

Os Comediantes and *Bridal Gown*

David George

The cycle of the modern Brazilian stage that extends from 1943 to 1984 begins with a decisive staging of playwright Nelson Rodrigues' (1912-1980) *Vestido de Noiva (Bridal Gown)*, by the Rio de Janeiro company Os Comediantes. The director was polish emigré Zbigniew Ziembinski. The most recent milestone is the staging of the author's *Album de Família (Family Album)* and *Toda Nudez Será Castigada (All Nakedness Will be Punished)*, in a 1984 production entitled *Nelson 2 Rodrigues*, directed by Antunes Filho with his Grupo Macunaima.¹ The playwright's strategic placement in the 40-year cycle is no coincidence, for he is the most revolutionary and challenging figure in modern Brazilian drama, as a consequence of his thematic and stylistic breakthroughs and innovations in the realm of stagecraft. In part one of this two-article series I scrutinize the relationship between the text and staging of *Bridal Gown*, while part two examines *Nelson 2 Rodrigues*.² My basic contention in the two articles is that the archetypal and mythical dimensions embedded in the plays provide the glue binding texts and productions.

The national stage had been dominated since the 19th century by the comedy of manners (*comédia de costumes*), which along with the operetta, vaudeville (*revista*), and melodrama, still held sway in the 1930's and even into the 1940's. Many artists and critics viewed the comedy of manners as an outdated form and in fact scorned theatre in general as nothing more than a popular entertainment whose sole purpose was to get laughs. Modernist critic Antônio de Alcântara Machado summed up the comedy of manners in this exasperated fashion:

Give us no more stupid Portuguese; pretentious mulatto women who mix French and Portuguese(...); meddling

servants; truculent mothers-in-law who verbally torture carousing sons-in-law(...) and stop filling comedies with screaming faints, much running about, conjugal betrayal, family quarrels(...)³

Theatre was a closed circle with built-in defects, a 19th-century relic. Careless stagecraft, the predominance of one comic star⁴ and eternal type-casting reinforced and were reinforced by comedies and melodramas without artistic merit or social concerns.⁵ By the late 1930's Brazilian theatre was exhausted and change was urgent. "Commercial theatre(...) was unable to withstand the impact of the cinema, continually losing ground as popular entertainment. It had nothing fundamental to say about Brazilian life(...) Most important, it was unable to incorporate the new literary tendencies in poetry and the novel."⁶ The necessary changes would not be effected within the context of commercial theatre. While a few amateur troupes in Rio and São Paulo in the late 1930's and early 1940's had begun the process of change,⁷ it was the company Os Comediantes, in conjunction with playwright Nelson Rodrigues, that would modernize the national stage.

The playwright's career spanned five decades (1941 to 1980) and his production was extensive (17 plays), although journalism was his profession.

"Nelson Rodrigues' plays constitute the broadest theatrical picture of urban Brazilian society(...) through a language that is crisp, colloquial, concise, and vibrant, and through exposé of his characters' hidden selves, he opened the way for all the dramatists of recent decades."⁸

With the notable exception of Oswald de Andrade,⁹ Nelson Rodrigues was the only Brazilian playwright of his time to do what the European Expressionists had done decades earlier: he exploded the veil of consciousness and reason and exposed the hidden zones of the subconscious, examining taboos, perversions, and in general the abnormal. He opened society's abscesses and attacked its violent puritanical and sexual repression, and his female characters are frequently victims when their subconscious desires explode against the unyielding barrier of patriarchal society.

Nelson Rodrigues was a consummate stylist in drama and in journalism. His newspaper column "Life As It Is" ("*A Vida Como Ela É*") was widely read by all classes of people for its stories about everyday life narrated in the spontaneous language of the street. He transposed that speech to the stage, a radical departure from the

melodramas and comedies of manners of his time. From his first plays, the writer's dialogue is clear and direct. If it becomes somewhat more poetic in his mythic plays (e.g., *Family Album*), it is never *recherché*. With his "Carioca tragedies" (e.g., *All Nakedness Will Be Punished*), he makes full use of the colloquial language and slang of Rio's slums.

As significant as his stylistic innovations was his vision of stagecraft. He eliminated artifice from the theatre, as the Modernists had done with poetry and narrative in the twenties and thirties. It is ironic that his very lack of any connection with Brazilian dramatic tradition, chained as it was to convention, helped him to experiment technically. His influences came from the cinema. He made extensive use of the flashback, breaking with linear, chronological plot structure. He utilized the techniques of psychoanalysis to search for hidden motivations in the characters' past, and thereby defied the convention of limiting the time frame to the present. Often, in fact, there is more past than present action, as well as simultaneous actions in different time frames. In general, Nelson Rodrigues enriched stagecraft by removing the fourth wall and making the stage more flexible. He created a pure theatre without the spatial and temporal restrictions of realism. Under the influence of cinema, the visual image gained prominence in his work. He was willing to use any effect, borrow any technique, such as microphones and masks. He was not concerned with verisimilitude. In short, he attempted always to appeal to the spectator's imagination and fantasy. And with his play *Bridal Gown* he provided the vehicle for Brazil's first modern director, Zbigniew Ziembinski.

BRIDAL GOWN

The action of *Vestido de Noiva* takes place in the mind of Alaíde as she lies dying on the operating table after an automobile accident. There are three levels in the play: the planes of hallucination, memory, and reality. The puzzle of the young woman's life is revealed during the play's three acts: her fascination with a murdered prostitute who appears in hallucinations, the elegant Madame Clessy, and the violent and bitter love triangle involving Alaíde, her husband Pedro, and her sister Lúcia. The play ends in the time after her death, with images from Pedro and Lúcia's wedding.

Alaíde is the first female protagonist in Brazilian drama to revolt against the stifling conventions of patriarchal society. She transfers her defiance to Clessy and mimics the madam's violent death. Her quest is to discover and express that part of herself the prostitute incarnates and which has been repressed by social and moral strictures. Clessy becomes in the moments before the protagonist's death an inner voice, urging her to reconstruct memory and therefore the

truth of her life: her sordid relationships and frustrated revolt. Goaded by the phantom prostitute, Alaíde lays bare the crumbling facade of middle class respectability, the social entrapment of marriage, and the death of desire. Clessy is a temptress beckoning her to violate taboos, while her hallucinations expose the gruesome aspects of the prostitute's life (Clessy died with her face torn off by her young lover's knife).

Vestido de Noiva does not present this rather melodramatic material to reinforce conventional morality nor to warn against revolt. While according to social-class mores Alaíde's secret model, Madame Clessy, is scandalous and perverse, it is the prostitute who guides the protagonist to question those very mores. She reveals a startling truth to Alaíde: society condemns the idea of women fulfilling their fantasies and hidden desires. Indeed, it is the women in *Bridal Gown* who are strong and vital and lead the revolt against sexual repression. The men are merely part of a repressive apparatus, an implacably brutal reality.

The play tears away the conscious mind's veil of censorship. It draws the reader/spectator into a realm of forbidden desires and archetypal symbols. "*Bridal Gown* is supported by two pillars. It interests us for purely theatrical reasons by telling a story that holds our attention as it unfolds. Second, it penetrates the world of unrevealed feelings that represents one of the essential aspects of the human personality."¹⁰ *Bridal Gown's* real conflict takes place in Alaíde's unconscious mind, through which the dying woman reveals the forbidden zones of her psyche, to use the Jungian term for the mind, which she projects in the form of a phantom prostitute who dominates her life when instinct and desire come to the foreground.¹¹

Director Antunes Filho, in his production *Nelson 2 Rodrigues*, based his interpretation partly on the Jungian theory of archetypes, the ancient, "eternal" symbols embedded in the *psyche* and which emerge from the collective unconscious. These archetypes, according to Jungian psychology, appear in dreams, hallucinations, delirium, and artistic creation. They are especially likely to come forth in times of crisis and passage. In my view, *Bridal Gown* is well suited to Jungian archetypal analysis: its plot consists mainly of a woman's hallucinations during her time of most profound crisis and passage, her accident and approaching death.

Jungian psychology posits that the dreaming or hallucinating mind is linked to the world of myth and supernatural, and that is the case with Alaíde's hallucinations. In one scene, her mother suggests that Clessy's ghost haunts the house where she died and where Alaíde's family now lives. One might say that the protagonist is possessed by the madam's spirit, not a far-fetched idea if one considers the

pervasiveness in Brazil of macumba, a neo-African religion based on ritual possession. Supernatural images pervade the play, as in the scene after Alaíde's death, with its magical atmosphere. The stage directions state: "Light on Alaíde and Clessy. Poetic ghosts."¹² As the protagonist's ghost climbs the stairway holding the bridal bouquet, the other characters are frozen (immobile); reality is suspended while the supernatural takes over. The final image is Alaíde's tomb in the moonlight. In dreams, according to Jung, the moon is a death symbol.

The Swiss psychologist theorized that all people share a common instinctual repository, called the collective unconscious. This deepest level of the *psyche* sends vital messages that concern the individual's inner growth and development and it speaks in the language of visual or pictorial images and symbols, known as archetypes, to which Jung gave specific names and definitions: *shadow*, *anima*, *animus*, and *mandala*. They have distinct forms, represent different aspects of the personality, and perform special functions in psychological development.

Bridal Gown begins with the sounds of the accident. The first voice is Alaíde's, calling "Clessy, Clessy." She is summoning her *shadow* self. The accident has broken the shield of the conscious mind and plunged her into the vastness of the collective unconscious. The most shattering crisis of all, death, has placed Alaíde in direct contact with the *psyche*'s deepest levels and produced the emergence of the ancient symbols. The *shadow* archetype represents the dark or hidden side of the *psyche*, such as repressed desires and qualities difficult to integrate into the personality and which the conscious mind rejects because they seem alien to one's self-image. The *shadow*, projected as a figure of the same sex as the hallucinator/dreamer, is a critic of the personality, a teller of unpleasant truths. Madame Clessy is a *shadow* projection: she embodies the secret, dark side of Alaíde's personality, the repression of which has given rise to the tragedy. In the hallucination scenes, the *shadow* urges the protagonist to remember her past. And while Alaíde tries to reassemble memory, to stop the mental disintegration that comes with death, she also wants to forge painful and shameful events. In her *shadow* function, therefore, the madam is a catalyst for resolving one of the play's central conflicts: the struggle between the unconscious mind (desire and fantasy) and memory (objective reality). She forces the dying woman to recognize her soul's hidden zones and the truth of past events.

A second archetype that one would expect to be present in *Bridal Gown* is the *animus*. It symbolizes the "masculine" side of the female *psyche*, and its appearances are personified by various male figures. There is a man in Alaíde's first hallucination dressed as a *malandro* (rogue, hustler). The author indicates in the stage directions that,

"the same gentleman appears throughout the play, with different costumes and personalities." (110) He corresponds to the *animus*, which lives within the woman's collective unconscious and which she projects externally on various male images throughout her life (e.g., father, lover, wise man). That the man in Aláide's hallucinations possesses an archetypal essence is clear, since he metamorphoses, dream-like, in different guises. The dying woman's hallucinations present the complexity and contradictions of dreams; the man transmogrifies into a further archetypal manifestation, the negative *animus*. Aláide screams in panic that he wants to trap her. This dimension of the *animus*, an immature prolongation of the father figure, tries to entrap the woman in a dependent, infantile state. As I observed previously, all the male figures in *Bridal Gown* are part of a repressive apparatus. At the same time, the negative *animus* forces the young woman to confess that she killed her husband, which corresponds not to objective reality but to repressed desire. What she has killed, or attempted to kill, has been part of the *animus* itself, the smothering father, which she has projected on Pedro. The "murder" represents her search for maturity and independence, for liberation from the clutches of the negative male archetype. Aláide hallucinates killing her husband because his "goodness" disgusted her. This "goodness", of course, refers to social convention in a patriarchal society, and therefore to the negative *animus*'s function of keeping the woman from self-realization. But her training in the context of the patriarchal social code does not permit her to find the path of maturity and independence. And so her efforts (e.g., she lies to Pedro about "another man") seem perverse and ultimately are self-destructive.

The *mandala* is one of the most important pictorial symbols of the collective unconscious. Unlike other archetypes, it is not a personification. Rather, it is manifested as an object or shape whose form is usually round and occasionally rectangular. It symbolizes the *self*, the center of the *psyche* from which all archetypes emerge. The appearance of the *mandala* represents a retreat from external difficulties and psychological disturbances into the inner fortress of the *self*, an attempt to establish internal balance and harmony, to order psychic disorder. Aláide's rectangular *mandala* is, ironically, the operating table. She has taken inner flight--through the accident--from the difficulties of her life. Her tragedy is that she reaches the fortress within and gains self-awareness only at the moment of death. She has in a sense created a *mandala* that serves as the altar for a ritual of self-sacrifice.

Ritual informs the entire structure of the play, which reinforces the archetypal dimensions. According to Jungian theory, archetypal patterns and images mirror ancient ritual and mythical forms.

Director Antunes Filho also utilized a ritual interpretation in his staging, *Nelson 2 Rodrigues*, based on Mircea Eliade's theory of the myth of the eternal return (hence the original title of the production, *Nelson Rodrigues: O Eterno Retorno*). Eliade posits that for archaic societies time is circular rather than linear; it repeats nature's eternal cycle, returning always to the same point. Human rituals perpetuate the cycle by recreating the "cosmogonic paradigm," the original creation. Time is thus suspended and becomes sacred. *Bridal Gown* stages these rituals--wedding, funeral--and suspends time by projecting externally Alaíde's unconscious mind. Ritual symbols of death and renewal, funeral/coffin/tomb and cross/bridal gown/veil, as well as funeral and wedding marches, occur on the stage repeatedly and at times simultaneously. Death leads to renewal through ritual: during the wedding scene at the end of the play, Alaíde's ghost is about to hand the bridal bouquet to Lúcia. Linear time is suspended; there is only mythic time, which is also dream-time. The action in the play is cyclical, the same patterns repeated. Wedding and burial scenes happen over and over. Clessy dies to haunt Alaíde, who dies to haunt Lúcia.

There is a fundamental social irony in all this. The overriding ritual symbol in the work is the bridal gown, the wedding, marriage. It is an archaic form that the play depicts not in terms of its positive function (renewal of the eternal union) but as an institution that kills desire and impedes liberation. The playwright transforms a symbol of purity, innocence, and sacred ritual into a death shroud, Alaíde's postmortem costume, a mask that hides the violence and repression of a patriarchal society.

The archetypal and ritual aspects of *Bridal Gown* also determine the work's fragmented structure, as well as certain techniques that were revolutionary in Nelson Rodrigues' time. The play's most notable structural feature is simultaneous actions in different time planes and on three levels of consciousness: hallucination, memory, and reality. All of this provides great complexity, and what makes it function and gives it cohesion is the archetypal machinery of the unconscious. The ritual form allows Nelson Rodrigues to violate one of the principal conventions of realist theatre: a protagonist's actions through linear time and confrontation with an obstacle. In *Bridal Gown* there is no forward movement through time and no external obstacle to overcome or conflict to resolve. The beginning and ending point is the death of the protagonist. Dramatic time becomes ritual time. They play illuminates Alaíde's interior adventure, intermingling planes and abolishing linear time.

Plot is reduced to the simplest elements, flashbacks in fragmentary form. External action is the least important element in the

play. Dialogue and situation are external projections of images by the protagonist's hallucinating mind. Because Alaíde projects the action, she becomes *Bridal Gown's* unconscious narrator. What she "narrates" on one level is the breakdown of her personality and memory's futile effort to bring order into chaos, to establish a logical and rational sequence of events. Therein lies the work's principal conflict: the collision between the conscious and the unconscious mind. Alaíde's struggle is therefore a microcosm of a universal conflict. Jung uses the term *individuation* to describe the life-long confrontation between conscious and unconscious and the effort to achieve a balance. Such equilibrium--Alaíde never attains it--is the very essence of maturity and self-realization, according to Jungian psychology.

THE STAGING

A number of non-professional troupes¹³ were formed in the late 1930's and early 1940's, with aspirations to transform the theatre, to raise it to the level of the other arts and bring it into the mainstream of aesthetic renovation begun in 1922. The most significant of those companies was Os Comediantes, whose guiding force was director Ziembinski, trained in the Expressionist modes of the European theatre during the 1930's.

Why do I consider the Os Comediantes/Ziembinski mounting of *Bridal Gown* a turning point in the history of the Brazilian stage? It was, in the first place, the first mounting of a truly modern Brazilian play. Whatever the staging might have been, that fact in itself would have been remarkable in the context of the creaky edifice theatre had become. In this case, however, the production was perfectly suited to the script. *Bridal Gown* meant a considerable technical challenge for both the director and set designer Tomás Santa Rosa; they were equal to the task. Rehearsals began in May of 1943, and the company worked afternoons and evenings for seven months. Ziembinski was demanding, thorough, and precise as no director in Brazil had been before him. In the final stages of the rehearsal process he wanted ten lighting rehearsals (he got only three). There were six dress rehearsals. He never left the theatre during that period and he pushed the cast and technical crew to the limits of physical and emotional exhaustion.

Besides the playwright himself, set designer Santa Rosa was Ziembinski's principal collaborator. It is ironic that although Santa Rosa was a painter, he despised the conventional painted sets of his time because they made blocking cumbersome. That is, their one-dimensional character clashed with the three-dimensional movement of the actors. Sets, the designer believed, should be three-dimensional yet with simple and clean lines. "When critics write that Nelson Rodrigues' play was a milestone in dramatic literature and in the

renovation of stagecraft, they often forget that it also created Brazilian set design. Santa Rosa pioneered a movement that places our contemporary designers among the best in the world."¹⁴

Santa Rosa's design followed Nelson Rodrigues' stage directions closely. Photographs show a streamlined set consisting of three levels (platforms), in descending order: reality, memory, hallucination. The plane of memory contains four arches with movable curtains and scrims, and there are two lateral staircases connecting the three levels. The downstage area is bare, and a ramp crosses centerstage. In the upstage area a low platform leads to a wall with four multi-functional arches. A curtain hanging across one arch creates Madame Clessy's boudoir. Panels painted to look like stained glass and placed in two arches, with a bare cross between them, provide the setting for the wedding scenes. The furniture is simple: a bed, a chair. Santa Rosa's suggestive and imaginative set creates varied and flexible spaces for multiple and rapid scene changes.

The set reflects psychological states. According to the stage directions, in Alaide's first hallucination there are prostitutes, the madam, some furniture. But the author also mentions an invisible phonograph, upon which one of the women pantomimes placing a record. That is, the "props" refer to hallucination rather than to objective reality. Dreamers usually focus on some elements but not on others, and the invisible parts of the set pertain to the blank spaces in Alaide's hallucination. Because memory is also selective, furniture in *Gown* changes within scenes or when a specific scene is repeated (e.g., an invisible mirror in the first pre-wedding scene materializes in the second). Actors may carry objects off the stage during a scene or use pantomime to create the illusion of their presence. Set and "props," therefore, correspond more to inner than to outer reality.

Ziembinski's lighting design reinforced Santa Rosa's set. Reports on the number of lighting changes vary. They numbered between 100 and 200, a startling quantity if one recalls that lighting for comedy of manners plays was static, with two changes: on and off. The lighting changes, indicating the flux of the dying's woman's unconscious mind, increased the flexibility of the scenic space. More impressive than the sheer quantity of changes were the specific lighting techniques the director employed. A spotlight was used to follow movements from one level to another, symbolizing the shifting and narrow focus within the unconscious and emphasizing its vast darkness. At one point in the production, follow spots illuminated simultaneously a turn-of-the-century funeral scene on the plane of hallucination, and a pre-wedding scene on the level of memory. That is, fixed lights on a single area might indicate a certain stability of the *psyche*, whereas moving spots and simultaneous lighting on two planes suggested instability and

disintegration.

The use of microphones and loudspeakers was also innovative for the period. Because Nelson Rodrigues had not worked within the Brazilian theatrical tradition, he was not concerned about the "purity" of the language of the stage. He borrowed freely from whatever sources he found useful to create desired effects. Microphones fit perfectly with the subject matter and structure of the play. They provided an invisible, inner voice and allowed one plane to penetrate another (e.g., Alaíde hears Clessy's voice--hallucination--during the wedding scene--memory). The microphone permitted actors to move quickly from one plane or scene to another. For example, one might hear the protagonist's voice (hallucination), followed instantly by her appearance in a different guise within a memory scene. Loudspeakers provided music for the wedding and funeral scenes, as well as sound effects (e.g., accident and surgical tools) for exposition. The technique was, in short, cinematic.

Ziembinski brought his greatest talents to bear on acting and blocking. He utilized an ensemble approach that broke with the star system of the professional companies. If the latter relied on slapdash methods, the Polish director choreographed every moment with precise timing. He utilized a variety of acting styles. The hallucinatory scenes were dominated by Expressionist technique, "which deliberately violates reality in order to obtain greater plastic and dramatic effects."¹⁵ Distortion is one aesthetic quality of Expressionism: gestures, movement, and inflection seemed filtered through a veil, a dream. Acting in the memory scenes was more prosaic and in the reality scenes naturalistic. Consequently, acting styles clarified for the spectator the division of planes. Ziembinski gave "a light touch to the secondary characters, which [had] the effect of distancing and distinguishing them from the main characters."¹⁶ The result of the director's work with the performers was, to use a current expression, a very tight production. "The acting was excellent, carefully rehearsed, strong in the smallest details. The actors' every gesture, every attitude, every feeling was studied and executed with maximum precision."¹⁷ There were problems with diction, however, attributable to Ziembinski's foreign background and the actors' lack of professional experience.¹⁸

Nelson Rodrigues' stage directions combined with the Polish director's blocking produced a visual style not only innovative but far ahead of its time. Act II contains a vision (hallucination) with two men, one young and another old, dressed in turn-of-the-century costumes and holding candles. They kneel slowly before an unseen corpse; their movements are totally synchronized. This stylized scene foreshadows Robert Wilson's work during the 1960's and 1970's. It is

no coincidence that Wilson uses synchronized movement in slow motion to attempt to communicate on the level of the spectator's unconscious. Antunes Filho uses the same technique in *Nelson 2 Rodrigues*. And while oneiric movement itself is a link to the spectators' unconscious, the archetypal male figures in the above scene pertain to levels of the *animus*.

The stage directions include several examples of non-naturalistic, symbolic movement. At the end of an Act III scene, Alaíde, Lúcia, and Pedro place their heads together and lower them. As the author indicates, the movement "creates the plastic effect of a bouquet of heads" (160), an ironic visual image of the incestuous triangle, Pedro's marriage to the two sisters. In addition to synchronization and slow motion, there are numerous freezes, which create the sense of time stopped and facilitate changes of level.

The play ends with its most striking visual image, Alaíde's ghost at her sister's wedding and moonlight on her grave. Without dialogue, the scene conveys the essence of *Bridal Gown's* themes and structure. Its supernatural atmosphere, developed through an interplay of ritualistic motion and special lighting effects, and its overlapping planes, together communicated the finality of death and irony of the title.

Os Comediantes' production was received enthusiastically, even ecstatically, by audiences and reviewers alike. Following its success with *Bridal Gown*, the group went on to effect manifold changes: it placed Brazilian theatre in contact with the novel, poetry, painting, and architecture, and situated it in the mainstream of universal theatre.¹⁹ One of the company's most profound changes regards the role of a director, who would hereafter control the artistic unity of the spectacle.²⁰ His aesthetic and ideological vision now determined all phases of production. Working closely with him would be the designers, and lights, set, and costumes would correspond to the climate of the text and the production. The director now oriented the performers and trained them in modern acting techniques and styles. In general, his coordination of the cast as a whole encouraged ensemble consciousness, and the star system was thus eliminated for the most part. Play selection could now be based on the best of the international repertoire, and national dramaturgy of quality was encouraged. Os Comediantes was a laboratory where experiments in stagecraft took place, a school, as it were, of the dramatic arts, a training ground for those who would carry on and improve upon those experiments. The company thereby laid the groundwork for the most significant groups that would follow: Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia in the 1950's, Teatro de Arena and Teatro Oficina in the 1960's, and Grupo Macunaima in the 1980's.

There is a sharp irony here. Nelson Rodrigues shared with

Ziembinski responsibility for many of the changes wrought in Brazilian theatre. His creation of a new language of the stage and exploration of the hidden zones of the psyche have influenced much of Brazilian dramaturgy. But he would receive no further acclaim as a playwright for decades.²¹ His *Family Album* enraged the public and won for him the censor's muzzle. When his works were not censored, they were always controversial.²² His exploration of sexual themes incensed arbiters of good taste and officialdom and brought down upon him charges of immorality and perversion.²³ In spite of those problems, he continued to write and produce his plays. A few stagings were creative and intelligent, but most were failures. His work was too bold, visionary; it was not until the 1970's that the stage itself begin to catch up to his vision.

In that decade there two highly successful and innovative stagings: Antunes Filho's 1974 production of *Bonitinha, Mas Ordinária* (*Pretty, But Coarse*), and Osmar Rodrigues Cruz's 1979 *A Falecida* (*The Dead Woman*). The real breakthrough, however, came in the 1980's, with Grupo Macunaíma's epochal staging of *Nelson 2 Rodrigues*, the subject of the second article in this two-part series.

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Notes

1. The original title of the production in 1981 was *Nelson Rodrigues: O Eterno Retorno*, and included four of the playwright's works.

2. The second article takes its title from the 1984 production, "Nelson 2 Rodrigues."

3. Antônio de Alcântaca Machado, "Terra Roxa e Outras Terras," quoted by Décio de Almeida Prado, "O Teatro," in *O Modernismo*, Alfonso Avila Ed. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1975. 141-142. This and all other quotes that appear in the article are my translations.

4. In this star system professional companies were controlled by a single comic actor-impresario; the most famous were Leopoldo Fróes (1882-1932) and Procópio Ferreira (1898-1979). Their success was based on a comic persona rather than on technical and artistic skill. Audiences expected them always to play the same character. In addition, there were many satellites revolving around the star and specializing in specific types of roles and stock characters.

5. A few successful plays during the 1930's did express social concerns, most notably Joracy Camargo's *Deus Lhe Pague* (*May God Pay You*), but they were essentially 19th-century thesis plays written in a pompous and verbose style.

6. Décio de Almeida Prado, "Teatro: 1930-1980," in *História Geral da Civilização Brasileira*, Vol. III, Boris Fausto, ed., São Paulo: Difel, 1984. 538.

7. Two other amateur companies in Rio de Janeiro during the late 1930's and 1940's contributed to the changes. The first was the Teatro Universitário, founded by students from the National School of Music. The company became prominent with productions of plays by foreign authors: Claude André Puget, Jacinto Benavente, Alejandro Casona, Strindberg, and Shakespeare. Their most notable contribution was to mount works by 19th-century Brazilian writers Machado de

Assis, Castro Alves, and Martins Penna. The second was the Teatro do Estudante do Brasil, founded by Paschoal Carlos Magno (1906-1980), one of the most fascinating and influential figures in the history of the Brazilian stage: diplomat, former member of Teatro do Brinquedo, critic, playwright, artistic director, and festival organizer. The company was noted for its stagings of European classics, particularly *Hamlet* in 1949.

8. Sábato Magaldi, "Nelson Rodrigues: Dramaturgia e Encenações." Tese de Livre Docência, Universidade de São Paulo: 1983. 63.

9. Oswald de Andrade introduced Modernist techniques with his 1937 play *O Rei da Vela (The Candle King)*, but the work was not staged until 1967 by São Paulo's Teatro Oficina.

10. Décio de Almeida Prado. *Teatro em Progresso*. São Paulo: Martins, 1964. 85.

11. Alvaro Lins. "Algumas notas sobre 'Os Comediantes'", *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, January 2 1944.

12. Nelson Rodrigues, *Vestido de Noiva*, in *Teatro Completo*, Sábato Magaldi ed. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1981. 167.

13. Amateur theatre has often been a source of renewal for the Western stage. Several examples come immediately to mind: Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Players, O'Neill's Provincetown Players, and avante-garde groups in the 1960's such as the Living Theatre and the Open Theatre. Amateur theatre can play this role because it does not have to depend for survival on the box office, can hold its focus tightly on aesthetic and social values, and form a new, younger, and more open audience. Professionalism can then reappear with a new artistic, social, and even economic purpose. That is precisely what happened in Brazil during the 1940's.

14. "Tese" 155.

15. Décio de Almeida Prado. *Apresentação do Teatro Brasileiro*, São Paulo: 1956. 15.

16. *Apresentação* 17.

17. Alfredo Mesquita. "Nota sobre a visita de 'Os Comediantes' a São Paulo", *O Jornal*, São Paulo: 23 July 1944.

18. Mesquita.

19. Décio de Almeida Prado would write a decade later, "the theatre, as spectacle, became universal in the manner of the other modern arts, and Nelson Rodrigues represented for the stage what Villa-Lobos brought to music, Portinari to painting, Neimeyer to architecture, and Carlos Drummond de Andrade to poetry. What is certain is that the opening of *Bridal Gown* made Brazilian theatre lose its inferiority complex." *Teatro em Progresso*. 21.

20. In the professional theatre of the period there was no director in the modern sense, but a general coordinator known as the *ensaiador*. His principal function was general blocking and conducting rehearsals, unattended by the comic star, who considered his real work on stage in front of the audience, improvising, ad-libbing, getting as many laughs as possible. Lighting was simple and purely functional, so the role of lighting designer did not exist. Sets were either painted backdrops or drawing-room furniture, which the *ensaiador* arranged.

21. His newspaper column, "Life As It Is," continued to be very popular.

22. A further irony of Nelson Rodrigues' reception as a playwright was his ideological position. He took a reactionary stance when he supported the 1964 military coup. His motivations, though, were subjective. He believed above all in the individual and feared that the leftward drift of Brazilian politics could lead to the destruction of individualism. He was much maligned for his support of military dictatorship, and his position was as grotesque as the views of some of his characters. After all, how could an artist who had often been victimized by censorship support a regime that gave carte blanche to the censors?

23. The author saw himself as an accursed playwright, calling his work "unpleasant(...)" because they are pestilent, fetid works, capable(...) of giving the audience typhoid and malaria." Nelson Rodrigues. "Teatro Desagradável," in *Dionysos*, Rio de Janeiro: Sociedade Nacional de Teatro, No. 1, Oct 1949. 16.