

## Myth and Madness in Grupo Galpão's Expressionistic Production of *Álbum de Família*

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With *Vestido de Noiva*, I knew success; with the plays that followed, I lost it forever. Beginning with *Álbum de Família*, the drama that came after *Vestido de Noiva*, I started down a road that could take me to any destination but success.

— Nelson Rodrigues, quoted in *Teatro Completo 2*: 13<sup>1</sup>

The tragic piece that started Rodrigues down that ill-fated road is what we here undertake to analyze. In particular, we want to provide a setting in which Grupo Galpão's production, no less mythic and expressionistic than earlier productions of *Álbum de Família*, can yet be seen as original. Set in the early twentieth century, it enacts an increasingly violent series of confrontations among the members of a family of land-owning Mineiros<sup>2</sup>: Jonas (the father); Senhorinha (the mother); and their four children: Guilherme, Edmundo, Nonô and Glória. As the action progresses, these family members, subdued by the forces of predestination, destroy themselves through incest, castration, jealousy, suicide, murder and madness. The plot contains the fatal elements of classic tragedy: Jonas is a perverted Agamemnon figure whose daughter is immolated as she yields to destiny. Guilherme, the eldest son, falls in love with his sister and tries to avoid his fate in vain. Edmundo lusts for their mother, faces his lot diffidently and kills himself. Nonô meets his Oedipus role and escapes in madness. Senhorinha fulfills her earth-mother doom, aware of impending disaster.

With its parade of characters whose tortured interpersonal relations are corrupted by lust, jealousy, incest, castration, adultery, madness, murder, and suicide, *Álbum de Família* makes *Long Day's Journey into Night* look like *Life with Father*, but then, as it has often been pointed out, Nelson Rodrigues was not aiming for the kind of photographic realism that is seen in

O'Neill's play. Rather, in this first phase of his dramaturgy, the Brazilian author was writing mythic theatre pieces in which he intended to probe the depths of the human unconscious and the family dynamic, to put onstage most of man's hidden drives, desires, urges, and passions.

Written in 1945, this first attempt at what the playwright himself called "unpleasant theatre" was censored because it contained too much incest and only saw its first presentation 22 years later. According to the Brazilian critic Sábato Magaldi, this 1967 production, staged by Kleber Santos at Teatro Jovem in Rio de Janeiro, was not one of which the author was particularly fond. He preferred the version of *Álbum de Família* mounted in 1968 at Teatro Ateneo in Caracas (95). A production in 1970 in São Paulo, directed by Jaime Barcelos at Teatro de Bolso in conjunction with Teatro das Nações, was also somewhat unsatisfying, as stated by Magaldi (98-99). Two more successful stagings by Grupo Macunaíma under the direction of Antunes Filho were presented in 1981 and 1984. The first, *Nelson Rodrigues: O Eterno Retorno*, included not only *Álbum de Família* but three later plays by Rodrigues: *Toda Nudez Será Castigada*, *O Beijo no Asfalto* and *Os Sete Gatinhos*. The second, *Nelson 2 Rodrigues*, comprised parts of *Álbum* and *Toda Nudez* and ran for 235 performances (George 1992: 114). Of the first, Magaldi has written: "The beauty, the balance, the poetic vigor of *Álbum de Família* only was realized for me, in all fullness, in the show *Nelson Rodrigues: O Eterno Retorno...*" (99).

Several theatre scholars have interpreted this play using psychoanalytical and myth criticism. In their 1978 essay, Fred Clark and Ana Lúcia Gazolla de Garcia write that *Álbum de Família* is an exploration of the unconscious mind and a demythification of the bourgeois family. Clark and Garcia emphasize that Rodrigues's characters are abstract archetypes that are not developed in a psychologically realistic way. Instead, in their interactions within three framing triangular relations, they enact various dynamics described by Freud and Jung, such as the Oedipus Complex (Jonas/Senhorinha/Edmundo), the Electra Complex (Jonas/Glória/Senhorinha), and the earth-mother/Eve archetype (Senhorinha).

In his 1991 semiotic analysis of the play, Fred Clark elucidates its structure, claiming that *Álbum de Família*, like *Vestido de Noiva*, "is composed of the constant interaction and clash between reality and illusion in human existence," pointing out that the truly innovative element in the work is its focus on the human being's ability to read and misread signs (75). Clark discusses the way that Rodrigues makes iconic and indexical use of seven

freeze-frame photographs of the family members throughout the drama to show how the sign is unable “to capture its dynamic object in all its possible perspectives and angles” (79). The seven snapshots are not real photos; they comprise actors posed to represent pictures that show the inverse of the situation intended by a true print, that is, a representation of the actual, which is absent. “The photograph is then a device which Nelson Rodrigues uses to play with concepts of the real and the illusory...” (83). Clark goes on to point out that *Álbum de Família* sets up and maintains a tension between the dynamic and the static by having its action undermine the icons that begin each scene. Through ironic inversion in which the photo (usually assumed to represent the real) is revealed to be a fiction, while the *agon* of the play (usually assumed to be a fiction) becomes the real, Rodrigues subverts traditional notions of illusion and reality (94).

In his discussion of the Grupo Macunaíma productions, David George stresses that Antunes Filho drew on Mircea Eliade’s theories about the myth of the eternal return. Like the primitive societies, which Eliade studied that saw time as cyclical rather than sequential, the family is living a cycle of creation-chaos-destruction-regeneration, and is at a point in this process that Eliade describes as “a time of orgies and unrestraint, the unleashing of demons” (George 134). In addition, Rodrigues’s characters function according to mythic patterns: Jonas sees himself as the biblical patriarch of almost godlike stature who has the right to control other family members; Senhorinha is Eve, looking for the lost paradise of love with Nonô, the Adam figure; Glória represents the Electra myth; Guilherme and Edmundo evoke the Oedipus myth. Moreover, George points out parallels between Jonas and Senhorinha, and Adam and Eve, which construct the family’s story as a creation myth. The American critic also focuses on the Jungian dimensions of the play, explaining that Jonas and Senhorinha represent the animus (the masculine aspect of a woman’s psyche) and the anima (the feminine aspect of a man’s psyche) in their negative forms, which compel the couple to entrap and destroy their children.

David George’s analysis of the 1981 and 1984 productions of *Álbum* emphasizes the expressionist exteriorization of inner states by grotesques, by extremes of emotion, and by fluctuating utterances of feelings to create an oneiric mood. Other devices employed by Antunes Filho are the processions, which underline the importance of ritual and myth in Brazilian culture, and the photographs that serve as anti-rituals to subvert the established order. He

also points out elements not included in Rodrigues's playtext, such as the appearance of a young boy at various stages of the action.

One of the most recent versions and interpretations of this play is that undertaken by Grupo Galpão, a Mineira company, founded in 1982 by five young actors, which began its outdoor activities in Belo Horizonte, the state capital of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Its purpose was to rupture the predictability of stage performance and create a new cultural spectacle that would please not only the critics and the aficionados of traditional theatrical modes, but also the simple person of the streets. Since it began performing 20 years ago, Grupo Galpão has presented 16 plays and won wide critical acclaim, mainly for its five most recent works: *Partido* (1999), *Um Molière imaginário* (1998), *A Rua da Amargura* (1994), *Romeu e Julieta* (1992), and *Álbum de Família* (1990). Our analysis of this last production, the high point of their eight-year trajectory when produced in 1990, relies on two main concepts: the myth of the eternal return (so familiar since the work of Eliade) and the view of madness in the classical age as a paradoxical representation of reason.

The Mineiro director Eid Ribeiro developed the script for Galpão's 1990 adaptation of *Álbum de Família* from Nelson Rodrigues's original playtext and directed Galpão's first venture into tragedy. The company's previous theatrical projects were, for the most part, improvised street-theatre sketches and short comic pieces, often with a satiric bent that focused on contemporary Brazilian social issues.<sup>3</sup> To prepare to move in this new line of action, the cast did extensive research on the plays of Nelson Rodrigues and also participated in several workshops to create a theatrical language for the performance, alternating between tragic expressionism and comic grotesque, and finally choosing the former. In these workshops the actors also learned techniques of aligning body movement with voice projection. For this production they had no thought of using the kind of circus techniques and elements of *mambembe*<sup>4</sup> that had previously characterized their theatre practice. They studied, instead, Mircea Eliade's research on myth that had shaped the 1981 Antunes Filho version, *Nelson Rodrigues: O Eterno Retorno*, working under the direction of Valderéz Cardoso, an assistant to the Paulistadirector Ulysses Cruz, to come to terms with Rodrigues's mythic approach and the archetypal nature of his characters in this play (Brandão 87).<sup>5</sup>

The myth of the eternal return is related to the old traditional conception that history periodically suffers a process of regeneration. The earliest Christian authors strongly opposed this notion, but gradually and steadily it penetrated their philosophy. For the first Christians, time is real. A straight

line marks the course of humanity from Adam's fall to the final redemption, which means that history follows one single track. Christ died one time, and this is not a recurrent event. Each historical event is unique and radically singular. This is the destiny of humanity as a whole, and of the individual person, decided only once within a concrete and irreplaceable moment. This linear conception of time was first described in the second century by St. Irenaeus, Saint Basil, and Saint Gregory, and it was later elaborated more deeply by St. Augustine.

But even though the Church first rejected the cyclic theory that posited astrological influences on history and on men, some ecclesiastical writers such as Clement of Alexandria, Minucius Felix, Arnobe, and Theodoret adopted it. The conflict between the two fundamental conceptions of time and history lasted until the seventeenth century. For a period in the Middle Ages a double dogma was accepted; that is, the two conceptions coexisted. Tycho-Brahe, Kepler, Cardan, Bruno, and Campanella defended the cyclic ideology. Bacon, Pascal, and Leibniz were proponents of the linear progression of history. Nietzsche supported the myth of the eternal return, and it is with this modern cyclical theory that the meaning of the archaic fable of endless repetition as represented in *Álbum de Família* gains its present value. Michel Foucault's book on madness and civilization was not included in Galpão's theoretical research for their production of the play. Nevertheless, Ribeiro's choice to emphasize the role of Rodrigues's absent mad character, Nonô, by making him a visible protagonist and placing him onstage side by side with Senhorinha, inscribes in the production the director's criticism of the social exclusion of the mentally alienated individual as a substitute for spiritual reintegration. The archetypal repetition of madness in literature and in historical tragedies has a trans-historical and cyclic signification. Michel Foucault, for example, in his *Historia da Loucura*, reminds readers that, in most farces of the Middle Ages, the crazy man is the character in charge of publicizing the truth. By using an apparently irrational and unreal language, he ultimately stands for rationality and reality.

In the 1990 Galpão version of *Álbum* Eid Ribeiro made six major changes from the original, all of which enhanced in some way the notion of the eternal return and/or the theme of the madman's sensibility, purity, and wisdom. The *mineiro* director maintained Rodrigues's expressionistic staging quality, even though he made his own intuitive choice of forms, colors, and sounds to emphasize the manifestation of the characters' feelings. In his adaptation, Ribeiro utilized only about two-thirds of the basic playtext –

eliminating all characters except the members of the nuclear family and Tia Rute – in a tightly focused production that he called “stylized and expressionistic” (Lenard, *Caderno* 2: 11). “I wanted to condense the tragedy, focusing on the incest myth,” stated Ribeiro (telephone interview). He rearranged the scenes that he kept from the original so that the play’s sequence of murders and suicides builds more quickly to a climax. He also excluded most details that did not focus directly on the incestuous desires of the group and adjusted the remaining ones, so that lust becomes the focal point of the text and is seen as the destructive element that brings the action to its devastating climax.

Among the props which compose the stage design, there are two empty mirror frames that grow into constant attractants for the characters. Representative of expressionism, these mirrors are open spaces where the family members can look into themselves introspectively. They also reiterate the cyclical theme of the play as devices that return the gazing individual to himself. Flowers are also important props in the play. The bouquet that Nelson Rodrigues holds is an allusion to the *mineiro* journalist and short-story writer Otto Lara Resende’s comment that Rodrigues was “the flower of obsession” and is a homage to Nelson. Also, when the narrator representing Nelson gives roses to the characters, he is giving his art to them. “Each flower is the bloom of the personage’s actions,” stated Ribeiro (telephone interview). Tia Rute, for instance, destroys her roses and disperses the petals, a symbol of her destructive attitude toward the family, since she is the one who procures young girls for Jonas.

Another very striking modification was to substitute a narrator who represents Nelson Rodrigues and speaks his words taken from his plays, interviews, and columns, for the original device of a speaker representing public opinion. “The function of the playwright onstage is to establish some distance between the represented illusion and the actual audience and to provide a few moments of reflection,” stated Ribeiro (telephone interview). So, in the Galpão version, Antônio Edson, costumed and made up as Nelson Rodrigues, and smoking a cigarette, appears in the first scene. Slowly (as in a slow motion sequence) he climbs over a central table as he enters the stage, pointing accusingly with his cane towards the audience, which he addresses to inform them about the forthcoming tragedy and to introduce the marriage of Jonas and Senhorinha. At that moment his interpretation of the meaning of love, death, human anguish and hell is expressed in Nelson Rodrigues’s own words:

I believe that man, in all four quarters of the globe, is a lost cause. A tragic being that loves and dies, living between those two boundaries. In my view nothing lessens human anguish. We will never leave our hell, we will continue as miserable creatures. To believe that this anguish can be eliminated is a belief worthy of a simpleton or a scoundrel. (Ribeiro 1)

With these cynical words, Nelson Rodrigues's ghost greets the bridal couple, using the same technique of ironic contrast seen in the original playtext. After a scene in which all family members, except Nonô, appear to vent their spleens against each other and then assemble in an ironic family photo, the playwright-narrator makes a second commentary: "Every family has a moment in which it begins to rot. The family can be the most dignified, the most decent in the world, yet one day there will appear a child-molesting uncle, a lesbian sister, a thieving father, a crazy brother-in-law. All at the same time" (Ribeiro 3).

One of the most important asides in the play is Rodrigues's explanation of himself:

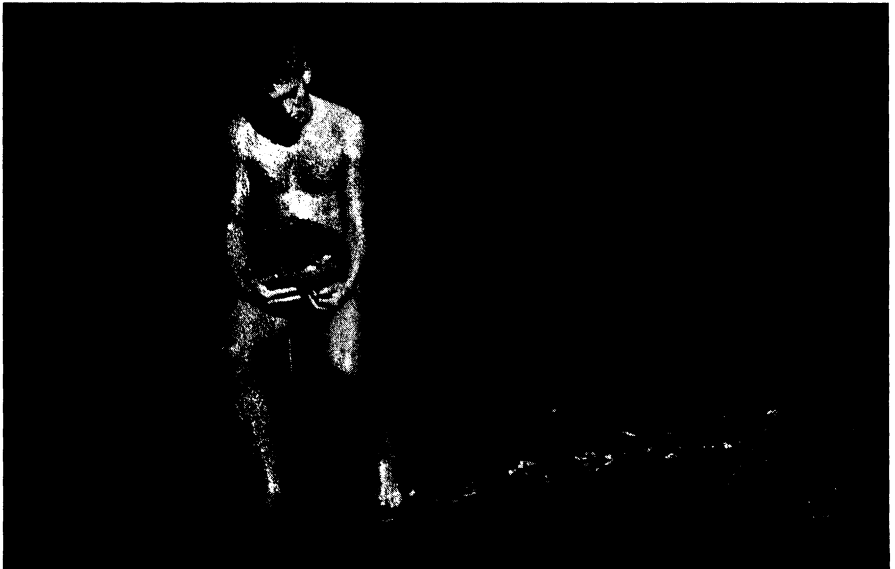
All my life I have been a sentimentalist, a romantic, a Pierrot of old carnivals. The only thing that keeps me on my feet is the certainty of the immortal soul. If man were not eternal, if he didn't have an eternal soul, if he didn't have his eternity guaranteed, this man would go on all fours. Of course there is life after death. I often ask myself if death is not a great awakening. I mean that death exists before itself. Death begins before itself; it is a luminous and patient elaboration. But I would like to be visited by death when I feel like it. I would like to have a quiet death when I consent to it. I would like to die, knowing that I was dying. I'm not sure that life is worth living, in a world that suffers a monstrous spiritual castration. (Ribeiro 8)

[...] In my theatre, desire is sad, lust is tragic, and crime is hell itself. The poor spectator goes home terrified by all his present and future sins. In an age in which most people behave sexually like dogs in the street, I transform a simple kiss into eternal abjection. If there is a Brazilian maniac for purity, I am that Brazilian (Ribeiro 12).

Nelson Rodrigues's ghost makes his final appearance and brief speech at the very end of the play, after almost all characters have either killed or been killed, as he proffers a bouquet and says: "Fiction, in order to purify, needs to be horrible. Character is vile, because we would not be. It accomplishes unconfessed misery for each one of us. And if they ask me what I mean by



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my play, I would reply that only the neurotics would see God" (Ribeiro 13). Because Nelson Rodrigues returns from the dead to the stage to picture his characters and to comment on them, as well as on the life, death, and rebirth of the family, this device works well to complement the central cyclical movement of the dramatic action.

The photos that belong to Rodrigues's album thematically differ from those devised and selected by Galpão. With Rodrigues, there are seven photographs interspersed within the plan of the story to show how the family relationships should be, as opposed to the way they are revealed by the plot. The seven pictures that comprise the family album are realistic icons of the familiar fact in that they show, as most photos do, an unreal, superficial, and static description of the photographed object, surface being the only layer of life that can, in fact, be apprehended by the photographer, who, like the speaker representing public opinion, cannot see beyond the surface. In Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation the seven photos stand for the family's superego or their social behavior, whereas their incestuous desires revealed on stage are the characters' ids or the parts of their psyches residing in the unconscious, which is the source of instinctive energy.

In the original playtext, the first picture shows Jonas and Senhorinha's wedding in 1900. The second presents the "happy" couple and their four children. The third is Glória's first communion. The fourth shows Senhorinha and her older sister, Rute. The fifth reveals Senhorinha and her youngest son, Nonô. The sixth is Jonas's last photo, and the seventh depicts Edmundo and Heloisa on their honeymoon. These snapshots counterpoise the action represented in the play, which aims to unmask the family as an institution by the demythification of the social roles of the father, the mother, and the "innocent" children. For that, the "reality" of the story told by the photographs is often juxtaposed with the most conflicting "truth" revealed by its x-ray, the action of the characters.

In his revision, Ribeiro introduced several unrealistic stage pictures to create scenes far removed from any attempt at verisimilitude. These photos would forge an illusion and express not only his opinions, but also those he artistically ascribed to Nelson Rodrigues. Thus, following the authorial instructions, the director's choice relied on expressionistic techniques, even though the basic text often emphasizes different angles of the same subject matter. Ribeiro's snapshots epitomize the mundane *mineira* clan that gradually suffers a conceptual transformation and is ironically shown at the end of the play as a substitute, a portrait, for the Holy Family. The last three photographs

represent Nonô's (Jesus's) descent from the cross after suffering a victimization, his lying in his mother's arms, which brings to mind the many and well-known Pieta paintings and sculptures, and his final redemption through resurrection. Those stage pictures are rhythmic in composition and lyrical in mood, even though they still stand for the innermost expression of the cruelty of the human heart in a heretical view or interpretation.

Perhaps the biggest and most significant modification was to make the part of Jonas smaller and that of Nonô larger. "In Nelson Rodrigues's text, the youngest son is the absent character who punctuates the spectacle with his screams," stated Ribeiro. "I put him onstage because I wanted to emphasize his importance. He is too important not to appear" (telephone interview). Even though this statement may be questionable, for there are innumerable examples of the absent main character in dramatic literature, the directorial choice has established some significant theatrical and thematic changes. In the original play, Nonô is seen only as a boy in a photo with Senhorinha. But the child, maddened by mother-incest, becomes a focal point in the new text. In Rodrigues's play, the central male character is the father, the apex of the three relational triangles (Glória/Jonas/Senhorinha; Edmundo/Jonas/Senhorinha; and Glória/Jonas/Guilherme). In Eid Ribeiro's adaptation, Jonas's part is de-emphasized and Nonô's is enlarged, for with Eliade's concept of the eternal return guiding the production, Nonô and Senhorinha, as Adam and Eve figures, are the two characters surviving the carnage of the action who will be able to regenerate a new life cycle.

This ending is a mystic repetition of the beginning of the play when Nonô is born naked on stage. The birth scene, probably the most emblematic of Galpão's version of *Álbum de Família*, is also a representation of the mother-son incest. Senhorinha's cries bear, in addition to their basic meaning of delivery pains, a second significance, that is, the immediate excitement of orgasm. Nonô is born to life as he is born to madness. He is the innocent naked man who, in his Adamic purity and sensibility, will endure, survive and recommence another course of the tragic existence. Although Nonô never speaks, he is present in almost every scene until the end of the play, where he and Senhorinha survive the other family members. Ribeiro's text directions not only make Nonô a physical personification of madness, but also apply a multiplicity of values to the development of the youngest son's characterization. Different members of the family value or see him differently. Tia Rute describes Nonô as an undesirable lunatic and a shame for the family. Senhorinha's eyes concentrate on his beautiful tanned body, which

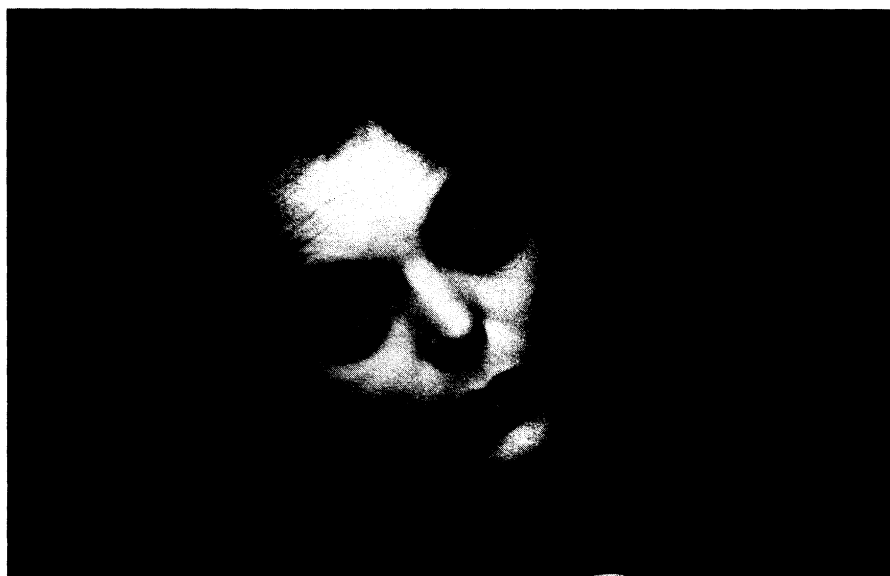
foreshadows the notion of reproduction and of the eternal return. Edmundo and Guilherme, in their jealousy, condemn his nudity as obscene for their mother's eyes. Glória hints at her own lesbian experiences as she quotes her lover Terezinha's remark about the ugliness of a man's body, and Jonas dislikes and seems to ignore him.

Ribeiro's directorial instructions contradict Rodrigues's text in which, as already mentioned, Nonô is an absent character whose mad grunts are heard throughout the play. The new version makes him present and visible and the personification of the old formula of poetic madness as a tremendous, inevitable and demanding qualification. As Michel Foucault reminds us, "in erudite literature, madness is in action, in the very core of reason and truth" (14). This poetic madness has the eloquence of the sacred, and Nonô becomes an Adam/Christ figure central to the play. Ribeiro's fundamental choice supports in concreteness the powerful reality of existence as an eternal, cosmic suffering, an eternal tragic return, resurrection, or rebirth. Nonô is the quintessential human being, in all his vulnerability and isolation, fulfilling the truth of the dramatist's words at the beginning of the play, that we live within the borders of love and death, in misery and anguish. In *Álbum de Família*, Nelson Rodrigues utilizes the grotesque expressionistic mode to state that the feelings of warm attachment and the deep affection presumably shared by the members of a family do not exist. What does exist is a perverted form of love that leads to destruction, be it madness or death.

The expressionistic movement started in northern Europe prior to World War I. Its pioneers were painters such as Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch, James Ensor, and the French Fauvists. Their stylized conceptions were adapted to serve literature, music, theatre, and the cinema. Having been conceived as a reaction against realism, expressionistic art stands as a highly subjective method which aims to manifest the inmost visions and convictions of the artist through antirational techniques and themes; thus, expressionism and logical reason cannot pacifically coexist (Fraga 71-87). This artistic convention serves to elicit a heightened emotional response from the viewer by distortion of form, color, sound, and space. The hallucination proper of the expressionistic mood corresponds to an escape from reality into a state of isolation and marginalization which provided the ideal theatrical language for Rodrigues's exploration of the human unconscious. His characters are expressions of hidden desires and reflections of the anguish of existence. They are distorted, oneiric projections of a collective consciousness. The



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accumulation of passion, hatred, aggression, murder and death is found in a specific type of expressionistic drama.

Grupo Galpão's production of *Álbum de Família* is rooted in this theatrical mode. The characters vacillate from the representation of real beings to that of automatons. The movements of Senhorinha, the protagonist, as well as her speeches, are very often mechanical; and the others – her husband and their children – often appear as cartoon-like nightmares. Other expressionistic devices in Ribeiro's version are created by strange visual and auditory sensations. Jorge de Carvalho's lighting choices privileged the chiaroscuro (black and white) contrast intermingled with amber, violet, and green spotlights which clearly stand for death, rebirth, resurrection and hell, myth and passion and hope respectively. The sounds are mainly clanging and beating noises, shouts and cries, moans and groans, and shots. There are also musical rhythms which change according to the moving photos or static scenes and which often become as distorted and overlapping as the action itself. At least three different types of songs stand out: church music, composed by Eduardo Guimarães Álvares for this version of the play; Vicente Celestino's "Botão de rosas" ("Rose Buds"); and André Filho's "Cinzas" ("Ashes"). These musical selections were high points in Ribeiro's production. The three different genres of composition are not merely there for the sake of beauty, relaxation, or entertainment; rather, they convey the psychological atmosphere of the play.

Church music is first heard in the opening wedding scene; next, when Jonas is asserting his patriarchal, godlike status by saying: "I'm the king. The father is sacred, the father is the Lord" (Ribeiro 2); and then, when Edmundo commits suicide, pronouncing: "Mother, heaven does not come after death. Heaven is thy womb, before birth" (Ribeiro 10). This scene is immediately followed by the fourth scene, in which Guilherme kills Glória out of jealousy. The instruments played are often out of tune and there is an intentional distortion of the musical score.

"Cinzas," which Galpão used in its 1992 production of *Romeu e Julieta*, is a skeptical comment on the romantic notion of "eternal" love. The song reminds the audience of the two stock characters of first commedia dell'arte and then Brazilian carnival, Pierrot and Harlequin, who stand pathetic romanticism and frivolous transient love respectively.

*Cinzas, somente cinzas no coração*

*Cinzas do nosso amor*

*Juro que estava mentindo quando jurei*

*Guardar para sempre este amor  
 Que abandonei  
 Chega! Já é demais tanto amargor  
 Basta! Não sou Pierrô  
 Sou um Arlequim bem moderno  
 Não acredito no amor* <sup>6</sup>

The word *cinzas* iconically represents the powdery residue of matter that remains after love burns itself out and, as such, suggests the destruction of the family relationship.

Although Barbara Heliodora was extremely critical of this unusual staging of *Álbum de Família*, the majority of the reviewers were complimentary; moreover, the high quality and innovative elements of Galpão's production were recognized with eight Cauê awards.<sup>7</sup> In his review of the spectacle, Marcello Castilho Avellar focused on the differences between the original piece and Ribeiro's adaptation. He applauded the abbreviated version, particularly the substitution of visual effects for words, stating that the play became more visceral, and asserted that the addition of Nelson Rodrigues's ghost and Nonô's physical presence onstage create a new point of view, replacing the traditional spectator-actor relationship with the author-observer-spectator interconnection: "What is seen on the stage seems to be commented on the entire time by speeches of Nelson Rodrigues or by the pure and violent gaze of Nonô" (5). Avellar compared the play to a kind of "sarcastic laughter at false morals and false social standards." Silvana Soares, writing for *Diário de Minas*, said of the production, "Grupo Galpão showed that it dominates the world of theatre arts even beyond the limits of popular street comedy, interpreting Rodrigues's tragedy with cohesion and talent" (13). Clara Arreguy, in *Estado de Minas*, wrote, "The entire show is thoughtful and accomplished with creativity, expressiveness and beauty. Set design, scenic moments, lighting, music, and gestures are meticulously realized to confer feeling and meaning to the actions of the actors: this makes *Álbum de Família* a show rich and dense and capable of moving the spectator" (2). Rogério Zola Santiago commented in *Jornal da Pampulha* that, "A true theatrical phenomenon was realized before the eyes of the audience.... Undoubtedly *Álbum de Família* is the best play of the year with details that verge on perfection" (11).

A number of scholars have perceived an element of social criticism in Nelson Rodrigues's dramaturgy. Ronaldo Lima Lins discusses five Rodrigues plays in his book *O Teatro de Nelson Rodrigues: Uma Realidade em Agonia*, stating that one of the major sources of dramatic tension in Rodrigues's dramas

is the disintegration of the family used metonymically to suggest the disintegration of the larger social order (75, 130, 154-61). Although *Álbum de Família* is not one of the five plays Lima Lins discusses in detail in his book, Audry Garcia's article, "*Álbum de Família?*" takes much the same line, suggesting that Jonas's patriarchal authoritarianism makes him an extension of the state, exemplifying the abuse of power and the crisis in the status quo (449). In her discussion of the stage and film versions of *Toda Nudez Será Castigada*, Melissa Lockhart sees Rodrigues as interrogating and subverting patriarchal norms, as does Ismail Xavier, who views the film adaptations of *Toda Nudez Será Castigada* and *O Casamento* as positing "bad taste, hysteria, and family problems as historical symptoms of the decline of patriarchy in Brazil" (331). And in his book on modern Brazilian theatre, David George sees a moral as well as a mythical dimension to *Álbum de Família*, stating that the drama demonstrates the dangers of uncontrolled spontaneity (135).

Although the play does, indeed, amply demonstrate the dire consequences of following our drives and impulses without regard to social convention or moral principle, the main thrust of Grupo Galpão's production of *Álbum de Família* is not one of social or moral criticism. At the end of the performance, Senhorinha, the character who, through her incestuous relationship with Nonô, has initiated the sordid chain of murders and suicides, is still alive, as is that son. The way Galpão uses lighting at the final disentangling of the plot is suggestive of the rebirth phase of Eliade's cycle of eternal return. Moreover, there seem to be no extrinsic causes for the family members' deviate behaviors that could be ultimately traced to problems within the social order. Nelson Rodrigues's play and Grupo Galpão's staging alike are disturbing and alienating to many spectators precisely because cause-and-effect motivation is apparently missing from the picture.

As Nelson Rodrigues himself once said, "The ladies tell me, 'I would like your characters to act like everybody else.' And it doesn't occur to anyone that my characters really are like everybody, and that's why they're so repulsive. Nobody wants to see their intimate wounds or their unconfessed sins right up there on the stage" (quoted in Lockhart 455-56). *Álbum de Família* makes us uncomfortable for exactly the reason that Rodrigues gives above. A friend of ours, Helen Tornovsky Santos, commented, as she declined an invitation to accompany us to a production of *Toda Nudez Será Castigada*, "Watching Nelson Rodrigues is torture." *Álbum de Família* does not ascribe human misery, cruelty, anguish, or abusiveness to any social evil. On the

contrary, it seems to be saying, "This is how we all are, deep down inside. If the façade of morality and conformity to social norms that mediates between ourselves and others were stripped away from us, we would be just like the characters in *Álbum de Família*."

Galpão's production of *Álbum* makes sense as a gloomy expression of Rodrigues's picture of the tragedy of being human, as told and interpreted by himself. The show is one in which the staging complements and adroitly conveys the play's conceptual basis. Its innovative marriage of form and content yields a well-unified spectacle that deserves all the praise and prizes it has received. Although this production is not enjoyable in the usual sense of the word, its adherence to the aesthetic of "form follows function" makes seeing it a rewarding theatre experience. The emphasis of the original piece on the portrayal of men and women as helpless creatures who are victims of destiny, desire and, most tragically, victims of themselves is heightened by the Mineira company's expressionist adaptation, grounded conceptually in the cyclical nature of human history, as well as in pre-modern notions of madness and sanity. As such, it serves to remind us, in the words of the dramatist, of the "unpleasant" realities of human existence.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We have translated into English all quotations from reviews and critical commentaries that were originally in Portuguese. We thank John Deely, Marian Monta, Kathleen Robbins, Brooke Williams and the *Latin American Theatre Review*'s two anonymous readers for their suggestions for revision.

<sup>2</sup> The word "mineiro/a" (Braz.) refers to a native or inhabitant of the state of Minas Gerais.

<sup>3</sup> Grupo Galpão's earlier productions were *E a noiva não quer casar* (1982), *De olhos fechados* (1983), *Ó pro cê vê na ponta do pé* (1984), *Arlequim, servidor de tantos amores* (1985), *A comédia da esposa muda* (1986), *Foi por amor* (1987) and *Corra enquanto é tempo* (1988). See Alves and Noe, "From the Street to the Stage: The Dialectical Theatre Practice of Grupo Galpão," forthcoming in the *Luso-Brazilian Review*, for a discussion of these and other Galpão productions.

<sup>4</sup> The word "mambembe" when applied to theatre refers to a moving or flying company, usually unsophisticated.

<sup>5</sup> The word "paulista" (Braz.) refers to a native or inhabitant of the state of São Paulo.

<sup>6</sup> Ashes, only ashes in the heart

Ashes of our love

I swear I was lying when I swore

To keep forever this love



That I abandoned  
 Stop! Too much bitterness already  
 Enough! I'm not Pierrot  
 I am quite a modern Harlequin  
 I don't believe in love

<sup>7</sup> Empresas Cauê is a cement company based in Belo Horizonte that gives annual awards for best theatre, dance and fashion in Minas Gerais, Brazil. 1990 Grupo Galpão winners were (all for *Álbum de família*) Best Adult Show, *Álbum de família*; Best Director, Eid Ribeiro; Best Actress, the late Wanda Fernandes; Best Actor, Chico Pelúcio; Best Supporting Actress, Teuda Bara; Best Musical Score, Eduardo Guimarães Álvares; Best Lighting, Jorge de Carvalho; and Best Set Design, Rômulo Bruzzi.

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