

PORTUGUESE JOCLAR AND NOVELLISTIC TALES IN FRANCISCO XAVIER DE ATAÍDE OLIVEIRA'S COLLECTION OF FOLKTALES FROM ALGARVE

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Francisco Xavier de Ataíde Oliveira (1842-1915) was a Catholic priest and civil servant in the town of Loulé in Algarve and he was also the founder and editor of the journal "O Algarvio" through its entire lifetime (1889-1893). In 1897, he published a collection of fairy tales for children, *Contos Infantis*, written by himself, but to some extent inspired by tradition. It was this publication that made the contemporary great name among early Portuguese folklorists, Teófilo Braga, write to Ataíde Oliveira and direct his attention to the fairy tales of Algarve. In 1898, Ataíde Oliveira published *As mouras encantadas* (The Spellbound Moorish Girls) and in 1900 he finished the work I shall be dealing with here, *Contos tradicionais do Algarve* (Traditional Tales from Algarve), in two volumes containing 440 folk tales, and by far the most comprehensive collection of Portuguese folk tales from a single province.

In 1905, he published *Romanceiro e Cancioneiro do Algarve* (Ballads and Songs from Algarve). From 1899, Ataíde Oliveira worked together with the journal "A Tradição" where some of his tales were published.

In his preface to *As mouras encantadas*, Ataíde Oliveira explained that he had asked both friends and colleagues for help with the collection and also had collected tales himself from the old women of Loulé. Unfortunately, Ataíde Oliveira does not comply with the ideal demands for correct collection and presentation of folk tales (which, as is well-known, not many did at the time). He received some of the tales at second hand, and it is obvious that he has edited the material prior to its publishing. There is no indication, though, that Ataíde Oliveira has modified the thematic contents of the tales<sup>1</sup> and unlike most other contemporary Portuguese folk tale collectors he has consequently included the concluding formulas of the tales<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, his collection covers an unusually wide field and contains tales not included in other Portuguese collections; it thus gives a fine and comprehensive view of the distribution of folktales of a restricted geographic area, *in casu* the Algarve region. This makes his collection of tales a valuable source although it must be appreciated with certain reservations.

Until recently, folklore research has primarily been focussed on fairy tales, whereas jocular and novellistic tales represent more unexplored country. The jocular and novellistic tales in Ataíde Oliveira's collection are very interesting because they, to a higher extent than the fairy tales, bear witness of a local influence. Both sub-genres contain many references to things specific to the Algarve province such as the importance of shipping, housing conditions etc, and they also provide a good psychological insight into the tensions underlying the presentation of the interpersonal relationships in the tales.

Traditionally, the jocular tales have been considered inferior to the fairy tales because the collectors of the nineteenth century – among them the Brothers Grimm – found them morally offensive. Thus it is possible that also Ataíde Oliveira has subjected them to a certain bowdlerizing and has left some tales out of his collection<sup>3</sup>.

Among the jocular tales from Algarve we meet several variants of the same type, i.e. the tale of the young girl who accidentally discloses to her fiancé or bridegroom that she is not a

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<sup>1</sup> One may wonder why Ataíde Oliveira, in spite of his spiritual ministration, was so open-minded in his rendering of the immoral contents of the tales. On this point, there is a striking contrast between Oliveira and his contemporary, the Spanish folklorist Antoni Maria Alcover, whose 427 folk tales from Mallorca from a scientific point of view are almost useless because he, on a moral basis, has bowdlerised all erotic episodes (Garau 1996:14)

<sup>2</sup> The concluding formula most frequently met with Ataíde Oliveira is "I was there, but they gave me nothing"; there are other versions, though, for example: "story told, money earned". Obviously, both introductory and concluding formulas have an important function as narrative metalepses involving both the narrator and thereby the audience in the narrative (Genette 1980: 234 ff.)

<sup>3</sup> In her article on Ataíde Oliveira's *Romanceiro* (Iberian ballads), V. Anastácio writes (Anastácio 1995:20) that Ataíde Oliveira shows himself as having a moralising, pedagogic intention intimately related to his ministry (my condensed translation). This is not the case with *Contos de Algarve* that contains both erotic and eschatological tales.

virgin. In some variants we are also told that the girl has given birth to one or several children, and that the girl's mother has been unfaithful to her husband so that he is not the father of her children (AT 1418\*)<sup>4</sup>. We are here talking about two different kinds of problems: On one hand, the young girl who loses her virginity before her marriage, on the other hand the married woman's adultery. In a religious context, these two problematics can be reduced to one, viz. an offense against the sacrament of marriage, something notoriously known to be considered a mortal sin by the Roman Church. This type of jocular tale is common in many countries and probably has its origin in Italian novellae. German folklorist Elfriede Moser-Rath (Moser-Rath 1984:97 ff.) gives several examples of similar tales from Germany, pointing out that they have their roots in Poggio and other Italian authors and in *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* (1486).

No doubt the theme of the man who discovers that his fiancée is sexually experienced has been regarded as being a comic one in the Late Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Baroque; but it may be worth some consideration whether the many local variants of this theme in Oliveira's collection can have been of any particularly topical interest in Portugal. In this connection, I have given it some consideration whether the tabooing of women's premarital relationships or adultery may have been particularly strong in the Algarve region, but I have found nothing to authenticate this. Also against this hypothesis speaks the fact that there obviously was a strong tabooing regarding these matters everywhere in Catholic Europe. There are many indications, however, that the theme has received renewed interest and with this a growing popularity during the Counter-Reformation and the Baroque period when the sacraments, and matrimony in particular, were given renewed attention throughout the Catholic world.

Undoubtedly, the sermons of that time have had conjugal fidelity and the sacrament of marriage as one of their subjects<sup>5</sup>, and most probably their influence have reached beyond the clergy and, among other things, may have resulted in the distribution of the many jocular tales about premarital relationships and adultery. On one hand, the tales may have been popular because of their quality of being reflections of real events, on the other hand they have most certainly also been popular as a satirical reaction to the current ecclesiastical debate of marriage as sacrament. Bakhtin maintained (1984:1-58) that the jocular tales represented a radical confrontation with the official culture in contrast to the fairy tales which are far more conservative in their outlook. Klaus Roth does not share this view, maintaining that the jocular tales primarily have an entertaining function, and that the laughter works as a valve for the resolution of social tension and as such has a rather conservative effect on the norms of society (Roth 1977:229 ff.). I do not find, though, that Roth has proven that a momentaneous resolution of social tension should not carry with it any long term effect, and therefore, in my opinion, the two points of view do not exclude each other.

As mentioned above, the tales of the man who discovers that the girl he is going to marry is not a virgin or, of the father who overhears a conversation between his wife and daughter and finds out that the daughter is not a virgin and that her mother has been unfaithful to him, are found in several variants among the folktales of Algarve. The motif of the girl bringing a large marriage portion along by way of compensation is only found in some of these tales. In one tale, the girl has clearly not a very high economic status, as her fiancé is son of the squire who employs the girl's father. Thus the relation between high and

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<sup>4</sup> The classification according to type is the one used by Aarne-Thompson in *The Types of the Folktale*. As it will be recalled, Aarne-Thompson distinguishes between five main groups, including Group III, Jocular Tales and Anecdotes. The classification according to motifs is that found in Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature*.

<sup>5</sup> Moser-Rath is of the opinion that there is a close connection between the Baroque period collections of sermons of the Counter-Reformation and folktales and delivers a penetrating description of this in *Lustige Gesellschaft, Schwank und Witz des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts in kultur- und sozialgeschichtlichem Kontext*. Unfortunately, her books are not translated into English for which reason she is rarely quoted in English-speaking literature.

low status usually forming part and parcel of folk tales is not given an unambiguous representation in these tales.

In the following, I shall discuss four tales in which the theme of women's premarital relations forms part in various ways. The tales have been retold in abridged versions and in my translation.

*Mãe e filha* (Mother and Daughter)

Once there was a young man who contrived to marry a girl to his liking because the marriage portion offered by the bride's father exceeded the bridegroom's expectations: No less than about 400,000 dollars in cash and some useful plots of rich soil. The two of them got married and moved to the neighbourhood of the bride's parents in a house built on one of the plots.

Of course, the girl was naïve and shy, unless it was so in the old days that one always told the truth. Anyway, the bridegroom got it from the bride's own mouth that some time before she became engaged to her future husband she had fallen for a young man and had had a child by him.

The newly married man felt that his honour had been hurt even though the wound was of an earlier date and went back to a time when he did not even know his wife, so he decided to take his wife back to the home of her parents. The day after the wedding, he appeared at the parents-in-law's with his wife.

— I didn't expect you, the mother-in-law greeted them when she saw them.

— You shouldn't, if things were all right: There are matters more serious than the laws, the man answered formally.

— What's the matter? the father-in-law asked, arriving in the same moment.

— I've come to return your daughter: I didn't find her the way I had a right to find her; she's had a child before she married me.

The mother-in-law was filled with anger and answered:

— What right did you have? So you had imagined a respectable wife, 400,000 dollars in cash and valuable land?! Here am I, who didn't have such a marriage portion when I married my husband and I had already had six children by six different fathers! Isn't that true; Manuel, (she said, turning to her husband).

— It's true, it's true, yes, yes, but that went with my taste. And I never thought of returning you to your father, her husband answered.

— Perhaps you knew before you married, the son-in-law defended himself.

— Before or after, one's honour will become neither greater nor less by that. Don't be stupid now, pull yourself together, the same thing happened to me. If you have daughters, and they do the same, they will only have taken after their mother: They will become like their mother and grandmother.

Thus convinced, the son-in-law went back in the pleasant company of his wife, but he never had children with her who could perpetuate the feelings of the mother and grandmother.

Comment: Apparently the sympathy of the narrator lies with the young girl as it is only her husband who is exposed to ridicule. Apart from the fact so obviously embarrassing to the husband that the girl is not a virgin, we also detect a note of admonition and of mockery because of the man's dependence on the bride's family<sup>6</sup>. This is seen, for instance, in the uncommonly precise description of the housing situation of the young couple. Normally a folk tale will contain only scanty information of such factual character. From other Portuguese tales the impression is gathered that it was more often the case that a young couple lived with or, in the immediate vicinity of the man's family.

*O juiz preto caldeireiro* (The Judge/Son of a Black Coppersmith)

A couple had three sons and a daughter. The daughter fell in love with a young man who often came to visit her home. One day, he met her alone and asked her to tell about her past. The girl was so naïve that she told him that she had already given birth to one child. The young man never came to see her again. One day, the girl's father met the young man and asked him why he never came to see them again. The young man answered: Spy on your wife and daughter, and you'll see why. The man follows his advice and overhears a conversation between mother and daughter where the mother comforts her daughter with the fact that she herself is the mother of four children of which only one son is by her husband.

The mother and the daughter died and the father drew up a will. After his death, it followed from his will that he left all his property to his only son. All three of them wanted to prove that they were sons of the deceased and they decided to go and see a judge in a far-away jurisdiction.

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<sup>6</sup> This is contrary to what Tagart (Tagart 1990:25ff.) has demonstrated in Spain in the Cáceres region (bordering on Alentejo in Portugal). There, during fieldwork in 1981-83, he showed that out of 221 households, 88 were living with their parents, of these 32 with the man's parents and 51 with the girl's parents. On matriarchal social structure in Galicia (earlier also in the northernmost parts of present-day Portugal) v. Rey-Henningsen, 1994.

On their way, they saw a wheat field where one half of the crop had been eaten and on the spot they deducted that it had been eaten by an animal that was blind, had sores on its back and had no hairs on its tail. Later they met the owner of the animal and when they described it, but denied having seen it, the owner of the animal took them to see the same judge they themselves wished to consult. Upon this, they explained that the animal had to be blind on one eye as the field had been devoured only on one side, the animal had spilled grains everywhere because it fanned off the flies with its mouth, and if it had had any hairs on its tail it would have used its tail and not its mouth to fan away the flies. The judge realized that they were a clever lot and could not possibly have stolen the animal.

After the judge had read the will, he offered the brothers that they could stay overnight and promised to give them his answer the following day. The judge asked the cook to buy and prepare a kid for the visitors' dinner and asked her to listen to what they were saying. While they were eating, the oldest brother said, "This kid has sucked a dog", the middle one said that the kid was a twin, and the youngest brother said that the judge was the son of a black coppersmith. The housekeeper told her master about these remarks. The next day the judge went to see his mother and asked her about the true state of affairs; and the mother realized that she had to tell him that the judge's father really was a black coppersmith who had left him everything he owned. Later the judge learned that the kid was a twin and had been raised on the milk from a dog. The judge went home and called for his guests and asked them to explain how they had reached these conclusions. When the judge asked the youngest brother how he could know that he was son of a Negro who was a coppersmith the brother answered that the judge, who had eaten before his visitors had said his grace with his hands folded downwards, as is the custom among black coppersmiths.

The judge sent for a coffin and said that the one of the brothers who could best cut the coffin in two with a sword was the son to whom the father had left his fortune. Only the youngest son refused to cut in his father's coffin and the judge declared that he was the son with the right of inheritance for only he had proved that the blood of his father was rolling in his veins.

Comment: The tale is a compound of three different types. The introduction is "the father overhears" (AT 1418\*), the mid-section is "the wise brothers" (AT 655), and the end is "shooting at the father's corpse; paternity test (AT 920C). "The father overhears" as introduction followed by the motif of the illegitimate brothers whose dispute about the will is to be taken before a judge stems from the Babylonian Talmud Traktat Baba Batra (Goebel 1932, p. 166 ff.). Goebel calls this type of tales wisdom tales (Weisheitsmärchen) and he points out that it is typical of the Jewish narrative tradition that it contains a down-to-earth, lucid and acute knowledge of life. Thus, Jewish tales almost never contain any love stories or supernatural phenomena. Goebel mentions that this Jewish tale must have been rather popular during the Middle Ages and that it appears in several Hebrew manuscripts. As is well known, there was a numerous Jewish community in Algarve so I find it rather probable that this ethnic group has distributed the tale. The judge, who turns out to be an illegitimate child, is a motif that finds its origin within Arab narrative tradition (Chauvin 1903:158 ff.). Two tales from the Arabian Nights contain this motif: "The Tale of the Sultan of Yemen and his Three Sons" and "The Tale of the Three Dodgers and the Sultan". In both tales, the three young men draw several shrewd conclusions and they end up with assuming that the sultan is an illegitimate child because he does not observe the laws of hospitality and therefore does not behave in accordance with his station of life.

The black coppersmith of the Portuguese version is, as far as I am able to judge, a local variant of the motif, a so-called ecotype. Ataíde Oliveira contributes another version of the same tale, viz. the tale *Os três espertalhões* (The Tree Astute Men), vol. I, p. 292. The two tales differ from each other in several points of minor importance, but the most interesting point is that in "The Three Astute Men", the introductory section "the father overhears" is reduced to the man hearing his wife telling a neighbour that he is only the father of one of the family's three sons, and in this version, the black coppersmith is a Jew whose profession is not stated. Ataíde Oliveira characterises "The Judge who was the Son of a black Coppersmith" as a variant of "The Three Astute Men" without explaining how his has arrived at this result. I find it most probable, however, that he is right and that the version with the black coppersmith is the younger one because a black coppersmith presumably must have had his roots in slaves from the former Portuguese colony of Angola whose native inhabitants were known to be skilled in the crafts of mining and metal work. The folded hands turned the wrong way we meet in both versions. This motif carries along associations to the Portuguese Inquisition that saw signs of devil-worship in the slightest religious deviations. There is a lot to indicate that the version with the judge, who was the son of a black coppersmith, can not have originated

earlier than the 16<sup>th</sup> century when both the import of slaves from Angola and the Inquisition had been functioning for some time.

Most likely, the tale contains a hidden satire upon the methods of the Inquisition: The patent fact that the judge had to be a mulatto if his father was a Negro is never mentioned. Of decisive importance, however, is the subtle argument that he holds his hands the wrong way while saying his grace.

The tale ends (AT 920C) with the judge establishing who is the biological son and rightful heir, i.e. the son who would rather refuse his heritage than cut his father's coffin to pieces because only this son thus was able to prove that his father's blood was running in his veins. Of course, this motif goes back to the Biblical narrative of the Judgement of Solomon<sup>7</sup> and originates, as mentioned before, in Jewish narrative tradition. Goebel thinks that the motif of the desecration of the grave dates back from time immemorial and has its origin in a pre-animistic world of ideas where the deceased is not considered really dead as long as his body has not lost its bodily shape (Goebel 132:171). At the same time, the motif contains a very distinct paternalistic interpretation of the meaning of matrimony as sacrament: To secure fatherhood within lawful wedlock so that the right of heritage follows the biological bonds from father to son.

As is the case with a number of other narratives, both the tale of "Mother and Daughter" and that of "The Judge, who was the Son of a Black Coppersmith" tell of a tight and intimate relationship between mother and daughter. It is remarkable that so many narratives of unfaithfulness and premarital sexual experiences connect this motif with tales of solidarity and friendship between women, not only within the family, but also outside it and crossing social barriers. Moral rejection and concepts such as guilt and punishment are, as far as I see it, never introduced.

I have found two narratives from Ataíde Oliveira that combine the themes of premarital sexual experiences and unfaithfulness with female solidarity in an unusual constellation. They are two novelistic tales, *A Virgem Santíssima* (The Holy Virgin), vol. I, p. 263, and, *O embarcadizo* (The Seaman), vol. I, p. 367. The resumé of the former is as follows:

#### *A Virgem Santíssima* The Holy Virgin

While out hunting, a newly married king meets a young girl whom he takes back home pretending that he is not married. He installs her in one of the many basement rooms of the house and comes secretly to visit her every night at midnight. The queen finds out about the relationship, but at first she takes no action on it. The situation goes on like this for a long time until the king must go to war. The girl has become pregnant in the meantime, and pours out her troubles to the king who comforts her that the Holy Virgin will take care of her during his absence. The queen has overheard this conversation. She disguises as the Holy Virgin and helps the young girl during and after the birth and puts the baby out to a nurse. The king returns and finds out that it is his wife who has taken care of the young girl. The king and his mistress ask the queen for forgiveness and the queen replies, "You I forgive. The young girl I have nothing to forgive, for she is without guilt".

The king asks his wife what he should do with the young girl and the queen answers that she should be sent to a retreat, the queen herself will see to the upbringing of the child. The girl kisses the queen's hands and they all became happy.

Comment: The interpretation of this tale is simple. The titles of king and queen are hyperboles, i.e. we are not talking of royalty, but only of persons of a higher station than the young girl. The tale is explicitly feminine, that is to say, the main protagonist is a woman, it is clearly meant for a female audience and to be told by a woman. It carries the message that it is regrettable, but normal, that a young girl is seduced, made pregnant and left by a married man, and that her hope of salvation rests with the female community and in the concrete case with the particular responsibility that the lady of the house must have for her entire household. Feelings like jealousy do not enter the picture. Both the wife's and the young girl's social status are locked, the position of the wife cannot be threatened, therefore she both can

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<sup>7</sup> The tale of Solomon was also known to the contemporary public outside its Biblical context, as the story of Solomon and Marcolf was current in the Middle Ages, first in a Latin version and later translated into a number of national languages (Burke 1978:162).

and must show generosity. To a modern reader it sounds grotesque that the husband should comfort his young mistress with the words that the Holy Virgin will help her. It is not very likely that they should have been construed like this by an audience of earlier times to whom a high degree of fatalism and belief in the help of Providence was the rule. Moreover, the Virgin Mary is known as the patron saint for childbirth and motherhood.

On a closer examination of the motifs and origins of the tale the message of the narrative emerges more clearly. The tale is not registered with Aarne-Thompson, but it belongs under AT 880-899 (faith and innocence)<sup>8</sup>. The Portuguese folktale may be seen as a counter-version to Ovid's story about Semele (*Metamorphoses*, 3rd song, 232-259): there we hear about the furious wife of Jupiter, Juno, who, angry that Jupiter has made Semele pregnant, takes a cruel revenge. Here we are talking about a Christian version telling about forgiveness and charity – and especially about the dependence of women and their need for mutual loyalty.

It has not been possible to place a date on the origin of "The Holy Virgin" in the version we know. In principle, Ovid may have been known to anybody who knew Latin, but in Portugal Ovid figured on The Index Librorum Prohibitorum of the Inquisition. This could very well be one of the reasons why a, from a religious point of view, more correct narrative was cut from the same cloth as Ovid's story about Semele. A tale like this seems to be in support of the theory that certain folktales emerge from sunken cultural repositories. "The Holy Virgin" is mentioned by Aurelio Espinosa who sees a certain connection between this Portuguese tale and the Spanish narrative "Maria del Carmen" in which the youngest daughter disguises herself as a nun (Espinosa 1946:227, vol. II).

I view the details of "The Holy Virgin" as cruel social realism. In Portugal, as in many other places round the world, it was not uncommon that the master of the house made the maid servants pregnant. The narrative clearly demonstrates that such conditions were not attractive to the young girl. Her absolute isolation in the basement regions must be viewed as a hyperbole serving to demonstrate her feelings of isolation. First we hear that the child is put out to a nurse, later that the mistress of the house will take care of the child's upbringing. The audience was probably well aware that the latter outcome was not a very likely one; and they must have known that unwanted children put out to a nurse or an "angel maker" would rarely survive.

It is a common feature of these tales that the young girl who has had premarital experiences is regarded as naïve and not to blame for her own situation. To the audience, it would be beyond doubt that it was the responsibility of the family to take care of their daughters in order to prevent them getting into trouble. There are numerous examples in folk tales of locked-up young girls where I find it evident that their confinement must not be taken literally, but must be seen as a symbol of the young girl's feeling of being exposed to an uncomfortable degree of control<sup>9</sup>. The following tale contains a clear example of such a symbolic rendering of a young girl's feeling of confinement.

### *O Embarcadiço (The Sailor)*

Once there was a man who spent half his time to sea and the other half ashore. He traded with foreign ports and gathered a vast fortune. He married and eventually God gave him a daughter of whom it was prophesied that when she became fourteen she would become thievish, sottish and a tart.

The father became sad and decided to kill the child and on her day of christening he locked her up in a cupboard without her mother knowing and a few days after the mother died. The father became terrified at being the cause of two deaths and went away and did not return until twelve years later. Then he married a good woman. When the woman heard that the man would be home for Christmas she decided to have her houses whitewashed. While the painter was whitewashing he heard a beautiful and melancholy music and

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<sup>8</sup> The tale has been classified in the Portuguese Index of Folktales (soon to be published) as 890 \*B (Cardigos) and another version from the Alentejo is also registered (note of the editor).

<sup>9</sup> I have used the term symbol in accordance with Bengt Holbek's definitions in his *Interpretation of Fairytales*. He defines symbol as an element imparting an emotional impression of an aspect of a person, a phenomenon or an event in the real world. Contrary to symbol, a metaphor covers an objective impression, and, according to Holbek, metaphors do not occur in fairy tales.

this he communicated to the mistress of the house who also had also been hearing the music. When she became alone in the evening she broke down the wall and found the girl who told her that she had spent thirteen years in the cupboard. During this long time she had been given food and drink by an angel and the angel had told her that her stepmother would be like a mother to her and would know to temper her fate.

The stepmother kissed the girl and decided to pass her off as her godchild to the girl's father and everybody else. A few days later, the husband arrived and his wife told him that the girl was her goddaughter whom she had taken into her home to keep her company.

When the man went away again and the girl soon would be fourteen years old the stepmother planned how she could fight Fate. She took care that the prediction would come true and that the girl was given the opportunity to steal and drink but once, upon which she would no longer feel the urge. When the girl felt like sleeping with a man the stepmother saw to it that she slept with a rich bachelor and after three days the girl talked no more about men.

When the sailor came home he found his wife pregnant and his wife's goddaughter in bed. After some time his wife gave birth to a boy and she proposed that the rich merchant should become godfather to the boy. When the man became displeased with this proposal she decided to tell him the true facts. "I found it a nasty thing to make it public that your daughter has had a child when she isn't married", the wife said. "But why does the merchant not marry my daughter?" "With whom should he negotiate the wedding when you are the bride's father?" That same evening, the sailor talked with the merchant and the marriage was arranged. Thanks to good advice from her stepmother the girl could be married without shame. Many celebrations were held on that occasion. I was there and they gave me nothing.

Comment: The tale is of an unusual type, viz. a variant of AT 934E "stepmother helps young girl with overcoming her evil fate". It is not usual to meet a good stepmother in tales and I have not been able to find other Portuguese versions of this tale. I find it rather probable that the narrative has a literary source and perhaps has its origin in a chapbook.

It is generally agreed that the dichotomy between the good mother and the wicked stepmother in fairy tales must be regarded as a symbolic splitting of the child's positive and negative feelings towards its mother. Of course we may be talking of a reverse splitting in this tale, but in my opinion it will be more natural to understand the stepmother as a real-life stepmother.

In my interpretation of this tale I shall use Holbek's theory of interpretation of symbolic elements in fairy tales (Holbek 1986). The somewhat peculiar details about the confinement in a cupboard and the angel providing food are more easily understood when we realise that the confinement is a hyperbole the simple meaning of which is that the girl feels that she is being brought up too strictly by her father and that he does not care enough for her. Likewise, the prophecy tells us only that the father thinks that his daughter is going to grow up in a disadvantageous way.

This interpretation is corroborated by the fact that the stepmother shows no surprise at finding the stepdaughter and when the stepmother wants to set her free it is no longer a cupboard that must be opened, but a wall that must be broken down. Thus the broken-down wall eminently symbolises the two persons' feelings of coming on intimate terms with each other. It may seem odd that the stepmother finds the girl when she is going to have her houses whitewashed on the purpose of her husband's coming home for Christmas. An obvious thing would be to interpret this whitewashing of the house as a symbolic action, but it would not be amiss to direct the attention to the fact that in the Algarve region it is normal procedure to have the facades of the houses whitewashed once a year.

The tale is not only the story about the development of a young girl. It has two protagonists and is just as much about the grown-up woman as it, on a more general level, is about her responsibility towards the young person entrusted to her care. The audience is also informed of the father's role. Within the domestic sphere he plays a secondary role, but it is only the girl's father who can call on the prospective son-in-law and negotiate his marrying the girl. If the girl's father himself does not understand that this is a man's business then his wife is there to teach him.

Holbek mentions that a young couple sleeping together before the wedding may be seen as a reminiscence of the usage of earlier times when it was accepted that young lovers slept "on the pledge of their word" (Holbek 1986). This phenomenon is also known in Portugal, but, as far as I am able to judge, it is another culturally determined phenomenon which lies behind the information given in this narrative about the young couple sleeping

together for three days during the father's absence. We hear that when the time is up, i.e. when the girl has become interested in men, the stepmother has picked a rich bachelor to whom she manages to introduce her stepdaughter. Most of all, this looks like an, in Portugal, formerly well known trick for providing the family with a son-in-law of a higher social standing. The family succeeds in luring the chosen one into a compromising situation with the young daughter of the house. Thereafter the father calls upon the young man's family demanding satisfaction, in other words, that the man marries the girl. It is probably this method of getting an awkward daughter married that is recommended in "The Sailor". Unfortunately I have not been able to find any written sources on this practice.

#### CONCLUSION

It is striking that narratives about premarital sexual experiences and conjugal infidelity occur in large numbers in Ataíde Oliveira's collection of folk tales from Algarve in Portugal. The tales I have examined link the themes of unfaithfulness and premarital experiences together with descriptions of confidence and helpfulness among women, both within the family, and outside it, and even crossing social boundaries. Rivalry and moral rejection do not occur and in this respect these narratives differ a great deal from the fairy tales in which rivalry very often is the cause of the basic conflict.

Within folkloristic research there is a certain tendency to view the trading of oral literature as being ahistoric and constant within a culture. I think it might be fruitful to ask whence has come the motivation for trading certain motifs and themes in preference to others. In what has been said above, I have pointed at religious currents in connection with the Counter-Reformation, but it is also very obvious that the Portuguese tales we find with Ataíde Oliveira bear witness of having been present for a long time and of multiple cultural influences.

Undoubtedly, there is a need for further contextualisation of this type of tales because not only are they reflections of predominant attitudes in society, but they also serve to integrate conflicting tensions in society. Above all, the tales are illustrative of fields of tension between culturally determined attitudes and views of life and the religious outlook predominant in pre-modern Portugal.

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#### RESUMO

São discutidos quatro contos populares, jocosos ou novelescos, provenientes dos Contos do Algarve de Francisco Xavier Ataíde Oliveira. Apesar de estes contos representarem tipos diferentes e origens diversas, demonstram uma característica comum na medida em que aparece em todos uma combinação entre os temas da infidelidade sexual feminina e da lealdade e ajuda entre mulheres. Procuramos contextualizar os textos e apresentamos a hipótese de que a combinação destes temas possa reflectir tensões reais de ordem social e religiosa na sociedade.

#### ABSTRACT

Four jocular and novelistic folktales are discussed which appear in *Contos Tradicionais do Algarve* by Francisco Xavier Ataíde Oliveira. Even though these tales represent different types and different origins, they have the common denominator of female sexual infidelity and solidarity between women. We try to contextualise the texts and put forward the hypothesis that the combination of these themes may reflect real tensions of the social and religious orders within society.