

# The reinterpretation of a Brazilian Play: *O Rei da Vela*

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Oswald de Andrade's *O Rei da Vela*<sup>1</sup>, written in 1933 and published in 1937, received scant attention in its own time as a literary work, and the first attempt to stage it was repressed by Vargas' secret police. Although Brazilian critics began to reassess the play in 1967, on the occasion of Teatro Oficina's famous production, American scholars seem largely to have ignored what is one of the key works of Brazilian Modernism. And its relationship to historical context has been only superficially considered. The play, to be fully understood, must be seen essentially as an unmasking of 1930's economic nationalism in Brazil<sup>2</sup>, with a concomitant presentation of a radical view of class struggle. One must also consider the work's inextricable links to the decline of the coffee economy, the fall of the Old Republic, and the rise of the Corporate State<sup>3</sup>. The play's internal structures are bound to historical events and socio-economic realities by means of a wide range of avant-garde and anti-illusionist techniques. At the same time, *O Rei da Vela* must not be confined to its own period. It became significant as literature and as theatre only in the 1960's, long after the Modernist period itself. In that context, it can be argued that Oswald's play was in many ways a harbinger of later dependentist viewpoints espoused by writers of that later period.

*O Rei da Vela* deals with a specific time and place (São Paulo and Rio in the 1930's). It presents a kaleidoscopic view of Brazilian society and class relationships in a period of abrupt changes and crises. All social levels make a direct or indirect appearance: residues of the Old Republic —the decadent coffee oligarchy—, the emerging urban commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, the petite bourgeoisie, the clergy, the intellectuals, the military, the immigrants —especially Italian—, the rural and urban proletariat, the poor and disenfranchised, the archetypal American capitalist. Historical events, too, play their part: the Depression, the decline of the monocultural coffee economy, the 1930 Revolution, the transition from British to American economic hegemony. Political polarization of the times manifests itself, from social revolutionary consciousness to Integralism. There are premonitions of future events: the rise of fascism in Europe, the advent of the repressive Corporatist State —Vargas' Estado Novo—, the establishment of multinational corporations. The presentation of an entire socio-economic, political, and historical complex is structured around a radical, anti-imperialist view of economic nationalism.

Artistically, Oswald utilizes an array of avant garde techniques: Expressionist, Surrealist, Absurdist. The anti-illusionist techniques in the play bring to mind Brecht, though there is no evidence to support that Oswald de Andrade was acquainted with the German playwright's early work<sup>4</sup>. Further, *O Rei da Vela* presents a form of analysis that will become common currency in the post-1950 Spanish American «boom» narrative: manipulation of masks and mytho-cyclical patterns within a dependency context.

#### FORMS, STRUCTURES, AND THEMES

The external, physical elements that comprise the setting and set of the play provide a visual framework for the socio-ideological-artistic relationships. The set for Act I, a money-lender's office, establishes the first stratum of what will later crystallize into a hierarchy of exploitation: foreign domination, internal bourgeoisie, and internal proletariat (both urban and rural), along with sectors totally dispossessed. The «props» seen on stage in Act I include a futurist divan, a Louis XV desk, a telephone, candles of all sizes and types. That perspective suggests a Brazil looking toward the future while remaining in the past, a Brazil without a history of its own. Those themes relate both to 1930's economic nationalism—a future-oriented ideology based on industrialization and modernization—and to the future theory of dependency. There is also an Expressionist device used to symbolize Brazil's «imprisonment» by external and internal capital: a waiting room in the form of a cage where debtors are kept.

Act II takes place on a tropical isle in Guanabara Bay near the city of Rio de Janeiro. There are exotic birds, palm trees, a beach, and people dressed in the «mais furiosa fantasia burguesa e equatorial» (p. 97). The American flag flies from a pole. Additional elements are sounds of motor boats, a landing field, «móveis mecânicos». That Absurdist parody brings into focus a cultural juncture of the Brazilian bourgeoisie: Luso-Tropicalist exoticism for export, with an overlay of imported American technology. The scene reminds one of a Carmen Miranda movie—set and choreography by Busby Berkeley—, which was precisely the inspiration for the Teatro Oficina production of *O Rei da Vela*<sup>5</sup>.

Act III takes place in the same setting as Act I, with «props» from a hospital clinic, symbolizing the defeat of one «rei da vela» and the rise of another, a theme to be analyzed below.

A constant in the set—candles—as well as the title—«candle king»—have varied and continually shifting symbolic values. The title is central to an understanding of the play's dialectic tension of art/ideology/society. The symbolic values of «rei» and «vela» unfold throughout the work and are fully revealed by the end of Act III.

The fundamental value of «vela» is economic. Because of the Great Depression and the coffee crisis, the electric company has shut down and the candle has come back into use. The protagonist, the usurer Abelardo I, has cornered the market in candles and thus becomes the candle king, «rei da vela». Consequently, «vela» is associated with notions of regression into feudalism, semi-colonialism, and underdevelopment. And the «rei da vela» represents the petty speculator, near the bottom in the hierarchy of exploitation. At the top is imperialism. Abelardo I himself sums up this process in Act I: «O pânico do café. Com dinheiro inglês comprei café na porta das fazendas desesperadas. De posse de segredos governamentais, joguei duro e certo no café-papel! Amontoei ruínas de um lado e ouro do outro! Calculei ante a regressão parcial que a crise provocou... Des-

cobri e incentivei a regressão, a volta à vela... sob o signo do capital americano» (p. 9). The composite value of «vela» in the first phase of its unfolding thus corresponds to a radical vision of the economic history of the period.

From its economic foundation, the candle symbol shifts to matters of social class. Abelardo I, who because of his money will marry into the traditional coffee oligarchy, is scorned by his adopted family as «rei da vela», «intruso», «arri- vista». He is a petit bourgeois, nouveau riche social climber.

Abelardo is destroyed by the very exploitative system in which he participates. As a result, «vela» turns into a death symbol, «velório» (or wake), and finally «vala» (or mass grave). Therefore a symbol of personal death, it comes to suggest collective death as well: the historical death of a people in a dependent country. When one candle king falls, another replaces him: Abelardo I is overthrown by Abelardo II. It is the unchanging cycle of non-history of all Latin American countries according to Oswald de Andrade's anti-imperialist focus.

The implications of title and set, therefore, lead us to certain conclusions about the author's ideological stance. The main body of the play does so even more clearly.

#### HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY

*O Rei da Vela* has a direct bearing on specific socio-economic systems and political events. The play begins with a reference to the financial troubles of the early 1930's. Because of the problems of the coffee market crisis and the Depression, credit is tight and many people have lost what small material wealth they once possessed. Abelardo I charges absurdly high interest rates. «O cliente», who represents all debtors, has paid more than twice the amount of his original loan just in interest and is now two months overdue on his latest installment. Abelardo I orders him shot. A hierarchy of exploitation is thus established: segments of the national bourgeoisie exploit their countrymen and take advantage of the financial vicissitudes of the time, while foreign interests exploit Brazil's economic vulnerability and the nation is saddled with an onerous foreign debt.

Some blame the 1930 Revolution for the problems. «O cliente» says: «E a revolução em 30 foi um mau sucesso que complicou tudo» (p. 58). Vargas-style reform measures and populist appeals to the growing urban proletariat are the villains according to middlemen like Abelardo I who benefit from the crisis: «Lei contra a usura! Bolchevistas! Por isso é que o país se arruína» (p. 70). Similar scapegoats are «as exigências do operariado. O salário mínimo. As férias» (p. 77). The true villain of the play, as we shall later see, is imperialism.

The plot of *O Rei da Vela* hinges on the marriage of the nouveau riche Abelardo I to Heloísa, a member of an old coffee family ruined in the crisis (the parody of the classical love motif, Abelard and Heloise, will be explored in another section of this article). Her father, Belarmino, «está de tanga. Entregou tudo aos credores» (p. 64). Heloísa has consented to marry Abelardo I in order to recapture past comforts. Her genuine predilection is revealed by her name: Heloísa de Lesbos. She admits frankly the purpose of their union: «O nosso casamento é um negócio» (p. 80). Since the coffee crisis and the decline of the coffee oligarchy, power had shifted to the cities and the rising urban bourgeoisie had begun to establish ties with the traditional rural «aristocracy», often in the form of intermarriage. Abelardo's marriage signifies for him the purchase of a status symbol: «Comprar esses restos de brasão ainda é um negócio» (p. 64). According to the perspective of *Rei da Vela*, the urban bourgeoisie is, by its very

nature as a social class, corrupt, cruel, and greedy; and the author views capitalism and imperialism as the prime causes of the chaos, suffering, and poverty.

The concept of dependency comes to mind in this context, but the word must be used with caution. *O Rei da Vela* does not present a full-blown dependency theory as we know it today. There are obvious differences, not the least of which is the lack of an elaborate and sophisticated theoretical formulation in the play. As a work of art, however, its «dependista» resonances are loud and clear. Just as Oswald de Andrade reacted against economic nationalism, the theory of dependency is a reaction to developmentalism<sup>6</sup>. A basic assumption of *O Rei da Vela* is that the Brazilian economy functions to serve the economies of the capitalist powers and that the urban bourgeoisie, represented by Abelardo, consciously participates to its own advantage: «Os países inferiores têm que trabalhar para os países superiores como os pobres trabalham para os ricos... Eu sei que sou um simples feitor do capital estrangeiro... E por isso que possuo uma lancha, uma ilha e você [Heloísa]» (p. 94). The bourgeoisie may have certain ideals (e. g., liberal economic nationalism), but ultimately it cooperates with imperialism. The reason is that dependency, in Oswald's view, is the key to bourgeois success: «A chave milagrosa da fortuna, uma chave Yale» (p. 90). As a result, Brazil remains «in hock» to foreigners: «já hipotecamos tudo ao estrangeiro, até a paisagem!» (p. 147).

Dependency, however, extends beyond economics. Cultural dependency takes many forms, one being the restriction of autonomous understanding and knowledge: «Esse negócio de escrever livros de sociologia... fica ridículo para nós, industriais avançados. Diante dos ingleses e americanos» (p. 80). Imported culture becomes distorted, grotesque. Dona Cesarina, Heloísa's mother, serves «rabos-de-galo»: «E a tradução de coquetel feita pela Academia de Letras» (p. 106).

In Act III, Abelardo I is destroyed by Abelardo II, who replaces him as candle king and husband of Heloísa, events that represent change without change: «Um cai, outro o substitui enquanto houver imperialismo e diferença de classes» (p. 151). That is, the dynamic of change remains external. Internal changes are circular, ritualistic. Abelardo II states the concept ironically during his wedding: «Heloísa será sempre de Abelardo. É clássico» (p. 158). Dependency is «classic»: there is only endless repetition.

Fittingly, the final word in the play belongs to the American capitalist Mr. Jones: «Oh! Good business!» (p. 158). Jones is the phantom protagonist of *O Rei da Vela*, the manipulator behind the scenes. He first becomes visible in the second act in a sexual context with Heloísa. Sexuality is portrayed in a grotesque manner, for Jones teaches Heloísa to wrestle and box: «Ele é campeão de tudo isso em Nova Iorque, Wall Street!» (p. 105). Symbolically, Brazilian culture is prostituted, while received culture is distorted and dependency and exploitation are violent. Jones himself describes the essence of dependency—a response to the needs of the economic center (i. e., the United States):

Heloísa.—Diga uma coisa, Jones, porque é que o Brasil não paga as dívidas com o café que está queimando?

Jones.—No Brasil precisa aviões... Metralhices... trocar por café... Oh! Good business! Shut up! (pp. 122-123).

The denouement—the marriage of Abelardo II with Heloísa—takes place to make her available for Mr. Jones. The meaning is clear: Brazilian social institutions, although conducted by Brazilians, function on the basis of foreign economic control.

While revealing the nature of imperialism and underdevelopment, the work also suggests alternatives. Abelardo I, as his death approaches, recounts the parable of Jujuba, stray dog and mascot of the soldiers. Jujuba brings other strays into the barracks, but they are shot. Jujuba decides to relinquish the comfort of the barracks and join his comrades, even though he will die of starvation. Such a romantic vision of the class struggle, fidelity of the proletariat, and unity of the oppressed represents, in the sense of class solidarity, an alternate solution to dependency. Jujuba is «solidário com sua classe» (p. 154) while Abelardo I, once poor himself, betrays his class: «Traí minha fome» (p. 154). The soldiers also belong to Jujuba's class; they will foment the social revolution. In the light of subsequent events in Brazilian history, one may consider this presumption naive, to say the least. Nevertheless, «tenentismo»<sup>7</sup> was still a heroic myth at the time of the play's composition, and Jujuba may well symbolize Luís Carlos Prestes<sup>8</sup>.

Having examined the author's treatment of the historical situation and his response to economic nationalism, we shall now turn to Oswald's means of conveying that situation and response—his aesthetic code and the destructive force of his art.

#### AESTHETIC CODE AND TOTAL THEATRICAL LANGUAGE

The complex aesthetic components of *O Rei da Vela* require for their understanding a variety of analytical perspectives. Those components are multi-dimensional within a temporal/spatial frame of reference. They represent an outgrowth of the São Paulo literary experiments of the 1920's, and parallel artistic currents in Europe before and simultaneous with the time of the play's writing. The components foretell Brazilian and foreign aesthetic transformations of following decades. The aesthetic code can be broken down into the following components: Modernist themes and the establishment of a Brazilian language; anti-illusionist techniques; avant-garde techniques; masks and ritual.

Oswald de Andrade is one of the great figures of the Modernist generation. Discussions and writings on Modernism usually include Oswald's prose works, poetry, and manifestoes. Scholars generally hold that Modernist theatre is insignificant, and they rarely mention *O Rei da Vela* as one of the key works of the generation. The play's polemical intensity may be a factor, since stress is placed on the aesthetic rather than the political thrust of Modernism, at least the São Paulo variety. Indeed, Alfredo Bosi, one of the best contemporary critics, lists among the Modernist's now irrelevant traits their «inconsequência ideológica»<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, *O Rei da Vela* imparts a strong ideological message through use of Modernist themes and techniques, thus representing a logical extension of the *Semana de Arte Moderna* program. The Modernist notion of anthropophagy is central to the play. (In fact, the reader may recall that Oswald is the author of the *Manifesto Antropófago*). In *O Rei da Vela*, the metaphor according to which Brazilians devour each other and are devoured by foreigners has been placed in a political context and transformed into the concept of hierarchy of economic exploitation. Also fundamental to the play is the anthropophagic paradox of rejecting while simultaneously devouring foreign aesthetic tenets. *O Rei da Vela* parodies European classical and romantic motifs, while it incorporates European avant-garde techniques; the purpose is to create a uniquely Brazilian language and ultimately to define Brazilian reality. Other Modernist works (e. g., Mário de Andrade's *Macunaima*) attempt to define Brazilian reality in primitive, racial,

ethnic, cosmogonic, and etiological terms. The overwhelming concern for such a definition remains the same in *O Rei da Vela*. Oswald has merely shifted the focus to economics and social class. The results are quite similar: Brazil's identity is presented as fragmented, its destiny unfulfilled. Through his attempt to achieve definition, Oswald has created a total theatrical language.

The aesthetic component that serves as the prime conductor of the play's ideologically-charged content can be termed anti-illusion. My fundamental assumption is that in *O Rei da Vela* Oswald de Andrade has created a dialectical tension between art and reality. The work does not simply create an illusion of reality.

It is art conscious of itself in juxtaposition to external reality. Consequently, the aesthetic object differentiates itself from that reality while commenting upon and defining it. Such anti-illusionist techniques are employed to break down audience empathy and to heighten awareness.

As stated above, it appears unlikely that Oswald was acquainted with Brecht's work. Nevertheless, there are some striking parallels between *O Rei da Vela* and Brecht's early *Lehrstücke* and later Epic Theatre: the notion of theatre as a moral/didactic institution; anti-illusionist techniques and alienation in both the artistic and social sense; use of primary Marxist concepts<sup>10</sup>; classical parody (Heloise and Abelard); and use of the exemplary parable (Jujuba)<sup>11</sup>.

The examples of anti-illusionist technique in the play are many. After the scene with the debtors in the first act, Abelardo I states: «Mas esta cena basta para nos identificar perante o público» (p. 62). A call has thus been made for objectivity on the part of the audience. Final clarification of the point is made in Act III when Abelardo I refers to «as soluções fora da vida. As soluções do teatro» (p. 144). Oswald de Andrade has affirmed that his theatre cannot serve as a form of catharsis. Its relationship and juxtaposition to social reality must be clearly understood.

The second alienation effect established by Oswald's «linguagem» is self-consciousness. Following are two examples. Abelardo I: «Sou o primeiro socialista do teatro brasileiro» (p. 75). Pinote: «O teatro brasileiro já virou teatro de tese» (p. 83). If reality is the thesis, and the theatrical piece is the antithesis, then self-conscious technique generates the synthesis: the audience's objective awareness of the play's interrelationship with reality, of its aesthetic-ideological interpretation of reality. Alienation or anti-illusion establishes the connection—in theory at least—with the ideological and social meaning of alienation: unequal distribution of social benefits, lack of the people's control over modes of production. The dialectical relationship between art and reality transcends the intention to satirize and reform society. The intent is to destroy, which is also a function of Oswald's language. Thus, his utilization of avant-garde techniques culminates in destructive force.

*O Rei da Vela* devours (in the Modernist sense) a whole gamut of avant-garde techniques and principles. (Although I separate them in my analysis, they are in actuality far from mutually exclusive.) The play utilizes such Expressionistic theatrical devices as the debtors' cage; it approximates Expressionism in its use of antiliterary language and its engagé social consciousness. What is more important, *O Rei da Vela* contains elements that parallel Surrealism as a specific literary movement and as a general artistic revolution, one of the major manifestations of which has been Theatre of the Absurd.

Examples of the devices, including verbal games, of the Absurd abound in the play: Mr. Jones' «direito de pernada» or *droit du seignor*; the announcement of the other wordly voice —«Amé-ri-ca-é-um-ble-fe!» (p. 156); the intellectual Pinote's livelihood by murder or «facadinhas». From all this one can conclude

that in spite of the play's relationship to specific historical circumstances, the author makes no attempt to present a realistic portrayal of Brazilian society. The relationship between art and reality can be a destructive one.

The first level of destruction pertains to the ideological foundation of the play: demolition of bourgeois mind-sets based on dependent capitalism and the hierarchy of exploitation.

The second level involves artistic destruction in many forms. One must certainly consider the fundamental influence of Dadá. Specifically, however, Oswald's artistic destruction takes the form of masks and unmasking. The characters, flat types who manipulate a language, are masks of the urban commercial bourgeoisie, decadent coffee «aristocracy», and so forth. By revealing these masks, by mocking them, the author intends to unmask official bourgeois reality, to destroy its mind-sets. The masks, within the context of a total theatrical language, become grotesque. The reader will recall examples from the text cited above, such as Mr. Jones' «love-making» with Heloísa. Destruction in this form saves the play from becoming a mere didactic exercise. As Mário Chamie observes: «Todo esse elenco recortado de protagonistas cairia num absolutismo didático, se Oswald de Andrade não o dinamizasse com o seu poder de análise demolidora» (*op. cit.*, página 22). Oswald's most powerful weapons are parody and sarcasm.

*O Rei da Vela* parodies the classical love myth: Heloísa and Abelardo. Their relationship revolves around finances and sexual aberration, as do most of the other relationships in the play. In his version of the love myth, Oswald manipulates the language of love. (Much of the destructive power of his language arises from the transformation of symbolic charges.) In one example, Abelardo I declares his love in a grotesque manner to Dona Cesarina, his future mother-in-law: «Por que não sorri mais e exala esse perfume de rosas murchas?» (p. 101). The traditional rose of youth and beauty is transformed into a symbol of decay. He calls her «meu vesúvio». The symbol transmutes in the following manner: Dona Cesarina is ready to go off sexually; she is large; she is old; she is scarred, wrinkled, rent, and pocked. The source of the sexual degradation, according to Oswald de Andrade's analysis, is capitalist society itself. Other examples of similar symbolic transformations are «rei» and «vela» (see above).

Finally, the parody of the classical love motif takes on the meaning of the circular, of repetition of the same decadent rituals. When Abelardo II puns that his marriage with Heloísa «é clássico», the ultimate significance within the ideological/aesthetic framework of *O Rei da Vela* is that Brazil's class system and hierarchy of exploitation will remain unaltered as long as the economy and class relationships are founded on dependent capitalism. Endless repetition means nonhistory. When «one falls, another replaces him», no real change takes place; Brazil's history does not unfold. And there is a further implication: the classical love myth is a foreign literary model, a European mindset and «ideology» of the pure relationship. Imposition of such an «ideology» represents dependency on a cultural level, and its presence suggests an ideological blind for the true relationship on the socio-economic plane. The relationship is a form of dependency that is unmasked—i. e., shown to be fundamentally «impure»—through the various dramatic structures of *O Rei da Vela*.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Oswald de Andrade, *O Rei da Vela* (São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> «Economic nationalism is revealed as a future-oriented ideology. And while the actual working-out of this policy is highly dependent upon circumstances, economic nationalism became intense enough in the Vargas years to amount to an ideology of development». John D. Wirth, *The Politics of Brazilian Development* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 7. See also Paul Singer, «O Brasil no Contexto do Capital Internacional, 1889-1930», in *História Geral da Civilização Brasileira*, Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda ed., v. 3:2 (Rio de Janeiro: Difusão Editorial, 1977).

During the Old Republic, economic nationalism expressed narrow class and financial interests rather than genuine national concerns. Furthermore, statements of economic nationalism had virtually no impact on the failure of the coffee-oriented export economy and price defense in the 1920's. Manufacturing and modernization became, to the minds of the nationalists in the 1930's, the means to greater economic and political independence. The Vargas regime during the Estado Novo took on many of the arguments of economic nationalism as part of its official policy, particularly regarding state ownership and intervention in the economy.

<sup>3</sup> The history of São Paulo, from the late nineteenth century to 1930, revolves around coffee. Production of coffee, at that time the principal export and source of foreign exchange, became focused in the state of São Paulo, and as a result Brazilian economic and political power gravitated to that region. The government of the Old Republic or «República Velha» —1899-1930— was controlled by the São Paulo coffee bourgeoisie. National coffee interests, however, took a back seat to international capital in various ways. Foreign capital investment, especially British, gained control of Brazilian coffee marketing and export operations.

The external financial stranglehold, as well as overplanting and subsequent surpluses, gave rise to a series of coffee crises. The government of the Old Republic instituted periodic price defense and maintenance measures referred to by the blanket term «valorização». Because of the crises, a large number of coffee planters were ruined, and the decadent coffee «aristocracy» became a characteristic feature of São Paulo society. The onset of the world economic crisis in the 1920's ensured the decline of coffee and the end of the coffee bourgeoisie's hegemony. Disaster was inevitable for the Old Republic, whose fall brought on Getúlio Vargas' initial tenure (1930-1945).

Vargas —who came out of the political machinery of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul— was an unsuccessful presidential candidate in 1930, but he was swept into office via military revolt. By 1937 he had become a dictator. He ruled by decree and censorship, and maintained a strong secret police force. Political parties on both the right and left were suppressed. The new government was called the Estado Novo or «New State»; it was modeled after the corporatist states of Italy and Portugal. Vargas' economic programs foreshadowed the developmentalist model of the 1950's. He initiated the drive toward industrialization and increasing government participation in the economy, which produced a tremendous spurt in industrial investment and output and an all-out effort to establish basic state-owned steel and petroleum industries. Most Brazilians remained outside the economy, however, and foreign presence was felt more strongly than ever. By the late 1920's, in fact, the United States had replaced England as the principal foreign influence in the Brazilian economy.

For further information see the following sources: Boris Fausto, «Expansão do Café e Política Cafeeira», Warren Dean, «A Industrialização Durante a República Velha», Joseph Love, «Autonomia e Interdependência: São Paulo e a Federação Brasileira, 1889-1937» in *História Geral*; John W. F. Dulles, *Vargas of Brazil* (Austin and London: Univ. of Texas Press, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> «Piscador e Brecht haviam, na década anterior, desenvolvido a teoria do afastamento, rompendo o efeito ilusionista da cena italiana, mas não cremos que ela estivesse muito divulgada nas fontes acessíveis a Oswald de Andrade, para que se pudesse estabelecer uma influência».

«E dizer que nesse tempo Brecht... já havia realizado alguns marcos do seu teatro épico com realizações memoráveis, e que Oswald de Andrade sem sofrer

a sua influência sonhava o mesmo para a nossa cena». Van Jafa, «O Rei da Vela», *Correio da Manhã*, 26 November 1967.

<sup>5</sup> Teatro Oficina's production of *O Rei da Vela*, directed by José Celso Martinéz Corrêa, opened in São Paulo on 29 September, 1967. José Celso's assumption was that the situation denounced by Oswald had not changed in any fundamental way; that bourgeois consciousness must still be raised, through parody or direct attack. The production gave rise to a theatrical style that came to be known as «teatro de agressão». Armed with the tools of Brechtian stagecraft, the production took the form of Epic Theatre. Although Oswald's text was not altered, songs —such as «Sim; nós temos bananas»— were woven into the dramatic structure. Several bourgeois styles, for example opera and «revista» (vaudeville) were parodied, devoured. The dominant colors of the set and costumes were «verde-amarelo», green and yellow, the colors of the Brazilian flag. The audience was «assaulted» with obscene language and gestures, and phallic symbolism. For example, a large dummy of a cleric, placed on one side of the stage and facing the audience, had a moveable phallus. The actors, of course, were costumed in the «mais furiosa fantasia burguesa e equatorial». In terms of the creation of uniquely Brazilian theatrical forms, Oficina's production was one of the most significant, and controversial, stagings in the history of Brazilian theatre. In fact, the forms and styles devoured in the production led to a general cultural movement known as «tropicália» or «tropicalismo», which is seen to be an extension of Modernist anthropophagy. The principal elements of «tropicália» are a critical view of Brazilian culture (especially forms that slavishly imitate imported models), socio-political denunciation through irreverence and aggression, and manipulation of national symbols, concern with underdevelopment and dependency, a devouring of foreign models. The «tropicália» movement was especially fostered by the music of the «baianos» Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, the initiators of samba-rock.

<sup>6</sup> Developmentalism or developmental nationalism —«desenvolvimentismo»— characterized Brazilian government policy from 1951 to 1964. It sprang from the ideological views of the «tenentes» (see n. 7) and the Estado Novo and resulted from the economic conditions surrounding WWII: a significant increase in foreign exchange reserves and expansion and diversification of the Brazilian industrial park. Those two factors lent credence to the notion that Brazil was capable of developing import-substitution manufacturing and of exporting industrial goods on a large scale. The developmentalist doctrine «called for government control of natural resources, limitations on foreign capital, continuing industrialization, and greater commerce with all nations». E. Bradford Burns, *A History of Brazil* (N. Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970), p. 320. See also Thomas E. Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967).

The heyday of developmentalism came during the euphoria of the Kubitschek administration (1956-1961). Brazil experienced spectacular industrial and economic growth in those five years. Nevertheless, runaway inflation, expensive government programs, budget deficits on all levels of government and increasing foreign involvement —especially on the part of the multinationals— brought about a shift in thinking by economic policy-makers from the capitalist developmentalist model to a socialist and anti-imperialist model.

<sup>7</sup> The «tenentes» were young military officers who were non-Marxist revolutionaries and supported a nationalistic program of modernization, industrialization, and «national regeneration». They also attacked the dominant position of foreign capital. Although their revolts during the Old Republic were unsuccessful, they were part of the coalition that brought Vargas to power in 1930.

<sup>8</sup> Luis Carlos Prestes was honorary president of the ANL [Aliança Nacional Libertadora] and leader of the famous Prestes Column, a manifestation of the «tenentes» rebellion, which marched through the interior of Brazil in the 1920's, playing «cat-and-mouse» with federal troops.

<sup>9</sup> Alfredo Bosi, *História Concisa da Literatura Brasileira* (São Paulo: Editora Cultrix, 1970).

<sup>10</sup> «A estrutura toda de *O Rei da Vela* é o papel carbono de uma súmula organizada dos clichés com que principiante marxista filtra a sua compreensão

do capitalismo». Mário Chamie, *A Linguagem Virtual* (São Paulo: Edições Quiron, 1976), p. 20. Chamie's concept, which he terms «pan-sexualismo», is that Oswald de Andrade's ideological action is linked to anarchic liberation, the organic representation of which is uninhibited sexuality. According to the author, the dionysian aspect of sex means for Oswald the overturning of stifling ethics founded on social class interest and prejudice.

<sup>11</sup> There are, to be sure, significant differences between Brecht's drama and Oswald de Andrade's. While Brecht's theatre production was vast, Oswald's was meagre: *O Rei da Vela*, *A Morta*, *O Homem e o Cavalo*, *Renúncia*, and *O santeiro do Mangue* (the latter two unpublished). The influence of Brecht's theatre has been monumental and his works have been staged all over the world. The Epic Theatre has established its own tradition — which is not to say there were no forerunners (i.e., Piscator's Epic Theatre). *O Rei da Vela* was practically forgotten for 30 years until its first staging in 1967. Of Oswald's other works, only *A Morta* has been staged — by an amateur group at the University of São Paulo. Nevertheless, *O Rei da Vela* does represent the first major break with the worn-out «comédia de costumes» formula and the point of departure for the revolution in contemporary Brazilian theatre: in the 1940's, Nelson Rodrigues' *Vestido de Noiva*; in the 1950's, the founding of Teatro de Arena and Teatro Oficina; in the 1960's, an explosion of engagé, ensemble, and experimental theatre.



CARLOS BLANCO AGUINAGA, JULIO RODRÍGUEZ PUÉRTOLAS e IRIS ZAVALA, *Historia social de la literatura española* (en lengua castellana), 3 vols.

Se trata de la primera historia de la literatura con intención rigurosamente metodológica en que la literatura se estudia en su auténtico contexto histórico-social, desde el feudalismo al franquismo, como una «rama de la historia». Así, se integra la literatura con la sociedad, la política, la economía, en las coordenadas de la dinámica histórica.

Un acontecimiento en la historia de nuestra crítica base para nuevos estudios, un libro polémico con el que, a partir de ahora será preciso contar.

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