

**What Oxum Learns: The Epistemological Erotic
through an African Source for *Dona Flor* and *Deuses de Dois Mundos***

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The acquisition of knowledge can be as continuous as daily-lived experience, or as epiphanic as a once-in-a-lifetime insight. Following Diana Taylor's exploration of the archive and the repertoire, knowledge can be imparted from sources outside our bodies—books, films, maps, musical scores—or it can be literally incorporated in the sense that we learn through doing, through apprenticeship, practice, and body memory. The fact that epistemology can be erotic, or that the erotic can be epistemological, informs Peter Brooks' exploration of epistemophilia in the modern novel, which will be engaged below. What I set out to analyze in this article is a particular contribution to the epistemological erotic from West African oral tradition, and its engagement, through the African diaspora, in the two Brazilian novels that, to my knowledge, develop it: Jorge Amado's *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos* (1966) and PJ Pereira's *O Livro da Morte* (2015), the final volume of his trilogy *Deuses de Dois Mundos*.

To situate my article with respect to the extensive bibliography on *Dona Flor*, my intent here is to enrich our understanding of the erotic context of Flor's epistemological agency and decision regarding her husbands, through an engagement with African as well as European contributions to Amado's vision of the sociocultural

milieu of Bahia.¹ I will develop a comparative relationship between the novel and a specific tale from the Yoruba oral traditions of West Africa, a myth of the orixás called “Oxum deita-se com Exu para aprender o jogo de búzios.”² This myth features a trio of main characters parallel to those of *Dona Flor*, and sheds light on the ways in which the erotics of Flor’s interactions with her husbands can be understood to embody distinct epistemological modes. While researching the connection between this myth and *Dona Flor*, I discovered and read the recent *Deuses de Dois Mundos* series by Pereira, who is forthcoming about the trilogy’s plot having a rather evident foundation on the myths of the orixás, especially as compiled in Reginaldo Prandi’s comprehensive *Mitologia dos Orixás*. What struck me as entirely pertinent to this article is Pereira’s modification of the same West African myth about Oxum, which is the climax of his three-volume series. I do not assert that Pereira was particularly influenced by Amado’s *Dona Flor*; rather, I will compare the original myth’s treatment by each author to show how both incorporated the same source: in Amado’s case, as the hidden kernel for the blueprint of what would become a sprawling novel, and in Pereira’s case, as one more myth—albeit the climactic one—in the series of myths that directly articulate his trilogy.

Deuses de Dois Mundos is a very recent publication with a wide social media following, but it has not yet received scholarly attention outside of some thoughtful reviews and book presentations in Brazil. *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos*, in contrast, recently surpassed the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. Acclaimed as one of the most popular of Jorge Amado’s works, the novel has earned considerable critical attention focusing on the eponymous protagonist’s decision not to decide, as it were, between her second husband Teodoro and the insistent ghost of her first husband, Vadinho. This “both/and” resolution was hailed as an essentially Brazilian “third way” triumph in an essay by Roberto DaMatta, “A mulher que escolheu não escolher.”³ For DaMatta, the transformative novel is nothing less than “uma parábola de viés enganadoramente populista, na qual uma consciência feminina, educada para ser obediente, ativamente transforma a relação mediadora, que é sempre lida como

¹ In preparing this article I wish to thank the students in two humanities core courses I taught at The University of Tulsa for their insights and discussion of the novel *Dona Flor* in English translation. I also thank the organizers and participants of the “spectral” session at the 2015 conference of the American Comparative Literature Association for their helpful comments to my presentation on this material. Finally, I extend my gratitude to David T. Haberly, Danielle Carlotti-Smith, and the readers for *A Contracorriente* who provided very insightful feedback.

² In Reginaldo Prandi’s *Mitologia dos Orixás*, 337-39.

³ DaMatta’s essay was revised and reprinted with the Jorge Amado Centennial Edition of *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos* by Companhia das Letras.

conseqüência, num sujeito” (467). Moreover, the work “expõe o imenso poder dessas triangulações reveladoras de um Brasil profundo, desconhecido e dilemático” (468-9). For Bobby Chamberlain, Flor’s unprecedented decision is something of a Hegelian synthesis (63); for Elizabeth Lowe, Flor’s “choice not to choose is a step beyond dependence on two men. It is a compromise that empowers her in the psychological, sexual, economic and social arenas” (129).

That Flor’s empowerment is undeniably erotic begs the question of an engagement with the concept of an erotics of epistemology, which has been addressed by Peter Brooks in his analysis of the development of the modern narrative. Such an erotics manifests in what he calls the epistemophilic urge, or the desire to know through, of, and for our bodies. For Brooks, this urge springs from childhood discoveries of sexuality, although it becomes much larger than sexuality alone:

Sexuality develops as a swerve from mere genital utility, driven by infantile phantasies of satisfaction and loss; it involves a dynamic of curiosity that is possibly the foundation of all intellectual activity, which I describe under the rubric of ‘epistemophilia.’ The dynamic of the narratives that I discuss derives in large part from their curiosity about the body [...] (Brooks xiii)

Brooks claims that many if not most modern narratives are fundamentally epistemophilic; I assert that *Dona Flor* is not only another such text but in fact a paragon of this kind of narrative. It is not in vain that one of the most persistent differences between Flor’s two husbands, often commented in the text, is the disparity between their sexual behaviors and appetites, especially as relating to the protagonist herself. In a quite literal fashion, Flor discovers bodies—her own, in alternated conjunction with the bodies of her husbands—in the sense that Brooks states, in which the body is “an apparent ultimate good, since it appears to hold within itself—as itself—the key to satisfaction, power, and meaning” (8). Ultimately the opposing poles of her amorous experiences guide her to a vastly increased self-knowledge and empowerment.

Such objectives could also, perhaps, be attained through other means, such as travel or advanced study, but Flor travels little and, although an extremely skilled chef, has not pursued advanced or specialized knowledge through study in the way that other characters have (Teodoro, for example, has studied pharmacology, and the foreign-born Dona Gisa, psychology). These options would not have been commonly available to a woman of Flor’s social status at that time, in that milieu. Yet even along her path toward eventually achieving greater self-knowledge and empowerment, Flor struggles to reconcile the sensual urgency of what she feels to be her greedy longings and desires,

with the respectability of her societally-conformed image as a middle-class woman of propriety in 1920s Bahia. Lowe explains:

What first limits and imprisons Flor, her gender, her social class, and her mixed race, is ultimately what liberates her for it enables her to see beyond a ‘stable’ and ‘binary’ reality to find stability in compromise. Flor opts not to choose between her living husband and the dead one, and in so doing she achieves balance and growth. (126)

The nature of how she achieves this “balance and growth” as an exercise in epistemophilic agency is what will be developed below.

Erotic Ghosts

Dona Flor’s first husband, Vadinho, dies on the very first page of the novel. It is a clever narrative trick in which readers become accustomed to thinking of him in the past, for we then read about his life with Flor as if he were already something of a ghost. When, near the end of the novel, he finally does appear again in Flor’s life as a ghost, it is as if we have already accepted such a spectral presence from the beginning. Thus, one can argue that Vadinho’s state as a ghost merely facilitates the simultaneity of Flor’s ostensible bigamy. However, the haunting Vadinho also fulfills Zoila Clark’s definition of ghosts as “beings that challenge the boundaries of any epistemologically defined classification founded upon reason” (17). In fact, Vadinho even challenges the boundaries of what can be classified as a ghost, in European as well as in African traditions, especially insofar as what could constitute the ghost’s role in an interchange of erotic knowledge with the dead.

In *The Double Flame*, Octavio Paz identifies the Roman writer Propertius, with his tale of the jealous ghost lover Cynthia, as the initiator in Western literature of “a genre that will come down through time to Baudelaire and his descendants: the erotic encounter with the dead” (71).⁴ Asserting that the trope of the erotic ghost is widespread in modern literature, Paz develops the idea with Quevedo’s famous sonnet “Amor constante más allá de la muerte,” in which “The body will cease to be a human form; it will be lifeless matter but go on loving nonetheless” (78-79). It is a deep corporeal longing, tinged often with eroticism, that causes the subject’s recollection of

⁴ Elsewhere in his writings, Paz also credits Propertius and his contemporary Catullus as having “decisively transformed the amorous relationship by converting the beloved into a subject with a soul, that is, a person possessing a free will,” a person who is “a free entity, a human being with whom we undertake a difficult relationship in which our own freedom is exercised and compromised” (*Sor Juana* 94). These observations regarding the agency of the beloved are also highly pertinent to the historical trajectory of Flor’s story.

the deceased lover, and yet, as Robert Moser elaborates with reference to Amado's *oeuvre*, both medieval and modern ghosts in the Western tradition are almost always "fully clothed. That makes Vadinho's frequently pornographic apparitions in Jorge Amado's *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos* all the more striking" (45). Nevertheless, I do not agree that Vadinho's nudity is pornographic. Although certainly problematic given the societal mores of the time, his nudity literally embodies Vadinho's characteristic immersion in the convivial pleasures of the flesh (smoking, drinking, sex, carnival), and, as will be emphasized below, his boundary-skirting relationship to the orixá Exu.

In Moser's thorough analysis, he clarifies that "Vadinho is generally referred to as *o finado* [the deceased]. However, when reference is made specifically to his restless spirit, particularly by Dionísia and other practitioners of Candomblé, he is called *egun*" (196). While the *finado*, in Catholic parlance, refers to a spirit who has most likely gone to the intermediary stage of purgatory, the *eguns* of Candomblé, in contrast, "are disembodied souls, [...] with whom contact may be harmful for mankind, provoking physical and spiritual problems. These disruptive souls must therefore be chased away and exorcised" (Capone 80-81). Vadinho, already a frequent crosser of societal boundaries, here straddles a crossroads between Eurocentric (*finado*) and Afrocentric (*egun*) perceptions of the dead, and thus exemplifies one of María del Pilar Blanco's most cogent insights to bear against political or allegorical ghost generalization: "ghosts often remain unwieldy figures and haunting actions perplexing events that resist prescribed interpretations, which, importantly, ask to be read according to their historical and geographic location" (8).

Not only does Vadinho's nude ghost cross over these interpretations, but he also denies them, or rather transcends them—resists them, to use Blanco's term—because it is not only the Western tradition that shrouds its spirits in some sort of textile covering, no matter how ethereal. Among the customs pertinent to the appearance of the *eguns* is their heavily clothed aspect: "When invoked, the *Eguns* appear dressed in multicolored, embroidered robes which cover them completely. No one may touch them, for contact with them is considered fatal" (Capone 276). These heavy robes serve precisely as protective boundaries between the living and the dead, not to be trifled with. Yet Vadinho's ghostly nudity, on the contrary, must facilitate his contact with Flor, and so it is Flor who sets boundaries on her person for what Vadinho-as-ghost can touch. Vadinho, in response, always seeks to reconquer more of what he sees as the corporeal territory that was once his, with the narrator's vocabulary reinforcing the metaphor of Flor's body as a battlefield or as the spoils of war: "Enquanto dona Flor

buscava maneira de iniciar a conversa, Vadinho enfiou-lhe a mão por baixo dos vestidos, tentando atingir exatamente aquele último reduto ainda incólume, cofre-forte a conter sua dignidade de mulher e a honra do doutor” (400). This is one of the ways in which Vadinho can be said to cause the “physical and spiritual problems” for Flor that can result from contact with eguns.

While naked Vadinho thus fulfills characteristics of both European and African ghost traditions—yet transgresses both simultaneously—the heavily clothed appearance of the egun, or even the shrouded appearance of the traditional European apparition, is transferred or projected by Amado not onto Vadinho but onto Teodoro, Flor’s second husband and Vadinho’s foil. If Vadinho’s nudity symbolizes his unfettered dedication to the pleasures of the flesh, then Teodoro’s staid suits, immaculate white lab coats, and long-sleeved pajamas keep him, in contrast, at a remove from full immersion, full exposure, or full contact. Of the two husbands, Teodoro is the living, breathing one, yet his clothing separates him from vitality, resulting in the paradox of a living husband who appears more devoid of life than the dead one. In the novel there is a particularly comic moment when Vadinho’s ghost finally puts something on: “O maligno surgia do ar e para cúmulo vestia aquela camisa de mulheres nuas, trazida da América por dona Gisa para o doutor. Só a camisa a cobrir-lhe o peito, o resto à mostra, mais indecente ainda” (399). If Vadinho’s naked ghost were to wear anything at all, it could only be a shirt depicting more nudity. The fact that the shirt with a print of nude women was a gift from the liberal Gisa to the scandalized Teodoro, sets up an important textile exchange aspect between the two husbands that reflects the central motif of the West African myth to be analyzed below. Further, in the 1976 film version of *Dona Flor*, directed by Bruno Barreto, there is a clever moment when Vadinho’s ghost (portrayed by José Wilker) mischievously dons Teodoro’s white lab coat, an act that even more closely parallels the importance of a white robe in this same African legend, while simultaneously evoking the traditional white shroud of the Western specter.

Writing from a general Latin American identitarian position vis-à-vis Barreto’s film version of *Dona Flor*, Clark maintains that Latin American context and identity accumulate over time from the “ideas and powers” of “a ghostly community”: “However, as acculturated mestizo people, this past can also seem threatening when viewed through the lens of western gothic convention, which demonizes such ghosts as part of the abject and evil barbarism we have to overcome if we are to take our place within civilized society” (2). In fact, this does seem to be what Flor wants—to take her

place within civilized society, although it is perhaps less her wish than that of her mother, Dona Rozilda. Nonetheless, Vadinho's ghost in relation to Flor is a "reflection that acts as the double we would wish not to see and which we consider despicable for casting doubt on the positive image we have of our own identity" (Clark 17). This casting of the ghost as a figure that challenges expectations coincides with Blanco's assertion that ghosts are "problems of textual representation and innovation, when crises of perception provoke new advances in literary craft" (9), and the ghost becomes an effective cipher for any number of possible understandings. John Mbiti has recognized that an essential aspect of representations of ghosts in African oral tradition manifests as "a literary device by means of which people caricature human life, satirize one another, make comments on society, and give an outlet to their feelings of fear, hatred or frustration without the danger of offending anybody" (76). As a safe space for social satire, the ghosts in African oral tradition thus resemble the embrace of critique and transgression in Carnival, the very event in which Vadinho died while dancing dressed as a *baiana* with an outsize phallus. Vadinho-as-ghost certainly addresses, challenges and even accommodates Flor's fear or frustrations of a sexual nature. While he may still offend, there are no real consequences from his behaviors such as there would have been when he was alive. In ghostly form, Vadinho personifies an uncomfortable lack that Flor perceives in her identity, in her persona; less "holy spirit" than spirit of carnality, Vadinho is Flor's desire made tangible, although palpable only for her.

Deities of Devotion

There is much attention given to the fact that Amado obviously and copiously employs elements of Afro-Brazilian culture in Bahia in his works. Yet, as Piers Armstrong has noted, what seems to be absent "in almost all criticism of Amado is the capacity to drop ideological agendas and consider the work hermeneutically in terms of a steady organic development fired by an original cultural and creative perspective" (140). Similarly, Lowe claims that the "surface elements of his later works [including *Dona Flor*] encourage superficial interpretations of the texts" (131), beyond which many critics have failed to push.⁵ Armstrong elaborates further:

⁵ Despite the promising title, Jaeckel's article, for example, does little to develop the basic assertion of Afro-Brazilian cultural influences in Amado's work.

Amado's increasing focus on Salvador in most of the great works of the 1960s (*Pastores da Noite*, *Dona Flor*, above all *Tenda dos Milagres*), his insistent residence there, and his status as an Obá of Candomblé, indicate a move away from his literary roots as one of the *nordestino* novelists, towards a realization of Afrocentric empathy and soteropolitan loyalty. (230)

Amado, a participant and even obá (similar to a deacon) in Candomblé, took pains to develop for his characters in *Dona Flor* precise correlations to certain orixás as their deities of devotion, coherent with the practice by which an individual Candomblé follower becomes associated, to a greater or lesser degree, with an orixá in the role of personal guiding divinity. In various syncretic traditions involving Catholicism and West African belief systems, these orixás were assimilated or accommodated as saints, which meant that individuals could have particular orixás as “saints” of devotion (Prandi *Segredos* 67). Indeed, knowing one's guiding orixá means understanding one's life path: “Sua vida não é mais que uma pálida repetição do mito do seu orixá [...] Saiba qual é seu orixá e saberá quem você é, é o lema do oráculo” (Prandi, “Posfácio”, 244). This idea, that one's life—or, a protagonist's life in a novel—is an attenuated recursion of the myth of one's orixá, takes on particular importance in comparing the myth from African oral tradition, “Oxum deita-se com Exu para aprender o jogo de búzios,” to *Dona Flor e seus dois maridos*.

Flor's personal orixá is revealed to her by the priestess Dionísia de Oxossi as follows:

—Minha comadre, seu anjo da guarda é Oxum, eu mandei um eluô olhar nos búzios.
 —E como é Oxum, comadre Dionísia?
 —Pois eu lhe digo que é o orixá dos rios; é uma senhora de semblante muito calmo e vive em sua casa retirada, parecendo a própria mansidão. Mas vai se reparar, é uma faceira, cheia de melindre e dengue, por fora água parada, por dentro um pé-de-vento. Basta lhe dizer, minha comadre, que essa enganadeira foi casada com Oxóssi e com Xangô e, sendo das águas, vive consumida em fogo. (232)

Through Oxum, the female orixá of fresh water and fertility, love and vanity (Prandi, *Mitologia*, 22), several of Flor's character traits are addressed, as well as a foreshadowing of her “double” marriage. From Dionísia's description of Oxum's personality, Amado develops a motif for Flor: the binary of a calm exterior-vs.-raging interior. Through the narrative voice, the motif is calibrated throughout the novel to indicate, for example, Flor's varying degrees of social and sexual satisfaction. An excellent and oft-cited example appears in Flor's masterful *vatapá* recipe that is simultaneously a lament for her unfulfilled longings. In Flor's narration of the recipe to the young women who are her

cooking school students, the calm exterior of her binary has almost disappeared as the raging interior assumes expression. Flor accentuates references to fire, heat, and boiling throughout the recipe, and compares herself metaphorically to the simmering dish. She ends by describing herself as “consumida em fogo e em maldição” (250), echoing and augmenting Dionísia’s description of Oxum.

Amado begins the final section of the novel by making explicit associations between the characters and their guiding orixás. Dionísia prepares for Flor a list of culinary preferences for the orixás, and indicates, as well, the people in Flor’s life who correspond to these orixás. Here the reader learns that “Dr. Teodoro é de Oxalá, logo se vê pelo modo sério e pela compostura. Quando está luzindo terno branco e leva seu fagote igual a um paxorô, parece Oxalufã, Oxalá velho, o maior dos orixás, o pai de todos” (366). Very careful about his appearance and his reputation—frequently seen in public “na pompa de seu traje branco” (338)—and associated with knowledge and prudence, Teodoro embodies the stability of Oxalá, the chief orixá, ruler of the skies and creator of humankind, deity of justice and wisdom (Prandi, *Mitologia*, 23). Along with the white robe and the bassoon-as-cane elements of Teodoro’s evocation of Oxalá, is the fact that Teodoro, like Oxalá, represents the wisdom of arcane, archived knowledge. From sheet music, and from medical reference books, Teodoro reads the black-and-white musical and chemical symbols shrouded in mystery to the uninitiated: “Se o mundo dos farmacêuticos fora imprevista descoberta, imagine-se o secreto e quase cabalístico universo musical da orquestra de amadores onde penetrou dona Flor pela estreita porta do fagote” (318). Also, like Oxalá, he is methodical in a pristine way, even in his sexual repertoire shackled to certain days of the week exclusively.

In her list for Flor, Dionísia also confirms what the attentive reader will have already discerned from the frequent references, throughout the novel, to the mischievous proclivities of Flor’s first husband: “Dizem ter sido o açobá Didi quem fez o jogo para o finado e os búzios por três vezes confirmaram: o santo de Vadinho era Exu e nenhum outro” (366). Vadinho’s character exemplifies almost all of the sexual and trickster qualities associated with the messenger deity Exu in the well-known description set out by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.: “guardian of the crossroads, [...] the phallic god of generation and fecundity, [...] inveterate copulator [... associated with] ambiguity, sexuality, chance, uncertainty, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty” (6). Jacques Salah concretizes this orixá’s most important associations within Amado’s *oeuvre* to characters such as Vadinho, Quincas Berro Dágua, and Pedro Archanjo: “Alegre até a travessura, suas reações são absolutamente imprevisíveis, mas

na maior parte do tempo engraçadas e mesmo grotescas” (154).⁶ Vadinho—whose name suggests the term *vadio*, a common term for a street-smart hustler—exemplifies a Brazilian kind of vagabond called the *malandro*, a character type who “inherits from Exu his creative, interpretative capacity for mischief, for ambivalence and trickery, in which music and [spoken] language are complementary resources and forms of mediation” (Treece 13). For example, in contrast to Teodoro’s preference for classical music, Vadinho’s taste for decidedly popular music comes not from printed scores but from the ear and heart, with no instrument other than his untuned voice. His passions are either sex or gambling, the latter (or rather both) being completely up to chance. His interaction with the world of letters, numbers, and other printed signifiers is so limited that even to deal with his interminable series of IOUs he will barely consent to sign his name.

Where he does leave “marks” is on Flor’s body on several occasions, the reprehensible “signature” of his abuse. As a ghost, he even leaves marks on Zulmira’s body. The intermediate purplish-blue hue of these bruises on Zulmira (415) reinforces a motif that Amado develops for Vadinho throughout the novel: “aquela rosa de tão vermelha quase negra” (109), a rose that Flor throws to him from her balcony on the night of the serenade. The rose and its particularly indeterminate or even impossible color are referenced in other moments, symbolizing the cohabitation of Exu’s traditional binaries represented in red and black.⁷ The classic example of these binaries is a widely-told story of Exu strolling through an African village wearing a hat that was red on one side and black on the other (or in some versions, red and white), for the purpose of sowing discord among two rivals as to the color of the hat (Prandi, *Mitologias*, 48-49).⁸ This red and black dichotomy colors Vadinho’s obsession with gambling through the hues of the roulette wheels and the playing cards. Moreover, the “both-

⁶ Yet Salah later connects Vadinho erroneously to the orixá Oxossi (185). In the beliefs of many, Exu was supposed to have died and been reborn at least once, somewhat like Vadinho (and also Quincas Berro D’água). Exu’s importance for Amado personally was paramount. The symbol that Amado adopted as a logo for his works, and that eventually became the logo for the Fundação Casa de Jorge Amado, is a stylized figure of Exu.

⁷ The flower appears in Flor’s *samba de roda* dream sequence, in which she is dressed as a widow holding “uma flor apenas, rosa de tão vermelha quase negra” (225). By the end of the book, slightly modified in hue, it has become a metaphor for her sex: “Vadinho colhe na mão a rosa azul de dona Flor” (433). Similarly, a purple live-forever (*saudade-roxa*) is placed in Vadinho’s hands for his wake, and a connection is made through this flower to gambling when Seu Vivaldo sees the flower and thinks it would have been more appropriate to leave a gambling chip in Vadinho’s hands (29).

⁸ The hat episode receives a treatment in the first volume of PJ Pereira’s popular trilogy of Yoruba mythology mixed with contemporary Brazilian life, *Deuses de Dois Mundos: O Livro do Silêncio*, 119-23.

and” red-black rose simultaneously represents Oxum’s syntheses of water-and-fire, and serenity-and-passion, that serve to characterize Flor and her final “both-and” decision. The “rosa de tão vermelha quase negra” becomes, in effect, the flower evoked by the protagonist’s very name.

The most important of these qualities for understanding Vadinho’s ghostly return from the world of the dead to the world of the living is the character’s constant association with threshold crossing. A typical description of his propensities to thwart borders and obstacles and to dwell on crossroads appears at a moment in which he has hatched another scheme (in this case, hosting a famous singer from Rio): “Para Vadinho, porém, as distâncias não existiam, nem obstáculos de qualquer ordem, para ele tudo era fácil, a vida não tinha impossíveis” (168). There are many further examples in the text, including Vadinho’s helping Flor to “traspasar a vedada porta” to the Palace Hotel (182) and beyond, where “nas encruzilhadas da noite pobre e despida de europeus, estendia-se o mistério de Vadinho, sua última verdade” (188). Listening to Teodoro practice his bassoon—evocative of “order and harmony, stately and saintly” like the ritual music for Obatala, an avatar of Oxalá (Soyinka 370)—Flor recalls, in contrast, the street music of Vadinho and makes an effort to “Tirar a cabeça daquelas outras músicas a fazê-la desatenta, perdida em obscuros caminhos, no mistério das encruzilhadas” (334). Amado also develops motifs related to duality and indeterminacy for Vadinho and Flor both, through images of twilight, references to being split in two or of two minds, and through the use of conceptual opposites (love and death, peace and despair, sorrow and celebration).

Since Vadinho is a barrier-breaker protected by Exu of the crossroads, not only is his return from the dead—or, as a *finado*, his return from the intermediate, threshold-like purgatory—made more comprehensible, but so also is the force of his desire. What Cuti (Luiz Silva) has identified as Exu’s erotic presence in contemporary Afro-Brazilian poetry holds true for Vadinho’s character as well:

Orixá mensageiro e princípio dinâmico que rege o universo, além de emblema da virilidade, Exu atua na poesia negra como impulso libertário. Ainda que a sombra do sadismo se insinue, dando à relação sexual seu tom combativo (afinal, sexo e violência é o que mais se propaga), é o prazer em sua dimensão maior o que pretendem os herdeiros (e desordeiros) dos escravos. [...] A via erótica da poesia negra atua no sentido da ruptura com essa continuidade [da objetivação] e de outras formas de repressão física y psicológica. Na volúpia revela o seu poder de seduzir. Reconhecer nos órgãos genitais esta capacidade é redirecionar e reavaliar hábitos e costumes. (211)

The dark side of Exu's eroticism—the violence that Cuti identifies above—does stain Vadinho's relationship with Flor and his general character. Specifically, his violence manifests as blows directed against Flor when she refuses to give him her money. The reader does not see Vadinho engage in sexual violence. Even though his lusty insistence with Flor is constant, she holds him off when she pleases, and indeed Flor's control in this aspect of her life is key in understanding her epistemophilic urge, in Brooks' terms, toward her own self-knowledge, or toward her own reconquest (echoing Cuti's terms above: *reconhecer, redirecionar, reavaliar*) of her bodily territory.

The Skinny-dipper's Dilemma

There can be no doubt that Amado makes very clear associations between his trio of protagonists and their respective guiding orixás, and then supports these associations in ways both overt and subtle. Particularly foregrounded is the correspondence between Flor and Oxum, each having two husbands. Among the varying beliefs held across the religious diaspora derived from the worship of West African orixás, descriptions of Oxum commonly assert that she is the wife of both Xangô and Ogun, or, as Dionísia claims, that Oxum was married to both Xangô and Oxossi. Neither Xangô (orixá of thunder and power), nor Ogun (orixá of weapons and war), nor Oxóssi (orixá of the hunt) appear in any particularly important way in *Dona Flor*. Instead, the narrative parallel of Oxum's two-timing through Flor involves, as we have seen above, the characters Vadinho and Teodoro representing, respectively, the orixás Exu and Oxalá.

There is indeed one extant myth in which this exact trio of orixás—Oxum, Exu, and Oxalá (Obatala)—interacts exclusively. Harold Courlander collected the myth he titled "Oshun Learns the Art of Divination" from a Nigerian source and included it in his *Tales of Yoruba Gods and Heroes* (67-69). The prolific analyst of Afro-Brazilian religions, Reginaldo Prandi, translated it to Portuguese, with slight modifications to the text, for inclusion in his massive compendium, *Mitologia dos Orixas* (337-39).⁹ Prandi significantly lengthened the title by specifying what Oxum does in order to "learn the art of divination," and by specifying what constitutes this art: "Oxum deita-se com Exu para aprender o jogo de búzios."

⁹ In his dissertation, Jorge Allen-Dixon mentions this same myth from the Prandi collection, but it is a passing reference, and inaccurate in its allegation that Exu chases after Oxum (50).

The story begins with Oxalá enduring endless pestering from the other orixás, particularly Oxum, to teach them the art of divination. Oxalá, however, refuses to teach them how to interpret the throwing of the cowrie shells.¹⁰ One day Oxalá goes to bathe in a river outside the city. Exu spies him, steals his white robe from the riverbank, and runs away shouting mockingly. Oxum happens along the road a short while later, finds Oxalá still in the water, and learns from him what has transpired. She makes a deal with Oxalá that she will retrieve his clothes from Exu on the condition that Oxalá will then teach her divination. Oxalá gives his word. Oxum finds Exu at a crossroads and manages to stave off his immediate sexual assault long enough to make a deal, in turn, with him: that she will engage with him sexually if he will then give her Oxalá's robe. It is agreed. After their romp, Exu gives the clothes to Oxum, who returns them to Oxalá, who teaches her the art of divination.

In this account of the skinny-dipper's dilemma, it is Oxalá, the supreme deity, who is bathing. The bath is a return to the semiotic, aqueous realm of the chora in which the particular pinning-down of meaning in signification is not present nor possible. Oxalá, as the creator god and ultimate signifier, is thus vulnerable here in the river, and Exu takes advantage of this by stealing the one item that most "signifies" for Oxalá: his white garment. In fact, Obatala—the name used for Oxalá in the myth—means, in Yoruba, "Lord of the White Cloth." In other words, it is not so much that nudity in and of itself is shameful, but rather that Oxalá's royal robes signify not only his leadership but even his very identity. Nude without his stolen robe, Oxalá has been made in this bodily way to resemble the thief, Exu, who is often depicted naked. When Oxum dresses Oxalá, she thus restores the ontological symbolism of his royal dignity. Further, the detained, nude Oxalá is literally soaking in Oxum's element, in the sense that Oxum is the orixá of rivers, streams, lakes, and waterfalls. Perhaps for this reason the immersion of Oxalá in the water is less of a transformative, *deus ex balneum* epiphanic moment than a static pause while the main character, Oxum, carries out her plan.

Of the three deities in the myth, Oxum exhibits the most agency. In fact, if Exu is, as usual, the mischief-maker in this story, the causer of chaos and confusion, then it is Oxum who restores order. In general, Oxum's "ability to accomplish unlikely or seemingly impossible tasks is testament to her resourcefulness and wit" (Hagedorn 155); such resourcefulness is certainly on display in this myth. In a sense, Oxum usurps Exu's role as go-between, but she can only do so after appeasing him first. To placate

¹⁰ This is the very act of divination to which Dionísia refers in the novel—an act carried out to reveal the guiding orixás of the main characters.

him, and restore order, she recognizes the preferences of her deity cohorts: undressing herself, she offers erotic nudity to the orixá who prefers it; dressing another, she offers corporeal covering to the orixá who prefers that. The system of equivalencies—this for that, *quid pro quo*—has the effect of setting up carnal knowledge as one kind of knowledge to be exchanged, through the intermediary garment, for another kind of knowledge: the symbolic, esoteric understanding of divination. If these types of knowledge can be exchanged in this way, then it can be implied that they are of equal value. A more detailed consideration, informed by the main concepts in Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire*, reveals that the know-how that Oxum wants from Oxalá approximates, in the myth's largely non-chirographic West African cultural setting, a kind of approach to *archival* knowledge, while what she gives to Exu to set up the exchange of the robe represents part of what could be called the corporeal *repertoire*, which includes knowledge about sexual acts.¹¹ This means that Oxum's agency in setting up the exchange enacts an equivalence in a particular sort of knowledge economy, in which one kind of knowledge equals, and even produces, the other. To say that the act of sexual intercourse with Exu makes possible the second, more esoteric, exchange is simply to recognize the priority that Exu always receives in *terreiro* ceremonies: an offering to Exu begins all such ceremonies because Exu is the carrier or transporter of *axé*, the life force or flow that makes possible the interactions between divine and human realms (Capone 43). Oxum finds Exu precisely at a crossroads, his most typically associated site as well as a common spot for leaving offerings to him. It is therefore possible to understand the myth, allegorically and teleologically, as a simple statement of the need for appeasing Exu first in order to make other things happen, particularly an act as dependent on divinities as divination itself. Prandi writes, “nada acontece sem o trabalho de intermediário do mensageiro e transportador Exu. Nada se faz sem ele, nenhuma mudança, nem mesmo uma repetição. Sua presença está consignada até mesmo no primeiro ato da Criação: sem Exu, nada é possível. O poder de Exu, portanto, é incomensurável” (*Segredos* 73-74).

Through the exchange process that she herself sets up, Oxum “learns” corporeally from one orixá, and extracorporeally from the other. Who is to say that when Oxum has intercourse with Exu, she does not learn some revelations of great

¹¹ Taylor's fruitful investigation in performance theory explores the rift “between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (19).

value? And they are inscribed, as it were, on her body. They do not reside outside the body, like the cowrie shells for casting, but rather upon it and within it. Further, Oxalá is complicit in the exchange. The myth as transcribed by Courlander, and also as translated by Prandi, takes pains to mention that Oxalá, like almost all of the other male orixás, desires Oxum for himself. Oxalá must surely know, or be able to guess, what exactly Exu will want from Oxum in exchange for the return of his robe, yet he consents to her plan anyway. He seems to agree, albeit implicitly, that one exchange begets the other. Oxum, then, after entering into sexual contract with Exu, carries his seed, or metaphorically his axé, and she is thus imbued when she later learns from Oxalá the secret knowledge of divination. Like Flor, her sexual interaction in this case does not result in a literal pregnancy, but rather in the acquisition of new knowledge and understanding—a metaphorical gestation.

Intimate Exchanges

Returning to Amado's novel, there are several particular elements in *Dona Flor* that replicate or recall aspects of this West African myth. While I have no evidence that Amado had ever *read* a written version of this myth (Courlander's work, for example, appeared in English in 1973, after the publication of *Dona Flor* in 1966), he may well have *heard* it, or one or more variations of it, on any number of occasions related to his involvement in Candomblé. If he never heard or read it before composing *Dona Flor*, it makes narrative parallels such as the following examples all the more striking.

On their wedding night, Teodoro presents to Flor a metaphorical necklace of the stars in the constellations that he identifies for her, “colar de astros com luz divina e com os volumes, os pesos e as medidas, sua posição no espaço, sua eclipse e sua distância exata. Com o dedo doutoral, ele no céu os elegera, dispondo-os numa ordem de grandeza; no colo de dona Flor os astros translúcidos refulgiam” (285). This image of Teodoro sharing with Flor an esoteric, extracorporeal knowledge in the imagined form of a necklace, mirrors the image—in one of Prandi's textual clarifications to his version of the myth—of the cowrie shells and cola nuts used for divination as being connected along a necklace called the *opelê*. The stars in constellations, like the shells and nuts in a necklace, are media of divination, and projections of knowledge outside the self. Yet the self, for both Teodoro and for the myth's version of Oxalá, is something that needs to be contained or stilled in moments of intimacy. Oxalá is nude and unmoving in the water, paralyzed by shame or by the potential for gossip (“Como Obatalá ia andar nu por aí? Que vergonha! Que falta de decoro! Um rei nu?” *Mitologias*,

338), while “clothed” by Oxum’s very element, the raging interior of her lake avatar. Similarly, lovemaking with Teodoro, as Flor discovers, is a matter of being clothed except for the necessary exposure of the relevant anatomy. Even in the sexual act, Teodoro, reminiscent of the etymology of “Obatala,” remains swaddled in the purity of the white cloth of the sheets, a wrapping that Vadinho-as-ghost is quick to transgress, “suspendendo a ponta do lençol para melhor apreciar e escarnecer” (405). We see again the conceit that the dead husband, free-floating and naked, has more vigor and vitality than the living one, who is clothed somewhat like an egun as well as enshrouded precisely in the covering that a ghost dons in the Western tradition: a sheet. Tellingly, in her delirious vatapá recipe, Flor claims that Vadinho “me despia do lençol e do pudor para a louca astronomia de seu beijo” (249). Vadinho, one could say, unshrouded or unveiled Flor and had her “seeing stars” through his corporeal repertoire; for Teodoro, seeing stars is a literal matter of astronomical erudition and mythological allusion, though no less an act of love for Flor. Although Flor lets Teodoro into the raging interior of her very self, he remains relatively immobile and at a distance, like the cold stars. Thus, when Flor passes into the “tranquil waters” phase of her life, that is to say the stable relationship with Teodoro, she realizes she needs to bring back the “raging fire” of her passion with Vadinho in order to feel complete; this dichotomy echoes the raging interior/tranquil exterior of Oxum. Ultimately Flor’s epistemological discovery is not how to read cowries or constellations, but rather how to read her own mind, feelings, and body—how to balance her mix of fire and water.

The myth’s Exu, as he is often portrayed in West African tradition, is corporeal, immediate, and sexual. Vadinho, similarly, is very physical in his relationship with Flor, even in public, and when he returns as a ghost, his compelling desire is to reconquer her corporeal territory. But more than reinforcing the highly sexual way in which the majority of myths portray Exu, the particular myth “Oxum deita-se com Exu para aprender o jogo de búzios” specifically portrays the sexual act as a pathway to knowledge (as Prandi makes explicit in his version of the title). Sex in the myth is not just a means to the very specific end of Oxum’s gaining the robe to give to Oxalá so that he will be obliged to share his divinatory knowledge with her; sex is also portrayed as a necessary condition, the exposure to the life force, *axé*, that is essential to Oxum for her subsequent gain of knowledge from Oxalá. In the novel, Flor has already lived in prolonged contact with Vadinho’s life force—his vitality—before meeting Teodoro after Vadinho’s death. The parameters of Flor’s interactions with her husbands are much more complex than the simple transactions among the orixás in the myth, but

what seems to be the case as far as these parallel exchanges of knowledge in the novel is that Flor attains her goal of social stability, and access to new knowledge, with Teodoro while still feeling the need to resuscitate her bodily passions through summoning Vadinho's ghost. She doubles back, to maintain her raging interior as well as her calm exterior. Her need for her deceased husband is enough to "animate" (literally, give a soul to) him such that her own life force supports an afterlife (afterlife-force) for Vadinho, linked always to Exu and the axé life force.

In a larger sense, the entire structure of the novel can be seen to parallel the general structure of the myth.¹² The main structural distinction between the two is that the trajectory reverses from the myth to the novel. In the myth, Oxum needs Exu to rescue Oxalá and gain what she really wants: knowledge of how to divine. In the novel, it is only from her tedious stasis with Teodoro that Flor feels the need to summon, and eventually rescue, Vadinho. In another sense, she rescues herself more than she does Vadinho; or rather, she rescues their relationship, and this very preservation of her corporeal repertoire and erotic satisfaction is, perhaps unexpectedly, the quid pro quo boon that she offers in return to Teodoro. Teodoro keeps his marital stability and his good name because he is saved from having to bear the shame of a wife involved in an extramarital affair—a possibility that Flor, in erotic desperation, had been led to contemplate. On her side, Flor also retains her good name and marital stability by preventing herself from having an affair, and she also reincorporates her passion with Vadinho, who is now tied to her in the sense that only she can see him. Ironically, at the moment that she herself lives a sort of polyandry, Flor no longer faces the obstacle of Vadinho's philandering.

Several critics have noted Amado's peopling of the end of the novel with various esoteric quacks and supernatural frauds who serve as foils for the African orixás, since the representation of the powers of these latter entities within the realm of the novel is, in contrast, quite real.¹³ Precisely in the context of these divinities and their stories, then, we can note how Flor herself stands up to Iansã and the other orixás

¹² In Stith Thompson's folk motif index (available online) one can find a somewhat applicable story category, T455 "Woman sells favors for particular purpose," but it must be noted that the stories in the category don't correspond very well in structure to the African legend. The Stith-Thompson index is overwhelmingly European with a small Asian presence, and thus in the nature of its organization and in spite of claims to universality, it may not represent African and New World motifs accurately.

¹³ Moser 195, Chamberlain 84.

united against Exu in his effort to save Vadinho. As befits this mythologically inspired combat, she erupts on the scene naked:

Foi quando uma figura atravessou os ares, e, rompendo os caminhos mais fechados, venceu a distância e a hipocrisia—um pensamento livre de qualquer peia: dona Flor, nuinha em pêlo. Seu ai de amor cobriu o grito de morte de Iansã. Na hora derradeira, quando Exu já rolava pelo monte e um poeta compunha o epitáfio de Vadinho. (458)

To rescue Vadinho-as-ghost, Flor could only be naked, in full contact with him, as she had been a short time earlier when she finally ceded all of her corporeal territory to the ghost's advances: “dona Flor tão despida quanto ele, um da nudez do outro se vestindo e completando” (434). Her nakedness, like Vadinho's, echoes that of the orixás in the myth, and literally embodies the totality of their immersion in the mutual desire that allows Flor to fulfill her sense of self.

In both the myth and the novel, the female protagonist as mediator is bound contractually to the male trickster as well as to the male seer, yet fulfills the plot role of principal agent. Flor's agency at the novel's ending is greater than, but can be compared to, that of Doña Inés, who, at the end of José Zorilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*, forgives Don Juan at the moment of his death to save him from hell. Unlike Flor, Inés is already dead, and there is no afterlife for her on earth as there is for Vadinho in the *Weltanschauung* of Amado's novel. Moreover, Flor saves Vadinho from something like a second death, or oblivion beyond purgatory, for her own good, for her own very tangible erotics of epistemology, not for some abstract salvation from sin. In saving Vadinho while also saving her marriage with Teodoro, Flor turns all three of them into a fulfillment of Brooks' terms: “bodies emblazoned with meaning within the field of desire, desire that is originally and always, with whatever sublimations, sexual, but also by extension the desire to know: the body as an ‘epistemophilic’ project. The desire to know is constructed from sexual desire and curiosity” (5). Oxum illustrates this desire in the myth (and in Pereira's series, as will be asserted below), and Flor illustrates the same desire in Amado's novel.

Secret Agent

This same African oral tradition articulates the plot of Pereira's *Deuses de Dois Mundos* trilogy, which alternates between the life of a young reporter, Newton Fernandes (“New”), in Orum (the mortal world)—specifically, early 21st-century São Paulo—and the lives of the heroes in Aiê, the eternal world of the orixás. In this latter setting, with various repercussions in New's life, the myths of the orixás are strung

together and retold in a master narrative pitting mortals who will later become deities (such as Oxum, Ogum, Exu, Oxóssi and others) against a group of ancestral witches, the Iá Mi. By the end of the second novel, *O Livro da Traição*, it is evident that this legendary conflict between heroes and witches has escalated and transformed into a war between the male and female orixás.

One of the main characters in the trilogy, Oxum appears initially as a sensual, spoiled woman with magical powers. By the third novel, *O Livro da Morte*, the once-proud Oxum has become an orixá, but she has been made subservient to the elder female orixás. She acts as their secret agent, determined to seduce the male orixá Ifá (orixá of divination) for the purpose of obtaining his esoteric mysteries and then killing him or at least invalidating him. Her capture of the secrets from Ifá fulfills part of the prophecy repeated by Nanã (orixá of mystery and origin, life and death), leader of the female orixás: “A humilhada roubou o destino” (236). This is the climax of the novel as well as of the entire trilogy, and it is the moment when Pereira deploys the myth analyzed above in relation to Amado’s *Dona Flor*, “Oxum deita-se com Exu para aprender o jogo de búzios.” Pereira’s incorporation of the myth into the *Deuses de Dois Mundos* narrative adapts Prandi’s version in several aspects of plot and imagery (and/or may follow more directly some other extant version of the myth). Pereira’s retelling, as developed below, alters Oxum’s agency, Oxalá’s role, Exu’s role, and the aquatic imagery. Additionally, Pereira’s version makes even more explicit the sexual nature of the quid pro quo exchange of corporeal for esoteric knowledge, while eliminating any third party. The transferal of the information that Oxum desires from Ifá is openly and directly sexual. Ifá succumbs to Oxum’s seduction, and the content of his ejaculation into Oxum is precisely “todos os segredos do lago,” in other words, all the information necessary to interpret the images in the mirror-like lake around which sit the sixteen odu princes whose reactions to the images determine the casting of the opelê. Allegorically, Oxum—representing all that is young, fresh, fertile and flowing—must extract some occult (literally hidden) knowledge from Ifá, who represents the accumulated wisdom of age, observation, analysis and experience. It is she who must seduce him, in order for him to share, to produce, to create. It is an act of pleasure, but an act of such import that it must be teased forth both indirectly (she lies) and directly (she puts his hand on her breast). The act both accentuates sexual differences and elides them in mutual pleasure. In Pereira’s text, it is the ultimate epistemological act, both sexually and metaphysically: “Ela ajeitou-se e / rodou os quadris, devagar, sobre seu colo. Depois mais e mais depressa. Agarrou-lhe a cabeça e fez com que ele lhe beijasse

o pescoço enquanto a possuía. Até que ele não resistiu e chegou ao êxtase ali mesmo. E, nesse êxtase, jorrou dentro de Oxum todos os segredos do lago” (238-39).

This union of body and spirit, and the understanding that conception and gestation can be esoteric as well as physical, underlie an entire worldview. Mattijs Van de Port has studied the corporeality and sensuality of *candomblé* as prevalent, pervasive epistemologies in the day-to-day negotiations of life in Bahia: “In all of these instances—from the *cervejinha na rua* to the various forms of divine possession—immersion is seen as the prerequisite to come to knowledge, or rather: the ‘deep knowledge’ that matters. A premium is placed on overcoming (or warding off) the body/mind divide [...]” (57). In Van de Port’s years of experience as an anthropologist in Salvador, he has found that this preference for forgoing the Cartesian split by immersing oneself body and soul “is congruent with a strong, overall tendency toward the dissolution of boundaries, the transgression of frames, and the intimacy, closeness, proximity and stickiness implied therein” (62). These declarations bring to mind not only Exu the transgressor, but also Oxum as the one, in Pereira’s narrative, who causes the dissolution of boundaries between men and women, past and present, and, of no less importance within the plot, between the individual identities of her father—the seer Orunmilá—and Ifá the orixá.

The secret and surprising nature of Oxum’s exploit in the climax serves to turn what was, in the original myth, her open agency, into an act of clandestine thievery met with reprimands from the elder orixás. Although Oxum is still the central character in Pereira’s scene, Exu and Oxalá are here peripheral, their roles in the myth combined into the actions of just one character: Ifá, the original orixá of divination. Oxalá, in Pereira’s version, becomes the castigador who, after Oxum’s actions are discovered, imposes on her the terrible choice of either relinquishing the secrets she earned from Ifá and earning divinity for her father (Orunmilá), or keeping the secrets—yielding the boon of women’s intuition—but banishing her father to the realm of the eguns. But in the brief time that Oxalá gives Oxum to reach a decision (until the end of the day), Exu hatches a plot with Iansã and Euá to upend Oxalá’s ultimatum, and Oxum has to go blind so as not to see Euá’s mysteries, to which she consents. After Nanã works her chthonic magic to reconstitute the new/reborn hybrid Ifá/Orunmilá, Oxum’s sight is restored when her father kisses her. Oxum, in summary, gains the esoteric knowledge of foresight from the seer Ifá, loses her normal physiological sight to save her father, the seer Orunmilá, and then receives her vision returned from the reconstituted two-in-one divinity Ifá/Orunmilá. The hard-fought victory results in females of both Orum

and Aiê being able to see their destinies, although Oxalá still imposes the precarious condition that only Ifá/Orunmilá can use the lake and the odus to interpret, whereas females must use their intuition. Oxalá comes off as a boor in this retelling, while Nanã seems to have all the real power and in some ways is the main character of the third volume.

Finally, the aquatic imagery in Pereira's version relocates from the river to the sacred lake of the odus. Instead of Oxalá bathing in a river, we see the spent Ifá, practically dead, floating in his own lake ("seu próprio lago"), the lake that functions as his crystal ball. Exu, with Iemanjá, finds him there after the transferal of his knowledge to Oxum has occurred (Oxum had dragged his moribund body to the lake). Even though it is Oxum who has almost killed him and then abandoned him in the water, it is still her agency that will save him in the end, and will also save her father. Finally, once Oxum's trickery is discovered and the consequences are playing themselves out, it is the female orixás, instead of Oxalá, who become the skinny-dippers, celebrating their victory in an embodied return to the feminine, semiotic source:

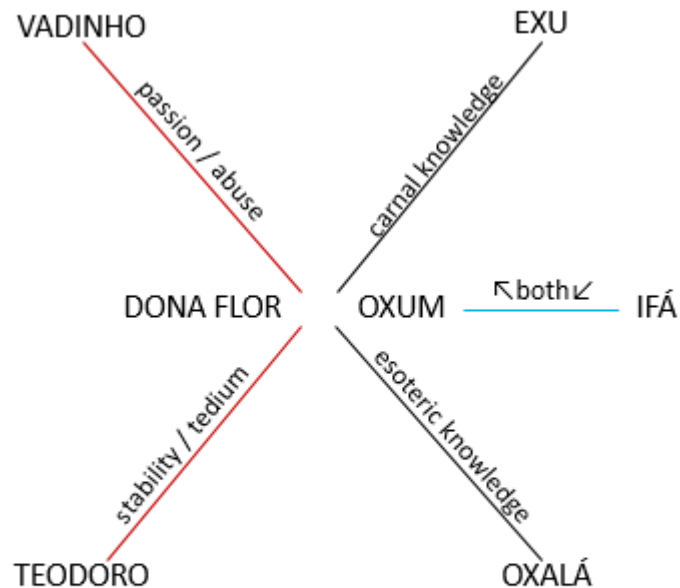
Uma festa sem tamanho explodiu no alto da montanha. Uma música que vinha não se sabe de onde inundou o lugar. Por todo lado, enquanto os homens olhavam em choque, mulheres dançavam sua vitória. Uma delas então tirou a roupa, apontou o lago e gritou o mais alto que pôde: - Águaaaaa! (291)

Aqueous imagery supports a feminine mystique in this scene: the women are immersed, and the music has flooded ("inundou") the area. Although the lake had been Ifá's for purposes of divination, Oxum—as the orixá of rivers, streams, waterfalls, and lakes—has symbolically reclaimed the body of water for the women and for their intuition, here presented as a slippery, full-body, naked and active epistemology.¹⁴ As per Van de Port, quoted above, "immersion is seen as the prerequisite to come to knowledge" (57); in this case, the female beneficiaries of Oxum's covert seduction literally immerse themselves in the lake of their own intuition.

¹⁴ Oxum's erotic acts are somewhat echoed in the section that follows this scene in the narrative of *O Livro da Morte*, alternating back to contemporary Brazil. In one of New's emails (241-48), the reader learns of women hired to seduce a group of Amazonian landowners through striptease, lapdance and beyond, so that the men will not make a big fuss about Radiex, a bovine medication already banned in other countries. But the context is merely a *festa* organized by New to buy their complacency—in this case there is no interchange of knowledge, per se, but rather an open secret, the widely-known but hush-mouthed dynamic knowledge of those participating on both sides of a bribe.

At the Crossroads

The quid-pro-quo choice that Oxum makes in the original myth, projects rather precisely onto the choice made by Pereira's Oxum, with the distinction that her two co-actors—Exu as source of carnal knowledge and Oxalá as source of esoteric knowledge—are collapsed into one (Ifá—see graphic below). In the much more detailed allegory developed in Amado's novel, by retaining both husbands Dona Flor is able to continue engaging in distinct epistemological modes: knowledge of the body comes first, and is continuously necessary, in order to build up knowledge about the world outside the body. When she has both husbands for herself (having saved Vadinho exclusively for herself), she can minimize the undesirable tendencies of her husband relationships (abuse, tedium) while retaining the desirable aspects of each: passion and stability. As much as Flor's phenotype (mulata as both-and), or her nationality (the Brazilian *jeito* as third-way), it is her literary connection to African oral tradition that pinpoints her capacity for fully embracing the both-and of the crossroads.



Dona Flor e seus dois maridos
"Oxum deita-se com Exu para aprender o jogo de búzios"
Deuses de Dois Mundos: O Livro da Morte

Ultimately, what Oxum learns is the reconciliation of binaries that is emblematic of the crossroads: of calm exterior and raging interior, of red and black, passion and stability, the carnal and the esoteric, the naked and the clothed. That she learns this corporeally, erotically—as the character in the myth, as well as in Pereira's

novels, and as her avatar Dona Flor—does not negate the esoteric elements of her knowledge, such as divination or intuition, but rather allows them to come into existence bodily. In Amado's and Pereira's modern Brazilian adaptations of an ancient story from West African tradition, Oxum and Dona Flor develop as characters in ways that embody and expand Brooks' epistemophilia.

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