

## Martins Pena: A View of Character Types

COLIN M. PIERSON

Although the farces or realistic comedies of Martins Pena have been the object of study, proper attention has not been paid to his characters (stereotypes, if you prefer) as an important basis in the tradition of the realistic comedy in Brazil. Before beginning our examination, however, it would be well to review certain socio-historical developments that influenced both Pena and his times.

The original impetus for interest in modern drama in Brazil was the moving of the Portuguese court to Rio de Janeiro in 1808 to escape Napoleon's armies. The Portuguese were much closer geographically than the Brazilians to the centers of literary ideas in Europe which, with regard to the drama in the nineteenth century in both Portugal and Brazil, meant mainly France. It is not surprising that Portuguese dramatists, while themselves almost always years behind their French counterparts, had a continuing influence on Brazil in the last century. If Portugal always seemed a bit backward in employing new ideas and techniques, the Brazilians were even more so because many innovations were filtered through Portugal. It has been correctly stated that Brazilian theatre as a whole from its inception until World War I really never freed itself from Portuguese domination.<sup>1</sup>

This domination by Portugal was not limited to dramatists and their plays but included acting companies as well. The first great Portuguese acting company, which included the famous actress Ludovinha Soares, came to Brazil in 1829 with the help of D. Pedro I.<sup>2</sup> This was merely the first of a long line of foreign companies, Portuguese as well as others, that came to perform in Brazil and were centered mainly at the reconstructed Teatro de S. Pedro.

In the nineteenth century, then, the Brazilian theatre, for better or worse, was very closely allied in all facets of its existence to the development of drama and dramatic techniques in Portugal. The intangible result was that the Brazilians, despite some infrequent protests against Portuguese influence, always held Portugal somewhat in awe. In consequence, Brazil dealt with Portugal by deferentially lowering her voice out of respect and fear of being thought the fool.<sup>3</sup>

It was the same kind of relationship that existed between the United States and England, except that when one examines what Brazil accomplished with no long tradition of theatre to support her (or Portugal either), one concludes that her inferiority complex was far less justified.

One subgenre, however, an exception to this deference to Portugal, was being created in Brazil at the same moment that Gonçalves de Magalhães (1811-1882) was introducing "serious" Romantic drama from France: the realistic comedy of Martins Pena (1815-1848). Pena's realistic comedy or comedy of local color was to strike a responsive chord with Brazilian theatregoers and dramatists alike. However, because dramatic influence between Portugal and Brazil in the nineteenth century was a one-day affair, Pena—as well as other Brazilian dramatists—would be completely ignored by the Portuguese.<sup>4</sup>

On 4 October 1838, the same year in which the Magalhães play *Antônio José ou o Poeta e a Inquisição* was produced (the play itself a milestone as the first tragedy with a national theme written by a Brazilian), an unheralded, one-act farce entitled *O Juiz de Paz da Roça*<sup>5</sup> by Martins Pena had its premiere. The appearance of this realistic comedy, along with that of the tragedy of Magalhães, marked, if not the founding of the Brazilian theatre in a strict historical sense, at least its beginnings in modern form. Pena, much more than anyone else, was the principal factor and moving force in the development of this truly Brazilian theatrical movement.

Pena himself tried his hand at writing tragedy, attempting six in all. Of the five complete ones, all of which were written when the author was no more than twenty-five years old and far from dramatic maturity, only *Vitiza ou o Nero de Espanha* was produced on stage. None of them added to his fame as a dramatist. Pena's fame rests entirely on his comedies, which were for the most part one-act pieces and colorful depictions of the customs and morals of the period. It has been said that if all of the written documents concerning the period of the nineteenth century during which Pena wrote were to be lost and only his comedies were to remain, it would be possible to use them to achieve a faithful reconstruction of the mores of those years.<sup>6</sup> Although Pena was writing in the Romantic period in Brazil, his realistic comedies made him, in a manner of speaking, a precursor of realism. The language he employed, in particular, was realistic and captured the flavor of the spoken language of the period.<sup>7</sup> While the dialogue of the following rustic character might seem normal and not very innovative today, compared to the rhetorical speech of most of Magalhães' characters, it is very colloquial:

Domingos José—Muito mal vamos nós neste ano! As enchentes têm apodrecido as canas; o café tem morrido no pé e secado; o arroz, nisso não falemos! Está tudo alagado, entende o senhor? Não bastava para aflição de um pobre fazendeiro as enchentes, secas e o mais; era também preciso que sofresse a falta de pagamentos de seus foreiros. Os diabos os levem, juntos com as suas choradeiras. Não pagam o fôro dous, três anos, e no fim das contas safa-se com um filhinho, que é mesmo uma lesma, e a senhora que seja madrinha! Não se dá maior desfôro. Minha comadre pra cá, minha comadre pra lá, seu afilhado pra aqui, seu afilhado pra acolá, e com estas e outras choromingadeiras. . . . (*A Família e a Festa da Roça*, I, i, 1840)

In his comedies, Pena focused his attention, in general, on lower middle-class society. He did so, however, by observing and presenting only those peculiarities and foibles which were visible on the surface. They were comedies of local color, and Pena had no intention of making them otherwise. He was not in any way a philosophical dramatist and his observations, while realistic, were only skin deep, for he satisfied himself and his audience with a jest, a sight gag, a comical situation, a play on words. Sometimes the puns would border on the risqué but would never be really coarse or gross:

Clemência (para Júlia)—Como é mesa em francês?

Júlia—Table.

Clemência—Braço?

Júlia—Bras.

Clemência—Pescoço.

Júlia—Cou.

Clemência—Menina!

Júlia—É cou mesmo, mamã; não é primo? não é cou que significa?

Clemência—Está bom, basta.

Eufrásia—Estes franceses são porcos. Ora veja, chamar o pescoço, que está ao pé da cara, com este nome tão feio.

(*Os Dous ou o Inglês Maquinista*, I, xi, 1845)

It was a propitious time in Brazil for Pena's type of comedy. He was a civil servant of the Second Empire, which was entering a period of relative calm after many years of civil strife. Rio de Janeiro was still a provincial, colonial capital with an uncomplicated society, still fairly isolated from nineteenth century Europe. Pena was able to poke fun at certain aspects of society, while at the same time appealing to its awakening sentiment of national pride in things Brazilian. Nothing in the theatre was ever—either before or after—more wholly Brazilian than Pena's comedies.<sup>8</sup>

The necessary sources of Pena's realistic comedy cannot be ascertained with certainty, one reason for this being the author's reluctance to enter into theoretical discussions of his plays. Diverse elements of his comedies show that he was familiar with Molière although he differed from him in many important basic aspects.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps he was influenced by both old and new authors of comedies of manners, such as Gil Vicente, Antônio José da Silva and Scribe or by those foreign travelers like Debret and Luccock, who wrote picturesque travel books about the marvels of nineteenth-century Brazil. Other possible sources for Pena are the Portuguese farce and low comedy<sup>10</sup> which were brought to Brazil by foreign companies<sup>11</sup>—the very same type of low comedy that Almeida Garrett and the Romantic reformers tried to eliminate in Portugal. Together with these sources as possible influences on Pena, one must not forget the likelihood also of the Italian commedia dell'arte.

Pena's comedies were often curtain raisers, almost skits, that accompanied or followed longer, more "serious" dramas on the stage and the first such efforts did not even mention him as the author. Pena had to accomplish his comic purpose in quick order, for he had, generally, only one act with which to work. His successful formula was the creation of the kind of comedy in which stock char-

acter types were placed in certain situations upon which the entire action of the play would depend. Although many of these plays were standard situation comedies, replete with farcical action, it must be remembered that character and character types were most important, for it was these "types" (or caricatures), more than farcical action, which were developed in the realistic comedy by later dramatists. For example, *O Juiz de Paz da Roça* is a series of various *tranches de vie* of the rural countryside of the period. The difficulties and hard life of a farmer—the forerunner of the stereotypical bumpkin—and his country habits are portrayed picturesquely. However, the costumes and properties are described in realistic detail by the dramatist:

(Entra Manuel João com uma enxada no ombro, vestido de calças de ganga azul, com uma das pernas arregaçada, japonsa de baeta azul e descalço. Acompanha-o um negro com um cesto na cabeça e uma enxada no ombro, vestido de camisa e calça de algodão.) (*O Juiz de Paz da Roça*, I, iv)

Later on he has peasants enter the office of the justice of the peace, dressed in appropriate garb:

(Entram todos os lavradores vestidos como roceiros; uns de jaqueta de chita, chapéu de palha, calças brancas de ganga, de tamancos, descalços; outros calçam os sapatos e meias quando entram, etc. Tomás traz um leitão debaixo do braço.) (*O Juiz de Paz da Roça*, I, x)

The dramatist, as well as showing country life, is critical of certain aspects of the judicial process as it is administered in the provinces. After doing almost nothing legally for his constituents, the justice answers the notary's question:

Escrivão—Vossa Senhoria não se envergonha, sendo um juiz de paz?  
 Juiz—Envergonhar-me de quê? O senhor ainda está muito de cor. Aqui para nós, que ninguém nos ouve, quantos juizes de direito há por estas comarcas que não sabem aonde têm sua mão direita, quanto mais juizes de paz. . . . E além disso, cada um faz o que sabe. (*O Juiz de Paz da Roça*, I, xxi)

What happens, of course, in a great many of Pena's twenty-two comedies is that when the dramatist thought he had wrung every possible laugh from the piece, he needed to end it—or better, to extricate himself from it. Thus, the endings are not always the logical result of previous actions in the plot. For example, in the play, *O Juiz de Paz*, there is a concentration or telescoping of events which all happen with almost unbelievable rapidity and are ended by the justice of the peace ordering a dance. Presumably any loose ends in the action will be overlooked in the merrymaking:

Juiz—A menina não perde ocasião! Agora, o que está feito, está feito. O senhor não irá mais para a cidade, pois está casado. Assim não falemos mais nisso. Já que estão aqui, hão-de fazer o favor de tomar uma xícara de café comigo, e dançarmos antes disto uma tirana. Vou mandar chamar algumas pessoas para fazerem a roda maior. (Chega à porta.) Ó Antônio!

Vai à venda do Sr. Manuel do Coqueiro e diz aos senhores que há pouco saíram daqui que façam o favor de chegarem até cá. (I, xxii)

Another favorite and much used technique is that of ending a play in a deus-ex-machina fashion which sometimes bordered on what might be termed black humor. In *O Dileitante* (1845), for instance, Pena has been poking fun at one of his favorite targets: the Brazilian who is enamored of all foreign culture but who looks upon anything Brazilian as unworthy—even uncivilized. With the opportune arrival of a letter, Pena ends the play and the character.

Pajem—Esta carta que acabam de trazer para o senhor (Entrega a carta.)

José Antônio, abrindo a carta—Com licença. (Lendo em voz alta:) “Meu amigo, dou-lhe a mais triste e infausta nova que se pode dar a um dileitante.” (Deixando de ler:) O que será? (Lendo:) “Fecha-se o nosso teatro e a Companhia Italiana vai para Europa.” (José Antônio acaba de ler a carta; fica por alguns instantes trêmulo, levanta os braços, dá um pungente gemido e cai morto.)

Todos—Ah! (Merenciana abaixa para socorrer Antônio. Grupo.)

Gaudêncio, de joelhos junto de José Antônio—Está morto!

Todos—Morto! Que desgraça! (Grupam-se em redor do corpo de Antônio e cai o pano.) (*O Dileitante*, I, xxi)

Pena makes use of many of the situations and techniques, particularly in later comedies, traditionally employed by the farce. It is not surprising, therefore, that the targets of his lampoons are mere caricatures, stereotypes that would cause the audience to roar with laughter upon recognizing itself.<sup>12</sup> One must keep in mind, of course, the fact that Pena did not intend his characters to be anything but caricatures when he created them. Thus, one can readily accept their lack of passion or emotion. These traits of human behavior appeared only in rare cases such as that of José Antônio in *O Dileitante* and his “passion”<sup>13</sup> for Italian opera. There are several instances when Pena transcends his theatrical creation of types to introduce glimmers of psychological development: for instance, with a truly jealous personage in *Os Ciúmes de um Pedestre ou o Terrível Capitão do Mato* (1845).<sup>14</sup> But even in this exceptional case he was specifically trying to satirize the type of tragedy that João Caetano, the great Brazilian Romantic actor, had helped to bring into vogue.<sup>15</sup>

Several of Pena’s stock characters would be used by his followers with great success. One of them was the foreigner in Brazil who is used to point out certain disagreeable aspects of foreign presence in the country.<sup>16</sup> Pena’s technique for eliciting laughter against the foreigner from the audience is to have this type of character invariably speak a sort of pidgin-Portuguese:

D. Clemência, entrando—Estou contente com ele. Ó, o Sr. Gainer por cá! (Cumprimentam-se.)

Gainer—Vem fazer meu visita.

D. Clemência—Muito obrigada. Há dias que o não vejo.

Gainer—Tenha estado muita ocupada.

Negreiro, com ironia—Sem dúvida com algum projeto?

Gainer—Sim. Estou redigindo uma requerimento para as deputados.

Negreiro e D. Clemência—Ó!

Gainer—Pois nao! Eu peca na requerimento uma privilegio por trinta anos para fazer acucar de osso.

(*Os Dous ou o Inglês Maquinista*, I, v, 1845)

The foreigners are only in Brazil to make money with some odd financial scheme or other which the Brazilians take seriously because they believe anything foreign to be superior. So Pena's use of foreigners is double edged: he pokes fun at foreigners (particularly the English) while spoofing Brazilians for holding them in such high esteem. Dramatists that carried on the tradition of Pena's comedies, such as Joaquim Manuel de Macedo (1820-1882) and França Júnior (1838-1890), would use this theme almost exclusively to chide Brazilians.

Pena also classifies his character types by the region of Brazil from which they come. In general, those characters from the provinces are portrayed as being naive and rustic but at the same time solidly moral. On the other hand, those characters from the city, while more refined and better educated than their rustic counterparts, are shown as decadent and subject to corruption. Pena's sympathy for the provincial character can be seen in the following dialogue between Marcelo from São Paulo and José Antônio from Rio:

Marcelo—Enfim, na Rua do Ouvidor é confusão de coisas e de gentes a passarem de baixo para riba e a fazerem uma bulha tal, que me fizeram tonto. Tomara-me já em S. Paulo! (Senta-se no sofá.)

José Antônio—Homem, goze primeiro os prazeres da Corte. Não queira enterrar-se em vida no sertão. Vá ao teatro ouvir Norma, Belisário, Ana Bolena, Furioso.

Marcelo—Não acho graça nenhuma. Um as cantigas que eu não percebo e que não se pode dançar. Não há nada como o fado.

José Antônio—Que horror, preferir um fado à música italiana! (à parte:) O que faz a ignorância!

Marcelo—É o que o senhor ainda não ouviu um fadinho bem rasgadinho e bem choradinho. (Pega na viola e afina, enquanto José Antônio fala.)

José Antônio—Nem quero ouvir! Não diga isto a ninguém, que se desacredita. A música italiana, meu amigo, é o melhor presente que Deus nos fêz, é o alimento das almas sensíveis.

(*O Diletante*, I, iv, 1845)

There is a progression or evolution of the action in Pena's comedies, going from the countryside with its careful descriptions, its "slice of life" depictions to the city with more animated movement and theatricality on stage. This evolution from comedy-of-manners plays to outright farce is rapid since he produced his comedies at a prodigious rate.<sup>17</sup> In 1845 alone, ten new plays were produced. With each succeeding play, the amount of animated movement increased, with actors jumping in and out of closets and chasing each other around the stage until, by the end of each work, it seemed as if everyone were pursuing or being pursued at an unbridled gallop. One of the principal stage properties that the author would use in many farces to augment the helter-skelter action was the

*armário*, which made its first appearance in the play, *Os Irmãos das Almas* (1844). For example, as scene seventeen opens, the *armário* is full of people:

Cabo, entrando—Que gritos são esses?

Mariana—Temos ladrões em casa!

Cabo—Aonde estão?

Eufrásia—Ali no armário!

Luísa (à parte)—No armário! Que fiz eu? Está perdido. . . . (O cabo dirige-se para o armário com os soldados. Mariana, Eufrásia e Luísa encostam-se para a esquerda, junto à porta.)

Cabo (junto ao armário)—Quem está aí?

Jorge (dentro)—Abra com todos os diabos!

Cabo (sentido)—Camaradas! (O cabo abre a porta do armário; por ela sai Jorge, e torna a fechar a porta com presteza. O cabo agarra-lhe na gola da casaca.) Está preso.

But it is the wrong man:

Cabo—Pois abra (O cabo diz estas palavras a Jorge porque ele conserva-se enquanto fala, com as costas apoiado no armário. Jorge abre a porta, sai Sousa; o cabo segura em Sousa. Jorge torna a fechar o armário e encosta-se. Sousa e o cabo que o segura caminham um pouco para frente.)

Wrong man again!

Eufrásia—Não explico isto! (Jorge abre a porta do armário; sai por ela, com impetuosidade, Felisberto. Atira com Jorge no chão e foge pela porta do fundo. O cabo e os dois soldados correm em seu alcance.)

Cabo—Pega, pega! (Sai, assim como os soldados. Jorge levanta-se.)

(*Os Irmãos das Almas*, I, xvii, 1844).

The quick moving, almost slapstick air of Pena's farcical, one-act comedies does not signify that he did not attempt longer works in the same vein. He wrote several three-act comedies: *As Casadas Solteiras* (1845), *O Usurário* (1846) and *O Noviço* (1845). *As Casadas Solteiras* was an imitation of French models while *O Usurário* remained unfinished. *O Noviço* is unique in Pena's repertoire in that it consists of three acts and has an equilibrium and balance between form and content that shows a certain moderation in the farcical aspect.<sup>18</sup> Pena seemed to have in mind the Roman comedies, particularly those of Plautus. In spite of the balance and uniqueness of this longer comedy, Pena was to return to the one-act comedy, the form in which he felt most at ease, until his death.

Pena's popularity during his lifetime was enormous. As many as three of his comedies were performed in different theatres in Rio de Janeiro at the same time. He became famous, first in the capital, and then in the outlying provinces, until his name became a living legend with the theatre-going public.<sup>19</sup>

The Romantic drama in Brazil was carried on by dramatists who for the most part were considered (or considered themselves) more as poets than as playwrights. Just as occurred in Portugal, the Brazilian public tired of the Romantic poet-playwrights and the thesis play came into vogue, finding its leading exponent in José de Alencar. However, the realistic comedy in the tradition of Martins Pena was further developed in the nineteenth century by such playwrights as

Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, França Junior, Artur Azevedo (1855-1908) and Coelho Neto (1864-1934). Each dramatist added his own variations to the basic format: social and political satire, pathos, personal pique, and African culture.

But not only did Pena's realistic comedy become the basis for Brazil's most unique and lasting contribution to Luso-Brazilian drama, it also became Brazil's most dependable standby in times of theatrical crisis. When Brazil was cut off by World War I from the flow of dramatic ideas from France and Portugal, her dramatists turned once more to the tradition of the realistic comedy. And at least one modern critic thinks that the realistic comedy can continue to exert influence. In his tribute to Pena's having been (and to the possibility that he could still be) an important factor in Brazilian drama, Nunes stated: "Sua influência foi forte: grande no seu século e muito efetiva ainda nas primeiras décadas deste, quando surgiu uma comédia brasileira, despreziosa mas pitoresca, atenta à realidade dos hábitos do povo brasileiro. . . . A encenação na atualidade das peças de Pena . . . daria indubitavelmente resultados estupendos. Por que não começa um deles com a montagem de *As Casadas Solteiras*?"<sup>20</sup>

*University of Nebraska—Lincoln*

## Notes

1. Décio de Almeida Prado, *João Caetano* (São Paulo, 1972), pp. 139-40.
2. R. Magalhães Junior, "D. Pedro I e os Artistas" in *Revista de Teatro*, No. 289 (Jan.-Feb., 1956), p. 15.
3. Almeida Prado, p. 148.
4. Raymond S. Sayers, "A Literatura Brasileira no Portugal Oitocentista, Os Críticos, Os Jornais, As Revistas" in *Revista da Junta de Investigações do Ultramar*, 1974, p. 512. Sayers states that Pena not only went unpublished in Portugal but was not even mentioned in Inocêncio Francisco da Silva's (1810-1876) *Dicionário Bibliográfico Português* until the sixteenth volume printed in 1893 when Brito Aranha (1833-1914) was editor.
5. Martins Pena, *O Juiz de Paz da Roça*, in *Teatro de Martins Pena*, ed. by Darcy Damasceno. 2 vols. (Rio, 1956).
6. Sílvio Romero, "Martins Pena," *Dionysos*, No. 13 (Feb. 1966), 11. (The entire issue is a compilation of important essays on Pena.)
7. Cassiano Nunes, "Algumas Reflexões sobre o Teatro de Martins Pena," *Latin American Theatre Review*, 2/1 (Fall 1968), 54. Nunes states that realistic language is Pena's primary modern aspect.
8. Romero, p. 11.
9. Leon F. Lyday, "Satire in the Comedies of Martins Pena" in *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 5/2 (Winter 1968), 63-64. Lyday gives a detailed account of possible sources, including opinions of such critics as Sílvio Romero, Valdemar de Oliveira and Sábato Magaldi.
10. Nunes, p. 54. Nunes claims these are the main sources of Pena's inspiration.
11. José Veríssimo, "Martins Pena e o Teatro Brasileiro," *Estudos de Literatura Brasileira*, 4 vols. (Rio, 1901-04), I, 187.
12. Lyday, pp. 64-65. Lyday has an excellent discussion of the presence of satire in relation to farcical aspect in Pena's plays. He gives differing views of such critics as Nelson Werneck Sodré, José Bezerra de Freitas, Manuel Bandeira, Sábato Magaldi, Sílvio Romero and Wilson Martins, plus his own.
13. Romero, p. 10.
14. Lyday, pp. 67-68. Lyday offers an interesting history of possible change in title of this play to avoid censorship.
15. Sábato Magaldi, *Panorama do Teatro Brasileiro* (São Paulo, 1962), pp. 44-45.
16. Lyday, p. 67. Lyday regards, with good reason, satire concerning characterization as most important type in Pena's plays.
17. Lyday, pp. 67-68. Lyday says that part of this rapid transition to outright farce could be the result of a desire to avoid the Board of Censorship.
18. Bárbara Heliodora, "A Evolução de Martins Pena," *Dionysos*, No. 13 (Feb. 1966), 38.
19. Veríssimo, pp. 183-90.
20. Nunes, p. 56.