

## The Intermedial Muse: Literature and Anime (Bolaño and Oda)

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### Abstract

*The following proposal has rehearsed a dialogue between the figure of the muse, between the disciplines of poetry and manganime, through an intermediate theoretical perspective with which an aesthetic, historical, and critical link between two artistic objects produced during the same decade has been propitiated: the poem "Muse" by Roberto Bolaño, published in 1993, and One Piece, by Eiichirō Oda, whose manga dates from 1997 and the animation from 1999. Through this intermediate practice, this paper has meditated on the confluences and divergences of these two objects, to highlight the everlasting figure of the muse as the engine of creative problematization and source of inspiration for artists.*

**Keywords:** *intermediality, muse, poetry, manganime.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The figure of the muse makes its appearance since the origin of Western literature, through the hand of Homer and Hesiod (Havelock, 1996: 41). This figure, in singular or plural, has been mentioned throughout the history of literature by canonical authors such as Dante, Virgil, Pablo Neruda or César Vallejo. Thus, the muses have been for artists a topic to reflect on the possible ways of generating their art, to the extent that both creators and created characters have sought aesthetic and even ethical answers, intimate of themselves and for themselves, in it.

In the two objects analyzed, a poem and a manganime, the topic of the muse allows for establishing a medial relationship, despite the contextual and material distances, to observe the cultural and aesthetic phenomena that arise at the moment of problematizing discourses and audiovisual and literary narratives that invite to reflect on the concept of intermediality and transmediality.

In this regard, this research postulates an interpretation from an intermediate theoretical perspective, where it is possible to inscribe the muse as a figure that allows rethinking the Western artistic tradition, especially in an era characterized by ever-expanding digital information and communication technologies. In other words, using a conceptual theoretical anchorage of intermediality, it will be possible to read the inscription and resignification of the muse in current audiovisual narratives.

How does the traditional image of the muse, in its mainly literary use, allow for an enriching reading of the artistic elements contained in audiovisual media such as anime? To answer this question, this paper has defined, based on the ideas of Erick Havelock, Walter Otto, and Pascal Quignard, the figure of the Muse, whose image has been persistent in the history of literature since its origin, in the Greek oral tradition. To this has been added the intermediate theory of Silvestra Mariniello and Wolfgang Bongers,

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whose coordinates have allowed to sustain a critical reading of the muse in the two selected cultural objects.

The theoretical corpus will allow an interpretation of the intermediate figure of the muse, both in the poem “Muse” by Roberto Bolaño, included in the chapter “A happy ending”, from 1992 (Bolaño, 2018: 17), whose verses are inhabited by images that allude to the western film genre. The other material studied is the anime One Piece by Eiichirō Oda, specifically, of the character Nico Robin, in general in his performance that goes from chapters 303 to 441 in the manga, and episodes 207 to 325 in the anime, which are framed in the Water 7 Saga.

## 2. THE TRADITION OF THE MUSE

The figure of the muse has been a constant in the history of artists and poets, who rewrite, refigure, or disfigure it by exploring their relationship with a particular artistic discipline, with themselves, and with the history of which they are a part. Artists have situated the muse as a symbol of the incessant work of creation.

To characterize the reception of the figure of the 'muse' or 'muses' in history, the notes of Erick A. Havelock, Walter Otto, and Pascal Quignard, whose ideologies and chronographic guides have allowed to approach a poetic episteme for the analysis of the chosen corpus, have been used.

According to Havelock (1986), the muse goes back to the very origins of Western literature, with a vitality of approximately seven centuries B.C., a period in which it exercised a monopoly over the corpus of early Greek literature that, among other resistances, put it at the center of the criticisms of Plato, promoter of prose, and along with it, of a civilizing zeal. The image of the muse in poetry was fundamental in the formation of an Athens that found in orality the way to “preserving the tradition by which the Greeks lived and instructing them in it.” (Havelock, 1986:8). Daughters of Zeus and Mnemosune (which for Havelock tends to translate as “memory”), the muses are, through their ancestry, primarily the “guardians of social memory” (Havelock, 1986:79). Therefore, the pristine purpose of the muses would have been functional, collective, and irreplaceable. Their condition and language of memory was a work that combined rhythm, metaphors, performances, rituals, hymns, civic chorus, epic recitation, songs, musical performances, and a festive occasion, all conditions that bear symbolic relation to their names: “Cleio (Celebrator), Euterpe (Delighter), Thaleia (Luxuriator), Melpomene (Song Player), Terpsichore (Dance-Delighter), Erato (Enrapturer), Polyhymnia (Hymnal Player), Urania (Heaven Dweller), Calliope (Fair-Speaker)” (Havelock, 1986: 81).

Poetry was a word that was transmitted vernacularly and flooded the incipient Greek tradition; of itself, the muse, was the one who was invited to start that “song” that was not properly the creation of a poet, and if it was, it was not his song that was transmitted: “Homer (whether one or several) never identifies himself. Responsibility for the composition of both Iliad and Odyssey is assigned to the Muse, who is invited to «sing» the Iliad, «recite» the Odyssey. More explicitly, «Hesiod» describes the «song» (not «my song») as something «they taught»” (Havelock, 1986:20). The poet, from these beginnings of western literature, assumes a temporary condition, therefore, a role of hermeneut, of celestial messenger or necromancer, finally, of bridge or functional and necessary link to bring the song of an immeasurable other or secret world, which is poetry, art, through the figuration of the muse.

Regarding her image as an inspirational figure and her relationship with literature, this is not free of conflict. For Havelock (1986), the muse as inspiration would be a later image in the history of artistic creation: “The reason for their existence is not inspirational, as it later became, but functional” (79). This, because the inspirational call, for example, that of Hesiod in *Theogony*, would be of a religious and historical nature, a fact that does not

necessarily change when, using Havelock's metaphor, the muse learns to write, since “the products of the alphabet (...) are something more than just «literature» in our sense of the word” (Havelock, 1986:80), in the modern sense of the term. However, for Luis Gil (1966), this invocation of the muse carried out by the poets begins to be trivial, precisely from Hesiod onwards. Moreover, based on ancient criticism, he even mentions that Homer is not free from suspicion of using the figure of the muse as a stylistic device: the fact that in the *Iliad* the muses appear in contexts of crisis-struggle-defeat, would make them literary expedients, mere formulas (27). However, it remains a fact that the muses were part of a religious component, according to Gil, the tutelary goddesses par excellence of poetic creation (16), therefore, the Greeks recognized in poetry a phenomenon that went beyond the natural, when poetic creation was not linked to writing, but to the spoken word, in musical and rhythmic terms, along with dance and celebration.

In this regard, although inspiration and poetry are not mutually exclusive terms due to the religious component, inspiration acquires with Plato a negative connotation as a poetic exercise, his position on the subject, conforming to Gil (1966), rebels against the emotional force of poetry (39), as the enigmatic language and intuitive knowledge of the poets, added to the psychological effects, the beauty of the forms and the good conceptual content of poetry.

In its imitative form, he observes the danger when, in the voice of Socrates, it is said that poets do not write out of wisdom, but, by natural gift and the indwelling of the divine, they are speakers of beautiful things, but have no knowledge of what they say. While the creative factor of poetry is suppressed, for Gil (1966), the emphasis reverts entirely to the more mysterious «inspiration», which the philosopher compares to the prophetic trance (41), an act that, in *Laws*, places the poet seated on the tripod of the muses, without his sound judgment and who lets flow freely what occurs to him, ignoring the truth of what he says. According to Gil (1996), in the expression of sitting on the tripod of the Muse is possible observes what in later times would enjoy greater acceptance: it would become proverbial to designate literary activity (41), a connotation, then, that in the future would lose both the negative vision and the religious component, thus linking the Muse with inspiration, art and, mainly, literature with the act of writing.

For his part, Walter Otto records the muse's historical journey in essayistic prose, using a colorful and fascinating language, as he brings to the surface the deep and inaccessible connections between muses and nymphs, especially nereids and naiads, the symbolic spaces they inhabited and their enormous interference in the diplomacy of the gods, a role that, within the house of Zeus himself, is unparalleled in any other inhabitant of Olympus. Otto's text, while historicizing the presence of the muse, indirectly confronts Hebrew and Greek literature. While the former promulgates a song of the created to the creator; the latter locates in the creative power this desire to celebrate its creation, for Otto (2005), the created must not praise the creator; something is still lacking, for the essence of being is not concluded until there is a language to enunciate it. Being and its magnificence must be pronounced, that is the fullness of its being (30). The muse, as a deity, provides humans with itself: she is the song itself, says Otto (2005:69), so that our possibility of being materializes, through self-consciousness? Through our function as hermeneuts of that omnipotent and creative power? Be that as it may, the muse gives herself/himself to the artist, but this/this one, although creator, would only be the vehicle for that offering, which is the song of the muse.

By way of reflection, if for the Hebrew world creation is inhabited by the Holy Spirit and every being and thing should reach a zenith of sanctity in its existence, for the ancient Greeks who 'thought' the muse, everything that lives possesses the breath of the muse, and to sing of creation is also, incidentally, but not univocally, to sing of the creator. In other words, it is in the creation of the sensible that we find the consolidation of Beauty, which, although at this moment is a Greek meaning, takes a more than prudent distance

from Plato and his eagerness of scaping from the physical world. Even in the most modest details of nature, the muse inscribes an inexhaustible passion for forms, before which the “song” of the poet finishes creating the given: without the word that populates and celebrates the world, creation does not achieve plenitude, it can only do so thanks to its enunciation.

When Zeus had ordered the world, the gods watched in mute amazement at its magnificence, which became present to their eyes. Finally, the father of the gods asked them if they noticed the absence of something. Yes, they replied, something is missing: a voice to praise the great works and the complete creation in words and music (Otto 2005:30).

Aristides, the Greek statesman, is cited by Otto, not exactly for his worth in political terms, but because he was one of the readers of the lost Hymn to Zeus, of Pindar, whose laudatory character of this work influences a lush conception of the birth of the Muses. According to Otto (2005), there was lacking a voice to praise the great works and the complete creation with words and music. A new divine spirit was needed for that, and therefore the gods asked Zeus to create the Muses (30). But against the more idealistic or embellishing visions of the ancient Greek panorama, Pascal Quignard (2016), music lover, cellist, writer and film scriptwriter, points out regarding the Muse:

In ancient Greece, the mousa of mousikè was named Erato. She was a prophetess of Pan, the god of music, traveling in a state of trance under the effect of drink and the consumption of human flesh. Shamans were inspired by animals, priests by immolated humans, bards by the muses. Always victims (1).

What has been observed so far in the tradition gains a little more complexity and the muse obtains the features of an endless figure. Quignard, by externalizing and even involuntarily celebrating the bacchanalian events and abysses of that being, lets glimpse a sort of voluntary condemnation or tragic delight: that of the artists who are indicated by the muse, who would always be victims of the muse's work, and who would always be victims of the muse's own work.

The black box of the muse is minimally opened, vivifying her devotion to human flesh and human horror (at least the effigy of the music that emerges from the womb of the god Pan). The muse gathers with Quignard elements not previously evoked, giving her a fearful and secret character, which does not collide with the visions offered. On the contrary, and even if it has a satirical tinge, he imbues it with a human sense necessary to mundanize the handling of the concept of muse and its effects outside a delimited and utilitarian space that can give, for example, power.

### 3. INTERMEDIAL MUSA

Intermediality, from its actuality as a cultural and artistic practice, glimpses the crisis or transformation of the institution of literature, and of the arts, in its function of regulating what is or is not literature, and of the university, in its function as a regulatory institution of knowledge, as projected from the modern world. Specifically, intermediality calls into question the boundaries between disciplines and media, one of the facts that for Mariniello (2009) appears as the symptom of the collapse of the modern university (65). Globalization and virtual communication have influenced contemporary thought in such a way that the compartments and oppositions between knowledge and disciplines are put in tension. In accord with Mariniello (2009), this would have an impact on the fabrication of subjects that the nation-state establishes through the division and opposition between disciplines, art, knowledge, subjects, and objects of knowledge, thought, and affections (67-68).

Intermediality recognizes, therefore, the inadequacy of modern literacy (textual) The different social practices of human visuality that have been domesticated, ignored, or pushed to one side by the culture of literacy, but which in turn are imposed through frequent and intense exchanges as audiovisual media are developed and popularized (Mariniello, 2009:74-75). A situation highlighted by Cubillo (2013) in her experience as a university teacher for more than ten years in a Comparative Literature course. In the academic performance of her students, she locates an intermediate logic that invites them to rethink the traditional objects of study (174), since they show interest in exploring new topics and fields of study, with a strong presence of digital technologies, among them, anime (175). In these cases, students established relationships between a literary text and other textualities, starting from a thematic axis that allows for comparison (175). Now, the analyses associated with these intermediate practices are even more problematic and complex.

According to Mariniello (2009), intermediality produces a critical effect that seeks to take the analysis outside the linguistic and literary field, because it invites us to think about mediation, the matter of technology (75). This, because the current reality would not be mediated by the logos, the universal mediator of the modern state, a fact sustained in the weakness of language in the face of the speed of images and sounds. Intermediality is the place where one witnesses the struggle between two literacies for Mariniello, is a hybrid space where discourse opens up to the visible and visuality becomes discursive in a movement that disturbs the linguistic and philosophical construction that had separated them (2009:77). This struggle is present in the canonical functioning of the intermediality that refers to the entry of the image in the arts, such as the crossings between photography with literature or painting, cases in which Mariniello gives as an example Célestin Monga and Edward Hopper .

However, as stated by Mariniello, it also deserves attention how intermediality highlights the transfer of materials and techniques from one culture to another (2009:62). In this sense, relations between media of different origins can signify a historical metamorphosis concerning the transferred material and technology, whose identity and meaning function in relation to a new context. Intermediality thinks about the complex relationship between technology and societies, those who produce, use, and are “traversed” by it. Similarly, Cubillo (2013) refers to Armand Mattelard, who subscribes to the fact that digital media provide a vision of the current world in two logics, the first, a globalized one that unites, groups, and homogenizes societies around the world, the second, a localized one that dissociates, disaggregates and labels societies according to the region of the world they inhabit. This fact is interesting to review in the materials analyzed in this work because their origins and temporalities are dissimilar.

As for the definition of intermediality, Mariniello (2009) argues that it is a set of conditions that make possible the crossings and concurrence of media, the set of figures that the media produce when crossing each other, the potential disposition of the points of one figure in relation to those of another (64). Here arises the notion of the intermedial medium, of how the audiovisual technique extends in the metaphor of the bridge that connects senses (sight and hearing, above all) with the world, the stream of sensory, cognitive, and affective experience. This would lead to thinking about the dynamics of mediation (82): the ensemble of technique, experience, subject, and world.

In turn, if intermediality is a cultural practice that can derive from an academic perspective of reading, this is, in principle, an artistic practice typical of the neo-avant-gardes. Several researchers agree in locating its origin with Dick Higgins (Bongers 2017:138, Cubillo 2013:172), who, for Salas (2018), identified a feature of his time, the intermingling of communication practices, as a possibility of artistic creation (3). This indicates that the intermedial phenomenon not only occurs between media but also within the same medium or artistic discipline, which is why Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation is akin to such purpose . For Bongers, remediation is a concept that

designates the incorporation and conjugation of elements of an old medium in a new one (2018:106), of the elements of literature in anime or cinema, and vice versa. Of how it is possible to think of the figure of the muse itself as an intermediate image in terms of artistic thought that, in its origin, constructs its language from poetry, dance, and music, inter-artistic elements that find their place in the art of Bolaño and Oda.

#### 4. BOLAÑO'S MUSE

Cardinal readers of Roberto Bolaño's work, such as Andrews, Espinosa, Fischer, Fresán, and Goldman, among others, sustain the ethical and aesthetic relevance of the Chilean-born writer in the figure of the poet, as a vital element at the moment of analysis or interpretation. For Bolaño, being a poet is installed among the most inflexible rudiments of his morals as an artist: the subject spares no resources to make explicit this artist's ethics: his poetic *mise-en-scène* is reckless, delirious, and volitional. Above all, because Bolaño recognized in poetry an agonizing stage, a place to measure himself and others as a poet. In short, the figure of the poet in Bolaño is hyperbolic, utopian, and is composed of an almost irrational morality, by the ethos and the pathos of nomadism: as a guerrilla (Bolaño, 2019:365) in permanent movement and the possibility of reinvention (Fernández, 2011:214):

Un poeta lo puede soportar todo. Lo que equivale a decir que un hombre lo puede soportar todo. Pero no es verdad: son pocas las cosas que un hombre puede soportar. Soportar de verdad. Un poeta, en cambio, lo puede soportar todo. Con esta convicción crecimos. El primer enunciado es cierto, pero conduce a la ruina, a la locura, a la muerte (Bolaño, 1996: 37).

Bolaño's poem "Musa" overflows the textual, in order to provide a performative exercise: epic and ingenuous, a laudatory *summa*, where -as has become more and more frequent in the arts- a cultist veils his weapons or pays homage to the discipline of which he has made a trade. Now, there are at least three analyses I could propose: i) According to Bolaño himself, it is a reading where "I surrender to the evidence that poetry is there and that one must be faithful to its mysterious movements" (Bolaño, 2000: 51); ii) the second possible reading of Pablo Neruda's poem, not exactly with Nicanor Parra, evidencing a game or dispute that has the Muse as a point of reference and booty of beauty. This attempt to decipher the riddle or projected shadow of the poetic subject is linked to a reading in a nostalgic key that sheds light on an awareness of the spaces thought and written in this poem. In addition, the poem "Muse" has twenty stanzas, which we intuit as intentional since it can be linked at the level of structure with the *Veinte poemas de amor* by Neruda, a text that in Bolaño's hard disk operates as a foundational book of his own poetic education (Bolaño, 2001). Probably, some examples that compare both poems can shed more light on this one-sided brawl.

of «Musa» (Bolaño)

Era más hermosa que el sol

y yo aún no tenía 16 años.

24 han pasado

y sigue a mi lado (439)

of «Oda a la poesía» (Neruda)

Cerca de cincuenta años

Caminando

contigo, Poesía

(2004: 214)

In a superficial analysis, in both texts, the lyrical subjects establish sentimental relationships with poetry, but the modest differences in both discourses shed light on the bifurcated nature of both poetics. Neruda is the Christ for the Chilean literary canon, the material to be violated by later poets, the new apostles given to Christs, who will disappear from the face of the earth, while Neruda's gospel is still recited by some faithful ones (Bolaño, 2001).

In short, the poem "Muse" can be read plainly from different socio-historical, aesthetic perspectives, but it can also be read playfully and combatively, even agonically, in the sense offered by Caillois (1986), for whom the games of Agon are not centered on the physical or muscular display of the video game player, but demand strategy, warlike intelligence, and where the players, rather than looking for every possible way to win, fight to the death rather to be recognized for their intellect, energy, fearlessness, and how cunning they can be in a given situation. Even the Agón can also define a part of the warrior's path, Bushido (Hagakure, 2005), the one that was fascinating to think that Bolaño himself had traveled, which he is grateful for in "Musa". In this regard, Rodrigo Fresán, a writer who knew the Chilean closely, points out the following in "El samurái romántico":

La Universidad Desconocida arranca con un artista que está poniendo todo de su parte para que desaparezca la angustia y concluye más que feliz –y con un guiño a Dante– agradeciendo los dones recibidos a una "Musa/ Más hermosa que el sol/ y más hermosa/ que las estrellas" (Fresán, 2008:303).

From the beginning, it has been observed here the agenciation of the poetic subject with its discipline, that is to say, this of fighting to the death in the arena of Chilean poetry against the Neruda God is nothing but a game, whose essential desire is to be considered a poet: poet before all else; good or bad, but always one. However, the poem also opens layers that unravel without further struggle imaginary embedded in his verses, such as the Marian, where the Muse is not only a woman or a deity, or whatever (a matter that the Greeks could not solve either), but fundamentally shows itself in all its splendor as the inner strength of the poet himself, strength that is praised, since, perhaps, the muse together with linking with the creation, with the beautiful, with the internal and external war of the poet, with the created of himself, also exhibits a fundamental element with which to debate day by day a poet: his solitude.

This reading adds to the previous ones and observes in this poem the journey of Dante, but not exactly through hell, although he makes it explicit at some point. This dantesque poet rather crosses desolate and wasteland spaces (Bolaño, 2007:441), a desert that can link his poetics directly to his vital and aesthetic experience in Mexico. Also this transit through a desolate desert, with whistling in the background, manifests Bolaño's fascination for cinema and, among that genre, the Western films that propel an entire ethic: that of facing a destiny as a poet, whether invested as samurai or cowboy, although always protected by the muse, even in "the alleys/ of the gunfighters" (2007:440). The Dantesque poet carries in his mouth the song that at this moment will be different from the one in the novel *Amuleto* (1995: pp. 152-154), since here the singing, as a good Western, is the whistling in the manner of the interpretation that the Spanish musician Kurt Savoy advocates musically, in some film productions, for example, in *For a Fistful of Dollars* or *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. The muse in the poem is *Guardian Angel* (2007: 439), it is *Chimera* (2007: 441), with a capital letter, like *The Gold Chimera*, Jack London's 1905 novel; or like Charles Chaplin's novel of the same name, filmed in 1925, where these desolate spaces are the backdrop of both productions. The Dantesque poet celebrates the muse as he traverses these desolate spaces, but he does so safely, because he feels protected, as if the muse should procure his song, as Otto and Havelock have described her.



## 5. THE DIGNITY OF THE MUSE

To talk about *One Piece* it is necessary to repair the anime as a particular means of telling stories and presenting visualities. From there, one of the academic scopes has been to consider anime through the notions of cross-media and transmedia narratives, both related terms according to Scolari, because of assuming a practice of meaning production and interpretation based on stories that are expressed through a combination of languages, media and platforms (2013:18). First, since the anime usually has manga as its narrative and visual origin, another medium that, according to Mauricio Catalán, supplements the screenplays required by the anime by breaking down three scripts from the manga structure: narrative, plot and visual (storyboard basis) (Bonilla and Martinez, 2022:17). Second, while not all anime are adapted from a manga, it can also happen that a manga is anime. The term *manganime* is used to refer to elements in common, because of the difficulty of thinking of them separately.

The *manganime* industry tends to have their works build transmedial worlds, that is, in other words, they create, conforming to Scolari, abstract systems of content from which a repertoire of fictional stories and characters can be updated or derived into a variety of forms (2013:19). A mainstream narrative extends into video games, novels, live-action movies, merchandising, and light novels. In this regard, *One Piece* (Wan Pisu, in its original name) is originally a manga created by Eiichirō Oda, published in series from 1997 to the present in the magazine *Weekly Shonen Jump*. The anime, in turn, has been broadcast since 1999 and is produced by Toei Animation, and has had more than ten directors. As for other productions, *One Piece* has more than thirty videogames, the last one has been *Odyssey* (2023), in novel is *Straw Hat Stories* (Shueisha, 2017), light novels such as the two *Ace's Story* (Viz Media, 2020), and a new version is expected in 2023 live-action made by Netflix.

About the history of *One Piece*, the series focuses on the actions of Monkey D. Luffy, a seventeen-year-old boy who sets out on a journey to find the treasure of the only man in history to earn the title of “King of the Pirates”: Gold Roger. The first page of the manga and the first opening of anime begin with the execution of Roger, twenty-two years behind the play's present (Oda 2015:60-61), who, after mentioning his lost treasure, the *One Piece*, that “contains the whole world”. (Oda 2018: ch.1), opens the great pirate era that serves as a framework during the work, a fact illustrated at the end of chapter 7 of the manga: “The great age of piracy... Countless pirates take to the ocean, raising their flags, fighting for fame and searching for the “*One Piece*”, the lost treasure of the only man in history to have earned the title of “King of Pirates”: Gold Roger. This is that era...” (Oda, 2018).

However, *One Piece*, although it has a legendary and invigorating character, it comes to have in Luffy's time a trait of unattainable and ridiculous object, since “some doubt its existence” (Oda 2014: 266). A fact that is observed in the disenchantment of several pirates in relation to piracy, who prefer to survive by working for stronger gangs, such as Bellamy, a pirate who mocks Luffy's ideals and those of his companions, to tell them: “All those dreams that sailors have will soon be deciphered! (...) The era in which pirates dreamed is over (...) In this sea age, those who should be more capable than anyone else to cross the ocean are carried away by those illusions and die!” (*One Piece* 2003: E146). This philosophy of disenchantment is contrasted with the way of life of Luffy and his companions, summarized in the motto “How pirates will never stop dreaming!!!” (Oda 2014: 1), which is reflected before entering the Grand Line in Chapter 100, the initiatory place to which all pirates seeking the *One Piece* must go (Oda 2019).

Up to the point of the detailed analysis in the present study, Luffy has six other crew members: Zoro, Nami, Chopper, Sanji, Usopp, and Robin, with whom he shares a history of marginality, abandonment, and dreams. The apparently simple premise of the journey to become the new King of the Pirates becomes intertwined from the beginning with



complex social problems such as slavery, racism, corruption and authoritarian governments.

Nico Robin, the crew member of the Straw Hats, the name given to Luffy's gang, can be read as a Muse in terms of artistic expression. An enigmatic character of the first arcs of *One Piece*, is a scholar archaeologist characterized by silence and mystery, who appears at first as an antagonist as she belongs to an organization whose leader, Crocodile, has limited himself to take over and impoverish the inhabitants of the country of Arabasta in order to find the clue to a legendary weapon of mass destruction called Pluto (Oda 2021a: 192), which is found in a monolith of that place. From the very beginning, Robin is fundamental because she is the only living hermeneutic of the great mysteries of the past in the universe of *One Piece*, The Poneglyphs, coded monoliths that record history, the discovery of other monoliths and the location of ancient weapons. Robin's goal, meanwhile, is to find The Rio Poneglyph, “the alleged monolith that is said to record the true history of the world” (Oda, 2014:267).

This halo of mystery and silence is evidenced by the traumatic events that Robin bears, on the one hand, because her homeland, Ohara, has been razed to the ground and her existence erased from history, and on the other, because she has remained a fugitive ever since, having to work for various criminals (Oda 2021b:218). Despite this sempiternal state of tragedy, the archaeologist is able to intellectually incite her new companions, with interventions that show her deportment in the rigorous reading, elegance, and reflection she lavishes on objects and places they traverse in their adventure. At *Yellow Grand Elements* (2014), Oda compiled a series of comments by Nico Robin about the architectural constructions she visited with the Straw Hats, closing with the following words: “In all constructions, there is poured a little of the will of their owner” (277). From here, the analysis of the muse is proposed specifically with Clio, the celebratory Muse, in charge of history and poetry, who carries in her hands a lyre and a book of Thucydides, wherever she goes.

Since childhood, Nico Robin showed a scholarly character tinged with a resilient sensitivity, which was struck witheringly by the death of her mother, Nico Olivia, another anthropologist persecuted by the World Government because she conducted clandestine research that threatened to reveal the secret of the established order hidden in the Poneglyph (Oda 2023: 397). It is considered necessary to point out that in this universe the political power (World Government) and police (the Navy) are exposed as corrupt, abusive, and slavery organizations, where the pirates are by antonomasia criminals, but also, like the Straw Hats, represent freedom and justice outside the law. In this world, power was monopolized 900 years ago after the union of twenty monarchs for a supposed world peace, hence the World Government, the Navy, and the Cipher Pol, the latter, a secret intelligence service that evokes the role of the Gestapo or the CIA. This event in history, an event by which other peoples must be subjugated to these organizations, is erased, they are 100 years that have been lost and the World Government has proposed to keep hidden, hence they are called the “empty century of history” (Oda 2014b:254). The information of the century in the Poneglyph is closely linked to *One Piece* and the danger that Robin poses to the Power, in other words, Robin is fundamental for Luffy to achieve his goal, as these Poneglyph point the way to Raftel, the place where such treasure is located, and sets her up as the only character capable of relieving the sordid constitution of the world political order.

These mysterious blocks scattered around the world, whose information the authorities do not wish to make public, have clear intermediate allusions to different ancient cultures, in those glyphs: Aztec, Mayan, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian. In Ohara, Robin's homeland, these monoliths were studied clandestinely and that is the reason why Robin learns to decipher them on the sly. There was also housed the Tree of Absolute Wisdom, a tree more than 5000 years old where “wise men from all over the world kept very important documents (...) and archaeologists protected them as if it were a library” (Oda

2014a:225). The tree and the books are burned and destroyed by the World Government, an institution equivalent to the medieval Christian Church, not only for its power and physical violence but also for its symbolic force and slave territorial expansion. As happened with the library of Alexandria, the library of Ohara is destroyed and Nico Robin is transformed into a Hypatia persecuted by a mob of maniacs, as happened with the Alexandrian philosopher:

Hypatia, known as the Lady of Sciences, was considered to be the last scientist of the ancient world. Victim of the Christian fanaticism of the 4th century and brutally murdered, she was the sign of the disappearance of freedom of thought, giving way to a dark age, the Middle Ages (Sáez y Clavero, 2016:631).

In the myth, Hypatia's corpse was dismembered and paraded through the streets of that empire. For both her and Nico Robin, erudition has been her condemnation, her genre, and her reckless imprint: triggers of bestiality against her figures. Robin herself recognizes in her project of unraveling the past, a guilt, but, above all, an injustice for the mere fact of encountering so many difficulties and opponents for wanting to know history. This is how she expresses it to Cobra, king of Arabasta when both are on the verge of death and she begins to tell him about her past, how she has begun to be tired of living, that her desire was nothing more than to know "history", in quotation marks.

After Ohara's disappearance, Nico Robin began to be known by the nickname of 'demon girl', because as happened with Hypatia, knowledge in a woman, especially of a scientific or philosophical nature, was a 'curious' event, which in that context was tinged with a demonic or heretical character (Alic, 1991, 15, 24). It was completely forbidden for a woman, first to know, but even more to explore the cosmos, to discuss intellectually and that alone was what condemned the Alexandrian, and it is what almost condemns the character in question, if it were not for her new pirate companions, who become, paradoxically, a bastion of ethics, of fraternal unconditionality, in short, of friendship for the archaeologist who has been condemned to hide her identity in perpetual exile under the condition of fugitive.

Robin's fraternal connection with books allows her to establish a link with the Muse of the story, that Clio made of knowledge, what, for example, a princess elucidates from love. Nico Robin is on the borderline of both positions, since, although she has a critical and determined strength, she also feels a genuine sense of friendship for her companions, with whom she finally resumes the journey after being kidnapped by the Cipher Pol in Enies Lobby. There, her companions declare war on the World Government after preventing Robin from going to Impel Down, a tiered prison built on the idea of the Inferno from *The Divine Comedy*. The darkness, its secrets, its demon, make her a liminal muse between the fire of knowledge and the darkness of her pain, also a Muse because of her awareness or intuition of being in front of an unknown or dark world, but always secret, a place where she is invested with a tragic or at least inevitable skin.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The two objects reviewed in this essay, although they differ in their materiality, media, and times, intertwine elements such as appealing to the Muse, in search of a secret, that is, the detective spirit has prevailed, both creators and reader-spectators, for whom the effigy of the muse remains a source of philosophical and aesthetic inspiration, to observe themselves and what is created-read. To this secret is added the notion of struggle deployed in the two examples discussed, but with greater power in the case of Roberto Bolaño, where he duels, in a serious game, with a heavyweight of poetry: if it was not with Parra, it will be with Neruda. The Muse operates here as a measure for the poet-warrior himself, who will end up grateful for having given his best, regardless of whether he has won or lost. Now, a similar effect works in the case of Nico Robin, but in her, the

war, above all, is with herself. This is not to say that it is not so in the case of Bolaño, but it is known that in the case of the Chilean -in his extraliterary deployment, so to speak- he had notable disagreements and confrontations with different agents of culture, but in the case of the archeologist, although there is a saga of despicable sailors who have manipulated her, fundamentally, the war has been with herself. A battle practically to the death, which she manages to win, defeating the series of ghosts and traumas that do not die completely.

The poet-warrior does not look for answers or consolation in someone physical, as is the case with Neruda; the source of inspiration and answers is rather in a demi-goddess, since, although she has human characteristics, there are also more ethereal and imported from her conception of romanticism. As for Robin, the archaeologist makes flesh the figure of the Muse, since she is represented by means of a character not only secret, and mysterious, but also beautiful and solitary, even convinced that she has no need of others, a conviction that her crew had a hard time twisting.

Even though the historical and aesthetic journey through the Muse is quite mean, at least this succinct journey wanted to get out of the traditional 'box' of intertextuality, exploring the power and extension of her figure in the history of art. We believe that this gesture, at least, rehabilitates once again the exploration of the term and how, frequently, it runs in a dialogue between creator and created work, between subject and thing, which ends up being an endless and creative dialectic in itself, especially if elements and arguments from different media, different disciplines, cultures and, of course, from different times are discussed. This intermediate exercise has allowed us to read with criticality objects of the high culture with those of low culture, by means of approaches that did not subordinate one to the other, but rather exhibited them as what they are in the postmodern every day: horizontal texts, which contribute from their context and materiality to a more fruitful, deeper and more attractive dialogue, in which, for example, the 'stultified' figure, such as the Muse, can be reviewed in a fresher, livelier and more fertile way, rehabilitating both its notion and its use in terms of aesthetic reflection. Finally, in the three cultural objects, the presence of the Muse has a vigor that also prompted to invoke them in this text, to the detriment of others, perhaps more evident. And perhaps it is possible to generate an artistic dialogue, broadening the analytical concert, making it more attractive, and hopefully not forcing a conversation between these expressions, of such a different nature.

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