

Alfredo Dias Gomes, Social Commentator and Artist

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Prominent among the playwrights "engaged" in a new cultural-political mission in Brazil is Alfredo Dias Gomes, author of the world-famous *Pagador de Promessas*,¹ and of five later dramas, *A Invasão*, *A Revolução dos Beatos*,² *O Berço do Herói*,³ *O Santo Inquerito*,⁴ and *Dr. Getúlio, Sua Vida e Sua Glória*, written with Ferreira Gullar.⁵ As their titles suggest, two of these impart an obvious message of violence. One has only to read the remarks on the covers prepared by the nationalistic publishers for a clear statement of the author's and editors' socio-political intentions regarding all five of the latter. Important as Dias Gomes' rôle of social commentator is, one perhaps finds it easy to neglect him as an artist.⁶ Although my purpose is to show that the two rôles are inextricably bound together, it may be advisable first to speak of them separately in introductions to a fuller discussion of Dias Gomes' works.

In *O Pagador de Promessas* the dehumanized forces of society are organized to oppose the freedom of an individual representing the random affective elements in that society. These remain unfulfilled for want of a cohesive force, a real hero, found eventually in Zé-do-Burro, unwittingly made aware of his mission by the rationalistic forces tyrannizing him. His full awareness comes too late to avoid tragedy for Zé in life, but after his sacrifice there is ironic, telling triumph for him and for his followers. The work is significant from social, particularly Brazilian, and general philosophical points of view. *A Invasão* is a tragedy of urban life based on true fact, uniquely Cariocan yet applicable to the dispossessed of any large city. The evil, rationalistic forces of society are fewer in number, and the protagonists embodying what is human in this society are more numerous and varied, but the struggle is essentially the same as in *O Pagador*. The

sympathetic elements are better organized, however, and although there are personal tragedies in this work, ultimate triumph and jubilation result. Again, this is brought about by violent means, both on the individual and collective levels.

A Revolução dos Beatos is another imaginative interpretation of factual material. In the other plays the protagonists are not guiltless, but society which has determined them is guiltier. So long as their errors are of a personal nature and have no effect far beyond the individual, the censure is not harsh and means of redemption are made available. In *A Revolução* the victims are shown to be as guilty of their martyrdom as the most deliberately unscrupulous. It is they after all who make up society, whose passions make it possible for various species of demagogues, whether politician, priest or totem, to victimize them. Heartrending as it may be, their irrationality is perhaps more deserving of chastisement than the sophistry of the villain. The only way to health is to swallow the bitter pill of reality and fight to live, as may be seen from *O Pagador* and *A Invasão*, where there are moments of triumph. *A Revolução* ends with this realization by one of the protagonists, but salvation for him and his fellows remains uncertain. Individuals and small segments of society seem ready to awaken and reform. Can all of society be made aware of the need for thoroughgoing transformation? *O Berço do Herói* is a more pessimistic version of the theme of *O Pagador*, and seems to provide an answer of sorts to the preceding question. By attempting to call attention to its degradation Jorge has in his way died to save humanity from the corruption of the "establishment." The latter's cruel distortion of the truth and farcical conclusion make it clear that within the play no one can or will make the truth known. The anti-militaristic spectator, whether Brazilian or of the world, knows Jorge's and Dias Gomes' truth, but will he keep it limited to the play? Are ignorance and hypocrisy to prevail in life?

Without humor or satire, *O Santo Inquerito* is akin to *O Pagador de Promessas*. It is most Brazilian in that its content is taken from Luso-Brazilian history and Catholic tradition. In this respect Dias Gomes draws still nearer to his Northeast compatriots than in *A Revolução*, with all its local problems and color, and is consistent with his own development, for his works often make use of Christ-like figures as of Northeast and Bahian regional material. Despite its anti-McCarthyism, *O Santo Inquerito* is less politically dangerous than any work by the author since *O Pagador de Promessas*. Written in collaboration with Ferreira Gullar, *Dr. Getúlio, Sua Vida e Sua Glória*, although not difficult to follow, is more complex and most interesting. It has its basis in the modern epic of Vargas, humanizing the benevolent dictator while glorifying him. Further, it vulgarizes him by the parallel presentation of another tragic figure in the person of Simpatia, president of the "school of samba" that is dramatizing the "life

and glory” of Vargas. He represents the dictator in and out of the samba skit, for he himself becomes the willing sacrifice in an economic-political struggle in the school. The admixture makes the theme clear and close to the public, who was and is in fact an integral part of the life of Getúlio Vargas. Dias Gomes is a political animal, then, and the effort to be relevant to the current situation in Brazil constant in his work.

The art of an author is best studied by a detailed commentary of his work, on the basis of which one may arrive at an appreciation of the inter-relationship between form and content. However, after an attempt to isolate the principal objects of Dias Gomes’ criticism from play to play, there should be an effort to indicate the leading features of his dramaturgy as well. *O Pagador de Promessas* has great artistic interest in addition to intellectual content. The evil forces in society are revealed largely through caricatural types, and the warmly human elements are often represented picturesquely. Zé-do-Burro’s sacrifice is simple yet spectacular. The whole has dramatic impact, both because of classical concentration and sensuous appeal. Although *A Invasão* possesses many of the characteristics of the naturalistic theatre, its protagonists are for the most part symbolic types, too; and like *O Pagador* it offers classical synthesis with regard to place and action, if not to time, while it has spectacular appeal also. *A Revolução dos Beatos* treats its material impressionistically, and is a more complex drama in every way. There is little that can be considered classical in this piece; rather, it has many of the attributes of the epic, chronicle, and documentary, along with the miracle, farce, and more personal episodes. It is to the people alone, many of whom are stereotyped to the point of anonymity, that this clearly hybrid work is directed. Still more novel in style and structure, *O Berço de Herói* makes use of expressionistic means, and the author is careful to explain himself in his preface. *O Santo Inquérito* is more like *O Pagador de Promessas* in style and tone but closer in construction to *O Berço do Herói*. Again, the author gives his ideas in a lengthy introduction. The simple setting for its complex structure and the timeliness of its historical subject make *O Santo Inquérito* more universal than any play by Dias Gomes since the classical *Pagador*. The bulk of *Dr. Getúlio* is written in popular verse, largely the work of Ferreira Gullar, known for his experiments in theatre of and for the people. It has been noted, too, that Dias Gomes sometimes makes abundant use of elements of popular culture in order to bring his messages to the people. Combining numerous theatrical structures, styles, and tones, the authors have made much of the unity afforded by the play-within-a-play device. Once more there is the free adaptation of an historical subject to create universal human truth, where the lines between fact and fiction are hard to draw. The lives of the members of the samba school parallel those of the historical figures, which augments the verisimilitude and universality of their “entertainment” and of Dias Gomes’

and Gullar's play. Like other works of Dias Gomes, then, this one is in the tradition of coherent confusion of medieval art or of the concept of "total theatre" since romanticism.

In *O Pagador* the author immediately prepares us for conflict within the setting and between the principal characters in his directions for the first scene, the first phase of which is an exposition of Zé-do-Burro's contradictory nature. In addition to providing occasions for political innuendoes and for developing a subsidiary theme, the seduction of Rosa, the next two phases of the scene give more important details on Rosa and Zé. Aside from psychological and political considerations, there are strong artistic intentions for initiating the tragedy. One recalls what Zé has done thus far, his insistence on doing things as Christ did, and as the exposition continues one wonders what kind of man this is.

At the beginning of the second formal scene it is ironic but natural that stock figures in Brazilian Church society, the *Beata* and Sacristan, should be taken aback by Zé and his cross. Father Olavo immediately thinks the promise excessive and pretentious. The humor of Zé's situation all but ceases as his deadly serious realization begins. Zé's is a typically Brazilian commonsense reaction to excesses in religion. Again, one wonders if a part of the priest's suggestion does not, ironically enough, begin to take hold of Zé. He will henceforth sacrifice himself, not only to appease the saints and safeguard his burro, but much more to redeem his own self-respect and dignity, and as a member of humanity, in the face of growing intolerance. A personal promise is a grave matter to a Brazilian.

Notable among the new characters of the first scene of Act II is the Negress Minha Tia, typical Bahian vendor of regional dishes. Perhaps better than anyone else, she epitomizes the subsidiary theme of syncretism that recurs in these dramas by Dias Gomes. Like most of the other characters, however, hers is the path of least resistance. It is to Zé's credit that he refuses steadfastly to take hers and others' advice to compromise or otherwise become dishonest, although there is the strong suggestion that the fulfillment of his promise may nevertheless occur with the assistance of Iansan.

Zé shows irritation and bewilderment as a result of his first contacts with organized religion and society when Rosa returns looking guilty. Their encounter is very moving as they reveal their confusion. He cannot believe Rosa when she says that he is being punished, for he has always been the same God-fearing man. She knows that they have already been punished and wants him to leave, to think of them at this point, before something else happens. Zé does not understand her allusion to Bonitão; his fear is for what the supernatural may visit upon them if they go before the promise to Saint Barbara is fulfilled. The full impact of this scene falls on the spectator who is aware of the mounting tragedy in all its aspects. Rosa and

Zé have made little impression on one another: each is too much engrossed in his own dilemma and fate.

In the second scene of Act II the townspeople, whose number is growing, are typically anti-clerical. The popular consensus favors Zé, although those having the greatest effect on his destiny are against him, if not necessarily for the Church. The inflammatory newspaper article concerning the "new Messiah" and the "revolution" that he is supposedly preaching reopens the whole question of guilt and punishment for Rosa and Zé. This is not a mere repetition of an earlier scene, however, for with Rosa's infidelity revealed there is more true communication between them now. He concludes that he is being tested through his wife, with which she agrees enthusiastically in order to be free of guilt.

The unconscious irony of Zé's vow not to leave the spot until he is understood is keenly felt by the uneasy spectator. His second approach to the church shows how near Zé is to physical violence, and the verbal outbursts of passion between him and Rosa on the one hand and the priest on the other preview final attempts to keep his promise. The Monsignor's arrival temporarily fools the populace, but it appears inevitable that the higher authority be no better than its subordinate. Weakened, Zé suffers a terrible conflict, but he can repudiate neither Saint Barbara nor Iansan; that is, he cannot repudiate himself. He seems utterly hopeless at the close of the scene, but the forces of evil have not had their last word. Nor have the little people, including Rosa, whom Zé represents and has aroused.

In Act III Rosa sums up the entire action and essence of the tragedy from her point of view: the air is full of danger, the square is shrinking, there will soon be no escape. She attempts to convince Zé that he has kept the promise and that it is not his fault if the others refuse to accept his good faith. Despite his own fear, the stubborn Zé knows that *this* is his existential moment, that to give in now to the forces of evil will indeed close every exit for him. Yet he becomes sufficiently disillusioned that he seems willing to compromise: he will wait out the feast of Saint Barbara, then leave.

In what may be considered a recapitulation of the main elements of the play, Zé is bombarded in rapid succession by Rosa's explanation of Bonitão's denunciation, the gross materialism and opportunism of the Reporter, the well-intentioned suggestions for compromise from the crowd, Rosa's apparent desertion, and loss of Saint Barbara's favor. Assailed by all manner of doubt, Zé resolves that he must persist in order to be true to himself. He stands up to the Secret Police and Delegate, protesting in vain that his sole intention is to fulfill his promise. He calls on Olavo as his witness, but is denied by him as being a servant of Satan. Finally, he resists arrest and is shot down by the police. Too late, the priest recognizes his error. Zé's sympathizers from the crowd carry him into the church on his cross as a tremendous clap of thunder is heard, doubtless from Iansan.

The protagonists of *A Invasão* are drawn from three families, full of similarities and contrasts, whose members are familiar figures on the Cariocan scene for all their individualization. To them should be added the Prophet, an ambiguous type more common to the fanatical Northeast and its literature. The author's stage directions, reinforcing the remarks of his characters, make clear that this figure is not to be taken seriously. Though much of what he says is true, his authority is not of the same order as the problems that most concern his people, and he makes no call to action as do his Northeastern counterparts.

Only mentioned in the exposition of the first scene of Act I, the police are a constant menace to the protagonists. When they appear in the second scene, however, they are at least as frightened of the *favelados* as these are of the police. The "invaders" take advantage of the death of Santa's baby to remain in possession of their "apartments," threatening violence themselves if the police attempt to expel them. This opportunism is somewhat shocking after the genuine sorrow and resignation of the death scene, but one feels that it is entirely justifiable.

The cynical Mané Gorila furnishes materials to *favelados* for their poor shacks, extorting monthly fees for this service and "protection," but is kind to children because, ironically, they are "close to Heaven" and may intercede for him when necessary. The mountains are public property, yet the inhabitants of Rio's *favelas* pay "rent" and, when there are greater profits to be gained, they are dispossessed by *grileiros*. These are land-grabbers seeking lucrative real estate deals, in which they are assisted by scoundrels like Gorila, who is also the henchman of smooth, unscrupulous politicians. The same scene shows the police returning in a new attempt to evict the invaders. Set up by Gorila by Deputy Deodato, this moment is the "God-given one's" opportunity to impress most of the *favelados* with his influence in their behalf, and with his rhetoric, in order to capture more votes. This scene of Act II further provides the occasion for Malú's seduction by Deodato; for when he suggests that he may help her find "employment," she begins to think of an easier lot than the drudgery and poverty of an *empregada* (housemaid). These are defeats, collective or personal, although this fact is not yet fully realized by the protagonists. Only the tense, moving episodes of the remaining two scenes of Act II make clear how much the forces of Deodato and Gorila are triumphing over Lula and what he represents. There is bitterness and lack of solidarity now among the *favelados*. The struggle here is between those who compromise principle for peace or immediate material advantage, however stoically, and those of greater character and vision who must resist at all costs.

At the beginning of the third act six months have elapsed, and the invaders have progressed considerably in making another *favela* of the abandoned apartment building. It is soon apparent, however, that theirs

has been a false security. The Prophet is preaching Christian socialism when the police arrive to interrogate him concerning Rafael, a "prophet" of the labor movement offering a new promise of salvation. He never appears on the scene, and it is perhaps doubly ironic that the Prophet knows only of the biblical Raphael. There are other signs of great frustration and regression. A court order will soon evict the invaders. Bené has obliged his son to try his luck at soccer again, but Lula's heart is not in the sport. Justino and Santa are about to return to the Northeast. Moreover, it is inevitable that Rita follow her sister in her vain flight from disaster. One knows even before Malú's confession that her talk of Deodato's generosity and attentions is empty; yet she seems determined in her materialism. Her attitude is in sharp contrast to Lula's idealism, intact despite tragedy.

The climax is reached as a result of Gorila's relentless persecution of Justino and Santa and his murder by their son. Banded together by a combination of joy and fear, the *favelados* cover Tonho's escape by a grotesque dance. Unaware of the tragic situation, Bola Sete has gaily brought home a copy of his newly recorded samba, which opportunely initiates the dancing. There is genuine cause to rejoice when Bené returns with the announcement that the courts have honored their petition. Now secure in their conquest, the invaders have respect for Rafael, and there is hope even for Malú's salvation through his word. She and Lula await the new prophet as the *favelados* continue their delirious samba around the body of Mané Gorila. The police have discovered the corpse, but Tonho has fled. Once more, greed and injustice have been overcome; revolt has again been condoned, if only as a last resort.

The first scene of *A Revolução dos Beatos*, a mixture of realistic and stylized details, serves as satirical epigraph to this play: the curtain bears a map of the state of Ceará and certain pointedly selected statistics on Juazeiro. A Vendor of Prayers comments in popular verse form on a procession of pilgrims visiting Father Cícero, and on the many miracles performed at Juazeiro, despite its high rate of illiteracy. Continuing the *mélange*, the second scene shows the wretched crowd of pilgrims, penitents, and others. Some are there through pure fanaticism, others for more practical reasons. A herdsman introduces a "bull," a present for the Father. Within the play the creature is a real animal, toward which there are mixed feelings; but for the audience it is described as the representation of a bull such as appears in the popular *bumba-meu-boi* dance. The exposé concerning Dr. Floro and his patient is continued in Scene III, partly through Mateus and Mocinha, partly through the author's explanatory remarks and documentation. Floro cleverly plans to flatter Cícero and use his reputation as prefect and miracle-worker to further his own political ambitions.

Development and reinforcement continue also as Bastião explains his desperate need for Father Cícero's assistance to cure his infatuation—or to

cause Zabelinha to have the same infatuation for him! Bastião speaks to the bull as though it could more sympathetically perform the miracle expected of its master. Having promised the bull fresh grass, a great treat during the Northeast drought, Bastião immediately sees Zabelinha enter in search of first aid. As though all this were not miracle enough, Zabelinha's husband has deserted her for a lady trapeze artist! In the last scene of Act I there are those who still doubt but, when the bull refuses stolen grass offered in fulfillment of Bastião's promise, its sanctity is established. In Act II Mateus, one of several figures adapted from the *bumba-meu-boi* rite, has become a kind of high priest or "manager" to the new *santo*. Floro is furious that Cícero could have been supplanted, for a political sense tells him immediately that the bull is a threat to the Father's temporal as well as spiritual power.

During an exalted but hopeless last stand to keep the bull from falling into profane hands, Bastião and Zabelinha examine Floro's motives and their own conscience. They are beset by doubts, especially when the saint eats the now dry grass. The leader of the fanatics believes them to be chosen by Our Lady of Sorrows for this trial and the salvation of their people, and that there will be no sin or dishonor if she gives herself to Floro to save the bull. Bastião refuses to accept this and expressed his doubts on everything that has seemed to be miraculous, before and after the advent of the new saint. Zabelinha, a pathetic travesty of the Virgin Mary, seems ready to make any sacrifice for her beliefs. While she negotiates with and finally succumbs to the cynical Floro, the animal forcibly keeps Bastião from entering. How can the bull desert to its executioner unless it too is evil? How will the picaroon-turned-existentialist hero react at this moment of truth? It is a most impressive scene of destruction of idols, old and new, especially in the doubly dramatic, almost operatic foursome at the end.

The fourteenth and final scene serves as an ironic epilogue. Zabelinha's sacrifice has failed. The frightened crowd awaits the bull's execution and the wrath of Heaven. But the animal is already dead, and Floro and Cícero are quick to proclaim that God's will has been done. Anguished and humiliated, Zabelinha explains the bull's death to Bastião; to which the bitter young man hysterically replies that he is God. Bastião has destroyed the monster that he and the people created for their own ends, but he is aware, too, of having reinforced the power of another monster that they have allowed also to tyrannize them.

The Prologue of *O Berço do Herói* demonstrates the author's recommended admixture of the epic and domestic at the outset. An Actor announces and narrates a nationalistic "documentary" on the heroic death of Cabo Jorge, while a Chorus chants a lyric-ironic dirge in verse for the death of all heroes before the menace of the atom bomb. After the playwright's psychological analyses of the chief characters, full of contradictions and very

human, the scene is a flashback of the dedication of Cabo Jorge's monument in the public square. The obviously cynical Major, Jorge's uncle by marriage, capitalizes on the occasion to make a political speech, which parallels the documentary yet is on the domestic level also. He is aided by Antonieta, Jorge's "widow" and the Major's mistress, who underscores the satire with her farcical ingenuousness. The Chorus returns to emphasize that it is History (or a people) that creates heroes, not heroes History, and it does so for its own glory and profit. A dialogue between Antonieta and Matilde, madam of the local brothel made possible by the increased tourist trade and symbol of the town's progress and culture, is charged with different shades of irony. Matilde believes in the utility of her profession, as well she may. Society supports her, politicians encourage her, the Vicar accepts compensation from her in God's name, and her sometimes rebellious but hardworking girls emulate her. Antonieta's observations often seem to have a sarcastic ring, yet she is sympathetic, will intercede to protect the girls from the attacks of the pious, and expresses a desire to return to a life that is more honest and interesting than hers. The Chorus sardonically underscores Antonieta's point of view.

The crisis quickly begins to develop in the third tableau by a series of *quid pro quos* and contrapuntal techniques. Leaving Antonieta's house, Matilde is irritated by two small boys reenacting the Cabo Jorge story and echoing the commentary of the Chorus. She explains matters to a newcomer who is looking at the statue of the hero which he does not recognize, as he has not recognized himself in the statue. In the fourth tableau we are not surprised to learn who the newcomer is, then, and that the "widow" is his (and classmates') former mistress from Salvador. Following the author's psycho-philosophical portrait of Jorge, there is a brief sentimental flashback to his student days in Salvador with Antonieta. Returned to the present, she suggests what has happened in these ten years, but Jorge simply wants to recapture the past. As they begin to make love at the close of this tableau, there is another shift in time, and the Major is again speaking of the noble "widow" at the dedication of the hero's statue. The farce continues when the jealous Major discovers the hero resuscitated and sleeping in his alleged widow's bed.

Again illustrating the flexibility of scene as of time and style, the author begins the sixth tableau in the square, then moves it to Antonieta's house. Ignorant of the situation, especially of his supposed death as a hero, Jorge is surprised that the Vicar has not recognized him in the square and that the Major does not want his return known. As Antonieta clarifies the details of his "heroization," they find his situation absurdly amusing: if Cabo Jorge deserves a statue, it is because of his cowardice, which is the only sane attitude for man in the atomic age. To no avail Cabo Jorge explains his position to the indignant Major, growing himself more indignant against the

crimes of society. Antonieta, the Vicar, and the Prefect are more sympathetic, but not above thinking of ways to capitalize on the "miracle" of Cabo Jorge's resuscitation, and they are easily persuaded by the Major that his return is not in their best interests. Yet the Vicar wonders if God has not sent Cabo Jorge as a necessary punishment to their sinful town.

The seventh tableau is the poetic synopsis of Act I and prologue to Act II, which is composed of six additional tableaux to balance those of Act I. The Chorus comments in verse on the importance of the statue in the growth of the city, and in the prosperity of some of its citizens. Symbolic of this prosperity are the enormous bellies sported by the Major, Prefect, Vicar, and Antonieta in the grotesque ballet and chant. Closing the "morality," the Chorus states the town's dilemma now that the statue has, literally, reassumed its true form and nature, i.e., the real Cabo Jorge has replaced his false image. The city dies, while Jorge lives!

The next tableau takes us back to "reality," for the statue is back on its pedestal. Preparations are in progress to fête the supposedly forthcoming return of Cabo Jorge, who will remain a hero and whose "resuscitation" is to be hailed as a miracle. This manipulation of Jorge's essence, however, is not to avert the tragedy of his existence. The General's intransigence, especially loathsome for the average Brazilian today as for freedom-loving men everywhere, puts an end to the brief hopeful peripeteia. There are many reasons, then, human but inhumane, why Jorge would better have died. When Lilinha expressed disillusionment with her long sacrifice of chastity to an ideal of love, Jorge does not realize that she is referring to his "marriage" (of which he still is ignorant); he defends himself simply in terms of human liberty and self-preservation. Antonieta's explanation in turn stirs his indignation, and now it is he who refuses to compromise. Theirs is a moving, frightening scene, for he cannot understand what crime he has committed, and she is not yet fully aware of the danger of which she is warning him.

The eleventh tableau begins the denouement. In Matilde's house Jorge sings a cynical song of the human condition today: all that is left to contemporary man in the atomic age is war or sex. The prostitutes speak earnestly of their profession, but Jorge's responses are ironic as are his comments on his own, i.e., heroism. His confrontation with the General, Major, and Prefect is only partially ironic, for although they are caricatures they will be taken seriously. If the General is Pontius Pilate, Jorge is most Christ-like in assessing his intentions and the qualities that make a man both human and divine. He regrets being unable to lead a constructive life, but since he is doomed he chooses the way of sex. The General has turned the matter over to the local authorities, who have turned it over to the prostitutes. Ironically it is during the storming of the brothel by the *beatas* that Matilde kills Jorge. The Vicar and his followers have brought the plague

on themselves. During the collective examination of conscience following this action, the Major magnanimously and correctly says that the entire community is to blame, each in his own way. He concludes that perhaps it has been God's will, after all, to preserve the town, comparing Jorge's sacrifice to that of Christ. The author's strong suggestion is, of course, that the town deserves no better than a false hero and another brothel.

Dias Gomes' introduction to *O Santo Inquérito* traces the history of Branca Dias, but explains that for a dramatist this is only the point of departure. Again, far more important for him are verisimilitude and human truth. Dias Gomes gives his understanding of the chief characters with their function in *O Santo Inquérito* also in his introduction, and interrupts the text in this case only for brief indications on the staging. The author's solution is an unliteral version—depending only on different levels and lighting—of the multiple stage. Although simpler than in *O Berço do Herói*, the staging as well as the dialogue typify the spatial and temporal counterpoint so frequent in modern theatre and consonant with the dramatist's social purpose. A brief dialogue in verse between a mother and her boy, accentuated by the supernatural appearance of Branca, suggests the mood and theme of the play, and is characteristic also of the modern chorus-prologue. A second prologue, consisting of a heated exchange between Father Bernardo and Branca, with an apology by the priest directed to the audience and against the author, leads more directly into the action, primarily that of Branca's trial before the Inquisition.

Exposition and action have begun. The theme is first developed through a series of scenes between Branca and Augusto, Branca and her father Simão, a *cristão novo*, Simão and the priest, and perhaps coincidentally the series is repeated in reverse order, beginning with a scene between Branca and her father. These are all flashbacks, with no return to the time of Branca's trial, which is presumably the present. Each new scene is announced by a change in lighting, as one of the characters from the preceding scene exits or fades into the background, the other remains engrossed in thought or engaged in a new activity, and the next one enters. In each scene Father Bernardo asks questions or makes suggestions concerning the orthodoxy or purity of Branca, Augusto, and Simão, or the others continue to discuss them, refuting them, wondering about them, even accepting them. A wedding is planned, to be performed by Father Bernardo, that one fears will never take place; in its stead, the trials of three of the principals before the Inquisition gradually materialize, brought about by the same Father Bernardo.

Shortly before midpoint in the play, toward the close of Act I, the judgment begins. Simão and his daughter have been denounced, by whom they are not permitted to know. An array of evidence, apparently imposing to pious Luso-Brazilians of the eighteenth century, cannot be refuted by the

defendants for all their plausible reasons and to us obvious innocence. Frightened, Simão protests their complete conformism, while Branca convicts herself of unorthodoxy by being entirely candid. Act II reveals the girl in a convent prison wondering why the Inquisition has shut her up with the Devil, whom she had never encountered elsewhere, if it wishes to save her from him. She appeals to the indifferent Guard, as to the audience, demanding an explanation; for the Guard should know something and share his knowledge, as everyone possesses a portion of the truth that can be known wholly only in God. Branca's next confrontation with the Inquisitors—however well-intentioned they may be—emphasizes the irony not only of her clearer understanding of the true sense of religion but of some ritual formalities, as opposed to their superstition and routine mentality. A familiar question again arises when Branca hesitates to swear to tell the whole truth, for how can she or anyone know it? Following Father Bernardo's guidance, she swears, only to protest once more, against their conception of mercy. So it continues throughout the examination of the charges, initiated by the priest although he has not denounced her, and reinvestigated now officially by him.

In a scene with Father Bernardo it becomes clear that Branca's crime is really his crime, that he wishes to transfer some punishment for his guilt to her; for it was she who "kissed" him, albeit to save his life, and that act has tormented him since. Her pity soon turns to confusion—she had never considered herself a danger to society—and fear. Although the priest desires castigation for himself, self-imposed and from others, Branca knows that she is alone. During a scene with her contemptible father, who has saved himself and his property at Augusto's expense, Branca realizes that by recanting she too will be an accomplice in her fiancé's death and betray herself as well as him. A final conversation, between Branca and her guard but addressed directly to the audience, contrasts with bitter irony the suffering of spectators at tragedy in the theatre with the indifference of citizens witnessing similar tragedy in real life. Father Bernardo thinks only of his own deliverance but, although triumph for Branca seems to reside chiefly in her personal heroism and loyalty to her beloved, she dies for a larger cause too. Tangible evidence of this is slight, however, found in the short epilogue, where the mother and son of the prologue again recall the legendary Branca.

Addressed to Dias Gomes' and Gullar's audience for *Dr. Getúlio, Sua Vida e Sua Glória*, Simpatia's prologue sets the stage for the rehearsal by the samba school of the politically controversial Vargas story. At the same time it explains the financial difficulties brought about by Tucão who has abandoned the school. Simpatia believes that their salvation lies in the presentation of this skit, but turns the prologue over to its Author and his *Comissão de Frente* who have thoroughly researched the subject in the

interests of careful selection and appropriate dramatization for the Brazilian public. The band begins to play, typically costumed Carnival dancers samba, and the Commission recites its prologue to the skit. Succinctly, soberly, yet with some gaiety in the refrain, the chorus relates the career of Getúlio Vargas.

There follows the first of numerous interruptions to bring the audience back to the level of reality of the samba school. Tucão makes it clear to the spectator through his conversation with Marlene that he plans to cause trouble to regain what he considers rightfully his in the school. Once the action has begun on this level, it must start on that of the skit, and the band and singing resume. When the members of the school prematurely undertake their Carnival parade, however, the Author interrupts them and begs pardon of the audience. The "action" is delayed further as the rôles of some of the dancers are clarified and more links established between the two levels. In his suicide letter Vargas refers to Brazil's "birds of prey," represented literally in the skit by men wearing eagle costumes. These "Aves de Rapina" turn out to be Tucão's henchmen with whom he now discusses the school's situation, past and present, before the Author has organized the members so that the rehearsal can finally commence.

Again, there is all the fantasy and color of Carnival, and the verse prologue is partially repeated. The dialogue of the play dealing with Vargas himself is largely in prose, as if to underscore the historicity and gravity of the subject, and substantial portions, especially of Carlo Lacerda's speeches, are presumably direct quotations. Despite Vargas' great popularity at the outset, Lacerda opposes him immediately and relentlessly, encouraged by the Birds of Prey, until Getúlio is ready to speak. The latter is presented as a very human figure, particularly in scenes with his daughter and confidante Alzira. Vargas is further humanized when Simpatia steps out of character to clarify the dictator's efforts to improve Brazil's financial situation, matters that must appear quite complex to a popular audience: if a man of the people can understand and explain, then surely anyone can follow. Humor is added by Vargas' interview with the American Ambassador, conducted in verse and accompanied by Carnival fanfare, exaggerated courtesy, and irony. Reminiscent of medieval literature is the anachronism of Vargas' reference in 1952 to the American invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965. No device is neglected if it helps to bring the authors closer to their public through the instrument of their double play.

Vargas allows himself to be maneuvered by the opposition party and popular demonstrations into a move that he has favored but been unable to accomplish alone, namely nationalization of Brazilian oil. At this point Tucão interrupts Vargas-Simpatia to argue against the school's sympathetic presentation of Vargas, according to Tucão not a "Communist" but planning to sell out to the gringo. The Author and members of the school

hotly defend their version and Vargas before the spectators within and without the two plays. Tucão and Simpatia are on the threshold of violence, but Tucão permits the play to continue; and Simpatia-Vargas signs the oil monopoly into law. The people sing the praises of Petrobrás and Getúlio, yet the police brutalize them. Presumably, the audience is to believe that the dictator was neither all black nor all white, but some shade of gray.

To begin the Second Part of the play, first the chorus laments the death of Vargas in a brief epilogue. The Author then steps in to explain the intermission (the public had complained of the heat and hard seats) and the events leading to Vargas' suicide (the "courtesy visit" paid by the American Navy, American boycott of Brazilian coffee, Lacerda's renewed opposition). The whole is interspersed with music, dance, and other "business" reminding the spectator that the performance is by a samba school and again providing unity. Lacerda's speeches are sometimes burlesque demagoguery in the form of clever verse, portions of which are in quotation marks (!), sometimes citations apparently taken from speeches actually made by Lacerda. The good people admire his looks and intelligence, but the larger audience cannot at first believe in him, whatever his style, partly because of the *mélange*, partly because of the actions of less honest figures taking place simultaneously. The mounting hysteria of Lacerda's speech and its effects on his public and himself may ultimately affect the larger audience. The question is, does one feel himself swept up, repulsed, or simply amused by his fanatical samba?

The Birds of Prey, joined now by four gunmen, are not on Lacerda's side but represent an anonymous opposition to nationalization, that of Brazilian capitalism in league with the gringo. They stage an incident to discredit the government during which an army major is killed and Lacerda wounded. Through Vargas' reactions to this crisis the spectator gains further insight into the dictator's humanity: stern but just toward all, concerned for the welfare of the weaker members of his family, yet dependent on others for their advice and support. As the spectator may well have suspected, a parallel crisis soon arises in the samba school: the Birds of Prey and other players appeal to Tucão to intervene and resolve the school's financial problem. He is willing, provided that Simpatia step down as president. The latter is indignant, but there are those who, though they admire Simpatia and his play, believe that it is in the best interests of the school to have Tucão back. Through the discussion between the members of the school, particularly Simpatia and the Author, the spectator learns more about the political situation surrounding Vargas. The council will be parallel in the skit, but although the dictator was ostensibly both "Author" and President, many factors authored his situation. In fact, it is Getúlio's daughter Alzira who seems most like Simpatia in her desire to keep her

father in power. As the people clamor for the overthrow of Vargas on that level, Marlene, in some ways a counterpart of Alzira too, tries to save the intransigent Simpátia on the other. The two levels become increasingly and more rapidly fused as climax is reached and dénouement approaches in both actions. Development is especially rapid on the level of the samba school, where characters are of course more crudely drawn and passions less restrained, if not more violent. The authors are most interested in telling the Vargas story, for which that of the samba school is primarily the vehicle. Simpátia is murdered by Tucão's men as announcement is made of Getúlio's death, while above all is heard a recording of Vargas' voice reading his last letter to the Brazilian people of all time.

O Pagador de Promessas, the first and most classical of Dias Gomes' plays, has only three acts, no doubt for physical convenience. Like *A Invasão*, it is divided into five scenes, however, so that artistically it has the five balanced units of a classical piece. Moreover, the action of *O Pagador* unfolds within less than twenty-four hours, on the Feast of Saint Barbara or Iansan. The place is one, a public square in Salvador, Bahia, before the Church of Saint Barbara. Most important, the action centers about Zé-do-Burro's existential need to deliver his cross; every detail is subordinate to and highlights the tragic-triumphant fulfillment of his promise and what it comes to symbolize. Yet for all its clearly classical structure, *O Pagador* is complex in its blend of subsidiary themes with the main one, mixture of serious and comic elements, and richness of tones. The *Beata* and Sacristan are a sharp contrast to, yet complement the author's serious description of, the outwardly strong Father Olavo. The latter is another part of that Brazilian world recreated also in Ariano Suassuna's *Auto da Compadecida*; but in Dias Gomes' treatment of the priest himself there is little of the humor with which Suassuna ridicules his clergy and their entourage. The contrast between Zé's immense unhappiness and the caricatural scene of newspaper photography—in which Rosa willingly collaborates with the sinister Reporter—is most striking. More important than their picturesque value is the townspeople's function as chorus, for as each new type appears they intensify the drama by their queries and comments on its progress. The *capoeira*, a stylized struggle, ends with a syncretic reference to Saint Barbara and Iansan. The two-minute regional dance thus enhances the main action. Again, a chorus composed of the Galician, Dedé, and Coca adds information of an anti-clerical nature as they bet on Zé's chances of fulfilling his promise. Coca's wager that with the help of Iansan Zé will carry his cross into the church this very day is, once more, ironically prophetic. Dias Gomes therefore meets many requirements of the essentially unified "total theatre" recommended by Victor Hugo, as well as others before and especially after him.

If *O Pagador de Promessas* is largely the drama of one individual against organized society, *A Invasão*, as befits modern tragedy, is that of individuals organizing to combat that society. The very title indicates collective, even "epic" action. This almost Brechtian work does indeed begin with the invasion by families of dispossessed *favelados* of a piece of private property, the only setting of the play. The slow, painful drama of their conquest of the right to a home there, and of their just vengeance on the exploiters of their class, centers about three of these families. Each is different, however, and its members, though composed of types found in Rio de Janeiro's lower class, are complex individuals. They are "typically" Cariocan and Brazilian, as well as convincing tragic figures. Distinctly reminiscent of ancient tragedy is the Prophet, the lyrical chorus reduced to one man. He echoes on another plane, spiritual despite Dias Gomes' ironical treatment, ideals that Lula has learned from Rafael and the labor unions. There is the collective drama of the people, at times strong in their resistance, but more often weak in their ignorance and lack of sophistication. Further, there is personal tragedy for Lula, obviously interested in Malú as an individual and as a woman, and for Malú and her family who are dishonored and disillusioned. The naturalistic pall is heavy, but not all-embracing. On the contrary, a certain effective grotesqueness is extracted from the misery of the *favelados*, as in the aftermath of the death of Santa's baby, or the dancing that accompanies the murder of Mané Gorila. Not only does horror engender heroism in the characters but, as in a semi-abstract canvas by Portinari, it stirs the spectator to sympathy and action.

Both the regional and the collective assume very great importance in *A Revolução dos Beatos*. In his preface the author clarifies to what extent he has wished to make an artistic and political appeal to the people. Much like Brecht's, Dias Gomes' skill with popular elements to create milieu appropriate to the presentation of social problems has already been noted. For example, his presentation of popular syncretism in *O Pagador* was intentionally ambiguous, and the Brazilian tendency to personify animals only incidental. Rigid orthodoxy was the butt of his criticism. Here the author's satire of fanaticism and superstition is open and the sanctification of the bull very much involved. Any belief, however sincere, used for oppression or personal gain is to be censured. Dias Gomes' political message, marginal in *O Pagador de Promessas*, is quite clear in *A Revolução* as in *A Invasão*. Possibly because of less intimate knowledge of Ceará (the regional setting of *A Revolução*) than he has of Bahia or Rio, the dramatist has greatly multiplied details of local color and history in a panoramic as well as tragic vision. Accordingly he has expanded his three acts, heretofore in five scenes, to fourteen scenes (symmetrically arranged, four-six-four). It may be, too, that he has wished to exploit a people whose problems

are of long-standing and particular notoriety, and thus contribute to a growing body of literature on the Northeast.

As Dias Gomes points out in his preface, *O Berço do Herói* is of indefinite dramatic type. He calls it an increasingly tragic comedy, although one may easily classify it a satirical tragedy, as *A Revolução* with which it shares features of structure and theme. The author insists that the hybrid nature of his play be maintained throughout, in style as well as genre, forming a persistent contrast between "epic" (regional or national) and "domestic" (individual or universal) elements. This once again is the complex pattern of his drama, which like *O Pagador de Promessas*, however, concentrates on one hero and his liberty. It is appropriately ironic that, like Olavo and the other representatives or near-representatives of organized religion in the plays of Dias Gomes, the weak, ineffectual Vicar can imagine only an "epic" God of wrath and vengeance; whereas the Messiah-like figure in each play is an humble everyman, who is at the same time an individual. With all its regional and national implications, the story of Cabo Jorge, even more clearly than that of Zé-do-Burro, is the story of contemporary man.

Like Hermilo Borba Filho's Joana,⁷ and akin to others of Dias Gomes' heroes, the Branca Dias of *O Santo Inquerito* is a simple Brazilian girl charged with sorcery and heresy in compensation for worthy acts misunderstood by her betters. Her trial before the Inquisition, conducted in counterpoint, complex yet without the undue virtuosity employed by the dramatist in other works, is of great significance structurally and thematically. Counterpoint is of course commonplace in world literature today, especially in dramatic forms, and this play reminds one of Anouilh's *L'Alouette*, for example, as of Dias Gomes' own *O Berço do Herói*, in structure as well as theme. Though far more accurate historically than any story of Joan, *O Santo Inquerito* has in its brief prologue and epilogue reminiscences of legendary-inspirational elements, which are satirized by Dias Gomes elsewhere. Such elements enhance Branca Dias' humanity over that of other heroes of his, lending her a semi-divine essence as they have done for other existential heroes and heroines in Brazilian and world literature. With *O Santo Inquerito* Dias Gomes seems to have returned to a classicism and universality, exemplified also in *O Pagador de Promessas*, but enriched by subsequent experimentation.

A Brazilian play treating the life of Getúlio Vargas, episodes of which are peculiarly well suited to dramatic form, needed to be written, perhaps more than that of Joan or Branca and for much the same reasons. Dias Gomes and Ferreira Gullar have chosen a most opportune moment in Brazilian history to write it. The crisis in the life of the dictator and his country that is its subject coincides with a similar one today, as it coincides

with the crisis in the life of Simpatia and the samba school. Vargas did not openly accuse Lacerda or other political enemies in his suicide letter, but rose above pettiness to offer his sacrifice in protest against foreign imperialism and its influences at home. Similarly, the authors of *Dr. Getúlio* have interpreted the myth of Vargas largely without undue embellishment for or against him, much as the Brazilian people have accepted it. Indeed, not only have they presented it with relative objectivity, but even demythologized Vargas by the varied artistic means that have been noted. An underdeveloped nation, Brazil probably continues to favor its patriarchal systems on all levels, national and international, with their reliance on strong, often conflicting personalities. Any nationalist or reform movement seems therefore doomed to failure and reaction. This excessively flexible, vacillating situation finds one of its best literary expressions in the Carnival parade and skit of the samba school as carefully adapted by Dias Gomes and Gullar. Theirs is perhaps the perfect form in which to develop many more national subjects in unified, forceful manner. We await with interest new works by the playwrights who, following the traditions of their country and especially of the modern Brazilian theatre, are both social commentators and artists of considerable stature.⁸

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Notes

1. Rio: Livraria Agir Editôra, 2nd ed., 1962.

Although it was made in a *candomblé*, in honor of the pagan goddess Iansan, *Zé* insists that his promise to deliver a full-length cross to the Church of Saint Barbara is valid and must be fulfilled. Saint Barbara and/or Iansan have cured his burro, after all. *Zé's* wife is skeptical, easily seduced by the big city. The clergy and civil authorities oppose *Zé* as blasphemous, even politically subversive. Others try to exploit *Zé* as a new messiah. Frustrated to the point of violence, *Zé* is shot by the police, but is carried into the church on his cross by the townspeople.

2. Two in one volume, introduction by Flávio Rangel. Rio: Editôra Civilização Brasileira, 1962. Short preface to second play by the author.

Three families dispossessed by floods from their Rio slum take possession of an abandoned construction site. During efforts to dispossess them from their new home, contested by Lula and his friends from the union, they are again exploited by racketeers and politicians. Divided from within and without, some of the *favelados* are corrupted and despair, but a few continue to hope for a better day. After the murder of one of their oppressors, the "invaders" learn that in union there is strength, for the courts have ruled to allow them to remain in the abandoned apartment house.

Father Cícero, once politically as well as spiritually powerful, is now old, infirm, and ruled by his doctor Floro who has political ambitions. Bastião and Zabelinha believe that their love has been favored by Cícero's bull, and they make a new saint of him. Furious that the bull should replace Cícero and himself with the people, Floro attempts to execute the bull. When the animal offers no resistance, and seems in fact to favor Floro in his seduction of Zabelinha, who sacrifices her honor to save the bull, Bastião kills the "saint." Officially, however, it is God who has struck the animal down.

3. Preface by Paulo Francis, Rio: Editôra Civilização Brasileira, 1965. Short preface by the author.

Jorge, supposedly killed in action at war, has been proclaimed a hero. His home town, now named Cabo Jorge in his honor, has prospered to the point where it contemplates establishment of a second brothel. Actually a deserter, Jorge understands nothing of what has happened in his absence, but gradually learns that it would have been better for all had

he died. Still believing that he chose the right course for a soldier in the atomic age, and extremely bitter, he allows himself to be killed by the madam during a stoning of the brothel by the priest and pious women of the town.

4. Preface by Yan Michalski and introduction by the author, Rio: Editôra Civilização Brasileira, 1966.

One day Branca Dias rescues a drowning man and uses mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The man is a young priest who is both scandalized and henceforth overcome with passion as a result of this "kiss." He becomes Branca's spiritual adviser and, at first unconsciously, begins a subtle persecution of her and her loved ones in order to rid himself of guilt. It is not difficult to find damning evidence against Branca's father, a new Christian, against her fiancé who taught her how to read, and against Branca, a creature of nature and passion as well as a reader of books. Branca's father recants, but Branca and her beloved are condemned by the Inquisition.

5. Introduction by the authors and preface by Antônio Callado, Rio: Editôra Civilização Brasileira, 1968.

Simpatia, duly elected president of a "school of samba," has replaced Tucão as president and lover of Marlene. Tucão was an excellent promoter, however, and the school is now in financial difficulties. Simpatia's solution is to charge admission to the rehearsal of the skit and accompanying entertainment to be performed for Carnival. Numerous members of the school are dissatisfied and plot with Tucão for the latter's return to power. This story develops parallel to and often interrupts that of the skit which represents the second rise and fall of Getúlio Vargas, and the murder of Simpatia (who plays Vargas) coincides with the dictator's suicide.

6. For Dias Gomes' first three plays discussed here, see Francis A. Dutra, "The Theatre of Dias Gomes: Brazil's Social Conscience," *Cithara*, IV, ii, 3-13. Mr. Dutra treats them primarily as social commentary. Not only Dias Gomes' publishers, but those other than the author who have furnished prefaces and introductions to all of his works have, I believe, been guilty of neglecting his artistry.

7. *A Donzela Joana* (Petrópolis: Editôra Vozes Limitada, 1966). Dias Gomes states that Branca has nothing in common with Joan of Arc except the tragic end of each one's story. It is true that Branca does not hear voices, does not eventually accept her heroic rôle with joy, does not sacrifice herself gladly. Yet he minimizes unduly the similarities between the two girls during their imprisonments and trials, their human despair and equally human protest and triumph at the end. Professedly less interested in historical than in literary truth, Dias Gomes does not seem to perceive that other authors have dealt with Joan in much the same way as he with Branca. As he further states, however, the long history of the Inquisition and analogous institutions, which continue to have their defenders, many of them as sincere as Branca's prosecutors and judges, attests to the universal truth of her story.

8. The research and writing of this and other essays on modern Brazilian drama have been subsidized since 1963 by the NDEA, Franklin and Marshall College, the American Philosophical Society, OAS, the Social Science Research Council, and Oakland University.