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## A Common Archetype: Imaginary and Linguistic-Discursive Analysis of the Heroic Feminine in Brazilian and Polish Folk Narratives

*Wspólny archetyp: wyobrazeniowa i językowo-dyskursywna analiza  
bohaterskiej kobiecości w brazylijskich i polskich narracjach ludowych*

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**Abstract:** Legends, fairy tales, and myths have always aroused the interest of diverse societies. They are discursive genres that represent the imaginary of peoples and communities. Through them, identities and beliefs are constituted, revealing common aspects of a particular culture. In the narratives we find heroes and heroines who defend cities, stop the enemy, and are at the mercy of their own fate. Based on this assumption, this study aims to answer the following research question: how can the linguistic-symbolic convergences of the female heroic archetype of Iara and Syrenka be explained from a transdisciplinary theoretical assumption? To address this issue, we propose the following objectives: a) to present the symbolic and archetypal convergences that emerge in the narratives of Iara and Syrenka's female heroism through Brazilian and Polish discourse and the imaginary; b) to propose a theoretical-methodological analysis in terms of transdisciplinarity. The work presented here shows that the exercise of this instaurative transdisciplinarity is possible if the methods and the theoretical path are made clear. Finally, the study has shown that the female heroic archetype is present in both cultures, Brazilian and Polish contexts, from which the narratives originate, sharing mythical traits and textual-discursive configurations.

**Keywords:** Imaginary, text-discourse, archetype of the warrior, mermaid, Iara/Syrenka.

**Streszczenie:** Legendy, opowiadania i mity od zawsze budziły zainteresowanie pod różnymi szerokościami geograficznymi. Są to bowiem gatunki dyskursywne, które odzwierciedlają wyobraźnię ludów, poprzez nie tworzone są tożsamość i wierzenia wspólne dla danej kultury. W narracjach pojawiają się bohaterowie, którzy bronią miast, powstrzymują wrogów, są zdani na siebie. Opierając się na tych założeniach, w niniejszym tekście stawiam następujące pytanie badawcze: ‘Jak powstają lingwistyczno-symboliczne konwergencje archetypu wojowniczkki na przykładzie Iary i Syreny w ujęciu transdyscyplinarnym?’ By odpowiedzieć na tak sformułowane pytanie zrealizowane zostaną następujące zadania: a) przedstawienie symbolicznych i archetypowych konwergencji w narracjach o kobietach wojowniczkach na podstawie postaci Iary i Syreny, w oparciu o teksty brazylijskie i polskie; b) analiza teoretyczno-metodologiczna w ujęciu transdyscyplinarnym. Przedstawiona tu praca zakłada, że wdrożenie interdyscyplinarnego ujęcia będzie właściwe dla podjętej tematyki dzięki precyzyjnemu użyciu metodologii oraz ujęciu teoretycznemu. Badanie wykazało, że wzmiankowany archetyp wojowniczkki jest obecny w obu kulturach, brazylijskiej i polskiej. Łączą je zaś elementy mityczne i ujęcie tekstualno-dyskursywne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Wyobraźniowość, tekst-dyskurs, archetyp wojowniczkki, Syrena. Iara/Syrenka.

## Introduction

This article aims to discuss the female heroic archetype in cultural examples that, although territorially distant, are close in their mythic features and discursive configurations. These are linguistic-cultural expressions derived from Iara, a Brazilian mythical manifestation that in the most popular versions represents a ‘mother of water’ ‘warrior’, and Syrenka Warszawska, a Polish mythical manifestation symbolized with shield and sword. Both of them represent a common archetype in which the heroism of the warrior woman can be translated as a symbolic image, expressed in the communicative practices and imagery of the countries studied through legends, oral and written narratives, pictorial and sculptural languages, and appearing in a wide variety of symbologies.

We can say that the intention of this study can be measured in two major general objectives: a) to present the symbolic and archetypal convergences that appear in the narratives of the heroic feminine of Iara and Syrenka through Brazilian and Polish discourse and the imaginary; b) to propose a theoretical-methodological analysis that corresponds to transdisciplinarity and uses the following theoretical axes: Anthropology of the Imaginary; Phenomenology of Religions and Religiosities; Discourse and Linguistics. This second objective reflects the formative and academic contexts of the authors of the study, as well as their common incursions in the IANDE - Brazilian

Languages and Cultures Research Group (University of Warsaw) and in the GEPIEM - Research Group on Imaginary, Education and Memory (Federal University of Pelotas).

The research groups combine in their studies the most diverse fields of knowledge, including sciences such as history, linguistics, anthropology, and education itself, with the subthemes of culture, narration, discourse, imaginary and symbology, for example. This scientific attitude denotes what the French anthropologist Gilbert Durand (1988) named instaurational hermeneutics: a scientific and analytical inclination that involves different views, theories, and methods to improve the perception of data, to expand the senses, and to keep inviting new approaches to research on the same subject.

The submission of this article is justified by the historical cooperation between Brazil and Poland, by the cultural exchange that arises from the interaction of the peoples, whether through Polish immigration to Brazil (Mazurek, 2016) or, more recently, through the settlement of Brazilians on Polish territory. However, such cultural exchange can also be perceived in the international policies of both nations, in geo-economic treaties and diplomatic activities, and in academic partnerships, such as the present one.

This article is divided into the following sections: The first section discusses the theories of the imaginary, language, and narrative used in this work; the second section describes the methodology of the study; the third section contains the findings and discussions; finally, concluding reflections that invite other approaches, from other researchers and fields of the topic, to establish new meanings.

We claim that a connection between Brazil and Poland can be seen in their sociocultural practices, more precisely in stories and oral narratives such as the fairy tale, legend, folklore, a fantastic creativity that tries to explain the different ways of being in the world. We also argue that this kind of symbolic language is expressed through the imaginary of men and women, constituted as such by mythical traits that are themselves cyclical and repeatable (Durand, 2012; Eliade, 2007) and manifest in a wide variety of textual-discursive genres (Bakhtin, 2011; Marcuschi, 2008) – “whoever tells a story adds a punch line.” In this collective universe, eras and historical boundaries are transcended, but they are influenced by hints of time and space that give them uniqueness. In the interim, it is possible to make use of a symbolic education (Borges, 2022a,

2022b): It is considered that sharing the mythical traces reported through a particular language educates/forms the subjects through the way of the sensible.

When immersed in the legends, in the stories charged with tradition and hierophany - the appearance of the sacred (Eliade, 2012) - the spatial and temporal context is implied through the local clothing in which the archetype - the universal form - is clothed. Moreover, ancestral knowledge is shared, continuing along the anthropological path of Homo (Durand, 2012) and present both in the Brazilian Amazon and, for example, in the Polish capital, Warsaw.

In linguistic field, the narratives analyzed represent a common cultural background of the linguistic group in which we are inserted (Calvet, 2011). In interaction, the supernatural entities, that is, the referents or objects of discourse of any text (Mondada, Dubois, 2003) change synchronically and diachronically, they are plural and inconstant before being normatively and historically determined.

From this perspective, discourse is dialog, as Bakhtin (2011) asserts, because it is never homogeneous and is socio-historically constructed by numerous voices in asymmetrical relations, each responding to the other. Thus, “to understand language as discourse means that it is impossible to separate it from its speakers and their actions, from the social spheres and from the ideological values that guide them” (Cavalcante Filho, Torga, 2011: 2). Texts, on the other hand, are understood as proposed by Beaugrande (1997: 10): “the text is a communicative event in which linguistic, social and cognitive actions converge”. It is the site of interaction, subjects are seen as social actors/constructors, active subjects who construct themselves dialogically and are constructed by it (Koch, 2021). Thus, it is hypothesized that the symbolic is one of the categories of the archetype that is shared, constructed, and co-constructed in and through language in the cultures studied, i.e., in the discourses there are the representations and, in the regularities, and the materiality of the text it is possible to adopt, approach and establish a new referent in a shared socio-cognitive context.

## Method

This is a qualitative, theoretical-analytical study supported by bibliographical research. We emphasize that, according to Lima and Miotto (2007: 38), “bibliographical research implies an ordered set of procedures for finding solutions, directed towards the object of study, and therefore it cannot be arbi-

trary”, so we have the bibliographical research only as a support, since we use it in the systematic selection not only of the theories that support this study, but also with regard to the documents that serve as objects of analysis in this study.

Regarding qualitative research, we can quote Gibbs (2009), who brings the method as a possibility to “scrutinize” the different sources and the different ways of representing society, according to various scientific traditions, due to different views of researchers. Mirian Goldenberg (2004), in turn, states that this type of research is not always placed as opposed to the quantitative model, and that in some cases the qualitative and quantitative conduct are combined for a better understanding of the data. The resistance is to a single model of science, that is, to perceive quantitative methodologies as hegemonic, for any and all analyzed objects. It is, then, about perceiving a semantic content, crossed by cultural interferences and social intimations more or less identified and controlled. Thus, the conclusions of this work are open to new looks, which establish other meanings, and do not end a discussion of the theme addressed.

The corpus to be analyzed is based on texts from the literature and versions of the legends of Iara and Syrenka. The subject matter of this study is reflected in the following research question: how can the linguistic-symbolic convergences of the female heroic archetype of Iara and Syrenka be explained from a transdisciplinary theoretical assumption? To this end, this study draws on the following theorists for an extension and symbolic convergence of current cultic archetypes: Gilbert Durand (1988, 2012), for example, in relation to the concepts of symbolic convergence and the imaginary; Carl Gustav Jung (2000), on the archetype and the collective unconscious; Junito Brandão (1987), Joseph Campbell (2013) and Kerényi (2015), in relation to mythology, especially the mythical aspect of the heroine and the mermaid; and in the studies of Mircea Eliade (2007, 2012), who is equally concerned with the sacred and (a)historical character of these expressions, and furthermore theorizes about the image and the symbol. As for the authors who support this work in its analytical character through linguistics, discourse, and narrative, we can mention Mondada and Dubois (2003) on referentiality in discourse, Marcuschi (2008), the language as an interactive activity, socio-historically situated; Bakhtin (2011), the discourse genres as relatively stable utterances; Moura (2020), the oral narratives as phenomena related to the cultural sociocognition.

## Iara and Syrenka: the symbolism of the female heroic in the shared imaginary

When we think of Iara, we immediately conjure up the image of a metaphysical woman of water, enchanted by the nature that surrounds her. This representation appears in various texts that have described Iara from a European perspective throughout Brazilian history. In various approaches to Brazilian religiosity, this woman is endowed with powers that make her worthy of the title of entity. The Umbanda, in the cult of its most diverse caboclos and caboclas (entities associated with nature, such as forests, rivers, quarries - waterfalls - and seas), reserves a place for Iara, who would be a cabocla of the sea, associated with another archetypal aspect of the “great mother”, namely Iemanjá (African deity worshipped in Brazil since the immigration of people from Africa, forced by the slave trade). In this way, of course, a syncretism is identified that by itself contains meanings related and glued to each other, while pointing to a linguistic-cultural mestizo that pays tribute to the entire process of imposition, conflict and interests of the peoples that formed the Brazilian society.

The article entitled *As Faces insólitas da Iara* (Sousa, Rodrigues, Silva, 2021) offers a comprehensive account of the mythical and archetypal traits of the Iara, as well as the formatting roots of this cultural element that, although impregnated with indigenous roots and intersections in the Brazilian countryside, also has an origin in European fictional perspectives. In exploring the narrative plurality surrounding this entity, the authors unraveled literature and even contemporary cinematic usage. In this exploration, important texts emerge, such as the fragment of Santa-Anna Nery’s below:

La Yara est une femme étrangement belle; quiconque la voit ne peut plus s’en détacher; de près ou de loin, il la voit constamment, il se sent pris pour elle d’une passion sans trêve, et il se livre inconsciemment à une joie bruyante et délirante. Cet accès dure jusqu’à ce qu’il la revoie réellement, telle qu’il l’a aperçue la première fois, et alors il se jette à l’eau dans le même endroit où elle lui est apparue d’abord, fascinatrice et séduisante. Il sent ce désir intense de se jeter à l’eau, dans le même endroit où elle lui est apparue d’abord, fascinatrice et séduisante. Il sent ce désir intense de se jeter à l’eau, comme si c’était là le seul moyen d’éteindre les flammes d’amour qui le dévorent (Nery, 1889: 107-108 quoted in Sousa et al., 2021: 502).

The seductive and dangerous trace in the myths in which women are the protagonists of the seas and endowed with incomparable beauty. The woman, the feminine, has always been considered by the patriarchal traditions

(which to this day are male chauvinist) as dangerous, inciting to sin and leading men to death by “diabolical” means. This is what the currents that oppose and/or problematize the Freudian vision call “womb envy”, an expression coined by Karen Horney (1885-1952), since the sanctity of conception, the mystery of life, and fertility have always been in the existence of women (see Beyne, 2011).

All these mythical aspects mentioned are known in the version of the Iara warrior, which is more widespread in Brazilian culture, precisely because it is linked to the Western aspect shared in the most diverse texts to which we have had access. In Nery, we find the characteristics of this mythical trait that borders on seduction, passion, and finally death. The man, enchanted by the beauty of Iara, jumps into the sea to seek the contact that devours him.

The regions of the unknown (desert, jungle, bottom of the sea, strange land, etc.) are free fields for the projection of unconscious contents. The incestuous libido and the patricidal destructiveness, therefore, are reflected against the individual and his society in forms that suggest threats of violence and fantasies of dangerous delight - not only of ogres, but also of mermaids of mysteriously nostalgic and seductive beauty. Russian peasants know, for example, the “wild women” of the forest, who inhabit mountain caves, where they keep houses like human beings. They are beautiful women with beautiful, well-toned faces, abundant curls of hair and hairy bodies. They put their breasts over their shoulders when they run and when they feed their children. They live in groups. With ointments prepared from wild roots, they can anoint themselves and become invisible. They like to dance or tickle, even lead to death people who walk alone in the forest (Campbell, 2013: 52).

Eliade (2007) tells us that myth is a sacred story, which is not limited to ordinary time because it is a nuance of a primordial time which narrates the beginning of things, space-time in which supernatural beings, feats, places appear, that is, the beginning of fabulous things. These “things” are justified by their own history, fate, traces... Iara, regardless of her closest origin, is expressed by narratives that endorse her story, in this case, of enchantment, persuasion, power, beauty, and fear. We have in the myth, or in the mythical trace (the aspect of a myth) a dramaticity that seeks to ground the world and explain things.

This feature is given by the maintenance of the semantic content, from the linguistic aspects in different texts, in its oral and/or written modality. More specifically, in the language, such traits are revealed by the nominalization of the narrative-title, in the etymology of the legend, in the pronominalization and predication present in the discourse.

In Western culture, in what concerns, still, the feminine aspects of the mythical trace of the mermaids, we can put in opposition the fact that this

element has already been associated with the masculine pole: “In our ancient language, the Sirens were called Seirenes. This word, in its masculine form, was also the description of a kind of bee or wasp - as was also the name of Penfrey, one of the Greys. Our ancient artists, who painted and drew on vases, figured the Sirens not only as beings feminine but also sometimes as masculine and bearded” (Kerényi, 2015: 39).

This peculiarity gives us the possibility to understand this being, which emerges from legends, fairy tales, and myths, as ‘sacred’, which is beyond ‘gender’ and therefore beyond good and evil. Angels would not have gender. This, however, is the mere form of the archetype, which, when translated into the cultural language of peoples, is given a moral charge.

In some versions of the legend, Iara also takes a male form:

There are also those who imagine Iara in the form of a young man, endowed with all the charms to seduce any virgin. This duplicity of the mythical figure is favored by the Tupi-Guarani language itself, which, ignoring grammatical gender, does not distinguish between *o Iara* and *a Iara* (Schaden, 1949: 52).

Regardless, the mythic trace is located on the threshold between the real and the unreal, or rather, between the factual historicity that refracts in language and the imaginary, which in turn carries the cultural burden of an anthropological path. If, on the one hand, myth is associated with the unreal in common sense; on the other hand, it is considered a narrative that is beyond lies and truth for theorists who deal with myth (Eliade, 2007; Campbell, 2013; Brandão, 1987), we still resort to the contributions of Iser (1996), who discusses the relations between the real, the fictional and the imaginary. In addition, Silva (2000), who approaches this author in her study of Amazonian oral narratives:

The status of fictionality for the narratives of the Amazon of Pará, considering the point of view that defends a constitutive relation between the two orders (that of the fictional and that of the real), I also understand that these narratives share this characteristic, given the nature of the agreement between the interlocutors: a narrator engenders coherent and necessary situations within the story itself, situations which, however, cannot be taken as possessing a truth value; in other words, situations in which what matters is not the truth of the facts, events narrated, but their verisimilitude (Silva, 2000: 104).

The intimate relationship of the Amazonian peoples with Iara and its impact on the lives of these subjects, as well as the case of Syrenka in relation to Polish, its historical expressiveness, and its artistic representation, allows

us to understand that in both cases there is a symbolic power that interferes consubstantially with culture.

This relationship between the religious, the mythological, and culture makes us think that there is no myth without historical and linguistic implications. History and its social and economic nuances, its values, and geographical conditions are present in the construction of the mythic narrative. “There is no such thing as a ‘pure’ religious datum outside of history, for there is no human datum that is not also a historical datum. Every religious experience is expressed and transmitted in a particular historical context” (Eliade, 1989: 22).

In the interactionist and socio-cognitive perspective of language (Marcuschi, 2008; Koch, 2021), we approach the assumptions of the Eliade (1989) through this linguistic theory, since discourses are constructed in a specific socio-historical context, in the interaction between social actors who, in the moment of utterance, are motivated to construct meanings that come from the cultural perception in which they are inserted. According to Durand (1988, 2012), the human imaginary is a cultural fabric that has been formed since the beginning of the species during its anthropological journey. This imaginary, formed from images of the present, the past, and the future, is collective but is tied to social intimations, the contexts from which the imaginary feeds while being fed by them.

SYRENKA STATUE IN OLD TOWN WARSAW



Source: Personal archive.

The most famous version of Syrenka Warszawska presents the figure of a heroine who protects the city from an impending attack. Therefore, this polarity of the Polish myth is not connected with the idea of "ambush", which is present in other Western versions. Nevertheless, it brings characters that are consistent with the classical mermaids, such as beauty and fascination.

One of the versions of the Polish legend, structured in folk narratives and impregnated with the imagery of Warsaw, says that once a mermaid was seen floating in the Vistula, heading for the city of Warsaw. As she rested on the shore, fishermen were attracted by her song and beauty. On one occasion, Syrenka was held captive by a wealthy but very mean merchant. A man is said to have rescued the mermaid, who, out of gratitude, swore protection to the people of Warsaw.

Here we bring another version of the legend, in which the semantic content is preserved, but there are linguistic-discursive differences. The following example was published in a blog entitled *Lamus Dworski*<sup>1</sup> in 2015.

Once upon a time there was a sea mermaid who got lost and swam up the Wisła [Vistula] River. After a long journey she decided to take a rest on the riverbank and it happened to be the area where the modern-day Warsaw is located. She looked around, fell in love with the harmonious surroundings and decided to stay.

Local fishermen started noticing that something unusual was disturbing the river's calm waters and releasing fish from their nests. Not deliberating much, they decided to catch the damage-doer.

To their surprise, they saw an unusual woman whose legs were covered in scales, looking just like a fish tail, captured in the trap they have prepared. She asked them to release her, and the mermaid's melodious voice made them fall in love with her. They apologized and let her swim freely. From that day on they were often gathering on the riverbank after a hard day of work, listening together to the mermaid's soothing songs.

One day a rich travelling merchant found out about the mysterious creature and sneaked to the riverside in the evening. After listening to the mermaid, his greedy heart and soul desired to own her. Merchant's mercenaries put up a trap and captured the mermaid, then locked her in a nearby hut and were waiting for the further orders.

The mermaid started crying and her cry was like the saddest song of the nature. People's hearts were bleeding with sadness. A brave fisherman's son couldn't stand the torment brought upon the mermaid and gathered the locals. Together they defeated the guards and set the mermaid free.

"I will never forget your deed" said the mermaid. "I can't be coming to sing for you any longer, but whenever your people would meet overwhelming troubles, **I will be**

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <https://lamus-dworski.tumblr.com/post/108085368462/polish-legends-war-saw-mermaid-legend-from>

**ready with my shield and sword to protect you, just like you protected my freedom”<sup>2</sup>**

A difference worth mentioning is the use of the syrenka as a symbol for the capital of the country, which is widely used in shields, emblems and in heraldry. This is not the case with the Iara, which occurs more in legendary oral literature, popular imagination, and in the narratives of Amazonian subjects.

The mermaid starts in a process of mythologizing that is also very different from that of other characters: it gives the impression that, at least originally, it was simply a symbol or icon of the city of Warsaw, transmitted as such by sigilography and heraldry, and that only later myths emerged (in the original sense of stories) starring that siren. And it seems that the plastic arts have been the ones that have contributed the most to the mythologization of the character and those that have inspired the stories of oral tradition and written literature (Molina Moreno, 2013: 2).

In the case of Syrenka, it seems the legendary discourse was employed in favor of a pre-existing symbolic use. This is what we have already discussed. The mythic language here configures itself from reality, a social demand, in everyday socio-communicative practices. In the case of Iara, on the other hand, the reasons for the mythological quality of a woman of water seem to be diluted in the different narratives and in the different linguistic resources in which this phenomenon is expressed. However, it is easy to see the similarities between the two examples. They are mermaids imbued with a symbolism of their own.

The mermaid is an even more instinctive stage of a magical female being, which we call by the name *anima*. They can also be ondines, [...] wood nymphs, graces or daughters of the fairy king, lamias, and succubuses who stun the young by sucking the life out of them. These characters would be projections of nostalgic emotional states and reprehensible fantasies, the moralistic critic will say. It is impossible not to admit that this observation is true to some extent. But is it the whole truth? Is the mermaid only a product of moral slackness? Did not such creatures exist in ancient times when the burgeoning human consciousness was still fully connected with nature? Surely, spirits must have existed first in the forest, in the field, and in the streams of water long before moral consciousness was questioned. Moreover, these beings were as feared as they were seductive, so their strange erotic charms were only part of their characteristics (Jung, 2000: 17).

Jung (2000) defines the characteristics of the archetype: It is a first language, an energy that carries information, but still on an unconscious level. A form. The conscious sphere, from the cultural perception, will give the laws and the motto of the archetype. “The archetype essentially represents an

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<sup>2</sup> There are various versions of the legend that differ in some details and this is the story as I know it since childhood (Lamus Dworski, 2015) (emphasis our).

unconscious content that changes through its awareness and perception and takes on nuances that vary according to the individual consciousness in which it manifests” (Jung, 2000: 17).

This collective representation, as well as the sociocultural specificities, can be seen in the analysis of the symbolic-discursive convergence of Iara and Syrenka. Therefore, we postulate while by adopting this instauration-theoretical-analytical understanding, there is a broadening of the understanding of the phenomena to be analyzed and at the same time new theoretical-methodological approaches are pointed out, in this case through linguistics and the imaginary.

### **Symbolic fluidity in sociocommunicative practices**

Colonization and catechism imposed the European language and culture on the native peoples. Under the prism of this Eurocentric culture and worldview, much of the imagery, representations, and essence of Brazilian folklore manifested itself in the various versions of the so-called Brazilian legends, as mentioned in the previous section. This process resulted in a mestizo or parallel cosmology (Figueira-Cardoso, Borges, 2021), which has a symbolic fluidity constitutive of the Brazilian imaginary, present in the legends and other folkloric manifestations-such as the Sairé in Pará, the Boi Bumbá in Amazonas, the Terno de Santos in Rio Grande do Sul-and, in this case, as Iara. In this sense, we affirm that the Iara warrior is structured by a European influence, but it also found a foothold in the original culture throughout history, which allowed its maintenance and textual-discursive genres.

However, this process of cultural overlap was not harmonious, for we can assume conflicts and impositions inherent in this contact. If we examine the first records of legends in Brazil, we will find that the stories are interspersed with references of the colonizers, such as the Christian faith and its dogmas. It is a Eurocentrism that has been established as hegemonic on Brazilian soil since the 16th century, complemented by an African influence that came with the enslaved people.

The first written records in Brazil about supernatural beings and entities that our research has had access to date back to 1560. In the book “Carta de São Vicente” the Jesuit priest José de Anchieta reports about Curupira, Boitatá and Iupuiara.

There are also other ghosts in the rivers, which they call Igpupiára, that is, that live in the water and kill the Indians the same way. Not far from us there is a river inhabited by Christians, which the Indians used to cross in small canoes, made of a single trunk or cork, where they were often drowned by them, before the Christians went there (Anchieta, 1560: 34).

As for beings associated with water, in the work *História da Província de Santa Cruz* by Pedro Magalhães Gandavo (1858) we find one of the first versions of a supernatural being, the Ipujiara, which tells the story “Do monstro marinho que se matou na Capitania de Sam Vicente anno 1564” (Gandavo, 1858: 41). This is what we can initially present about the literature that comprises Brazilian ‘folklore.’ However, as far as the Iara is concerned, the best-known version is precisely the one analyzed in this study, whose origins of this representation are unknown.

However, we argue that this version is the result of a confluence of languages and cultures due to its symbolic fluidity. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the aim of this article is not to search for the ‘origin’ of the mythical feature of the Iara mermaid/warrior in Brazil or to narrow down the original versions of Syrenka, but to expand the meanings of a symbolism that emerged from shared socio-communicative practices.

In five hundred years of Brazilian history with Portuguese influence, the Iara mermaid and warrior is the most narrated version of the legend, which is at the same time the subject of several studies (Nery, 1889; Cascudo, 2015; Freitas, Bezerra do Nascimento, 2017; Sousa, Rodrigues, Silva, 2021; Figueira-Cardoso, 2022), since this cultural element in Brazilian folklore is the most representative of what it is about a supernatural being that emerges from the waters. In this perspective, Freitas and Bezerra do Nascimento (2017) draw attention to the popularity of this ‘being’, Iara, represented in Brazilian literature with both Indigenous and European predilections. For the authors, the expressiveness of Iara is felt in the folklore of the country, both in verse and in the prose of consecrated authors, in addition to the orality that emanates from the voices of the subjects, especially in the Amazon.

## IARA REPRESENTATION



Source: Dani Mota<sup>3</sup>.

With her specialty, Iara gives a face to a country, as she portrays the regional peculiarities, the biome, the borders of continental Brazil, as it is her nature. “This seductive figure from the popular imagination is fundamental to the construction of nationality and as such deserves attention, since many consider it real” (Freitas, Bezerra do Nascimento, 2017: 1). In their article titled *Iara: mito e literatura*, the authors already point out the archetypal facets of this character that recurs in the Amazon - both in the humblest representations and in contemporary art - showing itself diverse character, with timeless and space-transcending characteristics - symbolically fluid:

Finally, we recognize the identity of Iara as a female entity that has traits belonging to women of other cultures, as well as its anthropozoomorphic nature, is, in fact, that of an archetypal figure like Lilith, and may be another name to celebrate the Great Goddess, because, like Lilith, Iara showed her maiden, mother and elderly faces (Freitas, Bezerra do Nascimento, 2017: 4).

The designation pagan for the Iara archetype implies that this cultural manifestation is not limited to the hegemonic, primarily Christian, beliefs that have catechized Brazil and all of Latin America since the arrival of the European colonizers. The point is that there is not always an ‘assimilation’ of the

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<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://danimota.artstation.com/projects/xJN3ER>

Church to popular traditions. Catholic ‘universalization,’ in turn, has not always trampled on the ancient beliefs present in the popular imagination, which can be refined through language, speeches, through oral narratives that, even if they converge, are rich in detail, specificity, and expressiveness. However, there is a commonality, a similarity that begins with the desire to tell. “In the act of storytelling, we share emotions, knowledge, and worldviews. The interest in sharing stories, experiences, fears, and anxieties are socio-communicative practices of all known cultures” (Figueira-Cardoso, 2022: 1). It is worth noting that in this mythical feature of the warrior Iara - version that we analyze, there is a resistance to aspects of the culture of original peoples, as the etymology itself expressed in his name: Yara - currently, with the most common spelling, Iara - of Tupi-Guarani language etymology.

As for language, human communication is organized through textual-discursive genres, that is, “socially used communicative patterns that function as a kind of communicative model representing a social knowledge in a complete situation” (Marcuschi, 2008: 190), as we can understand the legends and myths. With this in mind, we observe in the following narrative a context that repeats the communicative pattern mentioned by Marcuschi as well as the semantic content of the Iara warrior discussed here<sup>4</sup>:

(...) A minha avó, lembro que ela acostumava muito falar dessa personagem e ela disse, a minha avó e meu avô disseram que eles verem [viram] ela no encontro das águas na beira do rio Solimões e a lenda se acostuma dizer assim. **A Iara era uma jovem indígena** muito conhecida nas tribos do rio Solimões por ser considerada uma excelente **indígena guerreira**. Os irmãos de Iara sentiram muito inveja dela pois o pai dela a elogiava muito pelo fato que **Iara fazia função de guerreira** melhor que os irmãos. Então os irmãos de Iara sentiram um pouco de inveja dela porque ela era **jovem guerreira** e além de ela ser muito **jovem guerreira, ela era muito bela e maravilhosa**. E certo dia a Iara ouviu os irmãos planejando sua morte, porém ela resolveu matar os irmãos dela antes que eles executassem o plano. Após assassinar os irmãos dela, a Iara fugiu para os matos com medo da reação do pai dela, porém, o pai dela realizou uma busca e conseguiu capturá-la. Como castigo, por que tinha feito com os irmãos dela, o pai dela jogou ela no encontro das águas, rio Negro e Solimões. Mas, ao jogar ela no encontro das águas, eh... os peixes que ali estavam, salvaram a índia, e a Iara, ela se transformou em uma linda sereia. Só que ela encanta os homens com a beleza dela e com o canto dela e ela afogá-los. E é tipo hipnotismo. Muitas

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<sup>4</sup> The option of highlighting the transcription of the Portuguese text in the main text of the article is due to the fact that the authors of this study prioritize the analysis based on the transcription, the passage from speech to writing, rather than the English translation of the analyses.

peessoas podem achar a lenda da Iara muito notório, mas é isso mesmo, é real (...). (Patchett, 2018: 1-5) [grifos dos autores]<sup>5</sup>.

The narrative described above was collected and transcribed in a netnographic study by Gianna Patchett (2018) using audio recordings on the Messenger social network as part of a folklore research project at Utah State University. The sample is from a Brazilian narrator from the city of Manaus, Amazonas. It is possible to observe in the text a convergence (Durand, 1988) of mythic traits that are very close to each other and that, when constellated (unified), give a symbolic force to the image of the heroic woman denounced by both Syrenka and Iara. The elements highlighted in the textual-discursive narrative point to a representation of the mermaid, the warrior, but also the seductive and dangerous woman who leads men to their death.

In the linguistic analysis, we found that the base text has undergone a process of transcription and translation. It is important to emphasize that the transcription of speech (Marcuschi, 2010) consists in transferring a text from its sonic realization to graphic form, based on a set of conventionalized procedures as applied by Patchett (2018), who used tools and approaches of folklore through netnography, as she used the Messenger to capture the oral text (in audio form). In this process, one cannot ignore possible changes resulting from a series of operations and decisions.

The object of discourse *Iara* - although it is not nominalized/lexicalized by a title, the analyzed text is a narrative about Iara. Therefore, in the instauration of the object of discourse (Koch, 2021) or referent, it is assumed

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<sup>5</sup> English Translation: (...) My grandma, I remember that she would always talk a lot about this personage and she said, my grandma and my grandpa said that they saw her at the Meeting of the Waters on the riverside of the Solimões River and the legend usually says the same. Iara was a young indigenous girl very well know (não seria "known"?) in the tribes of the Solimões River because she was considered an excelente indigenous warrior. Iara's brothers were very envious because her father praised her a lot because of the fact that Iara did the work of a warrior better than her brothers. So Iara's brothers felt a little envious of her because she was a young warrior and more than her being a young warrior, she was very beautiful and wonderful. And one day Iara heard her brother planning her death, so she resolved to kill her brothers before they executed their plan. After murdering her brothers, Iara ran away into the jungle with fear of her father's reaction, but, her father searched and was able to capture her. As punishment, for what she had done with her brothers, her father threw her in the Meeting of the Waters, the Black River and Solimões River. But, when he threw her into the Meeting of the Waters, um...the fish that were there, saved the indian girl, and Iara, she transformed into a beautiful mermaid. Only that she enchants men with her beauty and with her song and she drowns them. It is like hypnotism. Many people may think that the legend is notorious but it really is, it is real (Patchett, 2018: 1-5).

that in the interaction the sociocognitive context shared between the interactants (researcher-narrator) is already constructed, which can be observed in the following excerpt: *My grandma, I remember that she would always talk a lot about this personage and she said, my grandma and my grandpa said that they saw her at the Meeting of the Waters on the riverside of the Solimões River and the legend usually says the same.* The referent's return to Iara through nominalization and defined expressions occurs throughout the text, indicating that the narrator's lexical choices are motivated by a pre-established interactional context. Iara is categorized as a **Iara era uma jovem indígena** 'young warrior'.

Ciulla e Silva (2008: 23) argue that categorization is a cognitive procedure through which interlocutors perceive the world, including distinguishing, classifying, and labeling things around them. Thus, it is not limited to naming the world in a correspondence relation, "but encompasses the process of conceptualizing and referring to that world through discourse, which, in the way we use our imagination, reveals an entire argumentative and creative process behind the use of a particular category rather than another" (Moraes, 2015: 36).

As the text continues, it is possible to observe the construction of referential chains around the archetype of the warrior Iara. For Roncarati, the formation of reference chains is the integrative mechanism of incoming information, "because it allows the information that is continuously added to the referents in the course of the sentences and paragraphs to be linked in a dynamic and variable network of semantic relations" (2010: 22), making discursive textual processing more visible, as we can see in the bolded passages in the studied example.

During the progression of the text, we can observe that the object of discourse *Iara* is recategorized. Koch and Elias (2010: 157) argue that recategorizations of the same referent-which simultaneously restate given information and bring new information-are a powerful tool for establishing the argumentative orientation of the text. Thus, recategorization presents itself as a continuous and complex process of cognitive and discursive transformations of referents during a text: "The speaker constructs the reference based on an interpretation of the real world, recategorizing the previous information by adding new predicates that are present to different degrees in people's knowledge as the interaction takes place" (Cavalcante, Custódio Filho, Brito,

2014: 156). The use of anaphora configures the categorization and recategorization of a discourse object.

In the analyzed text, the referent is first recategorized by an indirect anaphora, a forward shift (cataphora) (Koch; Elias, 2010), then by a prediction: **A Iara é uma jovem guerreira**. Later, the referent is recategorized again and acquires attributes of this symbolic fluidity, that is, from the western mermaids she was transformed into a beautiful mermaid - a fact that revisits the symbolic core of the narratives that approach the figure of the woman magnified with an aquatic nuance, as is peculiar to Iara and Syrenka. Moreover, it repeats nuances of the legendary career of these two characters, the polarity of the same archetype: both are kidnapped and rescued, that is, they suffer the 'envy' and the male violence. While Syrenka is grateful for their release and promises to defend the city, Iara in return fulfills the revenge in the 'hypnosis' peculiar to her stereotype, bringing the enchanted persons to the bottom of the sea.

### Final remarks

Despite the dilution of postmodern contemporary relations, we revive mythical and archetypal traits that present themselves in new guises in the various texts that appear in the multiple communicative interactions. The heroine does not just look like the Viking warrior wielding sword and shield propagated in current series. The heroic feminine carries the inheritance of the woman who overcomes herself, transforms herself, who is able to change her body and masterfully fulfill the most diverse social functions in one and the same life.

The examples of Iara and Syrenka provide the conditions for a symbolism that frees the feminine from the polarity of the 'great mother' who nourishes, is fertile, and nurtures and cradles men. No! Iara and Syrenka are unconscious outbursts of warlike energy that extrapolates patriarchy but is also visible in everyday feminine life that pushes for victory, even in the unequal conditions that have been historically maintained. At the same time, the versions that are preserved, told, and gain meaning in the various texts are precisely the image we want to see and the story we want to hear.

We reiterate that this study argues for a transdisciplinary approach to analyze the mythic and symbolic traces that emerge from socio-communicative practices about Iara and Syrenka and materialize in texts in contemporary

situations and environments of interaction. Moreover, it postulates the exercise of founding hermeneutics that brings together the studies of language, the imaginary, the history of religions and religiosities, and the theoretical conception itself in relation to the socio-communicative practices of the cultures under study.

It is this linguistic-symbolic analysis on a social, cognitive, and interactionist basis that allows us to observe and answer the research question of this study: how can the linguistic-symbolic convergences of the female heroic archetype of Iara and Syrenka be explained from a transdisciplinary theoretical assumption? Thus, this article is not intended to limit discussions on this topic. On the other hand, the analysis developed here is an invitation to transdisciplinary explorations.

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