

# Arts, Linguistics, Literature and Language Research Journal

## RESIGNIFYING AGING AND DEATH IN MISERERE, BY ADÉLIA PRADO

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**Abstract:** This research has as scope the introspective investigation of old age through death in the poems of the book *Miserere*, by Adélia Prado. By subtly demystifying the theme, the artist from Minas Gerais circumvents the stigma of death and ends up leading us to willingly accept it. With a hook from the theses of Simone de Beauvoir (1970), we observe how female aging can be portrayed, and also with the theoretical contribution of Bachelard (2002) and Bosi (1977) we delve into the parallel mystical-religious poetic world that *adelian's* work allows us to analyze. To do so, it will be investigated in the writer's poems the way in which longevity and scarcity are perceived and received. The collection that we obtain from Adélia's work consumes a physical and sacred reframing: aiming at the pain of living, its acceptance and compassion. **Keywords:** Adélia Prado; aging; death; *Miserere*; *adelian*.

## INTRODUCTION

The intense, sometimes mocking verses that make up the poet's work encourage us to reflect on everyday aspects, some of which are erased by the ego of immortality and belonging to the world. With such simplicity, *adelian* poetry seems to play with the artistic way of working with words, making the approach of such complex themes to subtle things. In a free and daring way, the writer conveys to us, discussing in an almost transgressive way, theological conceptions guided by the Christian faith, portraying everyday life in a charming and perplexing way, permeated by the playful aspect, one of the characteristics of her unique style.

This article is the result of dissertation concerns and thoughts about the resignification of old age through death in the poems of the book *Miserere*, by the Brazilian poet, teacher, philosopher, novelist and short story writer Adélia Luzia Prado de Freitas.

Born in Divinópolis - Minas Gerais in the 1930s, she wrote her first verses only in 1950, at a time when the pain of mourning gnawed at her interior, after her mother's death. She trained as a teacher and ended up teaching for nearly three decades.

Only twenty years later, in the 1970s, once again mourning her father's death, did Adélia Prado send letters to literary critic Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna and show her unparalleled talent. Impressed, Sant'Anna seeks to share the content of Minas Gerais with the then-writer Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Subjected to the appreciation of the unique writings of Minas Gerais, Andrade suggests that Editora Imago publish Adélia's first book. Launched in Rio de Janeiro, "Bagagem (1976), her debut book composed of a collection of poetry highly praised by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, who defined the author's production as 'Phenomenal.'" (MOREIRA, sd), becomes the Magnum opus of *adelian* poetry that drew the attention of critics for its style and originality. Its publication was accompanied by a distinguished presence.

In an attempt to introduce us to her verses, the theme of death, which often permeates us in a unique way, is portrayed in her poetry in a way that is conducive to exempting himself from the dichotomous view that seems to be consolidated in the Christian and social way of thinking: "God can only be death, / so terrifying in its mystery, / in its silence. The opaque one." (PRADO, 2014, p. 43).

The rupture with the traditional, in the formal sense, can be seen in the work of the writer from Minas Gerais. In the most diverse creations that (re)deal with situations of an imaginary or realistic world, sometimes one even sees her return to the past, thanks to the free and spontaneous lyrical way of writing. The representation of death has accompanied an inhospitable figure since ancient times.

For this reason, with the astonishment

of her inescapable presence, her allusions to this creature, thinking about her, poetizing her, incites us to the present study of poems to analyze the time and space of the most varied forms of suffering from revulsion and transforming it into a welcoming stigma with its verses.

## **MISERERE: THE RETURN TO POETRY**

The book *Miserere*, brings together 38 poems, translating them into poetic language, with such mastery, the portraits of childhood memories, the desperate desire to enjoy the present and the enigma of time regarding the future, this work by *adelian* delves into the feeling mystical-religious. Adélia Prado's proximity to religion, with its old-fashioned odor and dissimilarity to acceptance of a suffering fate, tends towards a cry for mercy, a poignant plea for help and contestation of aging and death.

All times are mixed in this arc that portrays the history of Minas Gerais. A book was written over the years, a poem that carries all of Adélia's essence, all of her ages. From the beautiful birth of spring, to the dark winter of suffering and towards the end. There is a restructuring between poetry and the sacred. This *adelian* work remakes this connection, seeking from the title *Miserere*, in Latin, to resignify the rise of the path we tread, nourishing us with the possible common fertilizers of our being: the mystery and the encounter, the memory, the flesh, and the enjoyment of the simplest things.

## **THROUGH THE VERSES: AGING AND DEATH**

Going through all the natural intercessions, certainly talking about suffering is perhaps what has the most stigma. The taste of life that is daily given to us for experimentation ends up disappearing in the blink of an eye.

In literary conception, Bosi conveys to us that:

If the poet resists, if the poet passes immune, to the turmoil of heaven and the madness of the earth, it is because he has already fulfilled the rite of sacrifice, he has already annulled himself so that the Final Judgment does not come to surprise him pregnant with himself and do not surrender it to the lethal clutches of the Self. (BOSI, 1977, p. 185)

There is, in fact, a huge problematization when one will theorize about the collapse of existence. Taking care of the body, but not the spirit, becomes one of the subjects criticized by the woman from Minas Gerais, because in her various works, including the book under study, *Miserere*, religiosity is present in an innate way. Experiences, criteria and values: from birth to aging, until arriving at the tomb, in a constant resistance and transition of plans, the lyrical self yearns for life.

Therefore, "it is the question of death, which is also the question of life." (CARDERNOS., 2000, p. 25).

Consequently, in the portrayal below, we observe how Adélia Prado transmits her precursory perspective of what she was and is no longer, recalling, through time and writing, feelings of anguish and bitterness. Solemn piece of small affirmative happiness, funereal disconsolation already choked with aging:

### *WHAT DOESN'T EXIST*

My parents died,  
I can check on the tombstone,  
name, date and inscription: SAUDADES  
I don't comfort myself by saying  
'in my memory, they remain alive',  
it's little, it's weak, frustrating like the comet  
that nobody saw pass by.  
Of any language, the elementary grammar  
Decline and conjugate time,  
serves us life in slices,  
eternity in posts.  
That's why we think things are over,  
the thick hair, the almost green eyes.  
what we call death  
it is a mask of what does not exist.

For just rest  
which no longer pulsates.  
(PRADO, 2014, p. 37)

Briefly, the lyrical selfie-shows a desire for life, even if not very hopeful. The passage of time, aging, whips perspectives and the walk of those who are surviving, but not living.

Instead of valuing the experience that comes with age, “maturity”; we reduce and suffocate the memory and projects of the elderly, we rob them of confidence, the possibilities for a path and meaning. We also refuse to recognize ourselves for the old we will be. (BEAUVOIR, 1970, p. 221).

However, does death end or does it reveal life? When the body suffers and there are no more vital signs, would that inert piece still be able to dream? The cycle of life is enigmatic. Despite being natural, like birth, death has, in an incised way, the capacity to inoculate the most varied reactions in people.

Death, in all its characterization, is not something that can be accepted at first. It doesn't matter how much the human being tries, whatever her methods to be prepared for this inevitable moment. However, Mrs. Prado approached her octogenarian when she published *Miserere*, which is not consolidated or presented as an abstract truth of life, or a religious dogma capable of astringent teeth. The book's poems make us experience life's nature, not overshadowing cruelty, taking off the mask and revealing the true face behind the signs of perception between reality and biblical spiritualism. This causes the lyrical self to have its attention chained and entertained:

#### SPASMS IN THE SANCTUARY

Think of it as abuse  
the truths I speak to the dissonant,  
to the ugly who asks for love.  
A fright struck me,  
as a perpetual punishment he accompanies  
me.  
Even if nobody knows  
if you ever laughed,

or at least laughed,  
Jesus spoke of God:  
“Do not be afraid, little flock,  
the Father loves you.”  
Why would I not have faith?  
So, what name does this desire of mine have?  
to kiss the body where the wound bleeds?  
From the bench of neophytes, I pray.  
In the Holy of Holies,  
in the living body I do not touch,  
I have little innocence,  
I don't even know  
if I really want  
soften the heart,  
clear my cloudy tongue.  
From here, where everyone rests,  
I hear a clash of swords.  
I'm alive. That's all I know.  
(PRADO, 2014, p. 61)

In fact, writing in a Christian mystical poetic way makes Adélia Prado a reference. However, revealing these ambiguities, fragmentations and adverse displacements end up correlating everything with traditional popular Catholicism. *Miserere* becomes just that, a mature, complete work that unfolds in a non-traditional way, but with a formidable formal and thematic variety. The poem stands out for its cry for help and an incessant search for compassion: the character of the title.

In this perspective, where aging is a road on which the lyrical self walks towards the end of life, the author's excruciating verses cherish metaphors of a living world, based on the magnificent dichotomy that distinguishes the material from the immaterial:

My body, protect my soul as much as you  
can.  
Eat, drink, fatten, grow thick to  
may it be less poignant to me.  
(PRADO, 2016, p. 441)

To base theories seems a little eloquent if we seek the prerogative that the body is the receptacle of the soul. There are experienced connotations, related to skeptical eyes and also those of a religious nature. In this sense “poetry is a synthesis force for human

existence” (BACHELARD, 2001, p. 19), the disorderly awakening of the enveloping sign of aging that accompanies suffering.

The analyzed poems are linked in an act of recognition, belonging and request for pity, which appears in the most varied and apparently petty situations of everyday life: “I ask because I’m alive / and I’m crazy about sugar” (PRADO, 2014, p. 33), begging for humor in the funereal poem *Distractions at the wake*, in its last verses. Becoming aware of the existence, perceiving that it is given and receiving it is a fundamental first step in familiarity with those who give themselves both in life and death.

In the poem “*Avós*”, Adélia Prado subtly describes how the conjunctures of time show themselves physically with the passing of an age. The details that longevity brings to being are curiously observed by children who, in their innocence, feel imposing. As if, for them, there was no period for passing through the cycle of the cosmos.

#### GRANDPARENTS

My hand has spots,  
brown spots like quail eggs.  
kids think it’s funny  
and display theirs with joy,  
in the certainty - which I also had -  
that they will remain immune.  
I enjoy and for my rest  
I set up a little circus with them.  
We have no protection for what has been  
lived,  
insomnia, waiting for the train, for the news,  
people who were late without warning,  
disgust for the food getting cold on the set  
table.  
Against all artifice, our gaze reveals us.  
Don’t disturb the innocent, there’s no loss  
and, like the new one,  
the old man is also a mystery.  
(PRADO, 2014, p. 31)

Step by step, existing has the thickness of the marks that living brings to the body. Formalities of the learnings of time, of this

simple correlation of the poems from Minas Gerais aimed at aging until the arrival at the sepulcher, describing the daily life of her performance in survival, but not in living.

This way, the method in which *adelian* poetry portrays the female figure in her conception of advanced age, unfolding in the most excavated sentimentality possible, where marks of time portray all the deepest feelings of the circumstantial experience throughout life. Although, in the poems, it is not known whether what the lyrical self exposes us several times in a comparison between the physical and mystical-religious world is credible, the poetic language itself highlights the polysemic character, comprising it:

#### THE HOST

Even if it is born in me, it does not belong to me.  
Like an eye or an arm this pity,  
the purgatory of seeing the pity of others  
as if I didn’t suffer myself.  
God can only be death,  
so terrifying in its mystery,  
in his mutism. The opaque one.  
Congenital morbid, they call me,  
this is the price for your birth  
in the center of Minas Gerais.  
I know. And I’m more  
melancholic, almost sad.  
I suffered a lot of paralyzing shame,  
not for that reason did I civilize my hunger,  
teeth to crush bananas,  
Meats gnawed to the bone.  
I try to look you in the eye  
who since I was born stares at me  
waiting for a nod from me  
- though humanly and weakly,  
though inept and crude -,  
a yes.  
It has welcoming arms  
and comes full of life.  
It is God the mighty death.  
(PRADO, 2014, p. 43)

When diving into the studies of the works of the Minas Gerais writer, between the first verse and the last in the composition of the

poem “O Hospedeiro”, for example, there are recurrences that encompass an entire existence. Adélia Prado composes all of her texts with great care, and twice in a row she occupies three verses when she will discuss death in the exposed content. It can be understood that they are key verses since that observation prior to that of the poetic subject ends up being what hosts, and also becomes only the gaze assimilated and understood to also be a host, both of life and of death.

In the short fifteen verses that occupy space between these two notes about leaving this existence, in that interstice, there is a subsequent transformation of a recognized bond that has been sustained since the origin of her life. The whole existence of this lyrical voice unfolds. Another connotative fact is the impossibility of not resembling aspects of her literary production with her own biography. In this perception, in his study of the book *Miserere*, FERREIRA conveys to us that:

There is, therefore, in the poetry of Adélia Prado, a recurrent semantic isotopy based on the pain of living. The triggering motives of existential pain are many and humanly relevant: illness, old age, the threat of death and the silence of God. But not all are equivalent. Interestingly, death is not, in Adélia Prado’s lyrical world, a fear factor as annihilating as the decrepitude and fear of Eros’s desertion. Death is not threatening, for a very Lucretian reason: because it doesn’t exist. For the Roman poet, the disintegration of the body is just a different arrangement of matter. And the atheistic materialism of Lucretius, by eliminating divine judgment, frees man both from the fear of life and from the fear of death. Adélia Prado does not share Lucrecio’s atheism, but it expresses an understanding of death that would not clash with the lyrical philosophical discourse of *De Rerum Natura*. (2017, p. 98)

Throughout the four divisions that make up *Miserere*, Adélia Prado manages to intercept and infuse feelings and emotions, some of which are often complex, on the

parka. And thanks to this welcoming vision, the woman from Minas Gerais, with her profound writings, manages to poeticize aging and exercise in an incomparable way, so that there is joy in receiving both. The enjoyment given by the gift of life allows us to entrust the proposal of existence in a cry: the request for compassion.

Thus, in this interpretation of the aforementioned work, it can be observed that *Miserere* reframes the way we observe cold and inhospitable areas, showing themes typical of a mature and formally rich work. The book breaks stigmas from the most diverse angles, treating the beginning and end with respect. Death doesn’t exist, it’s just a mask, there’s nothing behind it, or rather, there’s pure life, abundant life that we go out looking for as in the figure in *The Host*. It seems like a necessary milestone to think positively about a last meeting with the One who had always hosted her.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In a didactic that overflows like the sun, overcoming occlusions, Adélia Prado in her last poem unmasks longevity and passing away, realizing that life is a painful, fearful and rebellious acceptance of one’s own existence in participation in non-belonging: “I live from what is not mine.” (PRADO, 2014, p. 90) and also of death itself as a welcoming space-time that abounds with life: “Take my life / and do not deprive me anymore / of this new innocence that you instill in me” (PRADO, 2014, p. 90). Consecrated modernist, she pours sacred words into her poems, living, body, death, soul, resurrection and God.

It does not worship disenchantment, hopelessness or defeat. Anxieties common to contemporary human beings, with broad themes, the back of a backyard in Divinópolis is articulated and toasts death as a living space full of life. There is a belief in death, but not as

an end. You shudder to think of her. Integrated with the support to face any adversity, the Christian faith for Adélia Prado is aegis. Assent to faith is intelligible and promotes her poetry.

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