

## Two New Plays by Jorge Andrade

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At the conclusion of my recent study of the to-then published and most celebrated works of Jorge Andrade I suggested that a forthcoming play might well continue the author's more or less chronological development of the social history of São Paulo.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Jorge Andrade has had a number of works in progress—several of them revisions of earlier plays—that will complete and continue the treatment of the history and sociology of his native city and region. Two of them have just appeared.

*Rasto Atrás* is based on the author's most personal experiences and is more frankly autobiographical than any work of his to date.<sup>2</sup> Artistically, it is a synthesis of his previous works, incorporating as they do influences from world theatre, but it is nevertheless most original and a landmark in the Brazilian theatre.

The action of *Rasto Atrás* extends from 1922 (the year of Jorge Andrade's birth) to 1965, and the author-protagonist is shown at ages 5, 15, 23, and 43. The play represents the final stage in a series of emotional struggles on the part of the author, in general from work to work, but specifically with respect to *Rasto Atrás*, dating from 1957. His effort has been to make a sentimental journey back in time in order to resolve conflicts within himself and between himself and his father. The journey in *Rasto Atrás* is made both spatially and temporally; the graphic element—props are mainly suggested with various audio-visual effects—complements the flashback, which, in addition to providing background, depicts the mental probings of the author. Thus, the title has several meanings, literal and symbolic, crystallized in Vicente's father's explanation of backtracking in hunting; except that in *Rasto Atrás* the process leads to an encounter between hunter and hunted. The deeper meanings, social and psychological, are further exemplified in the author's choice of an epigraph from the writings of Eça de Queiroz, and in the dedication to his father. More than ever, theme and structure are one,

epitomizing the counterpoint in space and time so typical of Jorge Andrade and of modern literature.

Essential information on Vicente as a famous dramatist is given in scenes between him and his wife. His problems are not only individual but general, those of all Brazilian intellectuals since 1964, problems caused by inflation and the political situation. Vicente speaks, for example, of a theatrical failure (Andrade's *Vereda da Salvação*, an international success), of the need to support his family by teaching (admittedly one of Andrade's most rewarding human experiences), of a number of his plays awaiting an impresario, and of television, with its frequent prostitution of art (he alludes particularly to an adaptation of *Os Ossos do Barão*, which was rejected by Andrade). Other autobiographical details of the artist Vicente-Jorge have been (and will continue to be) reworked from version to version, not the least of which pertains to the typical attitude of the Brazilian male toward art as an effeminate occupation. This, of course, is the chief basis of the hostility between Vicente-Jorge and his father. Only after many years of searching, when the dramatist has justified his existence by success, can he be reconciled with himself and others; for, to be fully justified, he requires the approval of the father whose name he rejected (Jorge Andrade's paternal surname is Franco).

In order to prepare his audience for the final tragic-triumphant encounter between father and son in the most concise dramatic fashion, Andrade presents a series of flashbacks showing the two at several decisive moments in their lives, sometimes simultaneously. These free associations are made possible through the memories of the protagonist and his father. The five-year-old boy's imagination and sensitivity already come into conflict with João José's consuming love of hunting. At fifteen, the adolescent's budding interest in art is understood only by an aunt, and he attempts to leave home for São Paulo. At twenty-three, after a terrible scene with his father, Vicente breaks his engagement to his childhood sweetheart, following which he finally departs for the big city. The points of similarity between Vicente's life and Andrade's are numerous.

There are several differences, however, due in part to the process of artistic selection and transformation. Vicente's aunts, the chief characters of an earlier version in which he did not appear, were not Jorge Andrade's aunts, but neighbors, friends of his grandmother. Vicente's grandmother, Mariana, figures prominently in *Rasto Atrás* as the strong matriarch that the author's grandmother in fact was; she is to be found in his earlier plays too. The three friends become her daughters in this work, and their father in the earlier version, reminiscent of Quim in *A Moratória*, is now Vicente's.

Not only characters, but situations are transformed from real life and other plays; yet there is always evidence of Andrade's desire to study and clarify his "people" and society. His first works focused on the coffee crisis

in São Paulo in 1929, making only the vaguest references to events leading up to it. Subsequent plays similarly treated immediate problems. *Rasto Atrás* gives antecedents and consequences with greater precision, always in language appropriate to character and intent. The psychological, particularly personal, aspects of the play far outweigh its documentary value; nonetheless, this latter value is an important one in the Andrade canon.

Although completed by 1963, *Senhora na Bôca do Lixo* was staged and published only in 1968.<sup>3</sup> In this play Andrade continues to trace the sociological history of São Paulo in his more impersonal manner. Noêmia, *a senhora*, is the aristocratic woman, incapable and unwilling to adapt to reduced economic status, who is often found in other works by Andrade. Her escape into the glorious past is made possible by a refined form of smuggling; like so many Brazilians of her class, she is disdainful of her culture and must travel in search of the elegance she craves. Noêmia is supported by more affluent aristocrats or *nouveaux-riches* who purchase the luxury items that she imports as "objects of personal use." Indeed, wealthy Brazilians are well organized to perpetuate their way of life at the expense of the government and the democracy. This is the *lixo* (garbage) in the midst of which Noêmia, in a semi-conscious way, finds herself. The lower classes, generally little represented in Andrade's plays, are presented in dramatic contrast to Noêmia, whose attitude and actions contribute to their particular form of *lixo*.

Caught between the two social extremes are Camila, Noêmia's daughter, and Hélio, the police officer in charge of contraband and Camila's co-worker and boyfriend. The latter is a member of the *petit fonctionnaire* class, incarnating its morality, desirable but intransigent. Camila, the typical aristocratic girl found in many Andrade plays, has been obliged to face economic reality and earn her family's living; she has joined Hélio's class willingly, but cannot entirely reject her mother and background. For these two, Noêmia's situation, with all its ramifications, is or becomes a personalized, painful moral issue.

At the outset, Camila and Noêmia are found in a setting and situation reminiscent of the *drame bourgeois*, with comic overtones in the figures of Noêmia's friends and, later, the "French decorator" Simon. Problems, exposed or foreshadowed in references to Noêmia's activities and to Camila's job and boyfriend, are first dramatized by the appearance of another of Camila's co-workers, Carmem. She is an interesting blend of frank *soubrette* and modern working girl. After Simon's explanation to Noêmia of the organization of upper-class smugglers, there is further drama with the entrance of Hélio to seize the contraband and arrest Noêmia, who suspects that he is Camila's boyfriend. At the end of Act I Hélio is near comic, for he does not know that Noêmia is the mother of the proper girl who has

never allowed him to escort her home. His devotion both to principle and Camila, coupled with frustration on all sides, will make him almost a Cornelian hero.

Acts II and III are filled with contrasts of all sorts: what the police headquarters are now and what the building still represents to Noêmia; the latter's predicament and that of the poor wretches at the mercy of their conditions; social-political favoritism in the case of *a senhora* and injustice in punishing the lower classes; Noêmia's escapism and incomprehension, together with her deliberate snobbery and efforts at blackmail. Above all, the idealism of Hélio and Camila comes into conflict with the harsh realities of society, politics, and love. This, then, is the more conventional type of counterpoint used in *Senhora na Bôca do Lixo*.

Act II deals with the discoveries on the part of the chief characters, brought about partially by Garcia, the somewhat cynical believer in compromise. Hélio has arrested Noêmia and, although he was unaware of her identity, would arrest her again. Camila needs proof that Hélio has not used her, and in turn offers proof that she has not used him by denouncing her mother, much as Corneille's heroine (for whom her mother named her) denounced Rome to prove her love.

Act III provides a tragic-triumphant solution for a tragic dilemma. Like Rodrigue or Horace, Hélio wants to believe that love can be reconciled to duty; but, again like her classical counterpart, Camila renounces devotion to futile principles in favor of love and continues her efforts to find a practicable way of life. She persuades Hélio to follow her and the shaken but unregenerate Noêmia. It is not the most satisfactory solution, but to admit defeat in one direction and seek victory in another is modern, realistic, and not entirely tragic. If I may extend my comparisons to Cornelian drama, although the setting here is contemporary and there is a mixture of the comic and the serious, the basic concept is not unlike Corneille's on tragedy (or tragic-comedy).

While the world about us wallows in garbage, the best that we can do is to avoid contamination and strive to be pure. This moral lesson applies more or less equally to *Rasto Atrás* and *Senhora na Bôca do Lixo*, and these plays advance in accomplishment, as well as number, the increasingly-important theatre of Jorge Andrade.

## Notes

1. "The Theatre of Jorge Andrade," *Latin American Theatre Review*, I (Fall 1967), 3-18.
2. Jorge Andrade, *Rasto Atrás, peça em 2 partes*. Prefácio de Delmiro Gonçalves (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1967). This play took first place in the 1966 National Theatre Service Prize Contest in Brazil. See Sábado Magaldi, "A Procura de *Rasto Atrás*," *Comentário*, 1º trimestre, 1968, pp. 42-50.
3. Jorge Andrade, *Senhora na Bôca do Lixo, peça em três atos* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1968).