

## The *auto* Tradition in Brazilian Drama

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The *auto*, as a dramatic form, has been neglected by modern scholars and theatre critics even though various *auto* styles have endured throughout the centuries to the present day. The lack of critical concern has led to numerous misconceptions, causing some to reject the *auto* as unworthy of modern dramatic consideration.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, contemporary dramatists continue to employ traditional *auto* forms as a conveyance to express the social and metaphysical needs of modern man.

Unfortunately, very little has been done to trace the trajectory of *auto* development from early peninsular models to current Latin American forms. The microcosmic *auto* production in Brazil stands as exemplary of many regions which have cultivated this drama. The Brazilian stage affords a cross section of *auto* styles and themes utilized by many Latin American dramatists.

The Brazilian *auto* structure has its origins in the European medieval liturgical theatre, including such works as the *Visitatio Sepulchri*, *Officium Pastorum*, *Officium Stellae*, and early renaissance works of religious content.<sup>2</sup> Eclogues and pastoral colloquies, in addition to *farsas* and *autos viejos* were composed by early dramatists, most notably Gil Vicente.

The first recorded dramatic works that are recognized as *autos*, and carry that title, were nothing more than simple dialogues on Biblical subjects. In 1502, the pastoral *auto* by Gil Vicente, *Auto Pastoril Castelhana*, was written upon the request of Queen Leonor, widow of D. João II of Portugal, and presented in the Paço de Alcaçova in Lisbon.<sup>3</sup> This *auto*, of the Nativity type, exemplifies the mixture of boisterous pastoral humor and Christian religious piety essential to the Nativity play and to the pastoral farce. The work terminates in the solemn adoration of the Christ child, complete with singing and dancing. The *Auto dos Reis Magos*, 1503, is also basically a Nativity *auto*. The thematic intent is more unified in this play than in the former, but farcical buffoonery is still present. Here, the traditional pastoral characters searching for Christ are united in the final

manger scene. The *Auto da Sibila Cassandra*, 1503, breaks with the tradition and casts a curious mixture of pagan and Hebraic-Christian characters. The two poles unite in the theme of the virgin birth and the characteristic manger scene. The structure of this play is interesting because of its division into two parts. It is evident that each part composes a unit which could be considered an act, constituting an *auto* in two acts. The *Auto de São Martinho*, 1504, is an example of a work based on the life of a saint, a form frequently presented in Latin America.

Many contemporary scholars claim that sacramental inferences are basic to the *auto* forms from their inception. However, the early *autos* by Gil Vicente lack sacramental elements or Eucharistic dogma, even though the work *Auto de São Martinho* was presented and written for the festivities of the *Santíssimo Sacramento*, or Corpus Christi. It cannot be said that sacramental allusions are of primary concern to the *auto* of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Consequently, the early drama, that *auto* brought to the New World, was not a Eucharistic play nor did it necessarily contain allegory. And, although it might not have formal act divisions, as in the *Auto da Sibila Cassandra*, these were often implied. This dramatic expression contained many of the Vicentian constituents previously mentioned as basic to the *auto* performance. In addition, playwrights perpetuated the basic Hebraic-Christian religious tradition, and the ethical theme of the struggle between good and evil (Christianity versus paganism). This was the *auto* technique transplanted to the Americas in the early sixteenth century and preserved through tradition and necessity by clerics and laymen alike. The rudimentary Vicentian and pre-Vicentian liturgical *auto* forms set the precedents for the religious theatre.

These simple theatrical forms were adapted to the religious problems at hand, and the *auto* style and subject matter lent itself perfectly to the task of catechization. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that religious fervor is inevitably offset by profane elements. In Gil Vicente puns and folk play are combined with reverence for sacred subjects. In the colonial *auto* these same characteristics are noted, with the addition of autochthonous jest, and even some obscene symbolism.

Brazil had an active colonial *auto* stage, and its missionary theatre followed a development similar to that of other regions of Latin America. It was to be expected that secular components, such as the Indian legends and language would impregnate these dramas: "O teatro da Companhia, com escopo essencialmente humano e progressivo, nos seus começos divertia, entretinha e ensinava o índio, com elementos tirados da vida *brasileira* de então, *anhangas*, plumagens, expressões tupis. . ."<sup>4</sup>

It is apparent that the settlers had instituted simple religious dramas in the different Captaincies primarily for their own entertainment, but these works caused some censorship difficulties with the ecclesiastical authorities. They turned out to be more farcical than religious.

The Jesuit priest and scholar, José de Anchieta, born in the Canary Islands, was sent to Brazil by the Order for reasons of health after studying and taking his vows in Coimbra. He arrived with the second Governor General, D. Duarte da Costa, in 1553. In 1567, the provincial Jesuit head, Father Manuel de Nóbrega,

having learned of Anchieta's dramatic talent, asked for his aid in "substituir alguns abusos que se faziam com autos nas igrejas. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

There is ample record that *Auto de Santo Iago* was presented in 1564. This piece was sanctioned by some Jesuits but not staged by the Order itself. It seems to have been a devout religious dramatization. Father Antônio Blasque comments as follows: "Deixei de referir um auto que fizeram do glorioso Santo Iago, muito devoto, e o regozijo a prazer com que se passou aquêlê dia, porque, com serem passatempos de gente de fora, não faz tanto ao nosso propósito relatá-los. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

José de Anchieta, shortly after initiating his theatrical work, caught the imagination of Indians and colonials alike, creating a virtual monopoly of the Brazilian missionary theatre. In some ways, his drama was a continuation of many of the *auto* principles of the peninsula but he was also a great innovator of form and content. Adapting the drama to the needs of his audience, he molded and influenced the attitudes of his public. Anchieta insisted upon combining current historical figures with religious and allegorical characters. Apparently, he was the first playwright in Latin America to use the *auto* extensively as a political tool to change governmental attitudes and prejudices.<sup>7</sup> In this manner he aroused public opinion against traitors of the government and warring Indian chieftains. Also, the Brazilian religious theatre was used to greet important dignitaries, to celebrate important religious events, as well as to educate and catechize the Indian masses.

The *auto* production of José de Anchieta exemplifies the various missionary forms extant in the colonies. A perfect example of a piece dedicated to the arrival of magistrates or religious officials is *Recebimento que Fizeram os Indios Guara-parim ao Pe. Provincial Marçal Belliarte*.<sup>8</sup> The exposition of this drama is a flowery welcoming speech by one of the Indians, extolling the virtues of Belliarte specifically and of the self-sacrificing priests in general. Hardly a good example of character decorum, still the play no doubt flattered the traveling supervisor. Nevertheless, Anchieta weaves *auto* religious elements into the fabric of the salutation-exposition so as not to lose all semblance of dramatic thought. Were this not so, this work would be more correctly judged a *loa* introducing and praising a visiting dignitary than an *auto* with an independent spiritual and moral message.

Instead of works relating to saints' lives or Nativity scenes, Anchieta tries to give his plays greater realism and efficacy in the lives of his audience. The theme of his *autos* changes only immediately prior to Anchieta's death. Until then, it is almost always "the triumph of good over evil." The staging varies to an appreciable degree, but in his works written primarily for the benefit of the half-savage Indians, the style is simple, active and violent. The punishment of the Devil and his followers is usually bloody, which emphasizes the importance of fighting evil and entertains the Indians.

The very short *auto*, *Dia de Assumpção* like *As Onze Mil Virgens*, dramatizes the transporting of a religious relic from one parish to another. The forces of evil rally to prevent it, but those of good triumph in their intent. The *auto* is short and to the point. It has one act and approximates the medieval *mistério* or

*auto viejo* structure, never straying from its initial purpose of teaching and dramatizing religious precepts through moral behavior.

Anchieta also wrote *autos* based on legends and saints' lives. He especially enjoyed dramatizing the lives of martyrs. The principal work of this type is *Auto Representado na Festa de São Lourenço* (1583), written in three languages—Tupi, Spanish, and Portuguese. The work is a curious mixture of the comical and the sublime, common to the Latin American *auto*.

From the text in three languages and the erudite and cultured references, it is evident that the audience that witnessed this play could not have been comprised solely of unlettered Indians. It is written on a sophisticated level, but the references to Indian allies of the French and their ghastly defeat are directed at the Indian segment of the viewing public.

There are inexplicable digressions and doctrinal inconsistencies in this play. The saints and angels defeat the Devil's forces and then send them to fight against the Roman emperors who martyred the two saints being eulogized. This establishes collaboration between the forces of good and evil, and transforms hell into a penitentiary of heaven, elevating the devils to the level of judges who act in the name of God.

Guaixará, an Indian chieftain once allied with the French, begins to speak after the introductory scene of the martyrdom of São Lourenço, and he is a fine specimen of a diabolical, perverted demon:

Boa cousa é beber  
até vomitar cauim.  
Isso é apreciadíssimo  
. . . . .  
De enfurecer-se, andar matando,  
comer um ao outro, prender tapuias,  
amancebar-se, ser desonesto,  
. . . . .  
Para isso  
convivo com os índios,  
induzindo-os a acreditarem em mim.<sup>9</sup>

The political overtones are evident when the angel speaks to the audience about the abortive French attempts to destroy Portuguese coastal power, heightening the desire for a united, patriotic stand against any foreign power:

Os seus amigos franceses  
trouxeram inútilmente fuzis.  
Foram para eles terríveis  
as flechas de São Sebastião  
ao lado de São Lourenço.  
(SL, 53)

The work ends with children singing, dancing, praising God, and giving counsel. This play is much more concerned with local current events and history than other similar Latin American *auto* types. It does not neglect, however, the

thematic struggle between good and evil, with a regional characterization of the Devil. The most apparent deviations from the supposed standard patterns for *autos* are the lack of abstract allegorical characters, and the extended five-act structure of this work. Also, of course, there is the obvious absence of a Eucharistic sacramental message. However, none of these elements was ever imperative in the early *autos* nor in colonial forms.

The piece *Na Festa do Natal* (1584) is a reduced Christmas adaptation of the longer work *Auto de São Lourenço*. There is a decreased number of characters and the dialogues between them are shortened, but many of the speeches are almost identical, including those of Guaixará and Ambirê. Anchieta eliminated those parts that were superfluous to the basic action in the longer work (*Velha, Imperadores Romanos*, etc.), and he concentrates on the battle of wits between the two devils and the angel. This work demonstrates the traditional *auto* struggle and shows a more classic structure. Nevertheless, Anchieta still divides his theme into two parts: the struggle between good and evil and the Nativity. The only really inventive scenes commemorate the birth of Christ and concentrate on the Magi.

The Nativity act should be considered an independent entity only introduced by the other work. It is closely akin to the early peninsular Nativity plays of Gil Vicente and others which were adopted in colonial times, being slightly altered to incorporate the surrounding milieu and culture.

*Na Vila de Vitória* (1586), is an allegorical *auto* in three acts, constructed on Anchieta's favorite theme.<sup>10</sup> Here, Satanaz speaks Spanish and Lúçifer Portuguese. In this drama, Lúçifer is the leader and Satanaz acts as his henchman. Also, we observe a heightened interest in allegorical characters, such as Vila de Vitória, who personifies the proper village mentality.

Digressions are regular occurrences in Anchieta's *autos*, and sermonettes are a popular conveyance for ideas. Evidently, this work is directed at some of the town's people in hopes of correcting their vices and rebellious, anti-governmental sentiment. The playwright characterizes the people's selfish, thankless attitude towards the new Spanish governmental officials (after 1580), in the speech of the new ambassador who shouts;

. . . ¡viva Castilla,  
con toda su cortesía!  
Pues saber y policía  
hay en ella a maravilla  
y virtud en demasía.  
(VSI, 55)

To which Ingratitude replies in Portuguese:

¿Que diz êste castelhano,  
blasonador andaluz?  
(VSI, 57)

Finally, the old woman, Ingratitude, is run out of town and the new ambassador welcomed.

Often, Anchieta's *autos* are socially and politically motivated. He is close to the people and to the quotidian elements of life.

Perhaps, for the present study, one of the most interesting *autos* of José de Anchieta is *Na Visitação de Santa Isabel* (1595), written two years before his death. This work was prepared to be presented inside a chapel before mass. It is pious and short, written in Spanish, but containing none of the humor of previous works. It constitutes a genuine link with earlier medieval mystery plays and European *autos* written to be performed as a supplement to mass. The subject is the retelling of the regularly dramatized Bible text—the visit of Mary, the mother of Jesus, to her cousin, Isabel, the mother of John the Baptist. The work has neither act nor scene divisions as have most of the *autos* previously mentioned. It is a continuous metrical dialogue in perfect *auto viejo* style, including choral refrains sung throughout the play to emphasize the theme of the virgin birth: “. . . Hazle fiesta muy solemne / pues que viene Dios en él . . .” (VSI, 129). At the end of the work, some of the characters kneel before the effigy of the Virgin in a demonstration of faith, and the statue is transported to the altar, accompanied by choral acclamations. The work is devoid of staging apparatus and character movement is minimal, adding to the static solemnity of the scenes prior to mass.

In this work, the Virgin makes allusions to the Sacrament when speaking of her Son. These Eucharistic references are perfectly acceptable in an *auto* staged immediately before mass:

Gustad de él, que es muy suave.  
Comedlo, para vivir.  
Él es la divina llave  
que a mí se dió con el “Ave,”  
para los cielos abrir.

(VSI, 155)

This *auto* was written for the general public. It follows the Biblical story line and the common practice of relating stories of saints' lives, and glorifying the Virgin in song. There is no allegory, nor is there the favorite Anchieta theme of the confrontation between good and evil. But this play does demonstrate the dramatist's versatility and the variety found in the *auto* production of José de Anchieta, rounding out this overview of his plays.

It is difficult to locate or obtain any *autos* of this dramatic tradition, performed from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. This can be attributed to the scarcity of bibliographical data and works, the decline of the *auto* form in succeeding centuries, and a general lack of information concerning Brazilian theatrical forms in early centuries. However, twentieth century Brazilian playwrights have avidly adopted the *auto* form as a vehicle for the expression of many of the attitudes of modern man, faced with an alien world and society.

Man's desperation at a confrontation with the cataclysmic world of the present forces him to look inward for answers to some of life's problems. He again feels that universal concepts must satisfy many of the his longings. In the dramatization of man's metaphysical needs, many authors have turned to the traditional *auto* forms. For many youthful artists, the *auto* is a natural recourse and for others it is an enlightening discovery.

*Morte e Vida Severina* appears in a book of poetry by João Cabral de Melo Neto entitled *Duas Aguas* (1956), and it has many of the characteristics of a narrative or dramatic poem. Although this work is not dedicated to depicting the Nativity alone, its final scenes present the birth of a modern savior which is crucial to the denouement and finale of the piece. It is subtitled *Auto de Natal Pernambucano*, and since its composition the work has been performed as an *auto* on numerous Latin American stages. Most recently it was staged in Mexico City, by the *Compañía del Teatro Universitario* of the National University.<sup>11</sup>

Much of the poem employs dramatic techniques and *auto* principles as opposed to strictly poetic devices. The poet indicates textually an alternation of speeches between characters in the work. There are obvious religious implications in this poetic drama, depicting Severino's mystical journey in the spirit. His parents are named Maria and Zacarias, and his wanderings can be compared with those of the Israelites in the desert in search of the promised land. The birth or rebirth of the modern, urban Christ figure is significant and seems to be the focal point of the poem. It brings Severino's search to an end, as if this drama of death were another Nativity *auto* form, justifying the subtitle *Auto de Natal Pernambucano*. The babe's mother is named Maria and his father is a carpenter. The child is the modern reproduction of Christ: a weak, emaciated, pale, premature baby.

Severino, the protagonist, is the *retirante*, fleeing from the devastating drought of the northeast and traveling to Recife. He searches for rest and peace after he has been shot and killed, symbolizing an errant soul searching for repose. The theme of this *auto pernambucano* is death in life: "morre gente que nem vivia." The play is accompanied by music and a chorus whose text is set apart in italics. Cabral de Melo Neto was completely aware that he was creating a twentieth century poetic *auto*.

Severino is symbolic of mankind and its search for peace and happiness in life and death. He explains his universal make-up in his opening statement:

Somos muitos Severinos  
 iguais em tudo na vida:  
 na mesma cabeça grande  
 . . . . .  
 no mesmo ventre crescido  
 sôbre as mesmas pernas finas  
 . . . . .  
 E se somos Severinos  
 iguais em tudo na vida,  
 morremos de morte igual:  
 mesma morte severina.<sup>12</sup>

The *irmãos das almas* who carry his mortal remains promise to bury the corpse in Toritama cemetery which is only a short distance away. Severino travels on, always downhill, down to the sea which symbolizes the fruition of life. The chorus joins in shedding light on the scene and aiding in the interpretation of the action just as it did in *autos* in the past. This same chorus alternates speeches

with Severino and the two intermingle their lines and thoughts, adding to the spiritual, conceptual, and dramatic effect.

At the beginning of the fifth canto, the theme of death in life is emphasized:

—Desde que estou retirando  
só a morte vejo ativa.  
Só a morte deparei,  
às vêzes até festiva.  
Só morte tem encontrado  
quem pensava encontrar vida  
e o pouco que não foi morte  
foi de vida severina, . . .

(MV, 183)

Severino's existence is void of action; he is frustrated and can find no work in his spiritual sphere. He is man's anguished soul searching for mortal expression. He passes through good lands and bad. He sees the ground opened and a grave receive its dead. He sees the body wrapped in shrouds of earth:

—E agora, se abre o chão e te abriga,  
lençol, que não tiveste em vida.  
—Se abre o chão e te fecha.  
Terás agora cama e coberta.  
—Se abre o chão e te envolve,  
como mulher com quem se dorme.

(MV, 195)

Severino arrives in Recife, the city of the dead, the city of the *retirantes*. He wanders and searches, always observant, drinking in the excitement and activity of the city. He befriends a carpenter named Joseph who tells him of the river bottom lands and of his homeland in Nazaré. While they converse a child is born to José:

—Todo o céu e a terra  
lhe cantam louvor.  
Foi por êle que a maré  
esta noite não baixou.

(MV, 211)

The guests come bringing gifts. They cover the babe with a newspaper instead of swaddling clothes, and present him with sacred water from Olinda, with a canary, and with a doll made of clay. The scene is reminiscent of many Latin American *pastorelas* and Magian plays.

Egyptian palm readers enter and discourse on the importance of the birth, and the description made of the child is interesting:

É uma criança pálida,  
é uma criança franzina.

. . . . .



—Sua formosura  
eis aqui descrita.  
É uma criança pequena,  
pálida e setemesinha.  
(MV, 218)

The hope of the future and the reason for living are found in this urban, contemporary messiah.

Of all the modern *autos*, this work by Cabral de Melo Neto is the most unique and taxing. It demonstrates the heights of lyricism and imagery the Brazilian *auto* can attain.

In 1963, Ramiro Gama published *O Quarto Rei Mago*, a Nativity *auto* from a work dedicated to the spiritualist theatre. It is an ingenious single-act adaptation of the Magian plot to the modern Brazilian religious stage. Its setting is the Holy Land and it pictures in wide brushstrokes the life of Christ while the fourth Magus searches for the Master. The exposition of this king in the opening moments of the *auto* sets the stage for the entire work:

4° Rei Mago.            Meus três companheiros vieram  
de camelos. Eu vim a pé. Eles são  
ricos. . . . Eu nada possuo e, por  
isto, apenas pude juntar tres pedras  
preciosas a trazê-las para as oferecer  
ao Menino Santo. . . . Vim a pé e demo-  
rei de mais pelos longos caminhos. E,  
agora, chegando, soube que o Menino e  
sua Santa Mãe, acompanhados do Santo  
Homem que é José, fugiram para o Egito,  
salvando o menino da matança de Herodes. . . .<sup>13</sup>

The fourth Magus continues his search, setting out for Egypt, determined to honor the Saviour. While in Egypt, he is overcome by the suffering, poverty, and degradation that surrounds him. Years later, he returns to Jerusalem to continue his quest and he is surprised to see the movement and agitation in the ancient city:

Desde que cheguei que encontro  
a cidade de Jerusalém num movimento  
desusado. . . . Algo acontece e  
não sei. Vou indagar (Passa um  
homem do povo e êle indaga e sabe,  
por êle, que vão crucificar o Sal-  
vador, o Menino Santo, que êle  
viera homenagear. . . .)  
(RM, 125)

As he weeps in despair, suddenly he is enveloped in a light and Christ approaches him:

Jesus.           Esta, meu filho, a única homenagem  
que desejo. Recebi tôdas as tuas  
homenagens. Fui contigo ao Egito.  
Asisti aos teus gestos caritativos. . . .  
É assim, meu filho, que eu desejo ser  
homenageado pelos meus irmãos aos quais  
procuro servir!

(RM, 127)

The play ends on prayers of thanksgiving by the king who had given more to Jesus in his charitable actions and love for his fellowmen than all three of his companions:

Glória Deus no mais Alto dos Céus,  
Paz na Terra a todos os Homens de  
Boa vontade—Jesus é o Amor que  
salvará o Mundo! Viva Jesus!

(RM, 127)

This unusual interpretation of the Magian *auto* form is a welcome deviation from its predecessors, and yet it preserves the devout reverence and holy message of thanksgiving which has become so much a part of all Latin American Christmas plays.

The modern *auto* by Hermógenes Viana entitled *A Arca de Simon* is a contemporary dramatization of the account in Genesis of Noah and the flood, and it characterizes those *auto* forms constituting the reenactment of Bible tales. The work has a prologue, two acts, and an epilogue. The prologue and epilogue serve as the frame for the modern, human drama with religious symbolism.

Because of man's wickedness, God, *O Divino*, has decreed that He will send another flood to cleanse the earth. Saint Peter and the Archangel receive the assignment of selecting a human family to build and populate the new ark. The work is serious and its satire and imagery are biting. Modern man is ridiculed and scorned, as are his institutions and family life. Nevertheless, the parallelism between the modern family and legendary weaknesses of Noah's flock is vividly defined. The Biblical similarities could not be circumstantial. The heavenly beings are tangible, conscientious entities, and even though some of the stage effects surrounding their actions mock the human conception of heaven (use of a telescope to observe persons on earth) their activities are serious and binding upon earth's inhabitants. This parody of Biblical history shows the *auto* as a modern conveyance for social, human concern for man's plight. God's celestial servants discuss their mission:

Saint Pierre.           Muito difícil, Archange, . . .  
Onde achar, fàcilmente, um segundo  
Noé? Temos que observar muito  
ainda para cumprir as determinações  
do Divino.<sup>14</sup>

With didactic clarity, the discussion continues on the reason for the new flood:

Archange. Quando o Divino determinou que  
 haja novo dilúvio, é porque, na sua  
 sabedoria infalível, sabe que a huma-  
 nidade não pode mais subsistir,  
 chegou ao termo dos seus despropósitos,  
 dos seus pecados mortais.

(AS, 226)

Simon d'Angerville is selected as the subject for observation to determine his worthiness to be the new Noah. Although unaware of the heavenly observers, Simon is confident of his righteousness and that of his family.

Similar to the interpretation made of the origin of the races resulting from the lineage of each of Noah's sons in the Old Testament, in this reenactment each son prefers a particular continent, race, and life-style:

O mais velho, Jean, pelo seu gôsto,  
 nunca arredaria o pé de junto de mim.

. . . . .  
 O segundo, O Joseph, se não  
 fôsse a amizade que nos dedica, já  
 teria ido viver na Indo-China. . . .

O outro, Benoit, também nasceu com  
 o espírito de emigrante. Pelo seu  
 gôsto estaria a viver na África. . . .

(AS, 230)

Through the interaction of the characters, the audience realizes that each child has serious problems. Jean has been embezzling money from the bank where he works, Benoit has fallen in love with a negro cabaret dancer, and Joseph has become an opium addict which results in his insanity. The mother, Héléne, is fast becoming an alcoholic, but Simon is oblivious to any of his family's difficulties. When, at last, he discovers their weaknesses he is incapable of comprehending what has gone wrong, and he attributes the errors of his children to some unknown sin he has committed. Viana is not at all lenient in his criticism of common Christian concepts on sin and holy punishment.

Simon does not realize that his prejudices, his blind faith, and the coercive pressures he placed upon his family have alienated his children and driven his wife to drink. Although Simon is correct in principle, because he is unable to instill the desire for correct action in his family, he fails. In this moment of greatest depression, he admits that he believed at one point to have saved his family as did Noah, preserving the Biblical plot of the drama:

Simon. Pensei bem, Héléne. Mas . . .  
 Deus assim determinou, temos que  
 nos conformar. E eu que cheguei a  
 sonhar que nossa casa fôsse uma  
 segunda Arca de Noé! . . . Pobre  
 de mim! . . .

(AS, 253)

The pedagogical message is driven home in the epilogue. Sincerity, interest, and love are more essential than any particular religious code:

Saint Pierre. Ai d'aquele que se diz religioso,  
quando na verdade engana a si  
próprio, entregando-se às mentiras  
destruidoras da alma, filhas da  
miséria humana, que se chama: a  
hipocrisia.

(AS, 257)

It is extremely common for the orthodox dogma of religious drama to be combined with local indigenous and ancient Portuguese legends and superstitions. These humorous, caustic presentations laud the clever rural mind, even when matching wits with the supernatural.

Ariano Suassuna has written two excellent folkloric *autos* of this type, representative of popular Brazilian forms. The less publicized of the two, *Auto de João da Cruz*, 1950, is very similar to the Faustian adventure in its presentation of a carpenter who makes a pact with the Devil in order to obtain some choice land (in *Le miracle de Théophile*, a medieval production from the middle of the thirteenth century, Rutebeuf treated the same subject).

*Auto da Compadecida*, 1955, was first presented in 1956, in the Teatro Santa Isabel by the Teatro Adolescente do Recife, under the direction of Clênio Wanderley.<sup>15</sup> It is one of the foremost folkloric dramas of the Brazilian northeast and the point of departure for northeastern dramatic prominence. This *auto* gives voice to social criticism and modern anticlericalism, although not attacking the basic tenets of Catholic belief, and following the structure and tone of previous folkloric *auto* traditions.

*Auto da Compadecida* is a farcical drama whose first two parts are performed on a human, mundane plane, presenting the folkloric character types of the Brazilian northeast: João Grilo is the protagonist and plays a petty thief and con man who takes vengeance on his boss, the *padeiro*. *Padeiro* is the typical henpecked husband and his *Mulher* is the classical authoritarian but wayward spouse. The religious hierarchical figures: *bispo*, *padre*, and *sacristão*, are ruled by avarice and modify the liturgical rites of the Church to further their monetary ambitions. Chicó is Grilo's friend and plays the fall guy, similar to the Spanish Golden Age *gracioso*, resulting in the salvation of his *amo*. The supporting characters of these first two parts are the reverent Frade, and the evil *cangaceiros* who initiate the denouement of the play.

The interplay of farcical, slapstick events, leading to the death of all but Chicó, constitutes the first two parts. The third part stages the souls of the dead before the judgement bar. This is the folkloric *auto* scene. The previous sections are preliminary to the *auto* which follows. The spirits of the dead continue arguing even after death, and it is only upon the appearance of Lucifer himself, dressed in the black leather clothing of the northeastern cowboy, that they are silenced:

Encourado. Mas vamos aos fatos. Que vergonha!  
 Todos tremendo! Tão corajosos antes  
 . . . o padre, o valente Severino. . . .  
 E você, o Grilo que enganava todo o  
 mundo tremendo como qualquer safado!  
 (AC, 306)

They disobey Lucifer's commands and demand a hearing in the celestial court before they are condemned. Therefore, Manuel (Christ) appears to hear their plea. All the spiritual characters are cast in a human, confidential, nonauthoritarian fashion, but Christ maintains control. He reprimands the bishop and those ministers who would hypocritically transgress the laws of the Church. They are all accused by Lucifer, and just when he is confident of complete victory, João remembers to call upon their benevolent advocate. João invokes the Virgem da Compadecida who appears and pleads for mercy:

A Compadecida. Intercedo por êsses pobres que não  
 têm ninguém por êles, meu filho.  
 Não os condene.  
 (AC, 318)

A Compadecida asks Manuel to give João another opportunity, and he is sent back to earth. Meanwhile, Chicó and the narrator-clown of the play are preparing to bury João when he revives. He does not remember what transpired in the courts on high, and when they are about to take the dead baker's money to run the bakery, Chicó remembers that he promised it to the Virgin if she would let João live.

The two worlds of the play are united in the speech by João, who had almost convinced himself to keep his half of the money anyway:

Se fôsse a outro santo, ainda ia  
 ver se dava jeito, mas você de  
 prometer logo a Nossa Senhora!  
 Quem sabe se eu não escapei por  
 causa disso? O dinheiro fica como  
 se fôsse os honorários da advogada. . . .  
 (AC, 328)

*Auto da Compadecida* demonstrates the union of religious legends of saintly intervention with the raucous characters of northeastern, Brazilian folklore. The supernatural beings, as well as the human, are appropriately costumed and they speak with decorum. Suassuna stages his spiritual personages in a humorous but credible ambience, facilitating acceptance and appreciation of this work as one of the foremost Latin American folkloric *autos*.

The duality of composition and the combination of religious and profane concepts is also observed in the structural technique which divides the work between the secular, human level and the spiritual realm. This is not a new form to be found only in *Auto da Compadecida*. Gil Vicente's *Auto da Sibila Cassandra* was composed along similar lines: the human, egotistical wish of Cassandra

never to marry is linked with her selfish desire to be the virgin mother, but in the second part the metaphysical and Christian concepts of the birth of Christ are made apparent. The secular conflict of the first part is resolved in both *Auto da Sibila Cassandra* and *Auto da Compadecida* through an interaction with Christian deities and the supernatural incidents of the last section of each drama.

It is interesting to note that Ariano Suassuna uses two satanic figures, Demônio and Encourado or *o diabo*, as did José de Anchieta in his *auto*, *Na Vila de Vitória*. The actions of Demônio and Encourado parallel closely those of Satanaz and Lúçifer. The subservience of one demon to the other, who is ordinarily considered of equal stature if not technically the very same being, is common to many *autos* in all periods. Also, Anchieta's devils Guaixará and Ambiré in *Auto de São Lourenço* and Encourado are staged as legendary character types who represent the region and customs of the environment depicted in the work. In the case of Anchieta, they are actually historical Indian chieftains who fought against the Portuguese, whereas in the case of *Auto da Compadecida*, Encourado is dressed and depicted as the tough, northeastern *cangaceiro* and hardened criminal type.

In *Auto da Compadecida* as in *Dia de Assumpção*, the Virgin is the champion of human justice and through her influence she forces the Devil to release his prisoners and to vacate the field. In both cases, those under attack by Satan are given another opportunity to demonstrate their true character and respect for the divine representatives of God.

Just as Suassuna attacks the social problems and religious injustices committed by priests and laymen in northeastern Brazil, Anchieta also used the *auto* as a didactic weapon to counteract the subversive social and anti-governmental acts of the Brazilian colonists. The *auto* is conceived as a popular weapon to combat the excesses of society and, as such, continues to aid in the recognition and correction of abuse.

The *auto* has been cultivated and perpetuated in Brazil as efficacious to the development of a religious, moral consciousness. Whereas secular drama mirrors life, the *auto* mirrors the soul, giving voice to the spiritual longings and fears of mankind. In addition, it provides a moral interpretation of social and political phenomena. Dramatists will continually seek to portray artistically man's moral obligation to man and his spiritual obligation to God. In this concept is contained the perpetual *auto* struggle between good and evil, sublime piety and secular abuse.

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## Notes

1. Historically, all *autos* have been considered allegorical dramas in one act, based on the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist to be presented during the Corpus Christi festivities, which is the definition of an *auto sacramental*. [Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Obras completas*: Tomo III, *Autos y Loas*, Introduction by Alfonso Méndez Plancarte (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955), p. xiii; Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Autos Sacramentales desde su origen hasta fines del siglo XVII*, Vol. LVIII (Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, Edited by Eduardo González Pedrosa. Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1952), p. viii.] All too often critics and historians have simply repeated and perpetuated previous theories, disregarding new discoveries in the field and oversimplifying in their attempts to categorize literary expression without

substantiating the factual or historical validity of their conclusions. There are those who consider the Latin American *auto* forms nothing more than New World copies of the Spanish *auto sacramental*. [José J. Rojas Garcidueñas, *El teatro de Nueva España en el siglo XVI* (México, 1935), pp. 11-12; Salvador de Madariaga, *Rise of the Spanish American Empire* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 185; and Rodolfo Usigli, *México en el teatro* (México: Imprenta Mundial, 1932), p. 19.] A few observant literary historians have advanced correct developmental concepts pertaining to the *auto* in Latin America. [José Juan Arrom, *El teatro de hispanoamérica en la época colonial*. (La Habana: Anuario Bibliográfico Cubano, 1956), p. 37.] But, curiously, it is the Brazilian scholars who have been least encumbered by the generalizations of the past and now aid in dispelling the inconsistencies surrounding the development of the traditional *auto* forms. [Alfonso Ruy de Souza, *História do Teatro na Bahia* (Bahia: Livraria Progresso, 1959), p. 15; Serafim Leite, *História da Companhia de Jesus no Brasil*, Vol. IV (Rio: Imprensa Nacional, 1943), p. 297; Sábato Magaldi, *Panorama do Teatro Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1962), p. 220.] These critics have discovered that the development of the Latin American *auto* is independent from that of the peninsular, Spanish *auto sacramental*. The evolutionary process of each is separate, and the *auto sacramental* form is only one of many themes and styles found in Latin America.

2. "Coloquios de pastores from Jalisco, Mexico," *University of California Folklore Studies*, ed. Stanley L. Robe, No. 4 (University of California, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954), 4.

3. Gil Vicente, *Obras Completas*, Vol. I (Lisboa: Editorial Minerva, 1966), p. 26.

4. Serafim Leite, *História da Companhia de Jesus no Brasil*, Vol. IV (Rio: Imprensa Nacional, 1943), 297.

5. Ruy de Souza, *História do Teatro na Bahia*, p. 16.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

7. There had been other politically motivated *auto* dramatists, like Juan Gabriel Lezcano, who, in Asunción, Paraguay (1544), used an *auto* to satirize the fall from power of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, but Lezcano only mirrored the public opinion of the time. He did not try to change public or governmental policies through his theatrical presentation. [José Torre Revello, "Orígenes del teatro en hispanoamérica," *Instituto Nacional de Estudios de Teatro: Cuadernos de Cultura teatral*, No. 8 (1937), 50.]

8. José de Anchieta, *Primeras Letras*, edited by Alvaro Pinto (Rio: Anuário de Brasil, 1923).

9. José de Anchieta, *Auto Representado na Festa de São Lourenço*, Trans. M. de L. de Paula Martins (São Paulo: Museu Paulista, 1948), p. 25. All subsequent references to this work will be designated by the abbreviation "SL."

10. José de Anchieta, *Na Vila de Vitória e na Visitação de Santa Isabel*, introduction and notes by M. de L. de Paula Martins (São Paulo: Museu Paulista, 1950). Subsequent references "VSI."

11. Carlos Solórzano, "El gran teatro universitario," *Siempre*, No. 868 (febrero, 1970), xiii.

12. João Cabral de Melo Neto, "Morte e Vida Severina: Auto de Natal Pernambucano," *Dois Aguas* (Rio: Livraria José Olympio Editôra, 1956), p. 172. Subsequent references "MN."

13. Ramiro Gama, "O Quarto Rei Mago," *Teatro Espírita*, Vol. I (São Paulo: Lake, 1963), p. 123. Subsequent references "RM."

14. Hermógenes Viana, "A Arca de Simon," *Teatro Brasileiro*, Vol. II (São Paulo: Edições Algarve, 1954), p. 226. Subsequent references "AS."

15. Ariano Suassuna, "Auto da Compadecida," *Teatro Brasileiro Contemporâneo*, eds. Wilson Martins and Seymour Menton (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), p. 261. Subsequent references "AC."