

Jorge Andrade's São Paulo Cycle

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In October 1970, Jorge Andrade published his collected plays in one single volume—almost six hundred pages, with the addition of sixty-four pages of commentaries by various critics—, under the at first sight intriguing title *Marta, a Árvore e o Relógio* (“Martha, the Tree, and the Clock”).¹

The contemporary Brazilian playwright set himself a demanding task: to rearrange eight plays in such a way that they would form a cycle. For the purpose, he added two more plays, one at the beginning, the other at the end, so that the whole cycle consisted of ten plays. The two additional plays serve as a frame and place the others in a historical perspective. The first, *As Confrarias* (“The Brotherhoods”), takes us to the incipient movement towards Brazilian independence that occurred in several mining towns while, as the author shows, caste and class distinctions were being perpetuated through the religious brotherhoods. The last play, *O Sumidouro* (“The Sinkhole”), plunges even deeper into history, presenting in a new light the lifelong search for fabled emeralds by Fernão Dias Pais, one of the hardbitten pioneers of São Paulo.

Three important devices were used to weld the diverse plays into one organic whole.

The first is chronological progression. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century in *As Confrarias*, the action proceeds to the present time, first by giant steps—from around 1790 to 1842 to 1929, then by small advances, as the third play and the three that follow it are supposed to take place in 1929 and the early thirties. The seventh and eighth plays are placed in an unspecified but subsequent present, which could correspond to the years of their first performances, or 1961 and 1963 respectively. The ninth, however, encompasses events spaced between 1922 and 1965, while the tenth spans four hundred years, as its action oscillates between the end of the seventeenth century (thus rejoining the colonial past evoked in the first play) and 1970, or whatever future year the play may be performed. It is being composed before our eyes by three of

the actors: the playwright Vicente, who is debating his problem of identity, now with his twentieth century wife, now with his seventeenth-century character, the old Paulista pioneer.

The second structural means of unification is a chain of repeated situations, which make the plays resemble a poem in which the last line of each stanza would be identical with the first line of the next.² Thus, the first play, *As Confrarias*, presents a widow asking in vain one brotherhood after another to provide burial for her only son, who has been killed because he spoke up for liberty. The second, *Pedreira das Almas* (though a place name, it has a symbolic meaning: "Quarry of the Souls"), starts off with another politically motivated killing of a young man, whose burial the occupied town delays until his mother expires by his side and the government's soldiery withdraws. His sister feels obligated to remain with the dead, renouncing her lover and his dream of leading the townspeople from the sterile, rocky mining town to the green western lands.

Likewise, young Lucília places loyalty to her family above romance and marriage in the third play, *A Moratória* ("The Moratorium"). She stays with her dispossessed parents to support them with her labor as a dressmaker, to the distress of her father, who still acts the aristocrat, although he has lost his coffee plantation in the crash of 1929 and cannot count on Marcelo, his only son.

In the fourth play, *O Telescópio* ("The Telescope"), another patriarchal planter tries to redirect the lives of his quarrelsome children, who are caricatures of his own self-centeredness. Foreseeing the imminent breakup of the family and its ancient land holdings, he escapes into the remote calm of the starry heavens, which he watches through his telescope until even that instrument is demolished by a drunken son. In the fifth play, *Vereda da Salvação* ("Path to Salvation"), a young, impotent fanatic is the one to escape from a hopeless condition. He, a landless plantation sharecropper, lives the faith of an adventist sect to the point of madness, imagining himself to be Jesus Christ and persuading the whole wretched community that they will bodily fly with him to heavenly paradise. The chief victim of this man Joaquim is Manuel, the former, more practical-minded leader. Manuel's daughter Ana tries in vain to save her father, just as Dolor tries in vain to save Joaquim, her fanatic son, before all are massacred by the police.

The police also intervene in the sixth play, *Senhora na Bôca do Lixo* ("Lady in the Garbage Pit"), to maintain an unjust order. Here, the cancer is the large scale smuggling carried on by a ring involving society ladies, among them the widow Dona Noêmia, who almost destroys her daughter Camila's happiness in the process. All these charming people escape scot-free, while Hélió, the zealous young police officer who caught them is reprimanded. This Hélió forms a living link with the previous play: it was he who led the raid on the deluded sharecroppers.

As Camila had tried to keep her pretentious mother from committing fraud, so Maria Clara, the hardworking seamstress, tries to stop her father, Antenor, from selling real estate that no longer belongs to the family in *A Escada* ("The Staircase"). Like Joaquim, the bankrupt planter in *A Moratória*, Antenor has put his faith into a hopeless lawsuit to regain lost lands. The

caste and race prejudice that accompany his delusion of grandeur torment his granddaughter Zilda, for Zilda is desperately in love with a nice young man, who happens to be a black truckdriver's son.

Love between social unequals prevails in the eighth play, *Os Ossos do Barão* ("The Baron's Bones"), where Martino, the son of a wealthy Italian immigrant, gets his Isabel, scion of São Paulo's pioneers. All the social taboos are broken by her, with the connivance of her practical-minded mother. The money and shrewd scheming of Martino's father Egisto make it possible for the next generation to recuperate everything the pioneer family ever owned, even the bones of the Baron, their legendary ancestor.

Just as Isabel's father Miguel had paid a visit to the past by appearing in Egisto's "old" mansion, once the pioneer family's own, there is a visit to the past in the ninth play, *Rastro atrás* ("Backtracking"). Having reached middle age, the playwright Vicente feels unsure of himself and decides to visit his boyhood home, in the hope of meeting his father, from whom he has been estranged for many years. The hoped-for reconciliation occurs, but not without a fearful glimpse into their past quarrels and into the desperate poverty of the old maiden aunts still living at home, forsaken by the men in the family.

A reconciliation with the past also takes place in the last play, *O Sumidouro* ("The Sinkhole"). The past is not a private one this time, but the historical, public past of *Paulista* society, in the persons of the *bandeirante* Fernão Dias Pais, his family and his followers. The same playwright Vicente reappears to bring him back to life, for Vicente needs to understand what Fernão did to alienate his son José Dias. Moreover, he wants to make each understand the other's right to his aim in life: the father's to his quest for the fabled Emerald Range and the son's to his quest for freedom from foreign (Portuguese) domination. To bring about mutual comprehension, Vicente causes the tragic execution of the son by the father to be reenacted. And thus, the cycle is completed: as in the first play, *As Confrarias*, one more young man dies a victim of politics, the "great causes in whose name men are used," as Vicente remarks.³

One more important element of integration must be mentioned. It is the one character that appears or is named in every one of the ten dramas, although prominently only in *As Confrarias*. She is the symbolical figure of Martha: Martha, the Saint (Plays 2 and 5); Martha, the enigmatic old woman (Plays 7 and 10); Martha, the hardheaded, practical female (Plays 3, 8, 9); and most frequently, Martha, the strong mother and consoler, always watching over her children, appearing in the last play as the Indian Mother of the Nation, the woman who gave Fernão Dias Pais a son, the handsome and proud Mestizo José Dias (Plays 1, 4, 6, 10). At the same time, she speaks the very last lines, as Martha, the watchful servant: "Searching . . . searching . . . searching . . . , what more could he have done?"⁴

Martha is one of many symbols found in the plays, and is the most persuasive of the three that furnish the title to the entire work. No other is really bound up with the plot, although all three suggest the same thing: continuity. The clock, a family heirloom, is dragged into the plays with varying connotations. Sometimes, without its hands, it seems to symbolize timeless tradition; then, with hands intact and moving, a faithfully observed routine of work; and then

again, having stopped, stagnation. The tree gains significance only in the first play and the last, suggesting roots in the soil, as well as the entangled and entangling vegetation that hampers progress.⁵

The effort of unifying the plays through symbols has not been carried as far as it might have been. A comparison between the earlier versions of several of the plays shows that Marta in particular was originally absent from them or, if such a character appeared, it had a different name—Ismália in *Os Ossos do Barão* or simply "The Mother" (*A Mãe*) in *Senhora na Bôca do Lixo*. Within the 1970 Cycle, she remains an insignificant, shadowy personage in *A Moratória*, *O Telescópio*, *Vereda da Salvação* and *Rasto Atrás*. Even in *Vereda da Salvação*, the only one of the four plays where a "Marta" has an acting part, this occurs only when one of the members of the sect, Durvalina, changes into the biblical figure named Marta and not because of any identification with the "Martas" of the other plays. On the other hand, a "Marta" speaks the last, significant lines not only in *O Sumidouro* but in *As Confrarias* and in *Senhora na Bôca do Lixo*. This halfway symbolization has led one critic, Francisco Iglésias, to suspect, perhaps in a moment of wishful thinking, that *O Sumidouro* cannot be Jorge Andrade's last word in the theatre. After listing the appearances of "Marta" in the ten plays he concludes that "what we have here is a series of elements that add up to a many-faceted character. The author cannot escape from the play (about her): he must be working on it now. And perhaps it will become the first of a new cycle."⁶

In addition, the ten plays are unified by a theme that runs through all of them, and furthermore by the place of action. The unifying theme appears to be the struggle of a series of younger generations—those who live in the present—for the right to shape their own destiny, regardless of their elders' wishes, and of the past in general. What heightens the conflict is that the older generations are so powerful, having on their side the weight of a code of behavior, of traditions, prejudices, and the very institutions of the land, from the brotherhoods of the first play to the royal Portuguese administration of the last. The place of the conflict is always Brazil, the author's native country, but reduced to the region where his own family has its roots, specifically the north-eastern border of São Paulo State, including the metropolis of the same name, and the adjoining territory in southern Minas Gerais.

The unity of place is actually quite complex, and so is the basic theme of the Cycle. The plays present much more than regional literature. They mirror the ancient conflict between city and countryside. At the same time, the action moves with the history of settlement and migration in Brazil. Dealing with the quest for the good life in a New World, for an earthly paradise, the Cycle in its perpetual motion dramatizes the saga of human migration everywhere. City and countryside are contrasted through conflicting outlooks so that this conflict complicates the basic theme of the struggle between the generations. The younger people tend to prefer the city, where the traditional prejudices of the closed upper classes encounter the leveling pull of the masses which are both cosmopolitan and nationalistic at the same time. The struggle between the generations is reenacted throughout the Cycle, as sons and daughters rebel against the desires of mothers or fathers, beginning with the stubborn farmer

Sebastião of *As Confrarias*, who remains attached to the land, while his son José prefers the roving life of an actor, and ending with José Dias, the half-breed who turns against his father in *O Sumidouro*.

A further dimension is added to the conflict in three of the final plays, where it is identified with the author's own struggle for independence from his father, the planter.⁷ Jorge Andrade disguises himself as Vicente in them, but the self-portrayal is unmistakable since both figure as authors of some of the same plays in the Cycle.⁸ We learn most about the personal dimension of the basic theme in *Rasto atrás*, the next-to-the-last play. Here a middle-aged Vicente, doubting himself, decides to return to the small town of his birth in order to approach his father João José, with whom he had broken twenty years before. Their quarrel is re-lived: the playwright as a young man of twenty-three confronts his father. The father literally slaps the son down. Vicente leaves, exclaiming: "I shall win out. Do you hear? I don't want to have anything in common with you. Not even your name!"⁹

The son's costly victory is symbolically acted out in the final scene, as the old father comes home to embrace his now famous son, the playwright, and to die. The homecoming provides the encouragement Vicente needed, as well as a laying to rest of the demons of the past (p. 534). Through Vicente, we, too, are invited to overcome any fear we may have of facing the unsolved problems in our past, and thus to be set free. Doors must be opened. In *A Escada*, the seventh play, where Vicente the playwright first appeared, he had told his wife how tempted he felt to open the door to his old parents' room. In the earlier version of 1964, Vicente had added: "But, I don't like to open the door. I don't quite know what keeps me from doing it."¹⁰ In the 1970 version, these reluctant words have changed to: "Do you know what, Izabel? I'd like to open doors, to see how people live, to discover how they would like to live . . . and to write about the difference."¹¹ It is significant that the new version harks back to advice said to have been given by Arthur Miller, when Andrade visited him in 1958.¹²

Other changes with which Jorge Andrade tried to unify the plays bear on details, such as the addition of numerous allusions to earlier characters and the repeated mentions of a mythical forebear, the Baron of Jaraguá or of a mythical place, the small town of Jaborandi, faintly resembling Barretos, the author's native town.

The obstacles which Jorge Andrade had to overcome were great. The plays are heterogeneous in character; some are rural, others urban, some have historical plots, others deal with contemporary manners. At least two are comedies while others are serious middle class dramas, and at least two are tragedies, notably the last, in which the *Paulista* pioneer kills his own son as a traitor. Moreover, the vast majority of characters, including the principal ones, differ from play to play.

Having been written over a period of almost twenty years, between 1951 and 1970, the plays also vary because of their references to subjects that were topical in their time, such as the campaigns to recuperate national resources from foreign exploitation. Similarly, they introduce different new devices, among them the divided stage in *A Moratória* (1955). Ever since, Andrade has been

well known as a skillful experimenter with staging techniques. His preferences, as well as his high standards, become apparent when we see four photographs hanging on the walls of Vicente's room in *O Sumidouro*: two large portraits of Chekhov and Eugene O'Neill, two smaller ones of Arthur Miller and Bertolt Brecht (p. 531).

The Cycle grew beyond a search for the historical roots of São Paulo, although the symbols of the overall title continue to suggest the concern with social history: the matriarch, the (family) tree, the (family) clock. Psychological problems loom larger, especially the need of the sons to assert their independent manhood. Perhaps "A quest for identity through the conflict of the generations" would describe the underlying driving force. The dialectic of the generations emerges ever more clearly as the Cycle moves along. It is treated more effectively in some plays, to be sure—in *A Moratória*, *O Telescópio* and *Rasto Atrás*—than in others that are overlaid with other themes. Among the latter, *Vereda da Salvação* is at least as powerful a tragedy as the other three, with its additional conflict between the reality of wretchedness and the promise of heavenly bliss. The insertion or discussion of historical documents gives a contemporary critical flavor to *As Confrarias* and *O Sumidouro*, but it also slows down their dramatic motion. Quick reversals of situation and social satire provide theatrical entertainment in the two comedies, *Senhora na Bôca do Lixo* and *Os Ossos do Barão*; by the same token, they invite much less thought.

In many ways, Jorge Andrade has tried to unify the ten plays of his Cycle: he provided a historical framework for them through the addition of two historical plays; he changed the order in which the plays had been written so as to put them into a strictly chronological sequence; he added many cross-references to characters, places and events, as in the case of the character(s) called "Marta," originally absent from most; he changed four plays but little (*A Moratória*, *Vereda da Salvação*, *Os Ossos do Barão* and *Rasto Atrás*), while alternating four others considerably. Thus, he removed entire scenes from *Senhora na Bôca do Lixo* with the result that the priest and other influential society friends of Dona Noêmia are eliminated from the cast. He expanded an important scene in *A Escada*, the one between Zilda and Omar, the two young lovers of different race and class (pp. 384-386). He refashioned the dialogues between Mariana and Gabriel in *Pedreira das Almas* and thus gave Mariana a more vigorous character. And he filled *O Telescópio* with extended references to the symbolical family clock, to the fanaticized tenants that were to appear in *Vereda da Salvação*, to João José the hunter, foreshadowing *Rasto Atrás*, to the aristocratic airs that were to be made fun of in *Os Ossos do Barão*, to the sturdy forebears that had appeared in *Pedreira das Almas*. Nevertheless, the overall length of each play remained more or less unchanged. This he did through numerous cuts in speeches and stage remarks.

Although it is much too varied—fortunately—to be completely unified, the São Paulo Cycle leaves an impression of unity. It is admirable and unique as an attempt to combine no fewer than ten plays. Such scope is unrivaled except in the realm of the realistic novel.¹³ A common aim connects the two; both set out to study a given society through representative individuals. Having completed this study, which had been on his mind since 1951, the year of his first

play, the one-act *O Telescópio*, Jorge Andrade considered his mission as a playwright fulfilled and decided to leave the stage to younger playwrights with different ideas about the function of drama.¹⁴

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Notes

1. Coll. Textos em Teatro. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1970. 658 pages.

At least three plays, *As Colunas do Templo* ("The Columns of the Temple"), *O Incêndio* ("The Fire"), and *A Receita* ("The Recipe") were excluded. *As Colunas do Templo* was written in 1953, after *O Telescópio*, his first play (1951). It has never been published, nor is it likely that it was performed, in spite of winning second place in the 1954 competition for the Fábio Prado Prize in São Paulo. *O Incêndio* was mentioned as unpublished by Sábato Magaldi, in his introduction, "Dos Bens ao Sangue" ("From Property to Blood"), to *Os Ossos do Barão* (1963). The one-act play *A Receita* was written in 1968 for the "First Opinion Fair of São Paulo," a performance of dramatic comments on the contemporary situation in Brazil by several of São Paulo's playwrights. Further titles have been mentioned by George W. Woodyard in "The Search for Identity: A Comparative Study in Contemporary Latin American Drama" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois, 1967). They are *Os Vinculos* ("The Links," about 1960, in collaboration with Clô Prado) and *Um Sapato no Living* ("A Shoe in the Livingroom," 1965). According to the author, the second of these has not yet been given its definitive form. "(A peça) não foi realizada," he stated in a letter of June 3, 1971. Woodyard also points out that *As Colunas do Templo* is the revised version of an earlier play, *O Faqueiro de Prata* ("The Table Silver").

2. In fact, Jorge Andrade composed a preface in the form of a poem that is like a litany or a musical overture. In succession, it announces the motifs of the ten plays as experienced in the life of a boy, from his birth to his "liberation." The lyrical tone thus set was reinforced by quotations from Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poem "O Fazendeiro do Ar" ("The Aerial Planter"), which function as preludes to the various plays.

3. Vicente: *A usança do homem em nome de grandes causas . . .* (p. 556). All page references are to the 1970 edition of the Cycle that was mentioned in the first note.

4. Marta: *Procurar . . . procurar . . . procurar . . . que mais poderia ter feito . . . ?* (p. 594).

5. The new title of the Cycle tells perhaps less with its three symbols than the title Jorge Andrade had chosen when he had first planned a sequence of four plays, *As Raízes da Terra* ("The Roots in the Land"). The original tetralogy was to portray the origins, rise and fall of the planter families of São Paulo. Its four plays were to be *Pedreira das Almas*, *Sesmarias do Rosário* ("The Grants on Rosario Creek," projected but not written), *A Moratória*, and *O Telescópio*.

6. *Tem-se aí uma série de elementos configuradores de personagem rica. O autor não pode fugir à peça, deve estar agora trabalhando-a. Ela talvez venha a ser a primeira de outro ciclo.* (Francisco Iglésias, "O Teatro de Jorge Andrade," *Suplemento Literário, O Estado de S.Paulo*, March 7, 1971, pp. 3, 5.) Similarly, Fredrick C. H. Garcia voiced his doubts in his written comments on this essay, presented last April at the Northeastern Modern Language Association meeting in Philadelphia. He would not take seriously "his fellow countryman's protestations," voiced by the playwright Vicente in *O Sumidouro*, that this was the last play he would ever write.

7. *A Escada*, *Rasto Atrás*, and *O Sumidouro*.

8. The first play, *As Conjarias*, and the eighth, *Os Ossos do Barão*, are alluded to by Vicente in the seventh, *A Escada*.

9. Vicente: *Eu vou vencer. Está ouvindo? Não quero nada seu. Nem seu nome!* (p. 523).

10. Vicente: *Mas, não gosto de abri-la! Não sei bem o que me impede!* (*A Escada*, São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1964.)

11. Vicente (Animando-se): *Sabe, Isabel? Gostaria de abrir portas, ver como as pessoas vivem, descobrir como gostariam de viver . . . e escrever sobre a diferença* (p. 367).

12. Após "*A Moratória*," Jorge Andrade ganhou do governo norte-americano uma bolsa para estudar teatro nos Estados Unidos. Lá, conversando largamente com o dramaturgo Arthur Miller—na época considerado o maior escritor de teatro da América—este lhe aconselhou: "*Volte para o seu país e procure descobrir por que os homens são o que são e não o que gostariam de ser, e escreva sobre a diferença.*" Delmiro Gonçalves, "Introdução," p. 11.

("After *A Moratória*, Jorge Andrade received a scholarship from the American Government,

to study the theater in the United States. There, he had a long conversation with the dramatist Arthur Miller, then considered the greatest American playwright, in the course of which the latter advised him: 'Return to your country and try to find out why men are what they are and not what they would like to be, and then write about the difference.'")

13. Dramatic cycles exist in many literatures. Probably best known among the modern ones are some to be found in the Germanic literatures, such as Shakespeare's, Richard Wagner's, Friedrich Hebbel's and Franz Grillparzer's. According to information kindly supplied by Professor Helen Adolf in Philadelphia, August Strindberg wrote a series of seven dramas on as many Swedish kings, three more on royal regents, and two others on related themes in Swedish history. With these twelve plays about Swedish history, Strindberg appears to hold the record in dramatic cycles.

It must not be inferred that the Brazilian playwright intended consciously to emulate those Europeans. His effort follows and parallels the cycles of socio-economic novels written in his own country by authors such as José Lins do Rêgo and Érico Veríssimo, both of whom could be found the themes of the passing of the old order and of the younger generation's move from the countryside to the city.

14. When I visited Jorge Andrade in São Paulo on July 22, 1970, he told me that he had ended his dramatic career with this Cycle, a project he had conceived when starting out as a playwright. In the future he intended to write novels. However, it seems unlikely that an author who had enjoyed his intimate and successful relationship with the stage could abandon it entirely. As a playwright, Jorge Andrade has yet to say his last word about man in contemporary Brazil.