbra and the academic milieu, for its decadent state before the Enlightenment reform took place (Franco, ³1984). Besides all these titles, in this brief panorama, the Spanish *Gatomaquia* (*Cattymachia* / 1634), by Lope de Vega under the pseudonym of Tomé de Burguillos (Burguillos, 1935), is a literary reference that, for sure, João Jorge de Carvalho knew and had in mind while writing his poem, as the heroes are practically the same. At the same time, the Portuguese poet tried to keep a critical distance facing the Spanish, as Lope de Vega did not use the heroic stanza, but seven “Silvas”, a contemporary narrative poem of polymetric verses, the structure of which is not very far from a poetic song. There, the subject is a love affair, a passionate triangle, in which a female cat, the beautiful Zapaquilda, is requested by two rival male cats, Marramaquiz and Micifuf, up to the extreme point of causing a war similar to that between the Trojans and the Greeks due to the rape of Helen (Capasso, 1963, 546-547). In this way, the real episode, that one that was told to the Portuguese author by a friend, converged in the literary panorama with other vectors, that included not only the high epic tradition, but also popular traditional romances, with important models of reference and even a very similar poem written by a everlasting star from the Spanish Letters suggesting to the poet the choice of the protagonists. Regarding the place where everything happens, some critics ask themselves why Mafra was chosen mainly to be the place of the final fight between cats and dogs and they try to find an answer in the biography of the author. However, nobody may certify if he was born or belonged to a family from there (Pimentel, 1936, 61-62). Nevertheless, not very long before, in Mafra had been built the largest convent of the Portuguese Baroque, an amazing building that attested the fulfillment of one vow made by King John the 5.th, in order to assure his offspring. It became the most expressive

representation of the royal power and magnificence during Royal Absolutism, and in such a way that even in the 20.th century the Portuguese Nobel Prize, José Saramago located there one of his best novels, if not the best one, *Memorial do Convento* (*The Convent Memorial* / 1982). For that very reason, I guess, the poet decided to include a long excursus in the 3.rd Canto of the *Gaticanea* dedicated to the description of the Convent. Indeed the large square in front of it constitutes a magnificent scenery with the large building behind (Pimentel, 1936, 60-61). Maфра became, therefore, in the 18.th century, a place of fashion. Then, beauty contrasts with the violence of the fight and, once more, the description of the place fits to the nature of the poetic work as the mock-heroic poem is made of contrasts, between spiritual creativity and the force of instincts, everything translated into the dialectic established especially between the greatness of the form and the humbleness of the subject or at least of the figures involved in it.

The subtext is often the Camonian poem and, along the four Cantos, it is possible to establish several parallels between them. In this way, if the proposition recalls *The Lusiads*, in the invocation to the Muse the poet prefers a more original one: it is not directed to Calliope, muse of the epic poetry, or Talia, the protector of comedy, but to a more fluent muse, allowing him a burlesque speech, enriched with popular expressions, in spite of the use and abuse of another common technique of the epic speech, such as the hyperbole, here taken with an overwhelming subversive intention. With the same purpose, the oscillation between imitation and originality assures the diversity of the way how facts are emphatically described, regarding their poor contents. A clear example of it is found when the exaltation of the “heroes” takes place, and the names they use, almost all of them inspired in those of the author’s friends’ dogs. The same happens with the cats. Sometimes, when one of them, such as the cat called “Ministro” (Minister), whose name indeed may imply a higher rank regarding the common category of the cats, it is immediately associated by the poet with its tail, considered obviously a part of its body without any kind of dignity, and its real obsession with licking it.

Besides these remarks, along the poem, several are the situations in which other parallels can be established, either regarding the Camonian poem, or the Homeric works, or even the Virgilian one. For instance, when the dog Carroça (Cart) meets Maluco (Crazy), the chief of the canine battalion, and asks for its protection, in Canto I, how often do we remember the Hellenic Heroes asking for the protection of the Olympic gods? The same can be said about the dialog established with the chivalrous poems, when the knights ride miles and miles to ask their allies to help them in the battle field, mainly in the fights that are considered as decisive. In this specific aspect, we remember not only the adventures of Charlemagne and their knights, but also King Arthur and the Round Table. The same happens with the embassies to foreign countries, in which the occasion is used to make the description of the whole world: Europe and Asia in Canto II and Africa and America, mainly South America in Canto III. This hyperbolic strategy, already applied in the *Orlando Innamorato* and in *Orlando Furioso*, is useful to enlarge the number of the heroes in the battle

field, showing at the same time that these fights acquire a universal dimension and sometimes it is the destiny of the western civilization that is then being decided. In these cases, Jorge de Carvalho still uses with an intentional purpose quotations and full expressions from other poems and authors when the strength of their expression is already well known among the readers. It is what happens, when he deliberately assumes quotations from Camões' description of the Battle of Aljubarrota to reinforce the violence of the fight between dogs and cats. In other occasions, the parallel and the technique of the quotation has the purpose of making a parody of famous episodes, as I mentioned before, with the passion of the dog Tejo (Tagus) in love for Folinga, recalling Aeneas and Dido, Marc Antony and Cleopatra.

In the end of the ambassadors' travels, when the description of Portugal takes place too, already in the moment when all are returning home with reinforced troops from all over the world, the dog called Arrogante (Arrogant) walks down a street of Coimbra e meets three university students discussing if the animals any time, during their evolution had the possibility of talking like the humans. This discussion is, of course, a sharp critique towards the futility of academic discussions of the superior knowledge of the time. At the same time, it may be understood as a way of assigning credibility to fables and to the fabulous universe of the fiction and folk tales. However, evaluating the academic discussion, this poem reinforces the general opinion of that epoch for the necessity of a reform of the university, enabling that ideas such as progress and Enlightenment could bring again the country to the path of progress and prosperity.

Anyway, with this approach of *Gaticanea*, we understand that more than following previous models, it is a clear result of a productive and creative way of imitating classics, updating them to modern ideas and situations. So, to be sure of the success of his poem, the author knew perfectly how to use wit, humor, burlesque and social satire, everything well balanced with a high technique of *pastiche* and intertextuality regarding famous works of the epic and chivalrous poetic tradition, not mentioning the previous models of the Portuguese and foreign mock-heroic narrative poems. Everything is then stressed by a strong feeling of parody, so appreciated at the time as a feature of good taste and universal knowledge.

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