

University of Warwick institutional repository: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap>

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick**

<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap/73364>

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it. Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

**THE NATURE, ROOTS AND RELEVANCE OF THE  
FOLK THEATRE OF THE NORTH-EAST OF BRAZIL**

***Marco Antonio Camarotti Rosa***

**Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD  
at the University of Warwick,  
Joint School of Theatre Studies.**

  
**September, 1995**

## CONTENTS

DEDICATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION	1
1 - The Direction of the Research	2
2 - Ritual, Theatre, and Folk Theatre	4
2.1 - Ritual	4
2.2 - Life, Ritual, and Theatre - A Close Relationship	8
2.3 - The Origins and Growth of Folk Theatre	14
2.4 - Tracing the Ancient Roots	18
2.5 - Folk Theatre - In Search of a Definition	29
2.6- The Theatre in Brazil	33
Chapter 1:	
THE ENGLISH MUMMERS' PLAY	37
1.1 - Forms and Distribution	38
1.2 - The Revivals	47
1.3 - Theatre or Ritual?	58
1.4 - Origin and Contemporary Meaning	64
Chapter 2:	
A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRAZIL	91
2.1 - Brazil	92
2.2 - The North-East of Brazil	104

Chapter 3:

THE MAIN FORMS OF FOLK THEATRE OF THE NORTH-EAST OF BRAZIL	120
3.1 - The First Notices	121
3.2 - The Scholarship	122
3.3 - The Main Forms and their Origins in Brazil	126
3.3.1 - <i>Bumba-meu-Boi</i>	128
3.3.2 - <i>Chegança</i>	148
3.3.3 - <i>Pastoril</i>	157
3.3.4 - <i>Mamulengo</i>	165

Chapter 4:

RELEVANT FEATURES OF THE FOLK PLAYS OF THE BRAZILIAN NORTH-EAST	174
4.1 - Possible Bases for Comparison	175
4.2 - Ritual Symbols	178
4.3 - Essential Characteristics	180
4.4 - The Present Situation	194
4.5 - The Most Relevant Aspects	196
4.5.1 - Variant Versions with Different Names	196
4.5.2 - Seasonal Performances	198
4.5.3 - Performances in the Open-air and on the Ground	199
4.5.4 - Performances in Procession	200
4.5.5 - Well-known Plots	202
4.5.6 - Comic and Melodramatic Nature	203
4.5.7 - The Combat	207



4.5.8 - The Death and Resurrection	209
4.5.9 - The General Succession of Incidents and Run of Dialogue	213
4.5.10 - The Use of Recurring Formulae, Duplications and Repetitions	214
4.5.11 - Oral Theatre	217
4.5.12 - The Use of a Bald and Declamatory Style of Speech	218
4.5.13 - The Use of Laudatory Self-descriptions and Vauntings	220
4.5.14 - Use of Verses and Rhymes	221
4.5.15 - Use of Verbal Jestng (Word-play, Nonsense, Topsy-turvydom)	226
4.5.16 - Singing and Dancing	229
4.5.17 - The Musical Instruments	230
4.5.18 - The Use of Improvisation	231
4.5.19 - Male Performers	233
4.5.20 - Cross-dressing	235
4.5.21 - Fools	237
4.5.22 - Quack-doctors	242
4.5.23 - The Devil as a Comic Figure	244
4.5.24 - The Use of Masks or Blackened Faces	245
4.5.25 - The Use of a Bladder	249
4.5.26 - The Use of the Hobby-horse	250
4.5.27 - The Use of Colourful Clothes	252
4.5.28 - The Use of Military Uniforms	253
4.5.29 - The Participation of the Spectators	254
4.5.30 - The <i>Quête</i> (Begging for Money)	257
4.5.31 - The Actors are not Professionals in a Strict Sense	259
4.5.32 - Sexual Themes	260

4.5.33 - Obscenity	264
4.5.34 - The Relief of Fears by Witticism	266
Chapter 5:	
THE SOCIETY AND THE FOLK PLAYS OF THE BRAZILIAN NORTH-EAST: FROM THE BASIC SOCIAL DIMENSIONS TO AN ATTEMPT TO ANALYSE SOCIAL DRAMA	271
5.1 - Problems of Methodology	272
5.2 - Mary Douglas and the Grid/Group Functions	272
5.3 - Basil Bernstein's Socio-Linguistic Approach	276
5.4 - Some Preliminary Conclusions	279
5.5 - Victor Turner and the Dynamism of the Social World	284
5.6 - The People and the Plays of the North-East Brazil: An Attempt at an Analysis of Social Drama	286
5.7 - Another Preliminary Conclusion	292
CONCLUSION	296
BIBLIOGRAPHY	308
MAPS	329
ILLUSTRATIONS	332

## DEDICATION

To  
Conceição,  
Lourenço and Maria-Clara,  
    who have been a perennial light.  
Without them,  
    this work would not have existed.  
They, above all,  
    have made life and all efforts  
    not only endurable  
    but mainly pleasant.

To  
my supervisor,  
Clive Barker,  
    for his encouraging friendship and  
    for his remarkable, witty and  
    substantial support.

To  
Ron and Jean Shuttleworth,  
for their joy and kindness, and  
for everything they have taught me.

To  
the performers of the folk theatre  
of the North-East of Brazil and  
their *Mestres*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially and deeply grateful to the following institutions and people:

- . The Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE) - Recife, Brazil, which allowed me to come to the University of Warwick and, in particular, the staff of the Departamento de Teoria da Arte e Expressão Artística.
- . The Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq)-Brasília, Brazil, which provided the financial support.
- . The Joint School of Theatre Studies / The University of Warwick - Coventry, England.
- . The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library / The English Folk Dance and Song Society - London, England.
- . Birmingham City Archives / Central Library - Birmingham, England.
- . The Morris Ring Folk Plays Archives / Ron Shuttleworth Collection - Coventry, England.
- . Paulo Camarotti, Penha Freitas, Antonio Vilela, Mercedes Santos, Ricardo Bigi de Aquino, Rosa Vasconcellos, Jurandy Austermann, Marígia Viana, Luiz Antonio Marcuschi, Solange Coutinho, Lêda Alves, Roberto Benjamin, Aglaé Fontes de Alencar, Reza Alemohammad, J. D. A. Widdowson, Elaine Turner, Geraldine Cousin, Peter Jewell, Meriel Bloor, Kate Brennan, and Fiona Tait.

## SUMMARY

Folk plays have been performed in many different cultures all over the world, notwithstanding the level of material development and the distinctive features of the societies in which they are found. In the North-East of Brazil, they have probably been played since the beginning of the country's history in the sixteenth century.

This thesis examines the origins, the most relevant characteristics and the contemporary meaning of four of these folk theatre forms which are still performed in the North-East of Brazil, namely, the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, the *Chegança*, the *Pastoril* and the *Mamulengo*, stressing the aspects that they have in common with the English Mummers' Plays and other folk theatre forms from Europe and from the East.

Folk theatre forms have generally been seen as remnants of ancient religious rituals. However, this relationship is only hypothetical and can no longer be proved. Thus, although recognising that they possibly originate from magico-religious sources in the distant past, and that they still keep some magic characteristics, here they are chiefly seen as an expression of the collective unconscious of mankind and of social and political relationships.

# **INTRODUCTION**

## **1 - The Direction of the Research**

Very little has been written in English on the folk theatre forms existent in the North-East area of Brazil. A detailed search so far has only unearthed three articles, two of which, published in small magazines, seem unable to be traced. Even within Brazil itself the forms have not attracted the critical attention that might have been expected. This could be due in part to the lack of any consistent form or school of criticism. The folk theatre has been examined by folklorists, cultural scholars and theatre historians and so far no one has attempted any survey of the various approaches and insights. This thesis, in a very modest way, is probably the first attempt to pull the various strands together. In attempting to give for the first time a comprehensive and consistent coverage of the folk theatre of North-East Brazil, this thesis begins with the handicap of being unable to rely on any body of criticism setting out a methodology, simple or complex, through which to approach the subject.

In setting out on the research it was thought that a comparative approach might help. Because of the large amount of work which has been done on the English Mummers' Plays and the obvious accessibility of language, a detailed investigation of these plays and the critical attention they have attracted over the last century has been mounted and a summary of this work forms a significant section of the thesis. Attention has also been paid to the folk theatre forms of the Iberian peninsula and the work of scholars in the field of Middle-Eastern folk theatre. The folk theatre of North-East Brazil, whatever its particular and special manifestations, bears a distinct resemblance in many features to other forms of folk theatre throughout the world. Little evidence exists of any forms of pre-Colombian theatrical presentations, for reasons which will later become clear, and, even where evidence for the residual influences which might be attributed to that period of

history can be found in contemporary performances, these are more likely to become clear when the Brazilian forms are seen within the context of the wider international manifestations. In which case they will appear as anomalies, mutations or exceptions to more general features.

The prolific critical attention which has been paid to areas of social anthropology in this century has provided us with a range of viewpoints from which to study the survival of early cultural practices into our age, both in relatively unpolluted forms and in their adaptations and mediations into contemporary industrial society. The attention paid to the sociology of art, modes of discourse and the structure and function of ritual is of prime importance to anyone researching forms of folk theatre. The work of the following scholars has been researched in particular and detail: Mary Douglas, Basil Bernstein (and Elaine Turner's application of their work to theatre analysis), Richard Schechner and Victor Turner. The recent publication of the work of Carlo Ginzburg, although coming to my attention late in the period of my study, has proved useful in pulling together various strands into a viable hypothesis.

The work and ideas of all these scholars have been borne in mind during the research and if none of them has thrown up a consistent methodological approach which can be applied generally to the folk theatre of North-East Brazil, they have all contributed valuable and interesting viewpoints and side-lights. However, it must be stressed that the central concern of this thesis is to set down the folk theatre of North-East Brazil in its variant forms as they are at this moment in their history. Until this<sup>is</sup> done, any detailed analytical comparisons are unlikely to yield very much and the search for a methodology will be impeded and probably futile. The task of collecting and collating the material and constructing an analytical or comparative methodology has proved far too difficult to



attempt at one go and, although I hope there are many pointers in the work which follows, the main overall task must be left for the future.

## 2 - Ritual, Theatre, and Folk Theatre

### 2.1 - Ritual

Man is not only a social animal, he is also a ritual one, remarks Mary Douglas in her book *Purity and Danger*. And ritual is more important to him than words can be to thought, for without symbolic acts social relations could not exist. So, the existence of social interaction presupposes the practice of ritual. Its forms may change, but it will never disappear from social life.<sup>1</sup>

Expressing reality, ritual not only helps men to recognise their universe, but further supports the renewal of their insight and of their own experience. At the same time, it throws a more effective light over the most discernible components of reality and brings up the most remote and hidden aspects of their lives. Furthermore, without ritual there would be many events that they would not be able to perceive.

For Mary Douglas, disorder symbolises both danger and power and ritual recognises the potency of disorder. She says: "In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot be reached by conscious effort. Energy to command and special powers of healing come to those who can abandon rational control for a time".<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 8. ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

She observes that, through the report of several scholars, it is possible to see that, in many primitive cultures, ritual has power "to remake a man", and that one of the commonest ways of acquiring diviner's skills, as the power of healing, is becoming a temporary madman. The man who comes back from such inaccessible regions "brings with him a power not available to those who have stayed in the control of themselves and of society".<sup>3</sup>

According to her, the effect of religious rites is to create and control experience, which has already been pointed out by scholars such as Émile Durkheim, who was preoccupied with the study of "how religious ritual makes manifest to men their social selves and thus creates their society."<sup>4</sup>

"Ritual is pre-eminently a form of communication",<sup>5</sup> says Mary Douglas, and symbols are "the only means of communication. They are the only means of expressing value; the main instruments of thought, the only regulators of experience. For any communication to take place, the symbols must be structured."<sup>6</sup>

Non-verbal symbols and ritual are, then, essential for the organisation of human experience and of social life.

However, the activation by symbols is not only necessary "to create solidarity in small communities", for the same occurs in industrial societies, which are "organised by economic exchange".<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Mary Douglas, op. cit., pp. 97 and 96.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970), p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

As states the Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung, a symbol "*does not disguise, it reveals in time*" (C. G. Jung, *The Symbolic Life*, tr. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 212).

<sup>7</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 5

In short, in any culture, all social relations are represented and expressed by ritual, which is made possible because cultures are based on "a series of related structures which comprise social forms, values, cosmology, the whole of knowledge and through which all experience is mediated."<sup>8</sup>

Thus, "rituals work upon the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body", and "The analysis of ritual symbolism cannot begin until we recognise ritual as an attempt to create and maintain a particular culture, a particular set of assumptions by which experience is controlled."<sup>9</sup>

The human being has always wondered about the mysteries of the duality life-death. One of his biggest efforts has been to understand his own nature and that of his surrounding environment, and, thus, feel himself safer.

It is believed that in order to deal with the unanswered questions that arose in their souls, since the very beginning of their existence, men began to play and imitate, creating fiction and diversion, whose function appears to be the dispersal of mystery and the elimination of the fear that it causes.<sup>10</sup>

So, the appearance of varied forms of expression among different societies, can be seen as an answer to a deep necessity of these human groups. The necessity of arriving at other ways of expressing their values and their cosmologies, through a more efficient channel of communication than the pre-existent ones and, at the same time, reviewing and restating these common principles.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 129.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> See Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*. Tr. Meyer Barash (New York: The Free Press, 1961), pp. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Throughout the development of world theatre in its folk forms, inexplicable features assert themselves across ages and cultures. Jung sees these features as a manifestation of the *collective unconscious*, which

On the other hand, these forms, growing out of this activity, seem to be shaped according to the characteristics of each society and of each epoch.

For JUNG, the work of art arises from a deep need in man and society, and its form depends on the characteristics that define each society and epoch. That is, the shape of the work of art is a response to the values of society, being determined by the nature of these contents.

Jung observes,

"Therein lies the social significance of art: it is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking. The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present."<sup>12</sup>

Hence, many similar magical ceremonies sprang up in different and distant cultures, from the beginning of time.

Such ceremonies, from which the theatre probably derives, must have existed initially as magical rites but, after centuries of practice, they have taken many other forms for a multitude of reasons.

---

is universal, for it "does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn". Different to the *personal unconscious*, which is individual, the *collective unconscious* "has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us" (C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 2. ed., tr. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 3-4. The *collective unconscious* keeps the *archetypes*, which are the primordial images themselves, mythological figures (be they daemons, human beings or processes), which "give form to countless typical experiences of our ancestors" and are always recurring in the course of history, appearing "wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed". They are "the psychic residua of innumerable experiences of the same type" (C. G. Jung, *Man, Art, and Literature*, tr. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-83.

The world changed, men improved their way of living, but the inability to explain their doubts about the secrets of life and death remained unsolved. Consequently, their need for coming to terms with these mysteries in a pleasant and joyful manner also remained.

So, throughout the times, in all continents, many forms of <sup>indigénas</sup> theatre have appeared. They have been performed for generations and are similar in a great number of aspects. And, although impossible to prove nowadays, we can say that these forms are possibly survivals of those primitive rituals and magical ceremonies.

## 2.2 - Life, Ritual, and Theatre - A Close Relationship

Theatre is generally seen as deriving from ritual and, due to their nature, the two are related to private and social life, for they both mirror men and their society.

Expressing the human and social universe, ritual and theatre act upon it, fortifying common beliefs, controlling circumstances, regulating behaviours and modifying perception and knowledge.

Their configuration depends mainly on the relationship between the spectators and the players. According to Victor Turner,

"Ritual, unlike theatre, does not distinguish between audience and performers. Instead, there is a congregation whose leaders may be priests, party officials, or other religious or secular ritual specialists, but all share formally and substantially the same set of beliefs and accept the same system of practices, the same sets of rituals or liturgical actions."<sup>13</sup>

Partaking of the same point of view, Richard Schechner adds,

---

<sup>13</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* (New York: PAJ, 1982), p. 112.

"Theatre comes into existence when a separation occurs between audience and performers. The paradigmatic theatrical situation is a group of performers soliciting an audience who may or may not respond by attending. The audience is free to attend or stay away - and if they stay away it is the theatre that suffers, not its would-be audience. In ritual, staying away means rejecting the congregation - or being rejected by it, as in excommunication, ostracism, or exile."<sup>14</sup>

In his turn, Met n And says that ritual becomes dramatic "when it is performed before a number of people besides those actually taking part in the ceremony which is designed to awe and impress this audience".<sup>15</sup>

Such statements indicate that it is not the structure but the context which is the chief element to distinguish ritual and theatre.<sup>16</sup> For Schechner, the basic opposition is not between ritual and theatre, but between efficacy and entertainment. Being opposed to each other, these "form a binary system, a continuum", <sup>17</sup> for they exist in both ritual and

---

<sup>14</sup> Richard Schechner, "From Ritual to Theatre and Back" in *Ritual, Play and Performance* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 211.

<sup>15</sup> He notes that this can be seen throughout history, for instance, during the coronation of kings, which have ever intended "to impress on the monarch's subjects the concept that he is henceforth set apart from all common men, and that he has, at the least, a special relationship with the divine powers". This *dramatic ritual*, however, which "can consist only of performing a number of prescribed observances", differs from the *ritual drama* because this "includes personification and has narrative content", as it happened in the "Coronation Drama", during the coronation of the Pharaohs in ancient Egypt, in which the king performed the role of a god and "a small part of the myth of Osiris was symbolically represented by performers speaking a fixed liturgical text and performing a number of ritual and symbolic actions". In it there was mimesis because the performers represented mythical figures such as Horus, Set, Osiris, Isis and Nephthys (Met n And, *Drama at the Crossroads* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1991), p. 30).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Schechner, op. cit., p. 217.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 207 and 206.

theatre. The point is that in ritual the results are the dominant aim, and, in theatre, it is fun which dominates.

Thus, to distinguish ritual from theatre will fundamentally depend "on the degree to which the performance tends toward efficacy or entertainment",<sup>18</sup> as well as in "how symbolic meaning and affect are infused and attached to performed events."<sup>19</sup>

It is Schechner again who states that

"The entire binary 'efficacy / ritual - entertainment / theatre' is performance: performance includes the impulse to be serious and to entertain; to collect meanings and to pass the time; to display symbolic behavior that actualizes 'there and then' and to exist only 'here and now'; to be oneself and to play at being others; to be in a trance and to be conscious; to get results and to fool around; to focus the action on and for a select group sharing a hermetic language, and to broadcast to the largest possible audiences of strangers who buy a ticket."<sup>20</sup>

But, as "social and dramatic roles are indeed closely related to each other", <sup>21</sup> it is necessary to clarify which are the differences that we can find between the deeds of everyday life on the one side and ritual and theatre on the other.

While in ordinary life the events are usually spontaneous and more auxiliary than for show, in a performance (ritual or theatre), they are previously arranged, and are not "simply a doing but a *showing of a doing*", <sup>22</sup> which is both actual and symbolic.

---

<sup>18</sup> Richard Schechner, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

Dell Hymes makes a clear distinction between behaviour, conduct, and performance. He says that "there is *behavior*, as simply anything and everything that happens; there is *conduct*, behavior under the aegis of social norms, cultural rules, shared principles of interpretability; there is *performance*, when one or more persons assumes responsibility for presentation."<sup>23</sup>

So, performance is "something creative, realized, achieved, even transcendent of the ordinary course of events."<sup>24</sup>

In his turn, Thomas A. Green says that performance is not only an activity, but a "self-conscious staging of activity before a 'passive' group (an audience), although audiences at folk performances are rarely truly inactive."<sup>25</sup>

For him, such characterisation is enough to exclude the concept of drama developed among the social scientists, raising the notion of life as a stage, which derives, at least, from Shakespeare. Despite any similarity that can be found (the use of masks and costumes, for example), life as drama does not fit the ritual enactments.

However, I think that the matter at issue can be seen from another perspective.

Schechner reminds us that any ritual "can be lifted from its original setting and performed as theatre - just as any everyday event can be."<sup>26</sup> He cites performances which took place in the late sixties and early seventies in the USA, and gives the example of a family in Greenwich Village who "sold admission to their apartment where spectators

---

<sup>23</sup> Dell Hymes, "Breakthrough into Performance" in *Folklore: Performance and Communication* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas A. Green, "Toward a Definition of Folk Drama", *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 91, n. 361 (1978), unpaginated.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Schechner, *op. cit.*, p. 217.



watched them in their daily lives." He explains that the theoretical foundations of this kind of art "lie in Cage's assertion that theatre is actually an attitude on the part of the spectator - to set up a chair in the street and to watch what happens is to transform the street into a theatre."<sup>27</sup>

But the most important is that the differences between ritual, entertainment, and ordinary life, "arise from the agreement (conscious or unexpressed) between performers and spectators."<sup>28</sup>

Elizabeth Burns enlightens this point when she says that behaviour is not theatrical "because it is of a certain kind but because the observer recognises certain patterns and sequences which are analogous to those with which he is familiar in the theatre."<sup>29</sup> According to her,

"The theatrical quality of life, taken for granted by nearly everyone, seems to be experienced most concretely by those who feel themselves on the margin of events either because they have adopted the role of spectator or because, though present, they have not yet been offered a part or have not learnt it sufficiently well to enable them to join the actors."<sup>30</sup>

In ritual, in spite of being aware or not of its nature as a performance, the audience is always required "to participate in one form or another".<sup>31</sup> As Burns says, although varying in importance, everyone involved in the ceremony has a role to perform, "even if it

---

<sup>27</sup> Richard Schechner, op. cit., p. 222.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Burns, *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas A. Green, op. cit., unpaginated.

is only singing the responses, clapping in time to a dance or weeping at appropriate points in the ceremony".<sup>32</sup>

They cannot really be classified as spectators because more than being entertained they are participating in something that aims to have an influence upon their environment.<sup>33</sup>

But even though the audience is not exactly "passive", as Green himself points out referring to the audiences at folk performances, according to Dell Hymes we still have the characterisation of a performance as a ritual enactment.

In the same manner, in accordance with Schechner and Cage, life can always be seen as a stage. It will only depend, as they note, on the attitude of the spectators.

Theatre, among many other genres of cultural performance, reminds Victor Turner, is probably the most forceful of them all. He says that it works as a metacommentary on the difficulties and conflicts of the everyday life, when it goes further than entertaining, for it operates as an interpretive reenactment of society's own experience.<sup>34</sup>

To characterise theatre, it is enough that there should be the presence of people performing a character conflict in front of other people, with mutual awareness. Everything else is just accretion and enhancement.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Burns, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>33</sup> Schechner, mentioning specifically the Tsembaga and Kurumugl performances of New Guinea, and the Arunta of Australia, says that they are performed "to achieve results" (Op. cit., p. 206).

<sup>34</sup> Victor Turner, op. cit., pp. 104-107.

<sup>35</sup> For this reason, the *invisible theatre* of Augusto Boal, for instance, cannot be classified as theatre. It is, indeed, an interesting experience, whose main objective is to put down the wall that was built between the players and the audience, in a radical way. Although it uses theatrical techniques, it is not theatre. Even when Boal argues that actors and spectators are in the same condition, only the first know that the event is a theatrical performance, previously planned. Besides, as the spectators are totally unaware of it and have not been asked to decide their participation by themselves, they are overwhelmingly and deceitfully brought into the action. So, if we take into account the political proposal of Boal's theory of the *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which is based on the idea of theatre as a way to verity and freedom, we will have to look upon the *invisible theatre* also as contradictory (See Augusto Boal, *Técnicas Latino-Americanas de Teatro Popular* (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1979), pp. 71-82).

Thus, theatre is a performance whose essence is a relationship, which is materialised by the action played by the actor to the spectator.

### 2.3 - The Origins and Growth of Folk Theatre

It is believed that all forms of theatre, as well as music and dance, originated in such primitive rituals. For Metin And, "Every dramatic ritual is always based on the dance, and all the movements and the characters are evolved from this. It is at the same time an expression of worship and an entertainment, and an efficacious practice for expelling evil and strengthening contact with the benevolent powers whose aid is being sought." But, due to the multiple difficulties in tracing these ancient forms, the classic Greek theatre has generally been taken as the birth of the theatre, although its development, for some historians, have probably been influenced by rituals from ancient Egypt and from the empires of the Near East (Sumerian, Babylonian, Hittite, Assyrian, Chaldean, Canaanite, and Persian. While in the ancient Near East "the myths and rites of the ancient agricultural religion became fixed and stylized, preventing any change of name or divine nature", in cultures like <sup>that of</sup> the Greeks changes might occur. This ~~long-term process in all its variant forms was~~ the basis for the evolution of the Greek mythology. From this mythology and from the anthropomorphic nature of the Greek gods "eventually came Greek tragedy". But, "as the chief characters were heroes who, though mortal, also played their parts in the myths of the gods, their agon had its roots in the opposing principles of the ancient agricultural cults".<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Metin And, op cit., p. 32.

As with the European folk theatre and the theatre in general, the birth of the Brazilian folk theatre is lost in the distant past. Nevertheless, as Mário de Andrade stated, not one of the folk theatre forms developed in Brazil has a profane origin.<sup>37</sup> According to him, "They all have a religious base. More precisely: the theme, the subject of each one is, conjunctly, profane and religious, for they represent at the same time a practical factor, immediately conditioned to a religious transfiguration."<sup>38</sup>

As Mário de Andrade was aware of <sup>FRAZER'S</sup> *The Golden Bough*,<sup>39</sup> and *SIMILAR* works <sup>by</sup> other European scholars, it was easy <sup>for</sup> him to realize why in a great number of those *dramatic dances*, as he labelled the folk theatre forms, the death and resurrection of their main character occurred. This could be seen in the *Caboclinhos*, *Congos*, *Cucumbis*, *Reisados*, and, mainly, in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*.<sup>40</sup> He said: "It is a primitive mystic notion that can be found in the <sup>ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE</sup> rites of the seasons of the year and that culminate sublimely spiritualized in the death and resurrection of the God of the Christians."<sup>41</sup>

For him, this was the result of the "technical imperfection of the primitive man", which was decisive in the creation of all magic in primitive cultures. Unprovided with defenses, the primitive man developed the notion of a superior power, relating it to vegetation, animals, minerals and to the natural factors which he could not yet control. A power that, through mimesis and magic, he tried to arrogate.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Mário de Andrade, *Danças Dramáticas do Brasil*, vol. 1 (São Paulo: Martins, 1959), p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 12 vol. (London: MacMillan). It first began to appear in 1890.

<sup>40</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

Mário de Andrade was right in taking up Frazer's questions because any inquiry into the roots of such folk customs "must obviously be conducted from a comparative perspective". But, the problem concerning the investigative work of Frazer is that he constructed a theory of survival, viewing the folk customs of different societies and cultures as remnants of prehistoric religious rituals. Thus, he restrained the origin of the folk theatre to a general and single source, that is, probable ancient rituals of fertility. In fact, Frazer "may be right, but he is inadequate. It is not good enough to explain a world-wide phenomenon in terms of particular, localized, archaic beliefs".<sup>43</sup>

Following Frazer's trail, Mário de Andrade and many other scholars of the folk theatre in the world failed to realise that in pursuing such inquiry we must not insert our object of study into a plausible historical and geographical framework, or use chronological succession or geographical contiguity "as a connecting thread", for this can be "an undue simplification". Ginzburg says: "Very recent testimony might preserve traces of much earlier phenomena; conversely, remote testimonies could cast light upon much later phenomena". Also,

"... the discovery of analogous phenomena in very distant areas could be explained by cultural contacts dating back to a much more distant time. The reconstruction of a culture extremely viscous, on the one hand, while documented in a fragmentary and casual manner on the other, necessitated, at last temporarily, renunciation of several postulates basic to historical research: foremost among them, that of a unilinear and uniform time".<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> E. R. Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology*, 3. ed. (London: The Athlone Press / University of London, 1968), p. 132.

<sup>44</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, tr. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 14-15.

The fact is that "The unfathomable experience that humanity has symbolically expressed for millennia through myths, fables, rituals and ecstasies, remains one of the hidden centres of our culture, of the way we exist in this world. The attempt to attain knowledge of the past is also a journey into the world of the dead."<sup>45</sup>

To give a support to his position, Ginzburg cites some reflections which were made by Wittgenstein in the margins of the *The Golden Bough*:

"Historical explanation, explanation as a hypothesis of development is only one way of gathering data - their synopsis. It is equally possible to see the data in their mutual relationships and sum them up in a general image that does not have the form of a chronological development."<sup>46</sup>

So, according to Wittgenstein, the connections will only be seen by finding the intermediary links through this "perspicuous representation (*übersichtliche Darstellung*)..."<sup>47</sup>

Asking if such an a-historical exposition of the results attained suffices, Ginzburg finds a clear answer in Wittgenstein who said that "the 'all-encompassing representation' was not simply an alternative way of presenting the data, but, implicitly, superior to an historical exposition because (a) less arbitrary and (b) immune to undemonstrated developmental hypotheses".<sup>48</sup>

For Ginzburg, by dint of regressing to an ever more remote past, "one is apt to slip unconsciously from an explanation in terms of borrowings or diffusions (a) to an

---

<sup>45</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

explanation in terms of derivation from a common source (b)". This is the motive why he refutes "the fascination and perils of a model which is Romantic even before it is positivist: that of the genealogical tree".<sup>49</sup>

To understand characteristics such as persistence in time and dispersion in space "it seems necessary to follow a different route", that is, "derivation from structural characteristics of the human mind", but "there is no reason to suppose that these perspectives are mutually exclusive". Hence, Ginzburg seeks to integrate in his analysis both "the external historical data and the internal structural characteristics of the transmitted phenomena, isolating a specific element - a small detail - from the set of phenomena..."<sup>50</sup>

## 2.4 - Tracing the Ancient Roots

E. T. Kirby has criticised "the standard Frazerian concept of primitive totemism, in which it was supposed that the animal, identified with vegetation fertility, had been sacrificed and eaten to absorb its potency".<sup>51</sup> To reinforce his disagreement with the Frazerian concept, he quotes Lévi-Strauss who said:

"In order to place the modes of thought of the normal, white adult man on a firm foundation and simultaneously to maintain them in their integrity, nothing could therefore be more convenient than for him to separate from himself those customs and beliefs, actually extremely heterogeneous and

---

<sup>49</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 213 and 217.

<sup>51</sup> E. T. Kirby, *Ur-Drama: The Origins of Theatre* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. xi.

difficult to isolate, around which had crystallized an inert mass of ideas which would have been less inoffensive if it had been necessary to recognize their presence and their action in all cultures, including our own. Totemism is firstly the projection outside our own universe, as though by a kind of exorcism, of mental attitudes incompatible with the exigency of a discontinuity between man and nature which Christian thought has held to be essential. It was thus thought possible to validate this belief by making the inverse exigency an attribute of this 'second nature', which civilized man, in the vain hope of escaping from himself as well as from nature itself, concocts from the 'primitive' or 'archaic' stages of his own development.

(...)

In amalgamating sacrifice and totemism, a means was found of explaining the former as a survival or as a vestige of the latter, and thus of sterilizing the underlying beliefs and ridding of any impurity the idea of a living and active sacrifice, or at least by dissociating this idea to distinguish two types of sacrifice, different in origin and meaning."<sup>52</sup>

Kirby also mentions William Ridgeway, author of *Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races* (1915) who, after "establishing the hypothesis that theatre had originated in worship of the dead", developed the notion of the actor as being originally a medium.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 2. ed., tr. Rodney Needham (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 71.

<sup>53</sup> E. T. Kirby, *Ur-Drama*, p. xiii.



For him, the shamanistic performance "may be considered the ur-theatre or prototheatre", for it "has almost invariably been the antecedent of established theatre forms."<sup>54</sup>

He takes shamanism and spirit mediumship as identical and says that the distribution of shamanism among primitive peoples "is virtually worldwide, and it has continued to exist side by side with developed religion or as a function of it."<sup>55</sup>

He defines the shaman as a " 'master of spirits' who performs in trance, primarily for the purpose of curing the sick by ritualistic means",<sup>56</sup> and agrees with Mircea Eliade that "shamanism is a technique of ecstasy characterized by trance flight to spirit worlds and by a mastery over fire in rituals" in which, he states, "the shaman does not become the instrument of the spirits but maintains control over <sup>them</sup> ~~him~~".<sup>57</sup>

<sup>In support</sup>  
~~As an evidence to~~ his theory that the Mummers' Play "developed as a parody of the shamanistic séance or curing session", <sup>Kirby</sup> ~~he~~ points out "the extraction from the patient of some object representing the 'pain' ". He says that, in many places where the Mummers' Play is performed, the dead combatant is cured "by having a tooth drawn , and an elk's or horse's or donkey's tooth is exhibited to the spectators". But, "In at least one version the patient is cured by being blown up with air through a tube, a circumstance that appears

---

<sup>54</sup> E. T. Kirby, *Ur-Drama*, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

This is in fact what can be seen in Brazil even in the most developed and modern centres. In a country in which the Roman Catholic Church was always so influent, and that has seen a gradual increasing of Protestant sects, spiritualistic practices , mainly those of the shamanistic sphere, have become stronger and have penetrated Catholicism by the phenomenon of syncretism.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

to have derived from a shamanic practice of sometimes extracting a 'pain' by suction through a tube".<sup>58</sup>

For him, the extraction of the teeth "would be the nearest civilized equivalent to extracting a 'pain' from the patient, as well as being a parody of this practice."<sup>59</sup>

Another support for his theory would be the speeches of the Doctor which, in the Mummies' Play, he says, "deal with two themes; his travels and his abilities at curing", which would be based and derive from "the travels of the shaman's soul during trance which he elaborated in his songs and narratives".<sup>60</sup>

A third evidence would be the hobby-horse. He states: "The hobby-horse and horse enactments occur, in fact, in connection with ecstatic dances, and with dances deriving from this mode, virtually all over the world, in diverse and unrelated cultures". He gives the example of voodoo, in whose practice, "the state of trance is represented by saying that the god (*loa*) 'mounts' or 'saddles' his 'horse', the body of the trancer. It is significant that the trancer here does not enact or portray being a horse, but assumes the identity of the *loa* that possesses him".<sup>61</sup>

Regarding Kirby's observation, it is worth noting that in the recent past of the *Bumba-meu-Boi* the *Cavalo-Marinho* was usually the name given to the character of the Captain riding the hobby-horse. They were not separated but seen as a whole. Only recently the name *Cavalo-Marinho* began to be attributed exclusively to the hobby-horse. This unity or

---

<sup>58</sup> E. T. Kirby, "The Origin of the Mummies' Play", *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 84, n. 333 (1971), p. 278.

This is similar to the enema with which the ox used to be resurrected in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

identification of horse (body) and rider (consciousness), seen in many hobby-horse customs, "is a relic of trance dancing and illustrates the merger of the trancer with a possessing consciousness that dominates and 'rides' him".<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, as Kirby noted in the Mummers' Play, at least in the case of the *Bumba-meu-Boi* the cure, more than the combat, is the most important element of the play.<sup>63</sup>

He believes that the major part of the characters of the Mummers' Play, not only the Doctor, can be derived from parodies of the shaman. One of them would be the Man-in-Woman's Clothes who "is significant as a representation-as-parody of the shamanic identity, derived from the sex change that is characteristic of shamanism all over the world".<sup>64</sup> So, these characters "do not, as Chambers felt they did, 'seem to find their natural explanation in the facts of agricultural worship', nor is one 'justified in classing them as forms of a folk drama in which the resurrection of the year is symbolized' ".<sup>65</sup> Moreover, "There has never been any direct significant evidence in these plays of a seasonal pattern, of their association with fertility, of a death based upon a human sacrifice, nor any indication, direct or implied, of a relationship between these three traditional elements of interpretation. It is reasonable to conclude that such a culture pattern is no more than a fictional creation".<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> E. T. Kirby, "The Origin of the Mummers' Play", p. 282.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

In Brazil, where there is not such a death in winter, this connection would not certainly make any sense.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

For Kirby, the primary factor in the transformation of the "ritual" of shamanistic curing session into a "drama"

"... was the contact with an alien culture that caused the aboriginal shamanistic beliefs and practices to lose their credibility. At first the disbelieved 'empty form' was continued intact, but was thought of as a parody so as to protect the associated beliefs and practices. Later this aspect of parody was emphasized further, elaborated in the characters duplicating the shaman and in the farcical treatment of the curing. Entertainment which had always been an element in the séance, became its primary function in these performances. Evidence of this development may be observed even today."<sup>67</sup>

Then, two reasons, one economic and the other social, would have contributed to the perpetuation of the shamanistic séance as performance after ~~since~~ it was confronted with disbelief: first, the shaman and his associates did not want "to lose their means of support"; second, the people did not want "to give up their basic form of entertainment".<sup>68</sup>

Kirby seems to be convinced that "a shamanistic substratum informed and produced not only the mummers' plays and mummings but much of the whole spectrum of folk customs and festival observances that characterized the survival of the primitive throughout Europe".<sup>69</sup>

One example of this is given by Metin And. Tracing the vestiges of Central Asian Shamanism in Anatolia, which he sees as the most pervasive influence from Asia on

---

<sup>67</sup> E. T. Kirby, "The Origin of the Mummers' Play", p. 285.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

Anatolian culture, And gives the example of the *Köse Oyunu* (The Play of the Beardless Man), a mumming play from Kars, which reflects elements of both Asian and Anatolian cultures. In this play, one man is dead and resurrected by the beat of a life-giving whip, which is "no more than the old symbolical phallus". But in the *Köse Oyunu*, And finds at least "four significant elements which suggest the possible shamanistic origin of this play": the opposition of two adversaries, one in white and the other in black, which can be a relic of Central Asian shamanism, since shamans are differentiated into black and white; the sacrifice of a pig which is cut up and distributed, in spite of the fact that Islam strictly forbids pork, for "usually in shamanistic initiation rites the pig was killed and the flesh was eaten by participants"; the man who wears a white sheepskin rides a horse, and "the horseheaded stick, or simply a stick-horse, enables a shaman to fly through the air to reach heaven, since it is the white shaman who can communicate with heaven, and in his ecstatic dance he puts a reed between his legs and gallops away", besides the fact that "sometimes his drum is called the shaman's horse"; the same man carries a healing instrument, the whip, and among the Altaians "the stick with which the drum is beaten is called 'whip', and has the healing function", while the Turkish word for whip is *kamçı*, which can be ~~associated with~~ ~~approached to~~ *kam*, the Altaic word for shaman, and also to the ancient Turkish, in which *kamçı* means not only whip but also the male genital of a horse.<sup>70</sup>

The fact that the Brazilian folk plays are remarkably different among themselves, can help to support the idea that folk plays, everywhere, have certainly had more than one origin. This is the case, for instance, of the Chinese theatre, of which Metfn And says:

"The sources from which the Chinese theater began have been suggested as shamanistic dances, funerary rites, puppet shows, performances of dancers

---

<sup>70</sup> Metfn And, op. cit., pp. 23-26.

and jesters, and the *chüeh-ti*, 'horn-tossing', a kind of game, or, in the opinion of the well-known Sinologist, Professor Wolfram Eberhard, it derives from religious games, bullfight and wrestling, among Turkish and Mongol peoples, which developed on the ancient Altaic peoples for the information shows that the *chüeh-ti* was at the beginning a ritual performance among the Tung-hu (Protomongolian) peoples in honour of their god of war Ch'ih-yu, and was apparently performed by people wearing animal, probably ox, masks."<sup>71</sup>

For him, parallel to the development of drama in Greece,

"in many other cultures the Theatre originated in the sacral dance and the mimetic and agonal movements associated with it. This occurred in India and China, in Japan, in Indonesia, in Turkey and in Iran. The Mime of Rome and Byzantium had the same origins. Everywhere there was the same tendency to separate mirthful and serious genres, though the classification might vary, and there was the phenomenon of historicization, and the borrowing of themes from narrative literature."<sup>72</sup>

The point is that, in the past there must have been ~~a~~ periods when both the folk and the literary forms of theatre co-existed, "each with its own following".<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Metin And, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>73</sup> Alan Gailey, *Irish Folk Drama* (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1969), p. 64.

According to him, "in these circumstances borrowing would have been mutual" (Ibid.). But the literary drama seems to have borrowed more from the folk forms than the opposite. "It is as if the folk tradition acted for a very long time as a reservoir from which the literary world could tap off what it needed whenever necessary" (Ibid., p. 66). Indeed, it appears to be that, throughout the times, the folk culture as a whole has been a significant source for the nourishment of the culture of the upper-classes.

The rise of professional theatre companies in Italy and later in England in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century; the rise of middle-class work ethics and, in England, religious persecution all served to submerge folk theatre in favour of more structured forms.

~~Probably the folk theatre existed as a simultaneous phenomenon with the classic Greek Plays. It seems that~~

~~" ... during the festivals of Dionysus, when for a whole month the classic theatres featured the crop of new tragedies, each of the trilogies was finally concluded with a satire based exclusively on the forms of the folk plays or mimetic rituals. When the classic theatre died, or degenerated, under the impact of the Pelloponesian War, and the resulting dissolution of the Greek states, the theatrical forms were maintained in the villages, in country districts, in the form of extended versions of the primitive rituals."~~<sup>74</sup>

~~In the theatre of Imperial Rome there were the festivals of the Attelanae which were organised "as a safety valve for the discontent of the slaves". These belonged to different racial groups and languages, but shared "a knowledge of primitive rituals or folk plays", among which "the basic ritual covering birth-death-resurrection". Thus,~~

~~"Because of the shared knowledge of ritual, language was no barrier. The festivals covered the period marking the turn of the winter Solstice (roughly the period covered by the twelve days of Christmas). The slaves superimposed upon the basic characters of the rituals the characteristics of their masters. For example, winter (or death) would be depicted as a greedy and avaricious slave-owner. Spring would be a popular slave, usually male. Birth would be a female slave and the conflict was exclusively slave-versus-master, usually resolved by the slave coming out on top. This basic structure was, of course, subject to a great number of variations."~~

---

<sup>74</sup> ~~Unassigned manuscripts aiming an "exposition of the relationship of music and drama" ( from internal evidence it would appear that the document probably originates with Ewan MacColl) - (Birmingham City Archives, Charles Parker Archive - Ref. n. CPA/1/7/4), p. 1.~~

~~These were the plays which the Roman dramatists, Plautus and Terence, remade into classic Roman comedies. Their task was that of adapters. They re-organised the dialogue into fashionable Latin poetic forms and re-wrote the songs in the style of the upper-class Roman epigrammatic songs. The poems of writers like Lucullus owe their enormous vigour to the fact that their forms arose directly out of the folk plays performed by the slaves in Rome."~~<sup>75</sup>

~~As it used to be a strong feature of the folk theatre, music was also an essential component of both the Greek and the Roman theatres, in such a proportion that we can even say that they were "exclusively musical theatre".~~<sup>76</sup>

In the Dark Ages, "the theatre again virtually disappeared as a classic form and was only maintained in the country villages in the form of seasonal rituals and folk plays". It would only emerge again in the 10-th century, when the German nun Hroswitha (935-973 AD) "took over two of the most popular German folk-plays (both of them extraordinarily ~~bowdy~~) and made the framework for a new type of play: the MIRACLE plays".<sup>77</sup>

~~The Miracle-plays, at first, were written only in Latin and, just as happened in Rome, where the slaves had attributed a social characterisation to Winter, Spring, or death and resurrection, the nun also gave them a religious characterisation:~~

~~"Death became Lucifer, Birth became God and Christ became the Resurrection. So we see here how the original religious significance of the~~

---

<sup>75</sup> ~~Unassigned manuscripts (Birmingham City Archives, Charles Parker Archive - Ref. n. CPA/1/7/4), p. 1.~~

<sup>76</sup> ~~"Only the studio tragedies written by Seneca and his followers made any substantial break with the folk tradition, and neither Seneca nor those after him reached the popular audience" (Ibid.).~~

<sup>77</sup> ~~Ibid.~~



~~characters (Dionysus for example becoming Christ) once again returns to the ritualistic plays. The orgiastic element of the plays, which before had been exclusively physical, now becomes exclusively mystical, but with - of course - physical connotations."~~<sup>78</sup>

~~The Miracle plays spread in Europe and were performed for nearly five centuries until the middle ages when, after the Black Death, which left an enormous labour shortage, the class structure of society was developed, as well as a new type of drama. Then,~~

~~"The growth of the urban proletariat and a new urban burgher class, organised into trade guilds and playing a more and more important part in feudal society exacerbated and defined more clearly the class conflicts existing in that society. At first the conflict is of the burghers and artisans against the landowners. Later it came to include the established church, which was also an important landowner. The guildsmen took the miracles away from the church and secularized them, and in the process returned to the basic folk ritual forms which had tended to become somewhat obfuscated in the later period of the miracles."~~<sup>79</sup>

~~What occurred in Britain would have a similar development in Spain and France in the same period, but in Italy and Germany the folk plays and seasonal festivals "were still the most important form of drama, and indeed hardly any other kind of drama existed".~~

~~In Italy, these plays and festivals would become the main source of inspiration to a new and remarkable form of drama. Arising in the context of "a society fragmented by feudalism", and contemporary with the Elizabethan theatre, there appeared "a theatrical~~

---

<sup>78</sup> Unassigned manuscripts (Birmingham City Archives, Charles Parker Archive - Ref. n. CPA/1/7/4), p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

~~phenomenon which was not only to revolutionize the art of acting but which also had the function of recreating the old balance between song, dance and what we call drama-proper". This was the Commedia dell'Arte, which was opposed to the "theatre of atrophy" or the "court diversion for aristocratic ladies and gentlemen", which had no popular bases.<sup>80</sup>~~

Francesco and Isabella Andreini, with some friends, all young aristocratic intellectuals, sold their properties and formed a theatre company whose aim was based "on the delineation of character, but character seen exclusively through socially-aware eyes". Then they took "the existing folk plays, the seasonal rituals, plays equivalent to the English 'St George and the Dragon' or 'The Seven Champions of Christendom' ", which had exactly "the same plots which had been used in the Greek satires, the Roman Attelanae, etc."<sup>81</sup>

But, elsewhere in the world, "throughout the Indo-Iranian cultural areas and through the Oriental India-China-Indonesia complex the classical theatres and the folk theatres were indistinguishable insofar as their use of music was concerned".<sup>82</sup>

## 2.5 - Folk Theatre - In Search of a Definition

Thomas A Green thinks that the notion of life as a stage has been a confounding metaphor, mainly in the field of the definition of folk theatre, for it has usually included in such category, he says, more activities considered as dramatic than it could really support.

---

<sup>80</sup> ~~Unassigned manuscripts (Birmingham City Archives, Charles Parker Archive - Ref. n. CPA/1/7/4), p. 24~~

<sup>81</sup> ~~Ibid., pp. 3-4.~~

<sup>82</sup> ~~Ibid., p. 4.~~

He also says that a reasonable definition has been prejudiced because of the different theoretical bias that normally lies behind all such attempts. ~~And that~~ <sup>To</sup> define folk theatre more precisely it is indispensable to be free from any theoretical bias, to be applicable in different cultural areas, and to use appropriately the principal terms.<sup>83</sup>

But what is really folk theatre?

Roger D. Abrahams makes an interesting differentiation, which comprehends three categories of theatre - folk, popular, and sophisticated. In it, he emphasises the amateur status of the players, the homogeneous nature of the audiences, and the seasonal characteristic of the performances in the folk theatre. As he states,

"Folk drama exists on a village or small-group level. The performers are members of the community and therefore known to most of the audience. The dramas are given on special occasions only, most commonly a seasonal festival. Popular theater often arises from folk theater but the players are professional and the audience comes from places other than the community in which the players live. Performances may occur more often. This is the theater of the strolling players of medieval Europe that we know so well through their part in *Hamlet* (...) "<sup>84</sup>

Differently, the sophisticated theatre "is much more sedentary and calls for a focus more intense and thus more cerebral than folk or popular theater. Consequently, the proper milieu of sophisticated drama is the theater, while popular and folk drama can be performed anywhere."<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Thomas A. Green, op. cit., unpaginated.

<sup>84</sup> Roger D. Abrahams, "Folk Drama" in *Folklore and Folk Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 354.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

The fact that, in the folk theatre, the spectators share their everyday life with the performers, tending sometimes to mingle the actors' lives with those of the characters, does not signify a loss of interest or pleasure by the audience.

Furthermore, unlike the popular and the sophisticated theatre, the impersonation of the characters in the folk theatre is not equivalent to the assumption of a fictional mask.<sup>86</sup> But, even taking into account that "transformation is the heart of theatre", in the theatrical transformation "neither the spectator nor the actor should have the sensation of a complete transformation. The actor must not be lost in the character into whom he has transformed himself: the action on the stage must not be sensed as reality but as theater".<sup>87</sup> In the folk theatre, the performer is always able to leave his character, easily re-assuming his own personality, and, afterwards, resume it in the same manner, without any damage to the performance or to its relationship with the audience.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Nor to the state of possession typical of the ritual trance. Besides, in ritual there is no mimesis as in theatre. Instead of imitating real beings, the ritual performers impersonate supernatural beings, and the audience has to believe that they are real and not the outcome of a transformation (On the subject, see Thomas A. Green, op. cit.)

<sup>87</sup> Richard Schechner, op. cit., p. 199 and Petr Bogatyrev, "Forms and Functions of Folk Theatre" in *Semiotics of Art*, 2. ed. (Cambridge-Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1977), p. 52.

Schechner points out two fundamental kinds of theatrical transformation: "(1) the displacement of anti-social, injurious, disruptive behavior by ritualized gesture and display, and (2) the invention of characters who act out fictional events or real events fictionalized by virtue of their being acted out (as in documentary theatre or Roman gladiatorial games)". The two can occur together, "but in the mix usually one is dominant. Western theatre emphasizes characterization and the enactment of fictions; Melanesian, African, and Australian (aborigine) theatre emphasize the displacement of hostile behavior. Forms which balance the two tendencies - Nô, Kathakali, the Balinese Ketchak, medieval moralities, some contemporary avant-garde performances - offer, I think, the best models for the future of the theatre (Richard Schechner, op. cit., p. 199).

<sup>88</sup> One example of this I saw during a performance of the *Chegança* in Laranjeiras (Brazil). A young girl who was watching the play, after having a word with a woman who was accompanying her, entered the space of the players and called to an old man, her godfather, who was performing a sailor. The old man turned immediately to her, and the girl told him that she and her mother were already going home. Then, she asked for his blessing, kissed his hand, and they said good-bye. The girl went away with the woman, and the old man turned again into his character. But the event neither bothered the onlookers nor disturbed the course of the performance.

The plots in the folk theatre are previously known by the audience. They are ever the same but they never bore the spectators, who consent and stimulate such repetition.

In reality, folk theatre seems to be located somewhere *between* ritual and theatre, principally if we take into account that its audience is constantly led to participate more than simply observe. As says Petr Bogatyrev, "the actors draw the spectators into the play, often directly provoking them, laughing at them and their environment."<sup>89</sup> This is not what is expected in a theatre like the sophisticated one. As a matter of fact, several performances labeled as "experimental theatre" or "avant-garde", since the early sixties, have tried to evoke it. But the consequences have always been unforeseeable and, nearly always, troublesome or even stormy, for its audiences are heterogeneous and used to a passive attitude.

In short, folk theatre seems to be that one transmitted traditionally and produced by and for small groups of people, belonging to the same community, be it in a rural village or in an urban area. Performed by non-professionals it does not require sophistication from the point of view of the material resources (costumes, properties, scenery, etc.), although, from the point of view of the acting, the use of different techniques and stylised performance<sup>90</sup> can be considered as a trace of sophistication. In the same way, its performance does not require artificial and closed stages. On the whole, it is performed on the ground in the open air or in a simple room. Full of improvisation and humour, its expression can be defined as non-naturalistic and even intentionally nonsensical.

---

<sup>89</sup> Petr Bogatyrev, "Forms and Functions of Folk Theatre", p. 54.

<sup>90</sup> Bogatyrev states: "In folk theater the simultaneous use of the most diverse styles in the same play is a widespread phenomenon, a special theatrical device of form" (Petr Bogatyrev, "Semiotics in the Folk Theatre" in *Semiotics of Art*, p. 40).

It is traditional because its practice appears to come from ancient times (probably from ritual and magic). But it is dynamic at the same time, capable of transformation and adaptation to each period or epoch, and of absorbing new information and materials.<sup>91</sup> The folk plays, unlike the masterworks of the sophisticated or conventional drama, which "can survive to be performed, loved, and misunderstood in inappropriate contexts", is constantly "adjusted, balanced, and made new to keep it fitting its times and places".<sup>92</sup>

Such dynamism has certainly been what has enabled folk theatre to survive, even in developed and industrialised societies.

## 2.6 - The Theatre in Brazil

In Brazil, the theatre was introduced at the beginning of the sixteenth century by the Jesuits who accompanied the first Portuguese colonisers, as a recourse to attain the catechesis of the Indians who inhabited the newly discovered land. Only in the next century did the theatre begin to be also practised by laymen, to be addressed to the elite of the colony and to become playful and not merely catechetical.

In fact, during the colonial period, due to the lack of cultural autonomy, the theatre practised in Brazil was solely a reflex of the cultural patterns of Portugal and other European countries, running parallel with the religious theatre that had been initiated by

---

<sup>91</sup> It is the case, for instance, of the appearance of plastic dolls in the *Mamulengo* (puppet theatre of the North-East of Brazil), performing the important role of *Quitéria*, traditionally carved in light wood as all the other characters.

<sup>92</sup> Henry Glassie, *All Silver and no Brass*, 2. ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 75.

He says: "Mumming is not a theoretical, symbolic art like a medieval morality, nor is it an empirical, descriptive art like a play by Ibsen. It rises between these poles of Western thought, falsifying their purity, uniting them in mysterious imagery" (Ibid., p. 66).

the Jesuits, although no longer with its former catechetical aim, but only for religious celebrations, for the Indians had already been systematically exterminated during those first years of the colony, and were then reduced to a minority. The secular theatre became thus predominant and its objective was to liven up the life of the colony, together with other festivities.<sup>93</sup>

In the eighteenth century were built the first theatrical buildings and appeared the first theatrical companies, basically formed by *mulatos*, for Portuguese prejudice attributed to actors the lowest social position.<sup>94</sup>

Martins Pena and França Júnior, in the nineteenth century, would be the first Brazilian playwrights, for their comedies reflected, for the first time, the life and the cultural patterns of the new nation that was emerging.

However, it would only be in the twentieth century that the Brazilian theatre would effectively develop and reach the level of the conventional theatre of Europe. The first attempt to drive the Brazilian theatre to a higher level of quality was made by Oswald de Andrade in the first three decades of the century, but his plays, due to their pioneering and revolutionary shape would only reach the stage during the sixties. The second movement, which had an effective consequence, was the staging of *Vestido de Noiva*, by Nelson Rodrigues, and directed by Zbigniew Ziembinski, a Polish war refugee who, together with other European directors, the Italians Rugero Jacobbi, Adolfo Celi, Gianni Ratto, etc., would bring to Brazil all the new techniques and aesthetic concepts which had been known in Europe for many years.

---

<sup>93</sup> From these festivals would emerge the tradition of Carnival festivities, which became a strong element in the Brazilian culture, merging ancient pagan customs with the playful character of the African features present in the formation of the country.

<sup>94</sup> Mario Cacciaglia, *Pequena História do Teatro no Brasil*, tr. Carla de Queiroz (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz/EDUSP, 1986), p. 2.

From then on the Brazilian conventional theatre flourished and developed in the big centres of the country to an international standard, although it had become more and more inaccessible from a popular point of view, in spite of the fact that, many a time, it had made recourse to popular themes and characters, to popular technique and languages, and had also constructed strategies to attract the people into its audience.

In the last centuries the conventional or classical theatre, with its literary shape, has become the predominant form of theatre in many parts of the world. However, folk theatre forms have persisted and, even though with new elements and functions, continue to have an important place within these societies.

The folk theatre performed in the North-East of Brazil, which has been played probably since the early period of the colonisation, has a strong dramatic expression that reflects the culture of the whole region.

Humour, improvisation, obscenity, music, dance, and ~~knockdown~~<sup>about</sup> are among its leading characteristics.

Its audience, which is used to ~~follow~~<sup>following</sup> the performances for several hours, is so integrated with this theatre that it is always interfering in the action, talking to and ~~instigating~~<sup>inciting</sup> the actors.

From the point of view of material resources, this is a poor theatre. In fact, its most attractive power comes from the histrionical abilities of its players and from everything that this theatre can tell its audiences about themselves.

Such theatre is not written but it has always been one of the most interesting sources for Brazilian playwrights.

Even though these theatrical forms are less performed today than they were in the past, they are still alive. In them, it is possible to recognise a feature of cultural resistance, for



these plays seem to be an expression and, at the same time, a vehicle to the reinforcement of the values and of the lives of such communities.

This theatre earns the right to be considered as a "dynamic and provocative art", "the most dangerous of all the arts" and "a constant source of anxiety (...) to leaders of Church and State alike".<sup>95</sup>

The following sequences of this study comprise a general review of the English Mummers' Play; a brief history of Brazil; an account of the main forms of folk theatre performed in the North-East of Brazil, looking over their origins, characteristics and functions; an analysis of their most relevant features and their similarities with the English Mummers' Play and other folk theatre forms; and, then, a brief view of the society and of the folk plays of Brazil, through the ideas of Mary Douglas, Basil Bernstein, Elaine Turner and Victor Turner, in search of a better comprehension of the contemporary meaning of these folk theatre forms (both for the performers and the audience), of how they function within the cognitive system of their society, and of what place can be expected for such theatre in the future.

---

<sup>95</sup> Glynne Wickham, *A History of the Theatre* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1985), p. 11.

## **Chapter 1**

### **THE ENGLISH MUMMERS' PLAY**

## 1.1 - Forms and Distribution

In *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, published in 1801, Joseph Strutt states that mumming had been very common in England since the middle ages and attributes the origin of the word *mumming* to the Danish form *mumme* (*momme* in Dutch), which signifies to disguise oneself with a mask.<sup>1</sup>

"From the time of Edward III", he says, "mummings or disguisings, accompanied with figurative dances, were in vogue at court, of which there were memorable instances in the years 1377 and 1400." Moreover, "In the mansions of the nobility, on occasions of festivity, it also frequently happened that the whole company appeared in borrowed characters", with "full license of speech being granted to every one", such spectacles being exhibited "with great splendour in former times and particularly during the reign of Henry VIII". However, in Strutt's time, that is, the beginning of the nineteenth century, the masquerades that had succeeded those spectacles were rapidly declining. But, if they no longer attracted "the notice of the opulent", the same did not occur with the mummeries "practised by the lower classes of the people", which "usually took place at the Christmas holidays". These performers "rubbed their faces over with soot, or painted them" because, says Strutt, they could not procure masks. For him, "many abuses were committed under the sanction of these disguisements", and ordinances were established, by which a man was liable to punishment who appeared with such a disguise.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (London: Methuen, 1801), p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

The repression of the unusual behaviour of the mumming custom would be stronger later on in the same century, forcing some teams to look for relief by becoming institutionalised and collecting mainly for charity.<sup>3</sup>

A century later, P. H. Ditchfield, in *Old English Customs (An Account of Local Observances, Festival Customs, and Ancient Ceremonies yet Surviving in Great Britain)*, refers to the decay of these ancient customs, which he attributes to "the restlessness of modern life" for, he says, new manners "are ever pushing out the old". He points out as the main causes of the decline and fall of many old customs, the agricultural depression and the transformation of the labourer himself, for the old one had died and his successor was "a very 'up-to-date' person" who had "lost his simplicity".<sup>4</sup> But he recognises that "they have not all died yet, and it is indeed surprising how many still linger on in the obscure corners of our native land where railroads and modern culture have not yet penetrated."<sup>5</sup>

For him, the Lord of Misrule, a frolicsome monarch who reigned during many festivities, including twelve days of sovereignty at Christmas time,<sup>6</sup> "has been dead many

---

<sup>3</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, *Introducing the Folk-Plays of England* (Coventry: published by the author, 1984), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> P. H. Ditchfield, *Old English Customs* (London: Methuen, 1901), pp. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> The Lord of Misrule, says Strutt, was derived, as many other traditional mockeries, "from the ancient Saturnalia, or Feasts of Saturn, when the masters waited upon their servants, who were honoured with mock titles, and permitted to assume the state and deportment of their lords. These fooleries were exceedingly popular, and continued to be practised long after the establishment of Christianity, in defiance of the threatenings and the remonstrances of the clergy, who, finding it impossible to divert the stream of vulgar prejudice, permitted their occasional exercise. The most daringly impious of such practices was the Festival of Fools, in which the most sacred rites and ceremonies of the church were turned into ridicule ( ...)" (Joseph Strutt, *op. cit.*, p. 271). Today, in the British Army, it is still the custom for officers to act as waiters to the 'other ranks' at their Christmas dinner.

years and been decently buried ...". Notwithstanding this, "we have still some fragments of ancient revels preserved in the mummers' curious performance".<sup>7</sup>

The worst decline, however, seems to have happened after the second decade of this century. With regard to this subject, Ron Shuttleworth says,

"The slaughter of the 1914-18 war, the hard times which followed and the tendency during the twenties and thirties to despise anything 'old-fashioned', effectively killed off mumming and there are now very, very few teams who can claim to be 'traditional' in the sense that their play was handed down to them by a member of the earlier team."<sup>8</sup>

The fact is that the Mummers' Play, which is today the term generally used to mean any folk play in England,<sup>9</sup> is an old and traditional folk custom, whose earliest notices are from Sword Dances and Morris Dances in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> Although the evident reduction of its practice today, it is still alive not only in England

---

<sup>7</sup> P. H. Ditchfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> The performers of the Mummers' Play have received many different denominations. *Mummers* is only one of them. They were also called *Plough Boys*, *Plough Jags*, *Sword Dancers*, *Tipteerers*, *Jolly Jacks*, *Morris Men*, *Soulers*, *Christmas Boys*, *Bull Guizers*, *Pace-Eggers* or *Blue Stots* (this last one resulting from the particular pronunciation of the word *plough* around York, which made *Plough* become *Blue*). In the past, it was usual to call the play after the name given locally to its performers.

Among the scholars, Alan Brody prefers the "overall term" *the men's dramatic ceremonial*, used by E. C. Cawte, Alex Helm and N. Peacock. However, *Mummers' Play* seems to be the most generalised and diffused name for the whole of the play, mainly outside the world of the scholars (See Alan Brody, *The English Mummers and Their Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 4, and E. C. Cawte, Alex Helm and N. Peacock, *English Ritual Drama* (London: The Folk-Lore Society/University College, 1967), p. 5.)

<sup>10</sup> For E. K. Chambers, the Morris Dance is the most divergent folk custom related to the Mummers' Play because it has developed upon choreographic "rather than strictly dramatic lines". But also because it "owes allegiance to no fixed season, and in fact is perhaps more often found at summer festivals than at those of winter to which the plays and Sword Dances belong" (E. K. Chambers, *The English Folk-Play* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. 153 and 152). However, according to Mr. Ron Shuttleworth, some teams seem to perform at May Day or Whitsun, and others at mid-winter, although many groups would dance 'out of season' for financial advantage.

but also in Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and even in Newfoundland, where new and local characters have been introduced into the play.

Those who took part in the Mummers' Play

" ... were people from the community in which they performed. Although they might go out to surrounding villages, they were not travelling players in the theatrical sense. The custom was usually a rural activity, although in Lancashire the existence of chapbooks helped people who were moving into the new towns, to continue the custom, and it became widely practised there."<sup>11</sup>

The Mummers' Play has been traditionally seasonal and used to be played at Christmas time (Boxing Day, Twelfth Night or Plough Monday, that is the first Monday after Twelfth Night, or Epiphany) but sometimes, exceptionally, it is also played at Easter or on All Souls' Day, depending on each particular community. However, some of the revivalist teams which have appeared in the last decades do not follow the tradition, but perform at any time of the year.

All over the United Kingdom there are many different versions of the play, each with their own title, which depends chiefly on the place and on the date of the performance. For instance, when played during Easter, as it is in the north-west, it is called a *Pace-Egg Play* (or *Pasch Egg*, from *Pascha*); when played on All Souls' Day, as in Cheshire, it is called a *Soul-Caking Play*.

All are short plays, full of comic elements. They usually last about half an hour and their most outstanding component is the action and not the story or the language.

Ron Shuttleworth throws light on this point:

---

<sup>11</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

"A team of mummers can vary in number from four to fourteen or more. A play can be as short as three minutes or longer than thirty. One of the governing factors would be the main outlets for performance. If a team is going from house to house in a village they want a short play - go in, do it, collect, get out and move on. The smaller the numbers involved, the greater is each individual share. If, however, they were tramping between isolated farms in mid-winter, the food, drink, warmth and company would be important and the plays might get longer with perhaps songs added as well. In the pubs and in the street, the entertainment value of the play might significantly effect the collection and might result in longer plays with more characters and perhaps a dancer or musician included."<sup>12</sup>

The players, traditionally all men,<sup>13</sup> used to come in procession to visit the villages and farms that were on their route, and the performances could be held in a circle in a kitchen, in any other living area or in open air, where the players were set apart from the spectators.

According to Ron Shuttleworth, "Later with smaller houses and changing attitudes to privacy the mummers started performing in public places - streets, pubs etc. Nowadays venues include concerts, dances and any other outlet which presents itself."<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Violet Alford says that men are found performing dancing rites all over the world, and that ritual dances "are almost entirely for men because in the magico-religious rites in which they are rooted women had no active part". Nevertheless, when she describes the personage of the Man-in-Woman's Clothes, she states that such a character "is of even more complex origins, and no valid reason why she must be played by a man has yet been put forth" (Violet Alford, *Introduction to English Folklore* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1952), pp. 79 and 82). The Man-in-Woman's Clothes will be analysed later on, but I can anticipate that, as these characters usually are rough women, with a nasty behaviour, if they were not performed by men, they would certainly be considered vulgar although humorous.

<sup>14</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, op. cit., p. 11.

Indeed, the space in front of pubs seems to have become the chief stop for many troupes, and sometimes the performances are held inside. Alan Brody calls attention to this fact, believing that it occurred because the houses in most areas have become "less scattered and more numerous, as the community loses its specifically agricultural identity".<sup>15</sup> Against this, Shuttleworth gives us, "(formerly) isolated farms surrounded by their fields were much rarer than today, most of them being clustered into villages."<sup>16</sup> Brody also thinks that, as the *quête* (collection of money during the performance) took on more importance, the pubs became the places which could afford the teams "the largest, most generous audience."<sup>17</sup> However, observes Simon Lichman, the Marshfield Paper Boys, from the Cotswold Hills of South-West England, "are proud of the fact that they do not perform in pubs."<sup>18</sup>

In the past it was very important that the players disguised themselves, using hanging strips of rag or paper, or ribbons, and also masks or blackened faces.<sup>19</sup>

The costumes have been traditionally very simple and sometimes they do not serve to establish role differentiation (as with the movements of the players and their declamatory delivery of speech), but only to distinguish performers and audience and to give an identity to the team.<sup>20</sup> However, among the modern revivalist teams and a few

---

<sup>15</sup> Alan Brody, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Brody, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Lichman, "The Gardener's Story: The Metafolklore of a Mumming Tradition", *Folklore*, vol. 93, i (London: 1982), p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> The faces blackened with soot mixed with lard or burnt cork have been related by many scholars, since Strutt, to the fact that they are an easier and cheaper method of disguise. Some references can be found to the use of red or white faces, or their combinations.

<sup>20</sup> Each performer usually announces his character in his first line, using the expression "In Comes I...".



traditionalist ones it is common to find more elaborated costumes (as well as a more elaborated acting style too).

The main features of the Mummers' Play are given by R. J. E. Tiddy:

"The typical Mummers' Play opens with a naïve induction in which one of the performers craves the spectators' indulgence, asks for room, and promises a fine performance. When this is concluded the two protagonists appear, and after each has boasted of his valour they fall to fighting. In this duel one or other is wounded or killed. A doctor is then summoned who vaunts his proficiency in medicine and proceeds to revive the fallen hero. Here the main business of the play ends. It is now the turn of minor characters to enter and provide irrelevant amusement of a simple sort. One of them collects money and the performance finishes with a song."<sup>21</sup>

According to Shuttleworth, the texts and content of the plays are widely different from place to place but their basic plot presents little variation, making it possible "to recognise certain basic actions common to all". And he summarises: "Someone is 'wounded' or 'killed' and later restored to health and life. It is also general that the spectators shall reward the players with food and drink and / or money".<sup>22</sup>

The several versions of the Mummers' Play are generally divided into three categories:

. *HERO-COMBAT PLAY* - The basic and commonest type, traditional to the period before and after Christmas.<sup>23</sup> In its simplest terms it "consists of a Presenter, the vaunts or boasts of the Hero and his Adversary, a Fight, the Cure, and the 'Quete' or end part where

---

<sup>21</sup> R. J. E. Tiddy, *The Mummers' Play* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> The *Pace-Egg Play* and the *Soul-Caking Play*, although performed on Easter and on All Soul's Day, are also *Hero-Combat Plays*.

the players solicit the generosity of the audience". The most common of its heroes is St. George who in some places can become King George or Prince George. But there are others, such as Robin Hood, for instance. Among the adversaries, the most widespread are Bold Slasher and the Turkish Knight and very rarely there appears a dragon. It has "the same sort of comic Doctor and humorous cure" which can be seen in the Wooing Play.

. *SWORD PLAY* - Traditional to New Year or Boxing Day it is associated "with the Longsword Dance which is found mainly in Yorkshire". It is performed by six or eight men, "each with a strip of metal or wood about three feet long and called a 'sword' ", and who "form into a circle by each holding the point of his neighbour's sword in his free hand". They then "perform various intricate manoeuvres which climax with the swords being woven together to form a 'lock' to be held up and paraded by one of the men". Here the death is not direct but only suggested by the choreography of the dancers. In short, this is its action: "A Clown or Fool acting as Presenter comes on and requests leave for the players to enter, and room for them to perform. He brings on the Captain or King who then 'calls on' the other dancers with a song which describes the supposed virtue of each. After a dance the King argues with the Fool and calls upon the dancers to help him. A lock is formed about the neck of the Fool, the swords drawn suddenly away and the Fool falls 'beheaded'. In turn, the dancers deny involvement and each accuses the man next to him. Eventually the corpse is returned to life - often without the doctor deemed essential in the other types of play - and the performance concludes with another dance".

. *WOOING PLAY* - Found only in some East Midland counties, it "is sometimes called the Plough Play because the teams might drag a plough around with them", and is traditional to Plough Monday. It is "less structured, with episodes which do not always occur in the same order. The main characters are a Fool, a Farmer's Man, a Lady, an Old

Woman ( 'Dame Jane' ), an Adversary and a Doctor. Sometimes there is a Recruiting Sergeant and sometimes a Hobby Horse". Its basic action "involves the wooing of the lady and the rejection of one suitor in favour of another. The Old Woman seeks the father of her illegitimate child. Two of the characters have a fight, and one is killed and then humorously revived by the Doctor".<sup>24</sup> One singular aspect of this kind of play is that its combat can be between any two players. And its main distinction from the other two categories is that in it the combat, the death and the resurrection are not the most important ones, for the wooing action becomes the chief element of the plot.

According to scholars of the custom, the Sword Play was probably the earliest of these presentations, while the Hero-Combat Play would be the latest.

The Mummers' Play has been essentially performed in the countryside, and its actors are not professional. They used to be agricultural labourers, fishermen, coal-miners, etc., who, on specific dates of the year, played it. Today, however, many of them are teachers and students who are reviving the play in schools all over the country.

With the passing of time, as we saw, there was a decline of the Mummers' Play in England, due to the great changes that took place in the life and in the social structure of all Great Britain, examples of which are the replacement of agriculture by industry and the breaking up of many communities.

Such decline, however, did not mean a disappearance of the custom. In reality, in the most recent history of the play, there have been two noteworthy revivals, which have resulted from a revival of folk culture in general, mainly of folk song. The first happened around the turn of this century; the second, during the fifties and the sixties.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-4.

## 1.2 - The Revivals

As Ditchfield observed, by the end of the nineteenth century the Mummers' Play was only marginally alive in England. And, according to Ron Shuttleworth, the first revival occurred at the turn of the century "and a bit before". For him it "was probably encouraged, and even consciously started, by antiquarian-minded teachers, minor gentry, etc. Other influences would have been the early 'folky' movements such as those of Mary Neal with her Esperance organisation, and Cecil Sharp and the English Folk Dance Society."<sup>25</sup>

He adds to this the appearance of some articles on the Mummers' Play in magazines such as *Notes & Queries* and *Folklore*, as well as of texts of the play in the form of printed booklets or *chapbooks*. He also notes the influence of the collections and writings of scholars as Thomas Fairman Ordish, Reginald Tiddy and E. K. Chambers.

On the other hand, it was in the last decade of the nineteenth century that there began to appear the twelve volumes of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, whose theories of magico-religious drama would be very influential. In the same period, several studies on Greek culture and drama, written by <sup>the Cambridge Ritualists</sup> ~~members of the British School at Athens~~ and other scholars, were published, creating great interest in England and, as happened with Frazer's work, they also contributed to increase the interest in the folk play.

Mr. Shuttleworth believes that most of these scholars were convinced they were rescuing the last vestiges of dying and disappearing customs. So, many revivalists were probably "motivated by the idea of returning 'folk' to the peasants, and were served by the publication of the texts". But, on the other hand,

---

<sup>25</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, in a letter <sup>to the writer</sup> dated 21 February 1995.

"The folk revival of the 1950s and 60's was a different thing. The earliest interest was in dance, with song not taking off until the early 60's. Mostly people did it because it was fun and because it became a minor craze. The song revival attracted adherents from other musical forms which allowed personal involvement in participation and performance, such as Jazz and Skiffle. The initial interest was mainly in U.S. material, switching to Irish and Scottish, and only later to English songs. This created an interest in other traditional activities such as Morris, Mumming and customs in general. I think that any 'motivation' was primarily enjoyment. There was left-wing ambition to hi-jack the movement for political ends, but this was largely unfulfilled. So Mumming was just another pleasurable activity that could be tried within the general idea of 'folk'. The clubs, dances, etc. also provided an outlet for performance."<sup>26</sup>

For him, mumming was above all a performance activity which could be undertaken by people who could neither dance well nor sing.

In this second folk revival the Festival of Fools was also rediscovered as a full-length dramatic presentation, "scheduled to run for thirteen nights", as says the Singers' Club News, n. 3, Nov-65. They explain:

"The Festival of Fools has its origins, like Christmas itself, in an ancient midwinter pagan festival, celebrating the Sun God - the nativity of the sun. The festival was celebrated by the lighting of bonfires, dancing and singing and by a feast in the course of which slaves were waited on by their masters. In Babylon it was called the Festival of the Sacaia, in ancient

---

<sup>26</sup> Ron Shuttleworth, in a letter dated 21 February 1995.

Greece it was known as the Festival of Chronos, and in Italy they called it Saturnalia; mediaeval Europe knew it as the Festival of Fools."

But, although it was "no longer possible to celebrate the annals of winter in the way our ancestors did", it could still be possible "to poke fun at ridiculous institutions, to expose the hypocrites in our midst and to prod the pompous", pointed out Ewan MacColl and the London Critics Group, who produced the Festival of Fools at the New Merlin's Cave, opening on Boxing Day, 1965.<sup>27</sup>

~~Despite the fact that~~ The London Critics Group and the Singer's Club cannot be taken as typical, for they were led by perfectionists and very political people, <sup>but an</sup> ~~such an~~ example seems to show that entertainment was certainly a strong motive for the revival of the Mummers' Play and other folk customs in that period. ~~Also~~ <sup>B</sup> Besides the amusement that they provided, there could sometimes exist an interest in ~~a good deal of~~ social criticism.

The first revival was indeed induced by the work of dilettant collectors with an antiquarian outlook, such as the pioneer Cecil Sharp. But, if Sharp and his contemporaries contributed to the discussion of English folk song, their work also had negative aspects, as their specific upper and middle-class viewpoint frequently drove them to wrong conclusions, mistakes and misrepresentations, which led to the censorship of the repertoire in order to harmonise with their preconceived valuations.

---

<sup>27</sup> Born into a Scottish working-class family, Ewan MacColl was an actor, singer and songwriter who was a dedicated scholar of folk culture. He was a leader in the Folk Revival and very active in the folk club medium. The Singer's Club, whose members played a pioneering role in the Folk Revival, had introduced folk drama to extend its activities as a folk club. Together with the London Critics Group they had produced a mumming play by MacColl, *St George and the Dragon*, which had been touring successfully round other clubs. The Festival of Fools, another joint production was "an even more ambitious venture".

~~So~~, Their educational goals "were not only idealistic and paternalistic but finally reactionary", says Ian Watson.<sup>28</sup> For him, these former collectors were ill placed to carry out such work because they saw the workers who were their sources as "an alien class".  
 Therefore  
 Then, they were unable to show the "implicitly socio-critical and political content of the bulk of songs", as well as to comprehend the "dimension of suffering, tension and resilience" in the essence of "plebian culture".<sup>29</sup>

One of their mistaken conclusions was that the folk was dying ~~with~~ <sup>due to</sup> the changes that the Industrial Revolution had imposed on rural life. This had been shattered in several ways and many traditions were falling into disuse, states Fred Woods, a situation that would worsen later through World War I. But, ~~he~~ <sup>Woods</sup> thinks, it is a surprise that those collectors, "governed by an archaeological approach" and faced with the dwindling rural culture, "believed that they were saving the songs from an inevitable oblivion " and did not inquire if the Revolution "had created its own songs and traditions ..."<sup>30</sup>

In his turn, Ian Watson is categorical. For him, this "was not a revival at all", for it "may have enriched British art music, enlarged the school curricula and consolidated British imperialist ideology, but it certainly did nothing to stimulate the composition of the performance of folk song at its social basis - in the working class."<sup>31</sup>

Pete Martin, in his preface to the book *The Imagined Village*, by Georgina Boyes, says that at the beginning of this century, "the certainties and confidence of British society in the Victorian era seemed to be evaporating fast".<sup>32</sup> So, the work of Cecil Sharp and his

<sup>28</sup> Ian Watson, *Song and Democratic Culture in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>30</sup> Fred Woods, *Folk Revival* (Poole-Dorset: Blandford Press, 1979), pp. 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> Ian Watson, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> Pete Martin, "Preface" in Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village*, 2. ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. p. vii.

collaborators seems to be an attempt to revitalise the English nation through the rescue of the folk traditions and their dissemination in the schools, and was intended to create a notion of Englishness based on an invented rural reality, leaving ~~apart~~ <sup>aside</sup> the new urban industrial reality, whose pressures had led to a cultural crisis in which the English folk songs and dances "were ceasing to be performed".<sup>33</sup>

Martin states that the elements taken from the folk culture, such as the dance and the songs, "served as powerful ideological weapons in debates about political direction, cultural values and national identity". He also observes that "the wide appeal of such symbols was their ambiguity", for they "could be appropriated, in their different ways, by socialist reformers and arch-conservatives alike". These were both "earnest elites" whose interest was "to take control of a culture perceived to be in a state of disintegration (...)". Such common will would not only be ironic, because "the idea, and the ideal, of the 'folk' can, and did, shade into the notion of the 'race', and a concern with its superiority or purity is clearly apparent in the 1930s, when fascist and anti-semitic views were openly promulgated".<sup>34</sup>

Hence, either to create "a national consensus" or "to build a new social order", says Georgina Boyes, "the Folk Revival has been used to serve a range of ideological purposes", and much of its emotional appeal "echoes the characteristic themes of Romanticism".<sup>35</sup>

For her, the revival came up because from the viewpoint of its founders, at the turn of the century,

---

<sup>33</sup> Georgina Boyes, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Pete Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>35</sup> Georgina Boyes, *op. cit.*, pp. xiv and 7.



" ... a concatenation of developments threatened England as an imperial nation, undermining its pre-eminence as a political and cultural power. Externally, German manufacturing, expansionism, military strength, intellectual and cultural influences were seen as posing increasing dangers. From within, the inter-relation of industrialisation, urbanisation and mass production were widely felt to have produced a cultural crisis in which refined aesthetics were being overwhelmed by a tide of vulgarity."<sup>36</sup>

These menaces "intersected and reinforced each other". Moreover, "Empire, class and gender dominance were based on interdependent concepts of racial and cultural superiority" and all would be brought into peril if one of these was threatened.<sup>37</sup>

In such a climate, the Folk Revival would replace the failed folk culture's natural possessors by "a new, knowledgeable, aware group of performers", <sup>who believed</sup> ~~for~~ the culture of the folk was "a heritage common to all", the "product of the race, not of the working class", and "represented an uncontaminated and non-aligned source from which all later, less innocent forms developed".<sup>38</sup>

The work of these first upper-middle-class collectors is today also discussed in terms of mediation and expropriation, for they "profited financially and in status" by taking the cultural products of the rural working class and re-working them "for school and drawing room performance".<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Georgina Boyes, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

Actually, this happened not only with the early collectors. Mr. Ron Shuttleworth called my attention to the fact that some of the post-war ones did quite nicely out of their collecting activities-acquiring copyrights. Moreover, in some cases, they allegedly induced their 'sources' to sign quite exploitive agreements. A similar situation has also occurred in Brazil, regarding the collection of the cultural product of the folk.

Thus, by the beginning of the 1930s, says Boyes, folk culture "had been fully colonised by the Revival. The folk, "on the verge of extinction at the turn of the century, could now be assumed to be non-existent". In fact, "Revivalists had replaced the Folk, and constructed the population of rural areas as non-Folk - failed inheritors of the Folk's culture and artistic abilities".<sup>40</sup>

The movement was then, "mature, widespread and formed a restricted, but accepted, part of national life". But the thirties was a decade of many crises, characterised by a worldwide economic depression and Fascist dictatorships, and, although the assumption of the folk "as the well-spring of Englishness" and the national culture "never came under concerted frontal assault", the fact is that "across a range of social, political and cultural positions there was a selective reduction in support for the institution and practices of the Revival". So, the identity of the Revival was fragmented, for "the carefully insulated reproduction of a synthetic art culture that was folksong and dance became less sustainable".<sup>41</sup>

But the Second World War would bring about what can be described as a greater development of the movement or even a second revival.

Fred Woods remarks that, in the early 1950s, the collection "began again with renewed vigour", and this would be the first stage of the new revival, whose initiative Woods attributes to the BBC, "without whose vision and resources much might have been lost".<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Georgina Boyes, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>42</sup> Fred Woods, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

The moment was perfectly suitable. Individualism did not seem to be the proper way after the collective tragedy of war. A whole generation of artists and young intellectuals was longing to find something that could bring them closer, that could help them to feel alive, and it became essential that they constructed a feeling of nation. For this, they needed History; so they needed to look back at themselves to better understand who they were. Folk culture then came to be a good source through which they could build the answer that needed to be given to the emergent consumerism and to the sentiments of anti-socialism that had begun to arise in the first post-war years.

Georgina Boyes notes that, at that time, "Propaganda designed to bolster morale and build a consensus among those experiencing 'The People's War' drew heavily on images of national identity. She states : " 'A country lane', 'a cottage small beside a field of grain' were not just the popular song's convenient encapsulation of 'what we're all fighting for' but were presented as Englishness itself - in their absence, the song claimed, there could be no nation".<sup>43</sup>

These notions were not entirely new. In a certain way they bring back Sharp's cultural thesis. Boyes says that, in many respects, "the post-war Revival has been a prisoner of its pre-war past, constantly regurgitating relict ideologies of the 1920s and 1930s". But

---

<sup>43</sup> Georgina Boyes, op. cit., pp. 180-181.

That most of the initial material was American or Skiffle-based, afterwards Irish and Scottish, and only later moved to English songs, has generally been the viewpoint of many scholars and academicians. Mr. Ron Shuttleworth, however, has another opinion. He says that he came into folk song when it was just starting to become popular in the Midlands. According to him, in the early days of the movement, it was common to find a division between the 'traditional' clubs and those with a 'contemporary' bias "who chose modern songs with mainly a political or protest message, with each deriding the other's choice of material". He also thinks that the song revival was not mainly middle class, for "It attracted intelligent people who liked to really listen to the lyrics and to think about them. If more came from one class than another, this was incidental. One good thing, which still persists, was/is the total disinterest in a participant's background. You can be a road-sweeper or a company director - nobody cares, and unless you volunteer the information, nobody knows. There may have been 'artists and young intellectuals', but if there were, they didn't shout about it. I had met Ewan MacColl several times before I found out that he was an actor" (Ron Shuttleworth, in a letter dated 03 April 1995).

now, undoubtedly, "the possibilities for change and development appeared to be more open than at any time since the Revival was first conceived".<sup>44</sup>

Both before and during the war, the American cultural production had already become very successful in England. But, after the war, such presence was much stronger. For the second revival, there was significant influence of American actors, such as Burl Ives and Harry Belafonte, who were folk singers too, as well as of groups like The Weavers and Peter, Paul and Mary.

This second revival has been frequently pointed out as a left-wing movement, involved with the cultural policy of the Communist Party of Great Britain. But, for Boyes, "Under all the circumstances, the proposal that any single organisation was responsible for the initiation and development of the movement - or even its 'cultural policy' - is simplistic in the extreme".<sup>45</sup>

But it certainly had a political nature, whose roots can be found "in the struggles of the 1930s" and in an "anti-fascist sentiment", as well as it was "inseparable from the labour movement". Its participants "(a minority from the working class itself, the rest intimate with it) seem to have recognised that the working class was capable of active struggle, which expressed itself in artistic cultural terms".<sup>46</sup> It made also a large public, including the working class, aware of a tradition that "they no longer knew existed". However, it "was and remains heterogeneous and contradictory" and, in its *mainstream*, "genuine working-class participation has been a minority phenomenon".<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Georgina Boyes, op. cit., p. 200.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>46</sup> Ian Watson, op. cit., pp. 34 and 33.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp 38-39.

The second revival also resulted from the work of scholars and, as say Michael Pickering and Tony Green, it "unavoidably had its intellectual roots in the first and specifically in the documents which the first had bequeathed", such as the collections, the learned articles and the monographs of Cecil Sharp and of the ballad scholars, although it had not taken on wholesale "the ideological and institutional baggage left behind by the first".<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, this revival was borne "by scholars and performers on the Left committed to the promotion of a democratic people's culture".<sup>49</sup> One of his greatest leaders, Ewan MacColl, is depicted by Ian Watson as someone who "has contributed song and drama to the political culture of the working class" as "collector, singer, scholar and songwriter, as English Scotsman at home in both traditions, an uncompromising traditionalist and a pacesetter innovator, an internationalist steeped in his own national heritage and a partisan of the labour movement".<sup>50</sup>

Although a "progressive institution", ~~it remains to be shown that~~ the second revival housed "a reactionary ideology", remark Pickering and Green. ~~They say:~~

"... because of its essential commitment to the first revival's notion of folk tradition, the second revival could cope with proletarian culture, rural as well as urban, only by the device of idealization, both positive and negative. The miner, the sailor, the farmworker, were working class heroes, inheritors of a rich and vigorous and strongly rooted expressive and political tradition: they were also the defeated victims of acculturation, no

---

<sup>48</sup> Michael Pickering and Tony Green, "Towards a Cartography of the Vernacular Milieu" in *Everyday Culture* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> Ian Watson, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

longer able even to distinguish between the gems of the 'folk' song tradition and the gew-gaws of Tin Pan Alley."<sup>51</sup>

But the fact is that the major part of the teams that still perform the Mummers' Play in England are revivalist in that they were created by the stimulus of the second folk revival.

However, even though very few, there are still traditionalist teams active. In their location, they are widely separated geographically and usually use the text that is closest to the place where they perform. The best known of them are: the Antrobus Soulers (Cheshire), the Chipping Campden Mummers (Worcestershire), the Marshfield Paper Boys (Gloucestershire), the Overton Mummers (Hampshire), the Uttoxeter Feather Guizers (Staffordshire), and the Ripon Sword Dancers (Yorkshire). These last ones, in spite of their name, do not perform a sword play but a hero-combat play and, together with the Uttoxeter Feather Guizers, seem to be in serious decline.

The first revivalist side must have been the Darlington Mummers, in 1966, which, as with the majority of them, came up from a folk-song club that also did Mummers' Plays.<sup>52</sup> But the first group which came up with a programme entirely dedicated to mumming was the Coventry Mummers, founded in November of the same year by Mr. Ron Shuttleworth, "to promote the performance, research, study and public awareness of Mummers' Plays or 'English Traditional Drama' ", as stated in the leaflet of the group. There are fifteen members in the team, all male. But the Coventry Mummers is not an orthodox team. Unlike the traditionalist and the majority of the revivalist sides, they do not follow the traditional calendar. They not only perform at any time of the year, depending solely on invitation, but also anywhere, as they have done abroad and in the foyer of the National

---

<sup>51</sup> Michael Pickering and Tony Green, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>52</sup> The folk clubs proliferated all over the country and, in the seventies, they were almost two thousand. But, during the 1980s, they became to diminish.

Theatre in London. They also give an unusual visual impact to their performances. The only element that they keep close to the tradition is the text, which they try to maintain as close to the original as possible, although not even then rigorously. As with other revivalist teams which are not tied to purely local texts, the Coventry Mummers use a chapbook play from the area of Lancashire.

### 1.3 - Theatre or Ritual?

In his article "In Comes I, St George", Alex Helm argues against the use of the expression *Mummers' Play* because it suggests theatre. Instead of it he proposes *Mummers' Ritual*, although recognising that such substitution only could be done on an academic level.

His dissension is sustained by the argument that

"... in the so-called Mummers' Play, the action is confined to a mock death and revival, there is no suspense or uncertainty, the participants in the ritual have come to illustrate an ancient belief and nothing else, and the acting is as negligible as can be expected from untrained and normally inarticulate people."<sup>53</sup>

So, "It is not a Play but a ceremonial".<sup>54</sup>

Albeit containing some truth, the first assertion quoted above is worthy of discussion because it seems to reveal some want of precision, reflecting a sense of theatre founded on an aristocratic point of view that comes from the nineteenth century's concept of the "well-made play".

---

<sup>53</sup> Alex Helm, "In Comes I, St George", *Folklore*, vol. 76, Summer (London, 1965), p. 126.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

A. E. Green throws light on the subject when he says,

"... most descriptions of mumming, in so far as they have anything to say about it as a theatrical event, tend to speak condescendingly of corrupt and nonsensical texts, eclectic costumes, and crude acting, invoking - usually tacitly - a definition of drama (prose, naturalistic, fourth wall, technically elaborate) which, powerful as it is in the history of the professional Western theatre, is local, recent and utterly inappropriate. The mummers' play does not attempt the detailed imitation of reality; it is an imagistic theatre whose effects lie in holding real and unreal worlds in a precarious balance."<sup>55</sup>

Helm also says that the word "Play" suggests to him "the interplay of character and incident which moves the dramatist's story along through a climax to its end."<sup>56</sup>

This statement seems to show that Helm confines the notion of play and theatre to the staging of a text, namely, literature made action by performance.

However, we could argue that the theatrical language springs from the association of different means of expression, as the gestures, the movements, the costumes, etc., among which are also included the words and the written text.

The play itself, as a literary piece, is only one of the several elements which compound the theatrical performance. The written play can be sometimes important in a performance and be central even if it is well-known. But there is no reason at all for considering it as an indispensable or sacred element, or, even, the most important.

---

<sup>55</sup> A. E. Green, "Popular Drama and the Mummers' Play" in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 152-153.

<sup>56</sup> Alex Helm, op. cit., p. 126.



A logical narrative structure, establishing clearly a beginning, a middle, and an end is not essential to characterise drama or theatre. The minimal component commonly pointed out as necessary to feature drama is the presence of a conflict (external, among the characters or among the characters and their surrounding reality; or internal, that is, within the character himself).<sup>57</sup> A conflict that is *shown* and not *told* to one or a group of onlookers, is performed as a direct and present fact, and is something alive that occurs at the exact moment in which it is being seen.

The Mummers' Play, in all its forms, seems to be theatrical for it fulfils satisfactorily these requisites. In what Helm asserts, there is nothing capable of revealing a contradiction between the Mummers' Play and the concept of theatre, which makes his non-acceptance of the custom as a Play, sound a little unsuitable and precipitate.

In the Mummers' Play the action is not confined to a mock death and resurrection for other themes are sometimes included in its plot, and wherever the Mummers' Play is performed, many little accretions can always be found.

In the same manner, suspense and uncertainty are not fundamental to configure theatre. Such components can probably enrich a play, but they are not what determines that a play is a play. If there is no surprise or novelty in the play, this will not exactly be a barrier for the appreciation of the spectators. Even if the characters and the plot are already known by the audience, this familiarity is not something to hamper the relationship between the play and its audience. On the contrary, it can even be a cause for greater enjoyment by

---

<sup>57</sup> Even that this conflict, says Victor Turner, "may appear to be muted or deflected or rendered as a playful or joyous struggle". Seeing life as conflict and theatre as close to life ("while remaining at a mirror distance from it"), what makes of theatre "the form best fitted to comment or 'metacomment' on conflict", Turner observes that, in certain theatrical traditions the scenes of discord are sometimes muffled and evaded, seeming to be "a cultural defense-mechanism against conflict rather than a metacommentary upon it" (Victor Turner, op. cit., pp. 105-106). (See note 13, page 8)

the audience, it does not matter whether the onlookers are children or adults nor what is their level of education.

An example of this are plays such as *Hamlet* or *King Oedipus*. The majority of their audiences, nowadays, are people who have seen them many other times and know them well. But this is not a reason for losing the interest and the pleasure.

On the other hand, there is no suspense or uncertainty, for instance, in Brecht, as well as in other forms of folk theatre, such as the Ta'ziyeh in Iran or the Ramlila in India.

In the Ramlila many of its episodes are awaited in a state of great suspense by the audience. This is due to the religious fervour of the onlookers, which makes them anticipate their favourite passages with such great anxiety, and not to the plot itself.

Although we can find suspense in the Greek theatre, Victor Turner reminds us that in the Greek plays the plots were always well known by the audience, because they were part of its religious and cultural heritage. The spectators maintained their interest, and this lay not in the story itself, but in how the dramatist dealt with it, in the quality of acting, and in the singing and dancing of the chorus.<sup>58</sup>

The fact that in the folk theatre performers and audience are usually members of the same community who share the everyday life, and that the audience "continually confronts the role which an actor-peasant plays with the actor's own private life", as Bogatyrev says,<sup>59</sup> must not be considered an obstacle for the classification of the custom as a play. This mutual acquaintanceship probably helps the audience to feel much more comfortable, favours the communication, and avoids the actor and performance being confused with character and reality.

---

<sup>58</sup> Victor Turner, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>59</sup> Petr Bogatyrev, "Semiotics in the Folk Theatre", p. 47.

Theatre has indeed a mimetic nature and its raw material is the reality itself. However, theatrical performances are not able to be exact reproductions of reality.<sup>60</sup> The elements of reality, when transplanted to the space of a performance, are no longer the same because, instead of being presented, they are then being re-presented. In fact, they become elements of a new reality, the reality of the stage. So, for theatre the only possibility seems to be fantasy, namely, the re-creation of real existence through the power of imagination. Moreover, for this re-creation to be accomplished, it is enough the presence of a single man, performing a character in front of another man, with mutual awareness and agreement. In theatre, the stuff of reality looks like that of dream.<sup>61</sup>

The participants of the Mummers' Play have not come just "to illustrate an ancient belief". They play, I think, as in all kinds of theatre, because they need to express and experience life more freely; to recognise themselves and learn about their own reality through entertainment; to reflect life how it is and how it could be. They play also because they want to meet up with the members of the community, to have fun together with them, and, as notes Louis Chiaramonte, "to cement and reinforce the bonds established in their workaday lives."<sup>62</sup> The Play is "an event in which the community

---

<sup>60</sup> In spite of its importance for the development of modern theatre, the experience of André Antoine and his *Théâtre Libre* in France, at the end of the nineteenth century, is an example of this. Inspired by the naturalistic ideas of Émile Zola, who advocated that theatre should be an exact reproduction of life, Antoine tried to present on the stage what became known as a *tranche de vie* (slice-of-life). One of Antoine's most extreme naturalistic attempts was the performance of *Les Bouchers* (The Butchers), a play by Fernand Ixres, in which he used real pieces of beef as part of the scenery. However, it was only a simulation and not a real butcher shop which he could create on the stage.

<sup>61</sup> "... We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep..." (Prospero, in William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 181.

<sup>62</sup> Louis J. Chiaramonte, "Mumming in 'Deep Harbour': Aspects of Social Organization in Mumming and Drinking" in Herbert Halpert and G. M. Story (eds.), *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland*, 3. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 103.

reaffirms its identity".<sup>63</sup> Exactly as it may have been for their ancestors, and how they presumably behaved.

~~This~~<sup>This</sup> is much more than simply the trace of an ancient belief which is no longer remembered after so many years. It is something that certainly arises from the deeper layers of the human unconscious, which has stimulated men through the ages to evolve similar forms of theatre in different cultures all over the world.

~~Even being~~<sup>As</sup> an undeveloped form of theatre,<sup>64</sup> for it presents only the basic elements of a theatrical performance and does not incorporate the artistic shape and the technological devices which can be found in the sophisticated theatre. ~~these also~~<sup>However such devices</sup> appear to be the foundations of the Mummers' Play, however simple the play can be.

The acting is not "negligible", for it is capable of maintaining the interest of the spectators and stimulating their participation. The purpose of the acting lies in confirming to the audience that they are seeing real people and not roles. The objective of this form of theatre is not to deny the nature of the game, but to reveal it all the time, which requires a naïve style of acting, where professional polish would intrude.

Indubitably, the Mummers' Play is not a play such as we find in the sophisticated theatre practised among the privileged classes of society, which depends chiefly on closed buildings technically prepared for its accomplishment. It is not a theatre that is used to lengthy and literary texts, and to elaborated and, sometimes, expensive and sumptuous professional productions.

~~The~~ Mummers' Plays are short, their texts are not comparable in "literary qualities" to those of the great playwrights, their actors are all amateurs (although "trained" by tradition

---

<sup>63</sup> Louis J. Chiaramonte, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>64</sup> Brody argues that the Mummers' Play began as pure ritual, developed when performers and audience were separated and the action started to be explained, but did not grow up sufficiently to reach a complete artistic form (Alan Brody, op. cit., p. 32.)

and repetition, as well as by rehearsals or, more properly, *preparations*<sup>65</sup>), and their performances are simple, even charming. But, in spite of these attributes, nothing can impede the Mummers' Play from being accounted as a form of theatre.

Therefore, as the Mummers' Plays, even in their simplest and shortest forms, fulfil the conditions regarded as significant to configure theatre, they do not need to have their name altered.

Notwithstanding any probable ritualistic origin that can be pointed out for them, which will be considered later, the Mummers' Plays are presently a genuine form of theatre.

That is not all. A. E. Green argues that it is "a highly stylised form of drama".<sup>66</sup> Although his reference is directly related to the Antrobus Soulcaiking Play, a statement that he makes later, suggesting the inclusion of other mumming plays runs: "If Britain has ever had an authentically popular drama, this was and is it".<sup>67</sup>

#### 1.4 - Origin and Contemporary Meaning

Mumming plays have aroused the interest of several scholars for many years. These have mainly been attracted by the fact that such plays "with so many similarities amongst them occurred at widely separated places". For Alan Gailey, this truth would imply "a connection between them, or a common origin at any early stage in the development of the peoples of Europe". Such common origin would be the only thing that could explain the

---

<sup>65</sup> *Preparations* is the term used by Schechner to mean "a constant state of training so that when a situation arises one will be ready to 'do something appropriate' to the moment", whereas *rehearsal* "is a way of setting an exact sequence of events" (Richard Schechner, op. cit., p. 222.)

<sup>66</sup> A. E. Green, op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

close similarities between the British mumming and, for example, the Anatolian folk drama.<sup>68</sup>

In England, and elsewhere where the phenomenon can be found, mumming plays have been collected and recorded in a great number of articles and in a few books and theses. According to Margaret Dean-Smith, in her article "An Unromantic View of the Mummers' Play", the interest in the Play probably began in England in the early nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup>

However, it is important to mention that such works, chiefly those written by the older English scholars, commonly reflect a strong class-oriented point of view. On the other hand, they always focus on the texts of the plays having "largely ignored the players", as notes Henry Glassie. According to him, these first scholars were too shallow and narrow and used the texts "as prods to speculation about the early history of drama and ritual, but they (...) paid little attention to the play as performance, as the embodiment of intention, the vehicle for meaning".<sup>70</sup>

The origin of the Mummers' Play has commonly been attributed to ancient rituals of fertility which reach back to remote times. However, in spite of all the attempts that have been made, the origin of the Mummers' Play still remains obscure. It is possible to presume that it comes from remote times but there is not enough evidence to prove more than this.

The difficulty in tracing the origin of the British folk theatre has helped to create different opinions, and distinct theories through the years, trying to explain it.

---

<sup>68</sup> Alan Gailey, op. cit., p. 79.

This coincidence has been tackled by Carlo Gizburg, though not strictly focused on the drama.

<sup>69</sup> Margaret Dean-Smith, "An Unromantic View of the Mummers' Play", *Theatre Research*, vol. VIII, n. 2 (1966), p. 89.

<sup>70</sup> Henry Glassie, op. cit., p. xii.

In the first accounts of the Mummers' Plays, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they were seen as a survival of the mystery and morality plays, and the presence as a character of St. George, the patron saint of England, usually led people to think that the Play ought to find its origin in the legend of the saint.<sup>71</sup>

But Margaret Dean-Smith indicates that

"Nor did the antiquarians of those days look farther afield to see that the same play, i.e. the same *action* occurred all over Southern Europe, nor consider that the crude text familiar to them, and which they dignified as an example of 'Old English' or pre-Shakespearean drama was immaterial, a mere local clothing of a prescribed action, as a liturgy clothes an act of worship. They remained unaware that sometimes no text exists, that the participants may be variously named, or not named at all; or that the episode they associated with St. George, either as dragon-slayer or miraculous intervener in the Crusades, is only part of a larger play in which is primitively figured the life-cycle of man from the cradle to maturity, from marriage to death, from death to resurrection. A few, more advanced theorists did, however, propose that the Play represented a battle between summer and winter."<sup>72</sup>

Later in the nineteenth century, it was suggested that the Mummers' Plays would probably be a remnant of ancient religious belief and practice.

---

<sup>71</sup> Indeed, St. George appears in the majority of the plays. His cult was brought to England by the Crusaders; his legend tells that, after being tortured and broken on the wheel into ten pieces, he dies and is restored to life by the Archangel Michael. Thus, he became a death-and-revival hero, as happened also to Osiris, Dionysus and Orpheus.

<sup>72</sup> Margaret Dean-Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

Henry Glassie, mentioning the poet W. B. Yeats who stated that "he could track any good modern folk expression back to classical times", says,

"The anthropologists and folklorists of the nineteenth century could not help but be affected by the romantic philosophies announced with such fury and beauty by thinkers like William Morris. Parts of the romantic message they left aside. Other parts they connected with the prevailing scientific concern of evolution and built into a theory of survival. Foreign societies were viewed as relics from man's social beginnings. Folk arts were viewed as relics of prehistoric spirituality. We call these old thinkers the survivalists and could leave them on their antiquarian perches high in our family tree, were it not for the survival of their ideas within modern works on mumming."<sup>73</sup>

One of the first scholars interested in the Mummers' Play was E. K. Chambers. In his book, *The English Folk-Play*, he affirms that the traditional text of the Play is based on *Famous Historie of the Seaven Champions of Christendom*, an Elizabethan romance in prose, written by Richard Johnson (1596/1597).<sup>74</sup>

Chambers was not the only one to relate the Mummers' Play to Johnson's sixteenth-century romance. But Margaret Dean-Smith makes this point clear:

"... not only would it be an extraordinary feat to reduce *The Famous Historie* to the compass of a doggerel play lasting a few minutes, but a comparison between the 'plot' of the chap-book and the succession of tales

---

<sup>73</sup> Henry Glassie, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>74</sup> E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 192.



in the *Historie* shows that there is no tale resembling the plot of the Combat fragment."<sup>75</sup>

In the view of Chambers, whose vision of the Play is that of "a rudimentary literary text",<sup>76</sup> the text was corrupted under the influence of the drama of the period. But, he thinks, there are more features of the Mummers' Play than can be found in Richard Johnson or in the plays that could have influenced its text. These would be, for instance, the appearance of the Fool, the Woman or the Doctor and his Cure, which might point to the possibility of a remoter origin.<sup>77</sup>

However, he does not go any further than to make a few suggestions of such ancient origin in the last chapter of his book.

Tiddy, who died before finishing his work on the Mummers' Plays, and had his incomplete notes published posthumously, in 1923, whilst considering them as "degenerate and undeveloped", recognised "traces of a ritual origin"<sup>78</sup> in the Mummers' Plays.

In this he joined a growing number of scholars who accepted the theory of the ritual origin of the Mummers' Plays, which was based on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. In this work, says Margaret Dean-Smith, "Frazer presented the conception of the Dying God, whether he were Adonis, Osiris, Dionysos or Christ, who, in order to bring about renewal and redemption must himself die by violence, and by supernatural means be resurrected to a new cycle of life."<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Margaret Dean-Smith, "The Lyfe-Cycle Play or Folk-Play: Some Conclusions Following the Examination of the Ordish Papers and Other Sources", *Folklore*, vol. 69, December (London, 1958), p. 248.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret Dean-Smith, "An Unromantic View of the Mummers' Play", p. 90.

<sup>77</sup> E. K. Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>78</sup> R. J. E. Tiddy, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>79</sup> Margaret Dean-Smith, "An Unromantic View of the Mummers' Play", p. 90.

For her, comparative religion together with Greek ethics and drama, which were subjects of great interest at that time, "reiterating that magic and religion are one", conferred on the English folk theatre "the conception of a magico-religious observance expected to benefit those assisting at its performance."<sup>80</sup>

This would be reinforced by other scholars, <sup>such</sup> as R. M. Dawkins, A. J. B. Wace, Gilbert Murray, Jane Ellen Harrison, Arthur Pickard-Cambridge and Francis MacDonald Cornford, whose works would be of great importance in conferring credibility to this theory.

The seasonal nature of the performance of the Mummers' Plays, as well as the presence of a combat and of a death and resurrection in their plot, were the basic elements to link the English folk theatre to some sort of primitive ritual performance.

As says E. T. Kirby,

"Lying between the higher forms and the basic ur-ritual, the folk plays have been understood as fragments, phases of this original ritual from which its form might be inferred and reconstructed. It was believed that the archetypal ritual drama had presented, in its various aspects, the 'life-history of a year-god or fertility-*daimon*' (Harrison), the death and resurrection of this figure relating to the change in seasons. Summary of this type of interpretation is Theodor Gaster's definition of the mummers' play as 'a survival of the primitive Ritual Pattern, combining the twin

---

<sup>80</sup> Margaret Dean-Smith, "An Unromantic View of the Mummers' Play", p. 90.

In this regard, Alan Gailey argues that "there is no reason to assume that these myths were the sources from which our recent customs ultimately grew. On the contrary, for example, the worship of Dionysus and all its attendant myths was probably an attempt at rationalising older folk beliefs by a culture moving away from the superstitious circumstances of early society" ( Alan Gailey, *op. cit.*, p. 80).

elements of (a) the Combat of the Seasons and (b) the Death-and-Resurrection of the god of fertility'.<sup>81</sup>

But Kirby does not agree with this theory and has become its main opponent. Contradicting what he calls "a fiction, a romanticization and, in method and its application, an egregious error of considerable consequence", he emphasises the cure and not the combat as the basic element in the performance. He assumes that the English folk theatre derives from shamanism. More precisely, he thinks that "the performances derive from two functions of the shaman; the mummers' play from his curing session or séance, the related hobby-horses dances from the trance dances at which he officiated."<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, despite his inflamed but sometimes reasonable argumentation, the theory of the fertility rite survival continues to be the most widely approved in English studies of the plays.

The publication of the book *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland*,<sup>83</sup> in 1969, a collection of essays which focuses on the Christmas Mumming tradition in Newfoundland, with a new approach on the subject, encouraged the Mummers' Play to be seen through a more socially oriented point of view. About this work Thomas Pettitt says: "Folk-drama scholarship, meanwhile, shaking itself free of the post-Frazerian obsession with ritual origins, has at last addressed itself directly to the social dimensions of the

---

<sup>81</sup> E. T. Kirby, "The Origin of the Mummers' Play", *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 84, n. 333 (1971), p. 275.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

Referring to the paper by Kirby, Glassie states that it "opens with an attack on the usual Frazerian interpretation, only to replace it with another survivalistic explanation" (Henry Glassie, op. cit., p. 171).

<sup>83</sup> Herbert Halpert and G. M. Story (eds.), *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

phenomenon, a trend largely inspired by a pioneering Canadian multi-discipline approach to the Christmas customs of Newfoundland."<sup>84</sup>

A. E. Green, in a review of *The English Mummers and Their Plays*, by Alan Brody, which he says "is a classical example of that old fault in folklore scholarship, the inability to discuss traditional phenomena except as relics of usually putative earlier traditional phenomena", <sup>85</sup> thinks that there are many new questions waiting for an answer. For him, a book such as *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* contains "suggestions for techniques of investigation which may release us all from the hackneyed, worn-out ideas of a former age of scholarship."<sup>86</sup>

The problem, for Green, is that "The idea seems to be that just back around the corner lies an integrated, unchanging society, in which these things have a meaning which is apparent to the meanest observer."<sup>87</sup>

To which he adds,

"In fact, if we could get back round the corner, we would certainly find that once more we were faced with relics of even earlier forms; on this ground alone the theory of 'survival in culture' has long since stood discredited, and it is depressing to find it, like St. George and the Turkish Knight, resurrected yet again."<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Pettitt, " 'Here Comes I, Jack Straw:' English Folk Drama and Social Revolt", *Folklore*, vol. 95, i (London, 1984), p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> A. E. Green, Review of the book *The English Mummers and Their Plays*, by Alan Brody, *English Dance and Song*, vol. XXXIV, n. 3 (London, 1972), p. 118.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

For Glassie, given the times of such scholars, "it is no surprise that the survivalists spent their energies hunting origins and were unable to make sense of the drama as it existed in their day", for whatever its original setting, mumming made sense, as well as, "in its most recent setting it made sense too". The point is that, he believes, they "made up the original mummers to look very much like themselves" and they preferred to "invent nicer actors for the play", for they felt that the peasants who were performing the play in their times, "were dull and incapable of understanding their own actions", while "the original players were contemplative and logical."<sup>89</sup>

However, notes Glassie, the survivalists of our day or Yeats' not only eliminated the performers from their studies, but also attacked the play, which is made apparent by the use of words such as "fragmentary", "nonsensical", "garbled", "undeveloped", "puerile", "incoherent", "corrupt" and "degenerate" to characterise the play, expressions that were products of their "elitist ethic" and their "realistic aesthetic". So, viewed "from the tower of their taste" mumming would really look like a fragment of a fuller work, although it be in fact "a fragment of spatial, temporal, and mental continuities" which exists, simultaneously, "as an object in itself", that is, "a separable whole with its own phenomenal integrity".<sup>90</sup>

For him, instead of "the detritus of a long realistic drama", the modern mumming "would be better seen as an intensification, a perfection - a streamlining". If in the past the play "told the whole story of a human life", today even the shortest of its variants is "a concentration upon life's central mystery: death".<sup>91</sup>

Peter Harrop, studying a folk play performed in Bampton, Oxfordshire, asks,

---

<sup>89</sup> Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

"What conclusions might we begin to draw from this brief consideration of a particular tradition? Why has this tradition been revived four times? Why should a group of men, their ages spanning forty years, maintain this tradition? What is it that unites a schoolboy with a cowman, a factory inspector with a farmer, and causes them to act out the Bampton play on one night of each year? It is clear, whatever scholars may once have had us believe, that they do not consider themselves to be acting out some ancient pagan rite. On the other hand, equally clearly, there is more to this than mere enjoyment. Otherwise why should men with numerous other commitments feel the urge to rush round on Christmas Eve performing an old play for modern audiences? By implication the tradition must surely have some meaning, and a meaning that may well have existed for over a hundred years."<sup>92</sup>

That the English folk play, as well as other forms of folk theatre in other countries, has its origin in ancient times, coming from religious and ritual practices, seems to be credible.

But, naturally, this former condition is not what has given support to maintain the tradition alive. And, if it is not the magico-religious observance anymore or if it is not merely for entertainment, what does motivate these players and their audiences everywhere? It is time to find an answer.

As Harrop stresses, the "overriding concern with questions of origin and distribution of the phenomenon has led to a neglect of equally important social and functional concerns."<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Peter Harrop, "Mumming in Bampton", *Folk Life*, vol. 18 (Cardiff, 1980), p. 46.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Susan Pattison, studying the Antrobus Soulcaiking Play, gave us an interesting article in which she also argues against the search for a ritual origin and underlines the need to consider its contemporary meaning.<sup>94</sup>

She found so many changes in the way of life of those who perform the Antrobus Soulcaiking Play, that she deduced:

"In the face of these profound social changes it has seemed inadequate and fruitless to consider The Soulcaiking Play as a vestige of some archetypal 'Lyfe-cycle Play', an interpretation which has prevailed up to date. However much its origins may have been connected with pre-Christian fertility ritual (and there is no historical evidence for its existence before 1685) this is clearly not what gives the play its undeniable vitality today, in an essentially non-farming community."<sup>95</sup>

She points out the comic nature of the performance as "one aspect of the Mummers' Play which those who see the play as a celebration of the 'life-cycle' have been at a loss to explain".<sup>96</sup> And this would certainly be the motive for its underemphasis in the majority of the studies on the subject.

For her, both the ceremony and the comedy serve two purposes. One is that, while laughing at the characters, the audience gets to cope with "feelings which might produce conflict destructive to the community";<sup>97</sup> the other, which she thinks is the most important, is a moral one:

---

<sup>94</sup> Susan Pattison, "The Antrobus Soulcaiking Play: An Alternative Approach to the Mummers' Play", *Folk Life*, vol. 15 (Cardiff, 1977), p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

"The characters represented in the Antrobus Soulcaking Play fail to conform to the community's code of conduct and are consequently outsiders. Exaggeration and ridicule condemns their ways of life and so the central community and its norms are reinforced."<sup>98</sup>

Thus,

"By turning out every year as their fathers and grandfathers did before them, wearing the clothes they wore and performing their play, the Soulcakers are resurrecting their ancestors' values. The maintenance of a sense of community is, then, the central function of the play."<sup>99</sup>

But, while the maintenance of a sense of community remained central to the play, she notes that because of the rapid social change that took place in Antrobus, a new element was introduced into Soulcaking, changing slightly its function. This new element was reunion, which converts the Soulcaking Play to a "unifying factor for a group of men."<sup>100</sup>

Seeing the Antrobus Soulcaking Play as vital for both performers and audience, with strong emotional force for them, she suggests that it is necessary to understand the tradition as it is now, instead of being conjectural about probable fertility ritual origins.<sup>101</sup>

Concluding her valuable study, she calls our attention to the fact that

"... the motivation behind and the response to the Mummers' Play will vary from place to place and time to time, and that in order to make any step forward in our understanding we must abandon the impulse towards a single interpretation which will explain all examples of the play's

---

<sup>98</sup> Susan Pattison, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.



performance. Each occurrence of the tradition must be studied in the context of the community in which it occurs and by reference to those taking part. By looking for tenuous clues to an understanding of the Mummers' Play in the past we risk missing the valuable concrete evidence available to us in the present."<sup>102</sup>

The players of the English folk play do not perform nowadays for the same religious reasons that must have motivated their ancestors. So, it is time to ask: why do they continue to perform it?

For several scholars of the Mummers' Play, the answer to this question will only be found if we analyse the relationship between the play and each community in which it is performed, that is to say, if we enter "the space between the people and their play" and interpret each "in terms of the other".<sup>103</sup>

Barry James Ward, in his study of the English folk theatre, written in 1972, disagreed with the early critics of the Mummers' Play, who supported the Life-Cycle theory, because these saw the English society as totally integrated and static. Today, he says, with the increasing urbanisation, they tend to be "less homogeneous and well integrated".<sup>104</sup> For him,

"The small kinship groups and villages which performed the Play no longer are the close-knit, permanent social organizations they once were. The social and physical mobility attendant upon the relentless urbanization of the English countryside has made it easier for the performers of Folk Plays to alter their values, their ideologies, their culture, because they are

---

<sup>102</sup> Susan Pattison, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>103</sup> Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>104</sup> Barry James Ward, *A Functional Approach to English Folk Drama* (The Ohio State University: PhD thesis, 1972), p. 185.

provided with many new alternatives from which to choose. The associative groups of men who now perform the Folk Play do so because, like members of political parties and other voluntary organizations, they continue to support the basic values of the group."<sup>105</sup>

Thus, Ward observes, for any team that performs the play at present, there are specific values and objectives. He mentions, for instance, what he saw at Antrobus, where "an antiquarian sense of the past prevailed", and at Bampton, where "the Play's relation to the village's middle-class values and the way in which the townspeople exploited it are central".<sup>106</sup>

In his analysis of the play he distinguishes three functional levels: personal, social, and cultural. In the personal level he underlines the play as entertainment; as a unique vehicle of expression not only during the performance itself but also through all the events that are related to it; as a means to the achievement of esteem and recognition from those who are "socially superior"; and as what he calls the "Pastoral Perspective", that is, the awareness of audience and performers that "they are taking a backward glance to a 'simpler' time in performing and being part of the audience of the Play" and, in the case of revivalist teams as the Coventry Mummers, or of folklorists and many academicians, that it is "a way of exploring an experience alien to themselves (...) a way of knowing another way of life by assuming a role". At the social level, he sees the play as providing cohesion "for small groups within the community who come to identify with its performance" and as "an outlet for social criticism". He also emphasises the collection of food or money, which has been frequently tied to charity, as being still an economic motive for the performance, as well as the violence, which is now "domesticated" and no longer can be

---

<sup>105</sup> Barry James Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

seen as the a-social behaviour that it was formerly, and the "atmosphere of licence and freedom from social restraints" that characterise the folk performance. Finally, he points to the "underlying conservatism" inherent in the play as its cultural function, whose durability is dependent upon "how long actors and audience believe in the myth of historical continuity, how long they look to the past for authority as an ethical model". He states: "In every performance the English Folk Play serves to validate the culture by celebrating the continuity of the present with the past, thereby reaffirming the present. It reaffirms the status quo each time it is presented."<sup>107</sup>

In his article on the Marshfield Paper Boys, Simon Lichman notes that in that area the essence of community life was being threatened "by the forces of change". So, the gentry and the mummers should "work together". There, the gentry is now included as an integral sector in defining and reinforcing the community. He says,

"It is significant that the mummers no longer demand largesse from the gentry, the donation comes now from the stranger. It is no coincidence that the collection money is used to help local charities.

Villagers believe the process of change to be the result of urban-based economic and political influence. The mummers are demonstrating to the outside world their discontent at this modernization process which has led, for example, to the standardization of hitherto local products and services. This demonstration takes the form of the symbolic re-creation of the past village and its community."<sup>108</sup>

In the past, the gentry were visited in their homes and had to pay for their social dominance by donating to the mummers' collection, says Lichman. But the Marshfield

---

<sup>107</sup> Barry James Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-195.

<sup>108</sup> Simon Lichman, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

Paper Boys do not question the status quo of village society and they also do not emphasise class tension by a socially uncontrolled behaviour, as do other teams of mummers.

On the other hand, as their audience comprises many strangers who have come "for the most part, from the outlying towns" and who are equated with the process of change, their performance can be pointed as "an example of the continued resistance to modernization" serving to reinforce "the villager's sense of their community". He then reminds: "We must remember that this drama *is* a bloody story, the sword being brandished at you". So, the stories "provide the mummers with archetypes who serve as examples that validate performance in the play, giving a rationale for its existence in the community".<sup>109</sup>

In his PhD thesis, Peter Harrop, using a semiotic approach, tries to correct what he calls the failure of the earlier scholarship on the English folk theatre, which is merely formalistic.<sup>110</sup> For Harrop, the basic aim is not only its dramatic form but also its social function.

He thinks that there was a great waste of time trying to place the meaning of the custom in a remote and obscure past, instead of searching the contemporary meaning of these plays. A meaning that, according to him, "lies not only in the content of the plays but in their mode of performance; not solely in the action of the plays but in the contrast between the action and other elements of the performance".<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Simon Lichman, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

<sup>110</sup> Glassie also agrees that the study of forms has superseded the study of meanings in the folk theatre. He says: "Since meanings vary without end and since so much of meaning lies unavailable to scrutiny in the deep unconscious, some scholars have studied forms and acts as if they were not vehicles for meaning, limiting their work to orderly descriptions of sensate phenomena". Then, "to get beyond description to explanation, we will have to suppose a tradition's performers to be volitional, intelligent beings and we will have to take our task to be the clarification of the principles that give a tradition significance" (Henry Glassie, op. cit., pp. 94-95).

<sup>111</sup> Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays: A Study in Dramatic Form and Social Function* (University of Leeds, Institute of Dialect and Folklife Studies: PhD thesis, 1980), p. 464.

His study really throws light on the contemporary meaning of the English folk play, the reason why it needs further consideration here.

Seeing the folk play as an artistic artefact, he shows that there is an inter-relationship between the various aspects of folk play performance (setting, action, *dramatis personae*, acting style, costume and properties, taken as "separate sets of signs") and the resultant internal meaning of the several traditions focused in his work, namely, those performed at Antrobus, Bampton, Chipping Campden, Ripon and Uttoxeter. His aim is to demonstrate that "the external meaning of the English folk play (...) may incorporate both the internal meaning and the function of the play".<sup>112</sup>

He, thus, points out that the English folk play, in contrast to many dramatic genres, "can operate on three distinct levels, all of which are present in any single performance". Such levels or "modes of performance", which he recognises are sometimes ambiguous, he names *real* (which has no relation with the usual theatrical notion of realism), *representational* and *presentational*, using these terms "in a very particular manner".<sup>113</sup>

In short, the *real* aspects are "autonomous events which represent nothing beyond themselves, although they are bounded in time and space by the rest of the performance", as happens with the stealing of the beer by Beelzebub at Antrobus or the knocking on the door by the old man (Letter-In) at the beginning of the same performance. The *representational* elements are those that "aim at the recognizable depiction of events such as fighting and healing" and "are concerned with action in the accurate dramatic sense". The *presentational* ones are those that "do not depict a sequence of action and neither are

---

<sup>112</sup> Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays...*, p. 435.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

(...) real", as the mimetic and monologous non-interactive characters, such as Beelzebub and Dairy Doubt.<sup>114</sup>

So, "the performance of the folk play takes place within a range of three distinct modes of performance" and "various aspects of the drama relate in particular ways to these modes". In it, "the setting (...) falls within the real mode, the action within the representational mode, and the *dramatis personae* within the real, representational and presentational modes. Costumes and properties are seen to be either real or representational."<sup>115</sup>

According to Harrop, any other signification derived from these aspects is supposed to be related to the external and not the internal meaning of the plays.

The point is that the folk play "contains a series of balanced movements between the real world, the representation of action, and the presentation of the inconsequential and the illogical. There is little sense of plot or narrative yet there is an amazing degree of shape and coherence."<sup>116</sup>

So, unlike the sophisticated or conventional theatre, the folk theatre offers not only an imaginative experience for the spectators, but also a "locally specific juxtaposition of varying levels of reality" (and, in this sense, it is also sophisticated), which "is both reassuring and alarming, celebratory and threatening, playful and anti-social".<sup>117</sup>

The internal meaning of the folk play, "which explains the widespread and historical popularity of the genre", is expressed then, at the representational level by its concern "with the contrast between the intense psychological and physical dangers of life and the

---

<sup>114</sup> Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays...*, pp. 436-437.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 469.

idealized hope of miraculous intervention"; at the presentational level by the parody of the most inconsequential and illogical aspects of an essentially mundane and banal existence". What, in content and expression, makes one contrast with the other, is "on the one hand the rigour of spiritual fears and necessities, on the other the absurdity of everyday life". Also

"Not only is this sophisticated contrast achieved with great economy of form, but a second contrast exists whereby the representational and presentational modes are framed by the real world which encompasses, both literally and metaphorically, the tragedy and comedy inherent in the action and presentation of folk play performances."<sup>118</sup>

Following this, Harrop examines the relationship between internal and external meaning and social function. First of all, he clarifies that internal meaning refers to "analogous patterns inherent in the performance of the folk play"; that the social function "is simply the purpose it fulfils, if any, for members of a community, whether this be the performers alone or the community at large"; while the external meaning "refers to the perceptions and conceptions most generally held by those associated with a particular tradition". His conclusion is that "each of the five traditions studied has a different social function, these functions being interpreted as conveying three distinct kinds of external meaning".<sup>119</sup>

At Bampton and Antrobus he saw the maintenance of tradition and the collection of money for charity as the external meaning, while at Campden it is "no more and no less than that of a cabaret", for its social function, which "is apparent to few people and is probably important to only a handful", remains obscure. Also, being restricted to a family, the reception by the audience cannot be foreseen. So, in Campden, where the play is more

---

<sup>118</sup> Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays...*, pp. 469-470.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 471.

conventionally dramatic than are the others, there is no correlation between social function and external meaning. There, the play is confined to a man, Mr. Jack Tones, and his sons, as performers, serving to the pride of a father and to the reinforcement of family ties.

For the social function at Antrobus, Harrop points to the celebration of a community, for they generally perform outside of the village, only performing there twice a season. There, the play "is a reiteration of community for outsiders". But, at Bampton, it is the celebration for a community, for it is never performed outside the village itself. Hence, it is "a reiteration of community for that community".<sup>120</sup>

Says Harrop,

"Although the form is traditional, it clearly has contemporary appeal. Both the Antrobus Soulcakers and the Bampton Mummers are currently capable of providing enthusiastic audiences with successful community theatre, in a very literal sense, and in doing so are able to contribute to a variety of charities. Both traditions clearly function in a socially useful manner and have an accessible external meaning which audiences can grasp."<sup>121</sup>

However, Ripon and Uttoxeter did not adapt themselves to current expectations, says Harrop. Their performance is inflexible, with no textual improvisation, and the performers, due to their seriousness and to the fact that they are not interested in establishing a good relationship with the audience, instil more antipathy than sympathy. Moreover, they are distant from the contemporary notion of dramatic representation. Thus they are both in decline today and, although their players state that their aim is "to please the population of the town and to continue the tradition as long as they can fulfil this aim", they do not

---

<sup>120</sup> Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays...*, pp. 472-477.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 474.



have much popularity these days. They now "appear anachronistic in a contemporary context and serve to fulfil a specific rather than a communal function".<sup>122</sup>

Coming to an end, Harrop shows the relation between dramatic form and social function, which can be seen in the current social viability reflected in their respective degrees of popularity, and that is linked to the communitarian sense of these performances and to the vehicle used to convey its social ends, that is, the "relatively orthodox and clearly comic drama", that is found at Antrobus and Bampton.<sup>123</sup>

This is the contrary of what happens at Uttoxeter and Ripon. There,

"To many people, brought up on television naturalism in a welfare state, a small group of men performing a barely recognizable drama, and begging, and taking themselves seriously to boot, may well be an uncomfortable if not downright embarrassing anachronism. Where it is apparent that the performers are unskilled, the temptation to avoid them or mock them may arise. When this happens, the tradition's existence may be threatened, simply because the audiences do not know how to respond to what they are watching and hearing."<sup>124</sup>

And, in the case of Campden, where exists no sense of anachronism, but where there is a humorous and entertaining performance, the play "has the potential for popularity but is under the control of a tradition bearer who is unwilling to face the possibility of a poor response". Then, instead of being performed in the town pubs, where the reception would certainly be enthusiastic, it is performed in expensive hotels, where "the audiences are

---

<sup>122</sup> Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays...*, pp. 478-480.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 482.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 483.

unaware of the function the play fulfils for Jack Tones and would surely be embarrassed if they were not".<sup>125</sup>

If at Antrobus and Bampton there is much popular support, emphasises Harrop, it is because their performances have "a more acceptable dramatic form" that is "utilized to fulfil two socially acceptable functions...".<sup>126</sup>

Thus, the performance of the five traditionalist teams studied by Harrop presented two different dramatic forms: one conforming to the popular taste, and the other rather unpopular. The first of them is being strengthened by the fulfilment of a popular function; the second one, which is characteristically using declining performance modes that are far from the contemporary taste and are inaccessible for the audiences, tries to fulfil a social function which is seen as anachronistic by the onlookers.

His conclusion is that " the localized social function and perceived external meanings of specific English folk plays have affected the form of those plays, and that the form of those plays has in turn affected their social function and external meaning ...".<sup>127</sup>

Studying the Christmas mumming in the Ballymenone district, southern County Fermanagh - Northern Ireland, which is no longer performed, Henry Glassie saw that its purposes were chiefly to gather money, to entertain and "to hold a fragmented community together".<sup>128</sup>

Glassie says that although the romantic dislike of the money economy on the part of the folklorists, which makes them "generally exile commerce from their concepts, and become upset when folk arts involve remunerative return", looking upon the players' collection

---

<sup>125</sup> Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays...*, p. 483.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 484.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

"as a recent addition to the magical ~~mine~~", the *quête* has not been the strongest reason for the performance of the play but has always been an important motive. If in other places money is sometimes used for the purpose of charity, in that part of Ireland it was used to purchase food and drink.

Larger than the economic goal was that of entertainment. Although scholars have underestimated this in their explanations of culture, Glassie remarks that for people "whose days pass in rough work, an occasional break for enjoyment is not a trivial matter" and "makes a hard life endurable".<sup>129</sup>

But the most relevant of its functions would have been that of helping to hold the community together. Asked about the subject, one of the old Irish mummers who were interviewed by Glassie answered: "Aye surely. It was to bring unity amongst them and to show the opposite number that there was no harm in them".<sup>130</sup>

Although in general the mummers were Catholics, some Protestants "might travel along with them" and "they went to Protestant homes as well as Catholic ones..."<sup>131</sup> However, "At a Roman Catholic home St. Patrick was seen to defeat St. George<sup>132</sup> but in a Protestant kitchen, using the same words, King William always defeated King James".<sup>133</sup>

For Glassie's informant, the mummers "broke down a lot of barriers" and "changed public opinion altogether". He thinks that "If the mummin had spread - if people had

---

<sup>129</sup> Henry Glassie, *op.cit.*, pp. 122-125.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

Here we have a reference to the disastrous animosity between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, which has resulted in so many tragedies.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>132</sup> St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland. Faced with St. George, says Glassie, they personify the divisions of the Irish community (*Ibid.*, p. 133).

<sup>133</sup> Alan Gailey, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

become more mixed - it [the conflict] really wouldn't have developed as it has at the present time", and Glassie seems to agree with him when says that in the days of the mummers "people got along better together".<sup>134</sup>

Even though Gailey has stated that the folk plays are still performed in some Irish districts,<sup>135</sup> Glassie observes that mumming is now illegal (it requires permission from the police to be performed) and "there is no chance for Catholics and Protestants to interact". The hostilities have increased, with bombs, barricades, suspicions and bad feelings turned into a routine in the life of <sup>Northern</sup> Ireland, notes Glassie, where "Schools, sports - Catholics play Gaelic football, Protestants soccer - and bars are as religiously distinct as houses of worship".<sup>136</sup>

His conclusion is that the Irish mumming "was the expression of a system of values that endured for centuries and has only recently failed" and that the modern function of the play is "entertainment and the encouragement of community feelings. For people who work hard, who live together but who are kept apart by personality, faith, and politics, those are neither trivial nor degenerate needs".<sup>137</sup>

Summarising the current state of scholarship, we can say that the ritual origin of the Mummers' Play is presumably true, but in practice it is impossible to prove nowadays, due to the great length of time during which no documents or concrete evidence are available.

~~However, (if we agree with it, we need to be aware that, after so many centuries, so many interferences and, overall, such radical alterations experienced by human society, it would be reasonable to take into account that.~~ <sup>This can summarise the process</sup> <sup>by making</sup> the following points:

<sup>134</sup> Henry Glassie, op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>135</sup> Alan Gailey, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>136</sup> Henry Glassie, op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., pp. 139 and 135.

- . The origin of these forms of folk theatre is believably connected with ancient beliefs and religious ceremonies;
- . Such orientation has changed as time has gone by, and what remains of its primitive nature today is almost imperceptible;
- . Although the plays have lost their primordial magico-religious character, their ritualistic nature has survived. The difference is that now it is no longer a ritual of religious relationships, but a ritual of social relationships;
- . The persistence of this folk theatre, as well as the appearance of similar forms in so many distant and different cultures is not only because of a possible common origin, or due to a simple question of traditionalism and conservativeness from those who perform such theatre. It is perhaps much closer to a deep and unconscious need which is probably the basis of all creative process and artistic achievement.<sup>138</sup>
- . In spite of the simplicity of these forms of folk theatre, of their derivation from religious ceremonies in the remote past, and of any other elements which can be taken to contradict their artistic and theatrical nature,<sup>139</sup> such performances are undoubtedly theatrical works of art, that is, "theatre which the folk perform, although unaware that they are performing theatre."<sup>140</sup>

The players in folk theatre perform because they have needs, wishes, and dreams to express; because they want to interact with other people and to come close to them;

---

<sup>138</sup> See C. G. Jung, *Man, Art, and Literature*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>139</sup> As it is stressed by authors such as Anthony Barrant, who only considers their aspects of entertainment and recreation; or Alex Helm, who only takes into account the ritual aspect (See Anthony G. Barrant, *Six Fools and a Dancer* (Plainfield-VT: Northern Harmony, 1991) and Alex Helm, op. cit.).

<sup>140</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste* (São Paulo: São Paulo, 1966), p. 22.

because they want to express their own vision of the community to which they belong; and because they want to release an unusual behaviour, which, supported by comedy and by the fact that what is being seen is not the reality but just a performance, a representation, which can be easily accepted and assimilated by their audience.

These seem to be the main reasons that motivated the mummers, during past centuries, to brave "the chilly lanes" of winter, rambling from house to house, to brighten country kitchens at Christmas "with a comical drama" that was "compact, poetical and musical", and "introduced an antic crew and carried one character through death and resurrection".<sup>141</sup> As they seem also to remain to be the principal and basic motives for the occurrence of such performances nowadays, notwithstanding their transformations and their cultural and geographical peculiarities.

Moreover,

"With its uncluttered geometry and free semantic, the mumming of recent years was far richer than the phantom the old scholars envisioned. It cannot be reduced to a tool that served some single purpose. It exists in itself as an art, and like any art it presents without answering profound philosophical problems".<sup>142</sup>

In fact, mumming exposes "the inner logic of fundamental contraries: male and female, life and death, hope and despair". Although not dissolving ambiguity in clear resolution, "in symbol and act, mumming has the power to ignite chain reactions of reference deep in its viewers' minds". Its essence is "the optimistic resolution of biological absolutes" but as it is an art, not a science, "it does not lie to people, pretending there are easy answers

---

<sup>141</sup> Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

when there are not". And if all ambiguity is removed, "the play is only entertainment - an intensification of the very best in day in day out existence".<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, p. 121..

## **Chapter 2**

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRAZIL**



## 2.1 - Brazil

"For thousands and thousands of years the vast land of Brazil, with its green and murmuring forests, its mountains and rivers, and the monotonous sound of the sea, remained unknown and nameless. Then suddenly on the evening of April 22, in the year 1500, several white sails appear on the horizon. Broad-beamed, heavy caravels, with the red cross of Portugal on their sails, draw nearer, and a few days later the first ship lies alongside the new shore."<sup>1</sup>

The passage above was written by the Austrian author Stefan Zweig as a tribute to Brazil. Zweig sailed for Brazil in 1941, trying to escape from the Nazi persecution or, in his own words, from "the war of all-against-all in our suicidal Europe".<sup>2</sup> He lived in Brazil until his death in the following year. There he had been for the first time in 1936 and had "received one of the most powerful impressions" of his life. Not only because of the magnificent landscapes but also because of what he called "quite a new kind of civilization". He confesses that his previous attitude toward the country had been as naïve, confused and narrow-minded as that of most Europeans and North Americans. But, after having been there, he seems to have been convinced that Brazil "is destined undoubtedly to play one of the most important parts in the future development of our world".<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Stefan Zweig, *Brazil: Land of the Future*, 2. ed., tr. Andrew St. James (London: Cassel, 1942), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3

Zweig's opinion is still shared by Brazilian and foreign scholars. Michael L. Conniff and Frank D. McCann, for instance, state that "researchers keep trying to portray Brazil to the world, for it is a country that each year grows in importance and will probably rank among the world's half dozen leading nations in the twenty-first century" (Michael L. Conniff and Frank D. McCann, "Introduction" in *Modern Brazil: Elites and Masses in Historical Perspective* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. ix.

Stretching from the Atlantic in the East to the Andes in the West, and from the Guiana Highland in the North to the Plata Basin in the South, Brazil, with its 8,547,403,5 km<sup>2</sup> is the world's fifth largest nation in the world, occupying nearly half of the continental land mass of South America.<sup>4</sup> With an outstanding diversity of climate and resources, Brazil has a topography that is mostly characterised by mountains, plateaux and plains, and most of its territory lies in the tropics.

The major part of its population<sup>5</sup> is concentrated in coastal areas, with a wide variety in density. Due to the importance of the Atlantic Ocean, which bathes 7,367 km of coastline, as a vital connection to the rest of the world, the Portuguese and their descendants remained at the littoral. It took a long time for them to slowly begin to penetrate the interior, and there is still a huge part of the country unexplored and unexploited.

Comprising five regions, North, North-East, East, South and Centre-West, and divided into twenty-six states and one Federal District, with its capital, Braslia, located on the central plateau of the country, Brazil presents one of the most extraordinary panoramas of natural contrasts and cultural diversities in the world. Each one of its regions has distinct physical characteristics, a different social development and its own cultural features, which grew out of the diverse influences that laid their bases.

With communities that are in general, with few exceptions, socially and culturally heterogeneous, there is a strong contrast between the urban and the rural population in Brazil. On the one hand, great modern industrial and cosmopolitan centres; on the other,

---

<sup>4</sup> Besides Guiana, Suriname and French Guiana, all the other South-American countries (Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela), which are Spanish-speaking countries, because they were colonised by Spain, border on Brazil. The only exceptions are Chile and Equador.

<sup>5</sup> The first official census taken in Brazil was in 1872. Then, there were 9,930,478 inhabitants. According to the census of 1991, it became 146,917,459 inhabitants and, in 1993, they were estimated to be 151,523,449.

isolated farms, plantations and small towns, which constitute two completely different social and material environments.

For a long time the discovery of Brazil was attributed to a coincidence provoked by adverse winds and waves. According to the legend, the Portuguese fleet under the command of Pedro Álvares Cabral, left Portugal intending to repeat the journey round the Cape of Good Hope towards India, which had been first taken by Vasco da Gama, and was sung by Luís de Camões in his epic poem, *Os Lusíadas* (Lusiads). So, if the ships suddenly arrived at the Brazilian coast instead of at the Cape of Good Hope, it would have been merely by chance.

However, the majority of the modern historians deny such coincidence. Although the documents that could prove it have disappeared during the earthquake that destroyed a great part of Lisbon in 1755, the Portuguese Crown probably knew about the existence of Brazil long before the official discovery in the far west, and even before Columbus had made his report on the discovery of America to the Spanish Crown. If they kept it as a secret, it must have certainly been for political reasons, for Portugal and Spain were in dispute over nautical explorations.<sup>6</sup>

Such a position has been supported not only by the fact that Cabral was being accompanied by Vasco da Gama's pilot, who knew the route well, but also by the report of the chronicler of the fleet, Pero Vaz de Caminha. This does not show any sign of surprise, as if the discovery were something that was already being expected.

It is also probable that other people had been in parts of the Brazilian territory before Cabral, as it was claimed by Spanish and French explorers. However, Cabral it was indeed

---

<sup>6</sup> In 1494 Spain and Portugal had divided their future colonies by signing the Treaty of Tordesillas, which had established a meridian situated 370 leagues west from the archipelago of Cape Verde.

who took possession of the land. So, the new nation has been considered as having entered into the history of the world in 22 April 1500.

The Portuguese, however, did not recognise at first the potential of the land. They only began the process of colonisation thirty years after the discovery, when they realised that they could lose the new possession to other countries.<sup>7</sup>

It was not easy for Portugal, since the first times of the colonisation of Brazil, and chiefly in the eighteenth century, to keep the land in safety from the greed of usurpers, such as the English and French corsairs and, mainly, from the Dutch, who settled in the North-East, first in Bahia (1624-1625), then in Pernambuco, from 1630 to 1654.<sup>8</sup>

After the war against the Dutch, the social and political conditions of the colony began to change deeply. Till then Portugal had only been interested in the occupation of the land, which was gradually taken from the Indians. The landowners had the real control over everything. As the Portuguese Crown did not seem interested in applying great expenses in Brazil for the profits would be little, its representatives in the colony were almost entirely passive in regard to the oppression exerted by the landowners on their subordinates and on the Indians.

As a matter of fact, the colonisation of Brazil was a very difficult task for Portugal. The Lusitanian kingdom, occupying a narrow band along the Atlantic littoral of the Iberian Peninsula, contained at the time barely a million and a half inhabitants. On the other hand,

---

<sup>7</sup> The first permanent Portuguese settlement was in 1532. They began exploiting the valuable red dyewood, called *pau-brasil* (red timber), which would give the name for the new colony (at first they had called it *Ilha de Vera Cruz*, because they thought it was an island), and was abundant in the narrow strip of thick tropical forest that fringed the coast. Only by the sixteenth century would begin the cultivation of the sugar cane, which was imported from the Azores.

<sup>8</sup> During the Dutch invasion, Portugal and Brazil were under the dominion of Spain (1580-1640). So, historians have pointed out the political misunderstanding that existed at that time between Holland and Spain as the motive of the invasions. But certainly it was also accompanied by the interest in the riches of the colony, such as the sugar, the gold and the wood, as it had been in the case of the other invaders.

it was also supporting the navigations to Africa and Asia. Thus, in population and resources it was not able enough to explore the vast territory of the new colony.<sup>9</sup>

However, in the second half of the seventeenth century, while the colony achieved a remarkable economic development, which was reinforced by the discovery of the mines of gold, Portugal had begun to decline and to see the end of its commercial empire. The commerce with the East had failed<sup>10</sup> and the losses were many, both in men and wealth. As the African colonies were only providing Portugal with the profits of the trade of slaves, which were not sufficient to support the kingdom, the Portuguese turned their interest to Brazil and its flourishing economy. They imposed on the colony a new policy, with severe restrictions upon commerce, in order to guarantee their own commercial activity, a policy that would chiefly ruin the powerful landowners, who gradually lost their political authority to the commercial bourgeoisie and to the Portuguese Crown. The former economic development and political autonomy of the colony, confronted with the new oppressive attitude from Portugal on both grounds, began to create the conditions for independence.

Some rebellions against the Portuguese Crown began to arise, among which the most important was the *Inconfidência Mineira* (The Conspiracy of Minas Gerais), from 1788 to 1792, which tried unsuccessfully to turn Brazil into a republic.<sup>11</sup>

But, unlike the other American colonies, whose independence came through violent wars, the Brazilian emancipation would be facilitated by the Portuguese monarchy itself.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> The Portuguese navigations and expansion throughout the fifteenth century, were not motivated by an excess of population, but only by the eagerness for profits of a commercial bourgeoisie who could not find them in the small Portuguese territory.

<sup>10</sup> It was taken by the Dutch and, later, by the English.

<sup>11</sup> Its leader, Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, known as *Tiradentes*, was the only conspirator to be executed (the others were sent to exile in Africa) and became a hero and martyr of Brazilian history.

In 1808, the Portuguese royal family, accompanied by an escort of nobles and dignitaries, was transferred to Brazil, to escape from the army of Napoleon. The transference to Rio de Janeiro would not only preserve the Crown, for Portugal was occupied by General Junot's troops on the following day, but would chiefly be a consequence of the strong influence of England over D. João VI, king of Portugal. For England, such a decision would "complete its traditional policy of economic absorption of the tiny Lusitanian Realm",<sup>13</sup> making easier its commerce with the colony.

Such an episode, however, would also mark a critical and decisive turning point in the Brazilian history and, mainly, prepare the bases for independence.<sup>14</sup> One of the first acts of D. João VI in Rio de Janeiro was the opening of the ports of Brazil to the commerce of all friendly nations, which put an end to the old commercial monopoly of Portugal which had been the foundation of its colonialism.

Hence, independence, which occurred on 7 September 1822, was pacific.<sup>15</sup> It was not a Revolution<sup>16</sup> but only a conservative passage, an agreement inside the dominant class.

---

<sup>12</sup> Also unlike the Spanish-speaking America, Brazil was the only country that was not politically fragmented after becoming independent, and that adopted a monarchic government. The motive for both points seems to be that the feudal structure of *latifúndia* which had been introduced in the colony was maintained by an agreement between the royal government and the dominant class.

<sup>13</sup> Caio Prado Júnior, *Evolução Política do Brasil e Outros Estudos*, 4. ed. (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1963), p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> D. João VI founded colleges of surgery and medicine in Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, a naval academy, a royal printing press, a public library, a bank and other important institutions which helped to modernise the new seat of the kingdom.

<sup>15</sup> Certainly motivated by the situation that had forced his exile from Europe, Stefan Zweig has stated that Brazil "has no desire to expand nor any imperialistic tendencies" and has hardly experienced war. He said: "With the exception of the Paraguay episode, which was senselessly provoked by a mad dictator, Brazil for more than a century has settled all border disputes by pacific agreement or through an international court of arbitration" (Stefan Zweig, *op. cit.*, p. 12).

<sup>16</sup> As says José Honório Rodrigues, "Conciliation rather than revolution has dominated Brazilian history". Moreover, even the manifestations of lack of conformity on the part of the Brazilian people, which have resulted in the very revolutions that have occurred, have generally been "confused expressions of popular demands and of attachment to personalities" (José Honório Rodrigues, *The Brazilians: Their*

The Brazilian constitutional empire, initiated by D. Pedro I, son of D. João VI, would end in 15 November 1889, when the Republic was proclaimed, once more without struggle or bloodshed and far from an effective participation of the people.<sup>17</sup>

As occurred in other parts of America, the conquerors of Brazil found several indigenous peoples who already lived in the land, although the Brazilian ones were less developed than the *Astecas*, from Mexico, the *Maias*, from Central America, or the *Incas*, from Peru and Bolívia who, in many aspects, had reached a very high stage of civilisation.

These natives,<sup>18</sup> who gave the Portuguese a kind reception, belonged to numerous tribes which were part of two big groups: the *Tupis* and the *Guaranis*. It is believed that the ancestors of this indigenous population probably migrated to the Western Hemisphere from Asia over forty thousands years ago, crossing to the Americas at the Bering Strait. But this is only one of several theories on the subject and none of them could ever be proved.

Their families of languages were numerous, but the Tupi-speaking peoples were the most important for the formation of Brazilian culture. As there was no unity among these Indians, the Europeans did not find much resistance and could easily dominate them.

During the colonisation, from the beginning till 1888, ruled by the need to secure a cheap supply of agricultural labour, for agriculture was the great economic activity of the colony, the Portuguese settlers had recourse to slavery, first of Indians and after 1530, of Negroes.<sup>19</sup> Then, when slavery was finally abolished (13 May 1888), after a long civil

---

*Character and Aspirations*, 2. ed., tr. Ralph Edward Dimmick (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 59).

<sup>17</sup> Even the Brazilian movements which could be labelled as revolutions can be characterised as temperate and isolated.

<sup>18</sup> In 1500 they probably were about three millions. Today they are less than 300,000.

<sup>19</sup> The Indians were ~~naturally~~ <sup>largely</sup> nomads. So, averse to the sedentary life of farming, they were not good labourers, and were frequently escaping. Moreover, the Portuguese Crown had laid down laws prohibiting

struggle and several rebellions among the black slaves,<sup>20</sup> they turned to immigration.<sup>21</sup>

But, as Portugal's colonial policy, till the end of the nineteenth century, was one of severe restriction of immigration, the bulk of the Brazilian population are descended from the three more important strains: the Portuguese colonists; the native Indians, by whose women they produced a mixed-blood offspring called *Mamelucos* or *Caboclos*; and millions of Negro slaves imported from Africa, by whose women they produced the *Mulatos*.<sup>22</sup>

However, after immigration started and until the present-day, numerous ethnic stocks have contributed racial elements to the composition of Brazilian population. Although these immigrants originate from a great number of different countries, most of them come from Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Syria, Lebanon and Japan. They have helped to make a still more diverse and heterogeneous racial make-up of

---

the "hunting" of Indians for slavery (1570) and, on the other hand, there was a strong opposition on the part of the Jesuits, who were politically very influential and were interested in keeping the monopoly of the Indian labour for themselves. Also the hunting and sale of Indians were profitable only for the settlers, while the black trafficking, on the contrary, became one of the most beneficial commercial activities for Portugal.

<sup>20</sup> The most famous example was the formation of *Quilombos*, groupings of slaves who had run away from the sugar mills, farms and mines. The most important of them was the *Quilombo dos Palmares*, in the state of Alagoas, which lasted from 1630 to 1694, gathering about 30,000 inhabitants, and whose leader, *Zumbi*, became a legend of martyrdom, a symbol of resistance.

<sup>21</sup> Officially it started in 1808 when the king D. João VI gave permission for the ownership of Brazilian lands by foreign people. His intention was both to facilitate the occupation of the South, avoiding it being taken by the Spanish, and to promote the "whitening" of the population who, at that time, was in the major part black.

<sup>22</sup> The Negro-Indian cross would produce the *Cafuzos*.

In regard to the cultural survivals of the Negro in Brazil, the greatest influences, according to Artur Ramos, came from: Sudanese Cultures (*Gegê-Nagô*) - *Yorubas*, *Ewes*, *Fantis* and *Ashantis*; Sudanese Cultures strongly influenced by Islam - *Haussás*, *Tapas*, *Mandingas*, *Fulahs*...; and Bantu Cultures - *Congo*, *Angola*, *Mozambique* (Artur Ramos, *O Negro na Civilização Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa do Estudante do Brasil, 1956), pp. 97-98).



the Brazilian population. But, indeed, the cultural influences from Portugal, the African heritage and the contributions from the multiple groups of Indians, have been the foundations of the Brazilian civilisation.

The unique Brazilian nationality and culture, shaped and fashioned by these different influences, are now composed by two distinct societies, according to José Honório Rodrigues. One, primarily urban and modern, as it is particularly evident in the South, presenting "a less stratified social structure and an amazing degree of social mobility"; the other, primarily rural and archaic, predominant in the North-East, preserving its traditional organisation. But,

"Despite the social differences, the two are closely knit, being united by the same national feeling and by other common values. They do not form separate cultures, but represent, rather, different stages of the same culture, separated by centuries. Positive and negative factors, the strength and the weakness of the basic Brazilian culture, are present in both societies. It was the early dissemination of the population of Brazil in the seventeenth century that resulted in the overall predominance of the basic Brazilian culture with its peculiar traditional characteristics, existing even today despite variations produced by urban technical change."<sup>23</sup>

The presence of different races in the composition of Brazilian society, however, even if we take into account the grievance of black slavery which lasted for so a long time, never produced any purely racial conflict. In 1964 the Brazilian scholar Vianna Moog stated that, in a general way, "the racial problem in Brazil, dissolved into the social, can be considered as being, if not solved, at any rate on the road to solution". Moreover, "when at times it attempts to revive, it no longer appears under the open and prickly form of the

---

<sup>23</sup> José Honório Rodrigues, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

racial issue, properly speaking, but as a function of class conflict, contrary to what occurs in the United States, where race conflicts exceed those of class, the latter tending to disappear". As a whole, Vianna Moog believed, Brazilians could be considered as being against racial prejudice, "not only because they do not believe in ethnic purity in absolute terms, but also because they refuse to accept racial superiority or inferiority as the exclusive or even preponderant explanation of the differences between civilizations".<sup>24</sup> On this subject, Stefan Zweig has stated that the Brazilian nation has been built for centuries "upon the principle of a free and unsuppressed miscegenation, the complete equalization of black and white, brown and yellow".<sup>25</sup>

This image of racial harmony has been supported by many people but, from the 1970s on, the myth of racial democracy in Brazil has been increasingly questioned and debated. If, in part, the two authors cited above were right, that the Brazilian race relations have never reached the segregation, the violence and the hatred that there is, for instance, in the United States, where urban riots, lynching and all sort of violent conflicts have become so common, what they have said also does not represent the entire truth. In fact, race and skin colour have been strong social barriers in Brazil, for the country is not completely free of racial discrimination. One evidence that has been frequently pointed out by the black movement, which arose in the last decades, is that, not only in the past but still now there have been few Brazilians of dark colour at the higher levels of society, which is amazing if we take into account the total amount of Negroes within the Brazilian

---

<sup>24</sup> Vianna Moog, *Bandeirantes and Pioneers*, tr. L. L. Barrett (New York: George Braziller, 1964), p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> Stefan Zweig, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

population.<sup>26</sup>

Although the Brazilian people themselves have emerged "as a radical political class" in the twentieth century,<sup>27</sup> the non-participation of the people in the big political events of the country would be repeated in many other episodes, which were followed by the dictatorship of the *Estado Novo* (New State), with Getúlio Vargas, from 1937 to 1945, and by the military *coup d'état*, in 1964, which installed political and cultural terror in the country.

The military coup of 1964 was indeed the most serious of all crises that Brazilian democracy has faced since the Republic was established. Attributing the economic and political problems that were affecting the nation to the civil government and interpreting the situation as the beginning of a revolutionary war, inspired by communism and by the Cuban revolution, "destined to install a syndicalist republic" in the country,<sup>28</sup> the military deposed the president João Goulart.<sup>29</sup> They would stay in power for twenty-one years, spreading fear, repression and persecution on everything and everybody who they thought to be leftist or nationalist. A repressive state that would be worsened in December 1968, with the promulgation of the Fifth Institutional Act, which conferred dictatorial powers on the military government.<sup>30</sup> But, besides its fascist character, the new government would

---

<sup>26</sup> They are still nearly half of the whole population.

The black movement has had a considerable growth and, sometimes, their actions have also been debatable, because of some exaggerations, certainly stimulated by the burden of centuries of dissembled discrimination.

<sup>27</sup> Octávio Ianni, *Crisis in Brazil*, tr. Phyllis B. Eveleth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> During the twentieth century, it has become frequent for the military to intervene in Brazilian political affairs, as a forceful power.

<sup>30</sup> Hence, Congress was disbanded, the state legislatures were closed down, the constitution was suspended, censorship was imposed and political rights and writs of habeas corpus were cancelled. From

also attach the country "to the international monopolist capitalism which was interested in the market enlargement, in the transference of obsolete technology and in the expansion of its profits...".<sup>31</sup>

The first significant political participation of almost the entire nation would happen with the national civic movement which campaigned for direct elections, by the end of the 1980s, as a step in the process of the restoration of democracy and freedom.

However, all the attempts which have been made after the military dictatorship to return the nation to democracy and to make modernisation and development a reality for the whole of the citizens, have been obstructed by the interests of corrupt politicians and of those who, inside the country, have been supporting the traditional oligarchies in power, as well as the interest of many international economic groups and imperialistic nations.

The situation has certainly been made worse by the fact that the educational system in Brazil has been faulty and that all attempts that have been made in search of a shift have usually been destroyed by governmental actions. It appears to be that the administrators in general do not have any interest in this sort of change, for the oligarchies to which they belong want to stay safely in their ruling positions. Thus, for centuries the educational system has not embraced the majority of the population of the country. An amazing number of adult people do not even know how to sign their names. A situation that has only helped to exclude them from political life and from the modernisation process, but keeps safe the interests of the minorities in power, the conservative classes which have

---

then on the number of people arrested increased, and many began to be tortured, killed or, simply, disappeared.

<sup>31</sup> Edécio Mostaço, *Teatro e Política: Arena, Oficina e Opinião* (São Paulo: Proposta, 1982), p. 75.

governed the nation for years, having their own prosperity and well-being, and not that of the people, as their priority.

## 2.2 - The North-East of Brazil

The colonial Brazilian society was formed through the sugar economy and the plantation system on which it was based. So, in spite of other groups and activities that also existed at that time, sugar, the *engenho* (sugar-mill) and slavery "played central roles in defining and shaping Brazilian society". It was a peculiar kind of society, which had inherited "classical and medieval concepts of organization and hierarchy", although it had added to them "systems of rank that grew from the differentiation of occupation, race, color, and status - distinctions resulting from the American reality". It was a society

"of multiple hierarchies of honor and esteem, of multiple categories of labor, of complex divisions of color, and of varied means of mobility and change; but it was also a society with a profound tendency to reduce complexities to dualisms of contrast - master/slave, noble/commoner, Catholic/gentile - and to reconcile the multiple rankings to one another so that rank, class, color, and civil status tended to converge in each individual".<sup>32</sup>

In terms of Latin America, today, Brazil can be comparatively seen as a rich country which has experienced a considerable development in this century. However, while the smallest part of its population constitutes a wealthy elite, to whom all privileges have been assured, the majority of its inhabitants are still far from the most simple of such

---

<sup>32</sup> Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 245-246.

privileges and even from the minimum elements that are indispensable to secure their daily survival. A situation that is extremely noticeable in the North-East of the country, where live nearly a third of the Brazilian population (43,792,133 inhabitants), on a total area of 1,561,177,8 km<sup>2</sup>.

The North-East, which comprises nine states (Bahia, Sergipe, Alagoas, Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, Piauí and Maranhão)<sup>33</sup> is one of the most discussed but least known geographic regions of the country, according to Manuel Correia de Andrade.<sup>34</sup> Only a few specialists in the field of the social and natural sciences have researched and analysed its specific problems.

In these works, the North-East is seen through different focuses. One looks at it as an area of constant drought; other, as an area of extensive sugar cane plantations, which have been the stage of innumerable social injustices; or as a poor and undeveloped region, due to the low *per capita* income of its inhabitants; or, finally, "as the region of the libertarian revolutions mentioned by the poet Manuel Bandeira, in his poem '*Evocação do Recife*' (Memories of Recife)." <sup>35</sup>

Among the problems that have obstructed the development of the region, Correia de Andrade points out the geographic ones, such as climate and soil conditions; the historical ones, characterised by the maintenance of archaic structures and traditions that require to be modified; and the social, technical, and, mainly, economic ones, such as low productivity, lack of planning, poor distribution, etc.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> I am using here the geographical division adopted by the IBGE - Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), in 1968.

<sup>34</sup> Manuel Correia de Andrade, *A Terra e o Homem no Nordeste*, 3. ed. (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1973), p. 21. There is a translation into English: *The Land and People of Northeast Brazil*, tr. Dennis V. Johnson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

He says,

"In the North-East, the element that most marks the landscape and most concerns man is the climate, through the rainfall pattern that is manifested by the natural vegetation. Since the colonial period, its areas were differentiated as the *Zona da Mata*, with its hot and humid climate and two well defined seasons - one rainy the other dry - and the *Sertão*, also hot but dry, and not only dry, but also, since colonial times, subject to periodic droughts that have destroyed the vegetation and the animals and forced the men to migration. Between these two areas there is a transition zone whose land presents stretches almost as humid as the *Zona da Mata* and others as dry as the *Sertão*, alternating and close to one another, which the people called *Agreste*. Such climatic diversity, would produce a duality recognised by the people of the North-East and that was expressed in the colonial period by two different systems of agrarian activities, which are economically complementary but that are politically and socially in opposition: the North-East of the sugar cane and the North-East of the cattle. In the middle of these, today, the North-East of the small property and of the mixed farming, and to the West, the Middle North, that is still an area of forest gathering and ranching."<sup>37</sup>

In spite of the time that has gone since Correia de Andrade wrote these words, the situation is still quite the same, although some slight modifications have occurred in the structure of the North-East, as, for instance, the establishment of industries in the principal centres of the region.

---

<sup>37</sup> Manuel Correia de Andrade, op. cit., p. 25.

The poverty of the majority of the inhabitants of the North-East can be partly explained by the region's history, patterns of settlement and organisation since Portuguese colonisation in the sixteenth century, according to a publication originating from a conference held at the University of Glasgow in April 1975. It says,

"From the start social organisation ensured extreme social-economic differences between people. Most of the population were to be 'pre-political' (to use Furtado's expression) and be economically excluded from the benefits of the land. Enormous land grants were given by the Portuguese crown to donatarios, prominent political men, who, in turn, handed out extensive tracts known as *capitanias hereditárias* to individual colonisers. Latifúndios were thus established from the beginning and one of their effects was to produce a polarised, highly inegalitarian class system, based by the 1530s on slave labour. Many of the effects of this organisation are still immediately recognisable in the present day."<sup>38</sup>

Half of the North-East is constituted by the semi-arid *Sertão*, with its erratic rainfall and periodic droughts. It was populated by men who moved westward in search of land for stock raising and, in the nineteenth century, by families who migrated from the other sub-

---

<sup>38</sup> Simon Mitchell (ed.), *The Logic of Poverty: The Case of the Brazilian Northeast* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 1.

Josué de Castro reminds us that "Brazilian colonization in the Northeast sprang straight out of a feudalistic, medieval background", for "the Crown undertook to colonize Brazil through a system of enormous land grants to the Portuguese nobility", which were called *capitanias hereditárias* (captaincies or fiefs). The *donatários*, who were the grantees, "had the power to found cities, levy taxes and subdivide their holdings" while the Crown "reserved the right to impose export taxes and to have a monopoly on exports of Brazilian spices and dyewood". When the system proved to be inefficient (initially fifteen, only ten were actually occupied and only two were viable), "the captaincies were divided into *sesmarias*, or vast plantation holdings, still within the feudal tradition of the inalienable ownership and arbitrary use of the land by a tiny privileged minority who had aristocratic connections". The black slavery later on, when the sugar cane replaced cutting dyewood as the principal enterprise, only "reinforced the archaic feudal arrangement to such degree that it persists in Northeast Brazil to this day" (Josué de Castro, *Death in the Northeast*, 2. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), pp. 13-14).



regions in hope of employment, when it was discovered that cotton grew well in that area, provoking a boom of migration.

The *Agreste* occupies about eleven per cent of the area of the North-East, where there are reasonable rainfall and soils and where are cultivated cereals, fruit and cotton, besides cattle raising. Its population was initiated by people who migrated from the *Zona da Mata* during the decline of the sugar industry, by runaway slaves, and by ex-slaves when slavery was abolished. But also, at the same time, by other people who established large estates primarily devoted to the raising of cattle.

"The owners of these estates allowed landless families to clear the land and grow food crops or cotton in exchange for grazing rights or rent, or for a share of the cotton production, or for one or two days of free labour each week. These relationships were, and are, highly exploitative of the landless who, having no advantages with which to negotiate and with minimal legal rights, are forced to accept very harsh contracts to remain on the land. While the *agreste* has a certain amount of minifundios and some middle-sized farms, the greater part of it, as in the *zona da mata*, is in the hands of owners with fairly large estates who, with state incentives, are tending to intensify cattle raising and are expelling landless families from their properties."<sup>39</sup>

The coastal strip, or *Zona da Mata* (Forest Zone), with its fertile land, approximately 200 kilometres wide, was the first area to be settled and was almost entirely monopolised by plantations devoted to the production of sugar cane. A monopoly that worried a few observers, among them the Dutch who occupied Bahia and Pernambuco in the seventeenth century.

---

<sup>39</sup> Simon Mitchell, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

The *Zona da Mata* is the most densely populated sub-region of the North-East. Alongshore are situated the main cities of the region and almost all the state capitals, where live the most part of the population, in numbers that have been constantly swollen by the rural exodus,<sup>40</sup> which have increased the formation of *favelas* (shanty-towns) on the outskirts of the big cities, because of the lack of adequate housing for a great part of the population.

The rural migration to the coastal cities or to the Centre-South is a phenomenon that, on a large scale, began with the great drought that occurred from 1877 to 1879. Conflicts between the workers and the landowners turned to be frequent and the migration would represent the paradoxical onset of the rupture of the stagnation of the area, "the more progressivist phenomenon of the whole period in the *sertões* of the North-East".<sup>41</sup>

Such migration was initially to the Amazonian region, in the North, during the rubber boom that occurred in that area. Although there these people usually found conditions so harsh and unfair as those that they had left behind, at least it represented a reaction, constituting an expression of protest and refusal to conformity with the rural social and economic order, a search for the improvement of their lives. Some of these migrants did return, but then, after having had contact with other forms of social and economic life, they were different, for they presented an increasing opposition to the landowners' system

---

<sup>40</sup> "From the late nineteenth to the midtwentieth century, the rural masses of Northeast Brazil became a recognizable subsociety, yet at the same time they were gradually integrated into the larger social, economic, and political systems of the nation. Socially, they were transformed from invisible herds of backlanders into a restive problem people. The citizens in the Center-South considered the Northeastern *sertanejos* to be an embarrassment and, worse, an impediment to the nation's progress. Economically, the masses shifted from subsistence farming and stock raising to laboring in capitalist commercial agriculture, typically in cane fields and sugar refineries. But at the same time their numbers grew too large for the regional economy to support, and a mass exodus to the coastal cities and to the prosperous Center-South began" (Eul-Soo Pang, "Agrarian Change in the Northeast", in Michael L. Conniff and Frank D. McCann, op. cit., p. 123).

<sup>41</sup> Rui Facó, *Cangaceiros e Fanáticos*, 2. ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1965), p. 29.

of near-slavery.<sup>42</sup> These discontents proliferated and could no longer find work. So, a sort of permanent nomadism, worsened by the droughts, which continued to lay waste in the region, began to take place in the North-East. These unemployed workers, who lived before widely separated in the vast portions of land of the *sertão*, started to gather, in search of a relief for their hunger and thirst. This, Facó remarks, gave birth to two different sorts of reaction: the formation of groups of *Cangaceiros*, armed men and women who assaulted farms and villages; and the formation of groups of *Fanáticos*, or mystics, under the religious guidance of a *beato* or *conselheiro*, a sort of spiritual leader, who believed that their misery was the consequence of their sins and that they had to obtain the divine forgiveness by prayer.<sup>43</sup>

Such groups of rebels, grown out of the agrarian crisis, became very dangerous to the existing order and were, therefore, severely persecuted during many years by the forces of the government, jointly with the landowners and the bourgeoisie, until they were exterminated in the late 1930s, almost all with extreme violence.

The resistance and resilience of the rural masses of the interior of the North-East,<sup>44</sup> would emerge again during the fifties in the *Zona da Mata*,<sup>45</sup> with the appearance of

---

<sup>42</sup> The formal aristocracy of the nineteenth century was gradually disappearing in the early twentieth century. Families that had grown wealthy through exportation of products such as coffee, cacao and others, had arisen as powerful state oligarchies and were even controlling national political affairs, despite the fact that they had regional differences and rivalries and were often internally divided, although less fragmented than the masses usually are. Conniff and McCann say: "Most writers assert that since about World War I the dominant elements in Brazil have formed a shifting set of elites (e.g., merchants, financiers, army generals, landowners, industrialists, and church leaders) whose decisions and actions are loosely coordinated by governmental leaders" (Michael L. Conniff and Frank D. McCann, op. cit., p. xv). In the North-East, the *coronelismo*, that is, the authoritarian power of rural strongmen was in its heyday.

<sup>43</sup> Rui Facó, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

It is worth mentioning that, besides the socio-political reasons for the formation of these groups, other motives must also be taken into account, as it is the case of the strong influence of the Folk Catholicism in the region.

<sup>44</sup> I am using the word "masses" in relation to those disadvantaged people, with irrelevant status, wealth and power; a concept originally adopted by Raymundo Faoro *Os Donos do Poder: Formação do*

what became known as Peasant Leagues, "probably under the remote inspiration of the Peasant Leagues of the Middle Ages, which European serfs had formed against feudal oppressors".<sup>46</sup>

The first of these new organisations, founded in 1955 by João Firmino, who was an employee of the *Engenho Galiléia* (Galilee Sugar Mill), situated in the district of Vitória de Santo Antão, sixty kilometers from Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco, primarily did not have any political intention of campaigning for radical agrarian reform as later movements did, nor did it seek conflict with the army and state police forces.<sup>47</sup>

According to Josué de Castro, it was created to pay for funerals and for coffins that could be buried with the dead.<sup>48</sup> However, the first and most famous political leader of the movement, demolishes this belief. Although attributing some truth to such "rather distorted idea", he states that the first League had

"modest aims: to set up a members' fund to hire a school-mistress to teach the children to read and write; to form a vegetable-growers' cooperative for which they needed credit to buy seed, fertilizer, tools and machinery; finally to campaign against the Secretariat and Ministry of Agriculture and to

---

*Patronato Político Brasileiro*, 2. ed. (Porto Alegre: Globo/USP, 1975) and followed by Michael L. Conniff and Frank D. McCann, op. cit., p. xvii.

<sup>45</sup> As, to some extent, it has always been expressed through the cultural role played by the folk and popular music, literature and drama, and by Carnival, since the *Maracatus* and *Congadas* created by the slaves.

<sup>46</sup> Josué de Castro, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> This only began after the landlord of Galilee, warned by other planters that the League was a dangerous Communist instrument, demanded its closure. From then on, under the pressure of events, it became "a full-blown political movement to secure peasant rights and freedom from landlordism" (Ibid., p. 15).

<sup>48</sup> Usually the dead were taken to the cemetery in a coffin lent by the government which, after the funeral, was returned to the municipal warehouse in order to serve other cadavers (Ibid., pp. 8-12).

demand the protection guaranteed by the State and Federal Constitution for agricultural cooperatives and the peasantry".<sup>49</sup>

But, neither the Leagues nor the rural labour unions that were created later were able "to bring radical political action quickly", states Octávio Ianni. Moreover, "Francisco Julião, who symbolized the leftist radical leader in the rural Brazilian milieu, and especially in the Northeast, knew that the agricultural workers who were organized into leagues, associations, and unions did not have the political experience to advance the revolution".<sup>50</sup>

For Josué de Castro the Peasant Leagues were "pathetically romantic" and represented but a small peril because "they never achieved any definitive political importance" and could not "unleash true revolution".<sup>51</sup>

But the fact remains that the Leagues grew and spread, frightening the ruling class. Soon, "portrayed as an evil dragon intent on swallowing up the feudal estates and destroying public order and tranquility and the whole wealthy establishment", they would be seen as a movement toward Communist-led revolution and Julião charged with being an anti-Christ. The Leagues would then reinforce the motives used to support the military

---

<sup>49</sup> Francisco Julião, *Cambão - The Yoke: The Hidden Face of Brazil*, tr. John Butt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 97.

Francisco Julião had been a peasant's lawyer since 1940 and was also a provincial deputy for the state of Pernambuco. The harsh conditions in which the rural labourers lived are described by E. Bradford Burns as follows: "They received a pittance in wages, and more often than not were heavily in debt to their employer. Housing was primitive, the diet inadequate, health and sanitary conditions abysmal, and education generally non-existent, and where existent, substandard. Social mobility was rare" (E. Bradford Burns, *A History of Brazil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 316).

<sup>50</sup> Octávio Ianni, op. cit., p. 81.

Notwithstanding, Julião, who was an admirer of Fidel Castro and Cuba, felt that only a revolution could bring the social and economic reforms that they needed.

<sup>51</sup> Josué de Castro, op. cit., pp. 18-21.

coup in 1964, which alleged that an armed revolution was arising in the region.<sup>52</sup>

It has become usual to connect the military coup and the facts that preceded it with the interests and policies of the United States. Whatever the extent and meaning of such connection, the fact is that, in the early 1960s, the U.S. initiated a massive infusion of assistance to Brazil, beginning what Josué de Castro would call the rediscovery of Brazil.<sup>53</sup> During the World War II the North-East of Brazil was of strategic importance to the U. S. "as a location of air bases and as a potential source of critical minerals". But, their later intervention in the North-East seemed to be much more concerned with the Peasant Leagues, among which there probably were CIA agents infiltrated, than with the poverty of the people of the region. Moreover, "Despite their rhetorical advocacy of land reform, U. S. agencies have actually promoted programs that discouraged redistribution of privately owned land", and the landless rural-worker and the low income farmer "have realized little benefit from twenty years of foreign assistance".<sup>54</sup>

In spite of the call for an agrarian reform that could favour a redistribution of the land, among other benefits, a call that had also become frequent amid the more enlightened elements of the urban middle-class, the land continued to be in the hands of a few owners and the rural population imprisoned in a inhumane and cruel structure. Today, the population of the North-East, plagued by unemployment and underemployment, is still for the most part being stalked by malnutrition and illiteracy. Because of the maintenance of

---

<sup>52</sup> Josue' de Castro, op. cit., pp. 18-21.

The fear that they provoked was such that after the military coup, whose repression was most severe in the North-East, and the extinction of the movement with the summary execution, simple disappearance or exile of some peasant organisers, the word *camponês* (peasant), among others, disappeared from the official language of the country, being replaced by *rurícola*.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Jan Knippers Black, *United States Penetration of Brazil* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 126-131.

the serfdom system, of the concentrated landownership, and of the political nepotism of the landowners, the conflicts between landholders and landworkers persist, and the discontent has, sometimes, reached an explosive point. And the region is still one of the greatest underdeveloped areas of the continent.

The main reason for the critical conditions of the North-East have been habitually attributed to the droughts that have periodically flagellated the *Sertão*. However, since the turn of the century, many projects and programmes have been financed, "attempting to counteract the effects of the droughts", but "The abuse of funds, the corruption and the ineffectuality of the schemes led to this 'aid' being popularly referred to as 'The Drought Industry' " and no Brazilian government "has yet attempted, with serious and honest concern, to come to grips with the problem",<sup>55</sup> which implies that the causes of such plight are much more political than hydrographic.

In 1959, the federal government created the SUDENE (*Superintendência do Desenvolvimento do Nordeste* - Superintendancy of the Development of the North-East), in order to encourage investments and industrialisation in the region, and to reorganise the agriculture and the distribution of population. However, its existence did not change the situation for, as in other governmental agencies, efficiency has not been its main feature.

On the other hand, if "the region experienced four centuries of an agriculturally based export economy in which capitalist and pre-capitalist sectors evolved, the two existing symbiotically, with the former feeding off the latter", the industrialisation which has developed in more recent times is of a sort that

" ... has permitted these two sectors to continue in being, the pre-capitalist sector providing cheap food and reserve labour army for the capitalist sector. Moreover, the Northeast is a quasi-colony within Brazil, a region

---

<sup>55</sup> Simon Mitchell, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

dependent upon the more developed Centre-South of the country, and a victim of capitalist forces controlled by the Centre-South and by multinational companies operating in Brazil".<sup>56</sup>

Mitchell reminds us that the economic miracle that was largely announced by the military government in the late 1960s and early 1970s, only benefited "a tiny portion of the population, and the unhappy class structure, already polarised, has, through maldistribution of income, become still more extreme". For him, "the highly anti-social forms of capitalist organisation established in the past have been strengthened rather than weakened by government planners". So, the land has not been reallocated, the credit schemes and fiscal measures have not been properly monitored and the extreme inequality in the distribution of wealth has not been lessened.<sup>57</sup>

But, on the other hand, the period between 1960-1964 presented a remarkable feature, both from a quantitative or qualitative point of view, concerning the implementation of a more democratic culture in the country, with the appearance of mass movements stimulated by the free expression and democratic relief that followed the end of the *Estado Novo*.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Simon Mitchell, op. cit., p. 7.

As he notes, the plight of the region "cannot possibly be understood without reference to the rest of Brazil and the wider mercantile system. The Northeast has provided and continues to provide cheap labour guaranteed by a surplus labour force" (Ibid.).

For Josué de Castro, the new industries sponsored by the SUDENE "are highly automated and are economically dependent on foreign capital or economic groups of the southern part of Brazil. They cannot absorb the potential labor force that exists in this region, any more than they can promote a more equitable distribution of wealth" (Josué de Castro, op. cit., p. x).

<sup>57</sup> Simon Mitchell, op. cit., pp. 6-8.

Such has been the attitude of the government toward the North-East that he asserts: "Cynical in its application of Orwellian slogans, heartless in its pursuit of efficiency objectives, hell-bent on economic growth at the expense of the majority, it has been, especially since 1967, one of the most inhumane administrations anywhere in the world" (Ibid., p. 8).

<sup>58</sup> See Edécio Mostaço, op. cit., p. 55.



Illiteracy, it is worth noting, in the early 1960s, was the subject of the first experimentations with the Paulo Freire's method of adult education, which "sought to instill in his students first a realization of their self-worth and then a critical awareness of the society in which they lived. He wanted to teach them not merely to read and write, but to think and know and act, as subjects capable of changing their own environment rather than as objects subject to the whims of fate". Seen as a seed of "revolutionary change", the programme was interrupted and banished by the military government in 1964, and Paulo Freire himself had to leave the country to live in exile abroad for almost twenty years, while his ideas and method were successfully adopted in other countries.<sup>59</sup>

Paulo Freire was also one of the founders of the MCP (*Movimento de Cultura Popular* - Popular Culture Movement), created in Recife, in 1960, for "the emancipation of the people, through education and culture", "with a technical and not political character", "uniting intellectuals, students and members of the people", "wide and pluralist, according to the UNESCO model, since it does not discriminate philosophy, religious belief or ideology".<sup>60</sup>

The MCP tried to reach the children and also the adults and, in order to achieve its objectives, used not only the usual schools, but also the spaces outside the schools, including the open air, besides the mass media. Through all these means, they stimulated the practice and the research of scientific and technical subjects, as well as sports, artistic expressions and folk customs.

---

<sup>59</sup> Jan Knippers Black, op. cit., pp. 134-135.

As Anísio Teixeira, who was another important Brazilian educator, whose ideas made of him a victim of the dictatorship of the *Estado Novo* in the 1930s, Paulo Freire believes that education is not a privilege. He created the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and his educational ideas are developed in several books, whose keynote is education and culture seen as a practice of freedom.

<sup>60</sup> Fragments of a text by Germano Coelho, originally published in the album *Meninos do Recife* (Boys from Recife), published by Massao Ohno in São Paulo, but left out of the album after the military coup (Germano Coelho "et. al.", *Movimento de Cultura Popular: Memorial* (Recife: PCR/FCCR, 1986), p. 10).

Supported by a period of democratic development and by a local government that seemed to be in touch with the interests of the masses of the North-East, the MCP, a sort of Popular University, would be one of the prime targets of the military repression unleashed by the 1964 coup.<sup>61</sup>

Such progressive forces were completely destroyed in 1964, for a *coup d'état* usually involves "the restoration and the strengthening of archaic structures".<sup>62</sup> So, "While industry in the Northeast has thrived in recent years with the aid of government policies encouraging investment in the region, the rural Northeast has remained virtually untouched by the otherwise impressive Brazilian economic development during the last twenty-five years".<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, the economic development of the country, which was increased by World War II, when Brazil began to export in large quantity its manufactured goods that before were mainly sold in the local market, "came to depend again more and more on ties with foreign centers" and on the financial policy of the International Monetary

---

<sup>61</sup> The MCP spread through the North-East and would, sometimes, join the CPCs (*Centros Populares de Cultura* - Popular Centres of Culture). These had been created by the UNE (*União Nacional dos Estudantes* - National Union of Students), whose centre was in Rio de Janeiro, in a building that, after the coup, was invaded by the police who set fire to it. They had also spread through the whole country, and proposed a "revolutionary popular art". However, due to their populist and contradictory actions, the effective contribution of the CPCs was less remarkable than that of the MCP.

<sup>62</sup> Octávio Ianni, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth D. Frederick, "Agricultural Development and the Rural Northeast" in H. Jon Rosenbaum and William G. Tyler (eds.), *Contemporary Brazil: Issues in Economic and Political Development*, 2. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 279.

Such industrialisation enlarged the employment market, causing urbanisation to proceed faster and depopulating the countryside, a phenomenon that was already encouraged by the relative rural stagnation, by badly paid employment and "by the social legislation introduced by Getúlio Vargas, which was extremely favourable to wage earners". In 1920, twenty-three per cent of the population lived in cities; by 1970, this proportion had become fifty per cent (Georges-André Fiechter, *Brazil Since 1964: Modernisation Under a Military Régime*, tr. Alan Braley (London: MacMillan, 1975), p. 11). In 1991 it had increased to seventy-five per cent.

Fund.<sup>64</sup> However, an underdeveloped country transforms itself into an industrial society "only when it attains economic and political autonomy. This autonomy only appears by means of a political and economic rupture with the traditional society and the prevailing international structures".<sup>65</sup>

The problem is that the form "followed by the politico-economic rupture on which was based the transition of Brazilian society to an urban-industrial civilization was not compatible with foreign interests". On the other hand, all political, economic, and social events in Brazil in this century, especially after World War I, "exhibited the tensions and conflicts induced by the transitions to an urban-industrial culture",<sup>66</sup> which was made more intense from the 1950s on.

After twenty-one years of military rule,<sup>67</sup> after the restoration of democracy symbolised by direct elections and, mainly, after the franchise had been extended to all over the age of sixteen, contemporary Brazil has been characterised by a more political participation of the urban masses. They now seem to be more responsive to the many perennial pressures that have been exerted upon them by corrupt politicians who have only been interested in the competition for political power. But, notwithstanding the optimism of many who see new values and patterns emerging, it is still difficult to foresee an effective transformation.

In spite of the industrialisation stimulated after the 1930s, which was concentrated in the big centres, Brazil remains an agricultural nation, with a small percentage of its soil being

---

<sup>64</sup> Octávio Ianni, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146 and 9.

<sup>67</sup> In 1985 the civilians returned to power. Tancredo Neves was elected president by the Congress but died before assuming the government which was, therefore, conducted by the vice-president, José Sarney.

cultivated,<sup>68</sup> a rural economy based also on livestock raising and the predominance of latifundia.

On the other hand, a political programme toward an economic growth and development able to touch the whole population, bringing for all not only hope but a real change to the system, putting an end to the chronic social injustices that have passed by nearly five centuries of Brazilian history, is yet to be formulated.

---

<sup>68</sup> The most important crops are: coffee, cacao, tobacco, cotton, rice, sugar, fruits, wheat, corn, etc.

## **Chapter 3**

### **THE MAIN FORMS OF FOLK THEATRE OF THE NORTH-EAST OF BRAZIL**

### 3.1 - The First Notices

The earliest notices of the Brazilian folk plays are references found in newspapers of the nineteenth century, among which many are diatribes against such customs.

This is the case, for instance, of an article entitled *A Estultice do Bumba-meu-Boi* (The Silliness of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*), in *O Carapuceiro* (11.01.1840), a newspaper published in Recife by a priest named Lopes da Gama, who was its editor and single writer. In his furious and indignant article, Lopes da Gama attacks the play stating that, among all the popular expressions which could be found in Pernambuco, the *Bumba-meu-Boi* was the silliest, most stupid and dull of them. For him the play was worthless because it had no plot, no probability, no logical sequence. Among many other accusations he emphasises that the ox "always dies, without any acceptable reason, and resurrects with an enema". But his displeasure seems to be even bigger when he refers that it had become common the appearance in the play of a man dressed as a priest, whose function was "to serve as the fool of the performance", being mocked and beaten by *Mateus*.<sup>1</sup>

In the same *O Carapuceiro* (21.02.1840), Lopes da Gama, registering that the *Pastoril* had spread all over Pernambuco, also attacks it with displeasure and anger. But, as his harangue seems to have been impotent, he turns to shout against the sensual dance of the shepherdesses in 14.09.1842, and again in 24.12.1842. In this last article his conclusion is that the *Presépio* entertainments are generally "the share of less elevated people".<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, pp. 17-19.

Lopes da Gama and many other members of the Church have not been able to realise that, although the evident anti-clerical nature of such characters and situations, "the people is able to separate religion and its respectable elements from its unworthy priests, who deserve to be mocked and satirised" (Roberto Câmara Benjamin, "O Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo" in *O Obsceno: Jornadas Impertinentes* (São Paulo: HUCITEC / INTERCOM, 1983), p. 156).

<sup>2</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, pp. 162-165.

The earliest notice of the *Chegança* was given by Henry Koster who, in 1814, witnessed a performance of the play in the island of Itamaracá (Pernambuco) and described it in his book *Viagens ao Nordeste do Brasil* (Travels in Brazil),<sup>3</sup> while the first reference to the *Mamulengo* is related to the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2 - The Scholarship

The folk theatre forms of the people of the North-East of Brazil have not merited sufficient attention on the part of the Brazilian scholars, at least with regard to extensive and fruitful critical examinations. The scholarship concerned with these plays only started in the twentieth century.

The first attempt at serious and focused work, which resulted in a major document that is still the most profound study on the subject published in Brazil, was made by Mário de Andrade, who carried out his pioneering researches over many years during the first half of this century.<sup>5</sup> In the three volumes of *Danças Dramáticas do Brasil* (Dramatic Dances of Brazil), in which he took his lead from the work of James Frazer, he not only reproduces the texts of plays which he collected travelling throughout the country, but also analyses their structure and tries to trace their remote and close origins.

Besides Mário de Andrade, it is also worth mentioning the works of Luiz da Câmara Cascudo, chiefly his *Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro* (Dictionary of Brazilian Folklore)

---

<sup>3</sup> Henry Koster, *Viagens ao Nordeste do Brasil*, tr. Luiz da Câmara Cascudo (São Paulo: Compainha Editora Nacional, 1942), p. 406.

<sup>4</sup> See Luiz Edmundo, *O Rio de Janeiro no Tempo dos Vice-Reis* (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, 1932), p. 447.

<sup>5</sup> Mário de Andrade was not only a notable intellectual, who lead the movement of Modernism in Brazil, in the 1920s, together with Oswald de Andrade, but also a prolific essayist, a revolutionary poet and novelist too.

which remains an indispensable book for the study of any aspect of the Brazilian folk culture.

On the folk theatre forms of the North-East the most remarkable work was done by Hermilo Borba Filho, between the 1940s and the first half of the 1970s. He was a theatrical director who used also to be a playwright, an essayist, a novelist and a short-story writer. He dedicated many years of his life to the research of the main forms of folk theatre of the North-East of Brazil, which resulted in the publication of three books on the subject and also influenced all his creative work.<sup>6</sup>

His close bonds with these folk theatre forms would also be the source for the development of an aesthetic theory which was gradually elaborated and applied during his work within two theatrical companies founded by him and Ariano Suassuna: the TEP (*Teatro do Estudante de Pernambuco* / Student's Theatre of Pernambuco), an amateur group, and the TPN (*Teatro Popular do Nordeste* / Popular Theatre of the North-East), which was a professional company.<sup>7</sup>

Such were the accuracy and the extension of these works that, in spite of the time that has passed by since they were written, they continue to be the main support for any scholar who has decided not to leave unnoticed these forms of popular expression, taking them seriously as a significant field of scholarly inquiry and not as a kind of picturesque but naïve manifestation.

---

<sup>6</sup> Many other Brazilian writers had their work influenced by the folk theatre forms. The most outstanding of them is Ariano Suassuna who, for instance, wrote a play entitled *A Pena e a Lei* which is centred on the characters and techniques of the *Mamulengo*. Hermilo Borba Filho himself wrote *A Donzela Joana*, a play that transplants the legend of *Jeanne D'Arc* to the North-East of Brazil during the period of the Dutch invasion and is based on the *Bumba-meu-Boi*. After them, several others followed the same path.

<sup>7</sup> His theoretical thought can be found in Hermilo Borba Filho, *Diálogo do Encenador* (Recife: Imprensa Universitária/UFPE, 1964).



Several other scholars, such as Mello Moraes Filho, Gustavo Barroso, Pereira da Costa, Ascenso Ferreira, Théo Brandão, Édison Carneiro, Rossini Tavares de Lima, Deífilo Gurgel, Altimar Pimentel, Beatriz G. Dantas, Cirinéa César do Amaral, Aglaé Fontes de Alencar, José Maria Tenório Rocha, Roberto Benjamin and others, many of whom are quoted in this work, have also contributed to the study of the Brazilian folk theatre. However, many aspects of the plays are still to be analysed, mainly the function and the meaning that they occupy in the contemporary society of the North-East of Brazil. Some of the existing published works are only reproductions of collected plays, and those who have attempted to go further, with few exceptions, appear to have been more interested in the origins and in the surface aspects of the plays than in approaching the position of these performances inside society. Thus, none of them deepen the questions about the relationship between this specific form of theatre, the community to which it belongs and the knowledge that arises from it.

On the other hand, there are also among the scholars, as among the public authorities who sometimes sponsor this kind of performance, a tendency to see this theatre as an "authentic" expression of the people of the North-East of Brazil. However, it is necessary to be aware that notions such as "authenticity", "identity", and "roots" are "typical ideas of post-colonial cultures" which need the elaboration of signs that reassure and emphasise their new status of independent nations. As Anuradha Kapur says,

"Categorizing cultural artifacts or traditional forms as being authentic is to level them down, to make them forcibly coherent. Authenticity then becomes a hospitable category which, while it does say something about the sameness of things, takes little cognizance of the specifics, making

disparate forms look deceptively homogeneous."<sup>8</sup>

"Authenticity" is a fallacious category, for it usually misleads the appraisal of traditional customs by establishing what must be approved or not. Following the criteria produced by the concept of "authenticity", the forms "which have the longest run backward into their 'classical' pasts are more acceptable than others."<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, "authenticity" or "identity" cannot be the best guides to the understanding of the folk theatre, for they tend to read it as if it belonged to "a unified field marked Tradition."<sup>10</sup>

On the contrary, mainly in a country so huge as Brazil, which has assimilated a diversified ethnical and cultural heritage, the folk theatre needs to be read and reread "in terms of what bits and pieces make them work the way they do; that, instead of a single essentially authentic voice, there are several possible voices with which to speak about tradition and traditional forms in order that the puzzles of our seeing today are solved."<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, "Forms that have changefulness, improvisation, spontaneity built into their very textures require a certain sort of 'seeing' for them to make sense."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Anuradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and Gods* (Calcutta: Seagull, 1990), pp. 1-2.

Brazil is one of these post-colonial nations. Such ideas also flourished there as soon as it became independent of Portugal. One example of them is the *indianismo*. This was a cultural movement that arose at the first moment of the Romanticism in Brazil. Trying to materialise the idea of an "authentic national identity", the *indianistas*, among whom the novelist José de Alencar is perhaps the best example, took the Indian as a literary source. However, this "Indian" was always ideal and artificial. Nothing could be less "authentic" than he.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 2

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

So, as these folk theatre forms are non-naturalistic, which implies that they present themselves as varying, they not only acknowledge the audience but also emphasise the mutual participation of actors and spectators to attribute meaning to the performance.

As occurs in the Ramlila at Ramnagar, witnessed and reported by Kapur, in the folk theatre of the North-East of Brazil, "the spectators collaborate with the actors in that it is their imaginative will that adds (and often subtracts) from the shown; it is this, their enabling vision, that facilitates the construction of supplementary images that allow for the possibility of play."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, it is in the relationship between performers and audience, which Kapur indicates using the words *complicity* and *collaboration*, that we will be able to grasp the actual meaning of the folk theatre, as well as to understand why it has survived everywhere.

However, as inevitably every human being sees the world through his own ideology, it is demanded that the one that speaks "define herself or himself according to the position that s/he speaks from", and it becomes also essential to be aware that "there is no position worth the name that does not first take into account the integrity of the form: the social ground on which it is performed and what it means to those who perform it."<sup>14</sup>

### 3.3 - The Main Forms and their Origins in Brazil

From the point of view of folkloric creations, the North-East is one of the richest regions of the country. Its folk theatre, whether performed in the rural or in the urban areas, has represented an important vehicle through which to express the lives and the hopes of those who live in the region, those people who were deprived of privilege and

---

<sup>13</sup> Anuradha Kapur, op. cit., p. 4..

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

constitute the oppressed side of its society. It is part of a common legacy, a collective cosmovision, creative and spontaneous, expressing deep realities that have been socially displaced. An expression that has always been limited by the patterns of a dominant and authoritarian culture, never less than when authorities exert their paternalistic stimulus, for the official institutions and those people in power not only usually allow it, but also sponsor it, direct or indirectly.<sup>15</sup>

This folk theatre can be found in other regions of the country as well, even in almost the whole country, as is the case of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*. But, in this report account will be taken only of the forms which are played in the North-East, with their specific characteristics and which present a specific dramatic structure and can be considered as representing a category of similar plays. These will be four: the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, the *Chegança*, the *Pastoril*, and the *Mamulengo*.

As each one of these has distinct names, depending on which state and locale they are performed in, I chose the nomenclature above because these probably are the most representative names presently in use. In the case of the *Chegança*, this is the name used by the people in Alagoas, where the play is more alive today than elsewhere.

---

<sup>15</sup> See Maria Helena Kühner, *Teatro Popular: Uma Experiência* (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1975), p. 111.

### 3.3.1 - Bumba-meu-Boi<sup>16</sup>

It is almost 8:00 pm. In the large *terreiro* (yard) there is already a great number of people. They have been gathering there since nearly an hour ago. They are distributed in a circle, around a group of musicians who are sitting on stools in the centre of the *terreiro*, playing their instruments and singing. In front of them, some boys and lads have formed an inner circle, and they are now dancing, following the strong and rhythmic beat of the music. It is a kind of tap-dancing that requires a great deal of physical effort and ability. At intervals, they change places, making evolutions and holding the arms of their partners. This is the *mergulhão* (or, using their own language, *merguião*), a sort of warming-up that usually precedes the performance itself.

---

<sup>16</sup> The description that follows is not the reproduction of one precise performance. It mixes details of performances that I have watched on different occasions with others that were registered by authors who are mentioned throughout this dissertation, chiefly Ascenso Ferreira, Hermilo Borba Filho and Beatriz G. Dantas. This observation also concerns the subsequent descriptions of the *Chegança*, the *Pastoril* and the *Mamulengo*, among which the most individualised will be that of the *Chegança*, for it will focus on the performance of a single team, the *Chegança Almirante Tamandaré*, from Sergipe. The chief purpose is only to propitiate a brief portrait of the nature of such plays to those who never had the opportunity of witnessing their performance. So, these performances here described must be seen as hypothetical, for these plays present numerous variants and even when performed by the same team, they rarely show the same structure and development. As with all folk theatre, they are flexible and allow many changes, cuts and accretions to their primary structure, depending on the place where they are performed, on their audience, on the historical moment, as well as on the creativity and desires of their performers.

Comprised of many isolated episodes, the main plot of the *Bumba-meu-Boi* usually tells the story of a little shepherdess who is looking for her lost ox which, in the final sequence, is killed and restored to life. However, the *Bumba-meu-Boi* of the state of Maranhão, which is the most different of all, has a distinct plot. It involves an employee of a farmer and his pregnant wife, who is anxious to eat the tongue of an ox. To satisfy her, the man steals the most beautiful ox of the farm, which is wounded and later cured by a doctor. The *Bumba-meu-Boi* of Maranhão is also less dramatic and more choreographic and colourful than the others. There it is performed during the celebrations of St. Anthony, St. John and St. Peter, between 13 and 29 June.

Now the small crowd around musicians and dancers has increased. There are men, women and children of all ages; they watch the performers, talk to one another or just wander.

Suddenly some joyful and excited exclamations go through the whole group. Around the edge of the human circle, above the heads of the people, becomes visible the top of a conical headgear, made with colourful ribbons. Soon the delighted audience can see *Mateus*<sup>17</sup> appear under the stool of a musician. At first, only his head with the headgear can be seen arising between the legs of the musician, as if he was just being born.

The performance is finally beginning. *Mateus* appears with his whole body, but he is still squatting. After some time, during which he crawls, spits on the sand and complains his hips ache, he starts to stand up slowly, complaining about his legs and greeting the audience. But, in a flash, he is already singing and dancing with enviable energy and skill. Meanwhile, he summons his partner *Bastião* and orders him to greet the audience. Then, enters the *Capitão*, riding the *Cavalo-Marinho* (sea-horse), a wood and fabric horse, and calling his

---

<sup>17</sup> *Mateus* and *Bastião*, who sometimes is the son, at others the brother of *Mateus*, are the *Capitão*'s black servants (in the past they were slaves). They dress and act as clowns. Among their functions during the play, they summon the other characters and beat them with an inflated bladder when they have to leave. So also did the grotesque dancers of the Turkish *Ortaoyunu* who, "Comically dressed, their hands and arms concealed in their loose and long dresses, (...) would cavort, dance, and somersault, striking out at spectators with their bladders (*tulum*) or indulging in humorous impersonations" (Metin And, op. cit., p. 101). Such costumes were well suited to the leaps, tumblings and all the "wide range of buffoons' tricks and comic routines", and gave the performers a great deal of physical freedom. A combination that "can be shown to have been used by clowns and comic actors in the secular theatre of Greece, Rome, the Byzantine Empire, medieval western Europe, and the Italian *commedia dell'Arte* and other parts of western and central Europe" (Ibid., p. 97).

servants.<sup>18</sup> After some rebukes and recommendations about the fulfilment of their obligations, the *Capitão* orders them to greet the audience again, indicating to them some particular individuals among the onlookers. At last, *Mateus*, *Bastião* and the *Toadeiros* sing a *viva*, that is, a song of praise, to the owner of the *terreiro*.

Next *Mateus* summons *Tutunqué*, a boastful gunman, who comes armed to the teeth, but is demoralised by the *Queixoso*, who had contracted him to kill the man who had kidnapped his wife and his daughter. The episode ends with *Tutunqué* being beaten by the bladders of *Mateus* and *Bastião*, and escaping through the audience.<sup>19</sup>

Afterwards comes the *Pastorinha* (Little Shepherdess),<sup>20</sup> who tells the *Capitão* that she is looking for her ox that got lost. The *Capitão* falls in love and tries to seduce her, after promising to help her.

They leave the scene and, at the same time, on the other side, appears a soldier. He wears a police uniform and a mask, and says that he is

---

<sup>18</sup> The *Capitão* commands the performance. The actor enters into the framework of the horse through a hole in the back, and he seems to be riding the animal for, on both sides, there are legs (generally painted) with the feet in the stirrups. His costume resembles the uniform of a Navy officer. Because of this and also of his position of command, its presence in the play was attributed by Ascenso Ferreira to a derivation of the "*Capitães Mores*", who were sent by Portugal to administrate the land in the colonial period (Ascenso Ferreira, *Ensaio Folclóricos* (Recife: DEC/SEC-PE, 1986), p. 111.

<sup>19</sup> Customarily, nearly all the characters are thrown out of the scene in this same way, to which always follows more singing and dancing. But, it is worth noting that the bladder, which is full of air, makes a big noise but does not hurt anyone.

<sup>20</sup> The *Bumba-meu-Boi* has a few female characters. The commonest are the *Pastorinha*, the *Catirina*, and the *Damas*. The *Cantadeira*, who was common in the past, is not exactly a character but a woman who sits beside the musicians to sing the *loas* (a type of songs). Moreover, she has been more and more substituted by two male singers (the *Toadeiros*). The *Pastorinha* is still performed by a young girl, whereas the *Catirina* is performed by a man who does not try to disguise his male characteristics. The *Damas*, who were before played by young men, are now frequently performed by girls. This sort of novelty, however, seems to occur only in the case of the secondary characters, as the *Damas*, who are only choreographic characters, do not participate in the dialogues.

in search of two rogues named *Mateus* and *Bastião*, who have been playing a *Bumba* without his permission. He carries a club on his shoulder and wants to forbid the continuance of the performance. *Mateus* argues with him, they fight and he is finally beaten by the two clowns.

With the soldier thrown out of the circle, the *Capitão* returns and sends *Mateus* for the *Galantes* <sup>21</sup> and the *Damas*. These are a group of young men and little girls, each one bringing in their hands a big arch covered with coloured ribbons. They dance in group, developing a complex, harmonic and charming choreography.

The next figure to enter is the *Babau*, which is introduced by its owner, *Manuel do Babau*, as an animal that "*adora cabeça de nego*" ("loves the heads of black people"). *Manuel do Babau* wears a mask and he is inside a framework that resembles the body of a donkey, whose terrifying head is made with the two jawbones of a dead donkey which he holds with both hands, clicking them together all the time, leaping and attacking the spectators, who usually relate this character to death itself. The *Babau* chases *Mateus*, bites his bottom and tries to catch *Bastião*, but he plays a trick, grabs the head of the donkey and takes it to the *Capitão*. This arrests the *Babau* and its owner asks him to allow the animal to make a collection of money to

---

<sup>21</sup> The *Galantes* only appear in the variants called *Cavalo-Marinho*. In other variants, they are tantamount to the *Romeiros* (See Roberto Benjamin in Ascenso Ferreira, op. cit., p. 155), who are Portuguese men who wish to become warriors of "França, Castela and Portos" (Ibid., p. 119). According to Hermilo Borba Filho, they are a variant of the shepherdesses from the *Pastoril*, who praise the birth of Jesus, and their episode is probably the only original scene that remains from a more ancient and more religious version of the *Bumba-meu-Boi* (Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, 2. ed. (Recife: Guararapes, 1982), p. 15.



support their travelling. Getting the permission, the *Babau* collects the money and leaves the *terreiro* with its owner.

Then, enters the *Engenheiro* (Engineer). He comes dancing, accompanied by two servile assistants. He says that he was sent by the government to demarcate the *Capitão's* land, because there will be built houses for the people and other social improvements. The *Capitão* protests against the order and is fined by the *Engenheiro*. He tries to prove that the land is his, but the documents that he produces are false. He tries other ways out and, finally, bribery. As all these attempts are useless, he sends *Mateus* for the *Fiscal da Prefeitura* (the supervisor of the town hall). He comes and, at first, supports the *Capitão*, but the *Engenheiro* calls him to one side and offers him a share of the money of the fine. The *Fiscal*, then, changes his position. The *Capitão*, without a way out, pays the fine. The *Engenheiro* shares the money with the *Fiscal* and puts on the ground a piece of paper that, according to him, is the plan of the land. They both sit on the paper to put on it, as they say, the seal of the government and legalise the transaction. They are then thrown out by the clowns and their bladders.

Then follows the *Jaraguá*, that is the ghost of a horse. It is the skull of a horse on the top of a long stick that is carried and moved by a man inside the cloth that covers its body. The skull, generally, has two red glass eyes, and its jaws are also clicked together as those of the *Babau*. It frightens and tries to bite the spectators, until it is thrown out by *Mateus* and *Bastião*.

Next is the *Caboclo do Arco*, an Indian who is known for his great ability to dance with the arch. The *Capitão* pays him to teach *Mateus* and *Bastião* to dance like him. Although the two servants only dance by putting their arches on the ground and the Indian dances with his in the air, the *Capitão* declares that he is content with the result and orders the *Caboclo do Arco* to show his other abilities. After his demonstration, the servants throw him out.

Enter the *Ema* (a Brazilian ostrich). Its framework is moved by a child. *Mateus* and *Bastião* say that they bought it in a street-market where "there is no people". But suddenly appears an old woman who is in search of her *Ema* that has been stolen. She proves that the animal is hers and the *Capitão* decides to buy it because "it is like a turkey and can be eaten". *Mateus* and *Bastião* are ordered to make the payment which, as always, is made with a bladder beating.

Then appears the *Cobra* (Snake). The two clowns play with it and are bitten. They think that are going to die and panic. The *Capitão* sends the *Arlequim* (Harlequin) for *João Carneiro*, a healer, who comes with his assistant, *Recombelo*. What follows is a parody of a séance. *João Carneiro* performs a sleight of hand and the two clowns stand up cured. The two men are then "paid" for their service.

After the appearance of several other characters, the *Capitão* summons *Mané Pequenino* (Little Mané) or *Mané Gostoso*<sup>22</sup> (Gorgeous Mané), who walks on stilts. The *Capitão* asks him why his

---

<sup>22</sup> This is also the name given by the people to a popular child's plaything in the region, which is carved in light wood and represents a flexible man hanging from a string tied to two small poles. When the poles are pressed, the man does the most varied and daring movements.

legs are so long and he answers that it is because his mother had brought him up in a too low hammock.<sup>23</sup> Then the *Capitão* tells him that he has heard about his abilities in "doing the death flight, the sign of the cross and walking laying downwards", besides other "gymnastics". *Mané Pequenino* confirms this but says that he only can show his abilities if *Mateus* collects some money for him, because he came walking and does not want to go back walking again.<sup>24</sup> *Mateus* collects the money and gives it to him, saying that he has collected a total amount of "three hundred and a small piece". *Mané Pequenino* asks for room to do his gymnastics and tells the *Toadeiros* to sing. He falls from the stilts, showing the death flight; stands up with the help of the clowns and makes the sign of the cross with his legs and, finally, dances, curving his belly downwards. After that, the *Capitão* asks him to take a message to the *Vaqueiro* (Cowboy). But *Mané Pequenino* says that he cannot because on the way to Piauí there is a big bog but that he can call *Mané das Batatas* (Mané of the Potatoes) to carry out the job. The *Capitão* agrees and he leaves. *Mané das Batatas* comes riding the framework of a small female donkey, called *Burrinha Calu*, which, by leaps and bounds, kicks *Mateus* and *Bastião*.

---

<sup>23</sup> Hammocks are very common in the North-East of Brazil, mainly in the interior. People usually use them to sleep, more than beds.

<sup>24</sup> Each character usually makes his own collection. In the case of *Mané Pequenino*, because of the stilts, he cannot collect by himself. Moreover, it is common that the actors walk long distances to the place of the performances.

The *Capitão* tells him to go in search of the *Vaqueiro* and, when he is leaving, there enters *Catirina*, a black and mocking woman, performed by a man. She is very angry and, making a great fuss, tells the *Capitão* that *Mateus* "*fez mal a ela* " (deflowered her) and does not want to marry her. After a long argument, the *Capitão* decides that *Mateus* has to marry *Catirina*. He then sends *Bastião* for the *Padre* (Priest) and the *Sacristão* (Sacristan). The *Padre* hears *Mateus'* confession, after calling him "*Negro, bêbado, velhaco e ladrão* " ("Black, drunk, crook and thief"), to which *Mateus* reply, with mocking amazement: "*Adivinhão!*" ("Good Guesser!"). Against his will, *Mateus* gets married to *Catirina*, who turns instantly to be a sweet and affectionate woman, in a sequence full of comic incidents, which include the *Padre* fighting with *Mateus* and being knocked down by him.

Then, appears the *Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo* (The Dead-Carrying-the-Alive), who amazes everybody with his strange figure. It is represented by an actor wearing a mask and carrying the torso of a big puppet in his front, trailing its legs behind, which makes it appear that the man is being carried by the puppet. The *Capitão* tells his servants to approach and examine the strange figure. Cautiously, they ask the newcomer who he is and he answers that he is a cursed son who comes from the cemetery and was supposed to be born as twins but, inexplicably, the two had been born stuck to one another. The *Capitão* then tells him that he will ask the *Padre* to baptise and save him from his terrible fate. Frightened, the *Padre* asks for the help of

the *Sacristão*, saying that he is "a loafer priest since three hundred and ninety years ago", but had never met such a figure. He confesses that he is so frightened that he is feeling something cold under the cassock and asks if the *Capitão* does not want to have a look and confirm if he is wet. Suddenly there appears the *Diabo* (Devil), who carries the *Padre*, the *Sacristão* and the *Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo* to hell.

Next come the *Vaqueiro* who is contracted by the *Capitão* to go in search of a *novilho* (young ox) that is "*na serra do Piauí*" ("in the mountain of Piauí"). The *Vaqueiro* leaves and immediately returns with the *Boi* (Ox). This is also a framework made of wood and fabric, moved by a man crouched inside it. The *Boi* comes boisterously attacking everybody, characters and audience. Then, amid the great uproar, somebody kills the *Boi*.<sup>25</sup>

Its early in the morning now. The *Urubu* (a vulture) approaches the dead ox. The *Capitão* makes the symbolic sharing out of the ox, giving each part of its body to the most important people who are among the audience. But, after that he summons the *Doutor* (Doctor). The quack doctor examines the animal, using strange and nonsensical methods of "medical examination", and declares that the case is serious and

---

<sup>25</sup> In an interview, on the eleventh of November, 1980, some time before his death, the late *Capitão* Antonio Pereira, leader of the *Bumba-meu-Boi Misterioso de Afogados*, who was then ninety-one years old, said: "The ox sustains the whole mankind, in the whole world, isn't it? (...) But it is not this *Bumba-meu-Boi*. It is the alive ox. This is a dead ox, although its intestine be alive." This is undoubtedly an allusion to the man inside the framework of the ox. It is also worth mentioning that, when asked why its *Boi* was called *Misterioso* (Mysterious), he answered that it was because the other oxen could feed the people but this could not because it was made of fabric. So, it was amazing that it could please the people so much.

that the only possible solution is the application of an enema. Immediately *Mateus* and *Bastião* catch a little boy in the audience who, among shouts, exclamations and bursts of laughter, is put inside the framework of the ox, through its behind, as if he were a syringe, and soon after is taken out from there, completely blotted with dung that was rubbed on him by the man who moves the framework. The *Boi* stands up, again attacks everybody. A great commotion spreads among the audience. Then, all the players gather around the *Boi*, forming the *Roda Grande* (Big Circle) and sing the final song.

Probably born near the littoral of the North-East, at the end of the eighteenth century, the *Bumba-meu-Boi* soon scattered to the interior. Its original environment was the countryside, where were the ancient sugar mills and the cattle farms.

It is linked to the old and diversified tradition of the myth of the powerful bull. This can be found in the hymns, legends, and traditions of many civilizations all over the world, as a symbol of fecundity. But, according to Câmara Cascudo, there is no other folk play with the shape, the extent and the thematic plan of the *Bumba-meu-Boi* anywhere in the world.<sup>26</sup>

In the past, it was part of the *Reisados* (from *reis*, i.e., "kings"), which is the name given to a group of sundry folk performances, all full of songs and dances. Formerly there were many different *Reisados*, but all of them always ended with an episode in which was performed the death and resurrection of an ox, one of the most constant elements in the

---

<sup>26</sup> Luiz da Câmara Cascudo, *Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro*, 2. ed. (Rio de Janeiro: MEC / INL, 1962), p. 141 and also: *Literatura Oral no Brasil*, 2. ed. (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio/INL-MEC, 1978), p. 382; and *Tradições Populares da Pecuária Nordestina* (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Agricultura, 1956), p. 49.

life of the Brazilian people, almost an obsession, as remarked Mário de Andrade.<sup>27</sup> This episode was the *Bumba-meu-Boi*.

Somewhere along the way, the *Bumba-meu-Boi* parted with the *Reisados* and became an independent form in the North-East and other regions of Brazil, agglutinating many of the other *Reisados*: the *Reisado da Pastorinha*, the *Reisado do Cavalo Marinho*, the *Reisado da Burrinha*, the *Reisado do Babau*, etc,<sup>28</sup> which became their main episodes. The *Reisados* were already disappearing when Mário de Andrade wrote. Today they are rare and the *Bumba-meu-Boi* alone has prevailed. But, as the play does not have a fixed text, new themes may be added to the central one through improvisation, creating several secondary scenes, which "often appear as critiques of behavior and customs".<sup>29</sup>

José Possi Neto remarks that

"In parts of Brazil where life is still relatively traditional and provincial, the Bumba-meu-Boi maintains its primary structure, main characters, and the basic theme of the Ox. Secondary themes are added and modified according to the place, the historical background and the contemporary setting of the performance. This depends on the creative inspiration and the desires of the group that is performing."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 51.

This perhaps was, initially, "about the ox of the manger (...) which merged later with the ox of the pastoral region, the profane invading the custom" (See Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, pp. 12-14).

<sup>28</sup> Mário de Andrade, op cit., pp. 48-50.

<sup>29</sup> José Possi Neto, "The Bumba-meu-Boi [Brazil] ", *The Drama Review*, vol. 21, n. 3 (T75) (New York, 1977), p. 9.

His article focuses specifically the *Bumba-meu-Boi* of Maranhão, but such aspects can be taken as general.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

For Mário de Andrade, the *Bumba-meu-Boi* became the most strange, original, complex, and exemplary of all Brazilian folk theatre forms.<sup>31</sup> Today it is the only festival, except for Carnival, "that is still held throughout all Brazil".<sup>32</sup>

In his turn, Câmara Cascudo has pointed to it as the most popular *auto*<sup>33</sup> performed in Brazil, and the most loved by the people of the North-East,<sup>34</sup> while Renato Almeida has said that it has "the greatest aesthetic and social meaning among the Brazilian folk forms".<sup>35</sup>

According to Gustavo Barroso, the *Bumba-meu-Boi* was created in the farms by the *mestiços* and became a summary of the moral, intellectual and vocal expressions of the three basic races which formed the Brazilian nation.<sup>36</sup> In the opinion of Ascenso Ferreira, at the beginning, it was performed by strolling players, who moved from farm to farm, and only later did the performances become fixed.<sup>37</sup>

For Hermilo Borba Filho, albeit its Iberian and European origin, it became essentially Brazilian. He said that "its structure, its subjects, its characters are typically Brazilian, and

---

<sup>31</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> José Possi Neto, op. cit., p. 5.

He says: "Given the central theme of the Ox, it would appear that Bumba-meu-Boi should occur only in basically pastoral areas; however, it is performed in mining, fishing, and agricultural areas as well" (Ibid.).

<sup>33</sup> The *auto sacramental* or "sacramental act" was a Spanish religious dramatic genre. Performed in the open air to celebrate Corpus Christi Day (there was also the *auto pastoril*, performed at Christmas), the *autos* were allegoric one-act plays in verse which lasted from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Its apogee, however, was the seventeenth century, with Calderón de la Barca, generally considered as the great master of the genre.

<sup>34</sup> Luiz da Câmara Cascudo, *Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro*, p. 140.

<sup>35</sup> Renato Almeida apud Luiz da Câmara Cascudo (Ibid.).

<sup>36</sup> Gustavo Barroso, *Ao Som da Viola* (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento de Imprensa Nacional, 1949), p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Ascenso Ferreira, op. cit., p. 111.



the music that is played during the show - sung by the *Cantadeira* or by the other characters - has a national rhythm, form and colour."<sup>38</sup>

If on the one hand it incorporated elements contributed by the Indian culture, on the other hand it absorbed not only characters and situations taken from the life of the black slaves who in the colony constituted its audience, but also elements of the magic festivals of Africa and especially the sensuality and the sense of revelry which became strong cultural features of the Brazilian people.

It is Brazilian, for instance, in the extent of its performances, for it is a typical Brazilian characteristic to extend to the utmost the opportunities of having fun and meeting.<sup>39</sup> It also is Brazilian in the shape and contents of its numerous episodes, for these reflect situations and human types which are the usual elements of the everyday life of the country and of the region. Among them, the landownership system, which keeps the labourers far from their dream of having their own land, and the corrupt representatives of the legal authorities. It is still Brazilian in the musical aspects. Not only because of the importance of the music as one of its basic elements, as it is in the whole life of the Brazilian people, but mainly because its music has merged their original sources, developing new and characteristic forms of musical expression.

The *Bumba-meu-Boi* is performed during the whole year but, predominantly at Christmas time. In the state of Pernambuco there is one version that is seen only during Carnival. It is called *Boi de Carnaval* (Carnival Ox), but it is more processional than dramatic.

---

<sup>38</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Carnival has become one of the best examples of this. In some parts of the country, and especially in states such as Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco and Bahia, the official carnivalesque period, that is, the three days preceding Lent, has been usually extended. There, carnivalesque celebrations can be frequently held between New Year's Eve and Lent and, sometimes, even during Lent itself. But, as a matter of fact, such celebrations can happen at any time during the year and for the most diverse reasons.

For those who see the folk plays as rigorously seasonal and linked to religious festivities, the *Boi de Carnaval* may appear as if it was out of place, and certainly it has not been always common. Ascenso Ferreira, for instance, has said that he never heard about it and that the only reference he knew was from Pereira da Costa. Refusing to acknowledge the validity of the *Boi de Carnaval*, he cites another scholar, Teófilo Braga, to reinforce that for him the *Bumba-meu-Boi* is a religious custom traditional to the period of Christmas.<sup>40</sup>

However, there is not anything strange in the appearance of the *Bumba-meu-Boi* as a carnivalesque processional group, for the play is totally identified and integrated in the atmosphere of revelry and riotous amusement of the carnivalesque period, as well as with the spirit of democratic merrymaking that in the past reigned from Saturnalia (in December) to Lupercalia (in February), and Carnival.

The bond between Christmas and Carnival festivities was seen, for example, in traditional European popular culture in which

"... the most important kind of setting was that of the festival: family festivals, like weddings; community festivals, like the feast of the patron saint of a town or parish (*Fête Patronale*, *Kirchenweihtag*, etc.); annual festivals involving most Europeans, like Easter, May Day, Midsummer, the Twelve Days of Christmas, New Year, and the Epiphany; and finally, Carnival. These were special occasions when people stopped work and ate, drank and spent whatever they had".<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Ascenso Ferreira, op. cit., p. 112.

The reference made by Pereira da Costa can be found in *Folclore Pernambucano* (Recife: Arquivo Público Estadual, 1974), p. 259.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 2. ed. (Hants: Scolar press, 1994), p. 178.

In early modern Europe, Carnival, which may be seen as "a huge play", was "a favourite time for the performance of plays" and its season "began in January or even in late December, with excitement mounting as Lent approached".<sup>42</sup>

In Carnival ritual Peter Burke points out three elements - a procession, some sort of competition and the performance of a play of some kind, normally a farce - as well as three major themes (both real and symbolic). These are: Food, for in Carnival there used to be a massive eating mainly of meat;<sup>43</sup> Sex,<sup>44</sup> for "Carnival was a time of particularly intense sexual activity"; and Violence, for it was "a festival of aggression, of destruction, desecration". For him, one should perhaps think of sex "as the middle term connecting food and violence". Violence and sex that were "more or less sublimated into ritual".<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, it is worth noting that other festivals also performed the functions of Carnival and shared its characteristics. Also carnivalesque "were a number of feast-days which fell in December, January and February, in other words inside the Carnival period in its widest sense", as was the case, for instance, of the Feast of Fools, held on 28 December or thereabouts, which was "the feast of the 'innocents' massacred by Herod". For Burke,

---

<sup>42</sup> Peter Burke, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>43</sup> He says: "It was meat which put the *carne* in Carnival" (Ibid., p. 186). In fact, the word Carnival (*Carnaval* in Portuguese) comes probably from *carne* *levare* (Latin) or *carne* *levare* (Italian), which means "the putting away or removal of flesh (as food)".

<sup>44</sup> *Carne* also means "the flesh".

According to Ewan MacColl, "in most cultures, in most of the older cultures, there was a recognition for the need in the community of orgiastic festivals from time to time. They still exist in some parts of the world, in parts of the world where a community has not been overlaid and strangled by the deadweight of a kind of nineteenth century morality for example, where it's still considered not sinful for a man or a woman to demonstrate the beauty of their bodies, for example, in a dance" (Ewan MacColl in tape transcripts of discussions by the 'Critics Group' (Birmingham City Archives, Charles Parker Archive - Ref. n. CPA/1/8/9), tape n. 7).

<sup>45</sup> Peter Burke, op. cit., pp. 183-187.

such carnivalesque treatment was "appropriately enough from a Christian point of view, since the birth of the son of God in a manger was a spectacular example of the world turned upside down."<sup>46</sup> Like Carnival, the twelve days of Christmas were a great time for eating and drinking, for the performance of plays, and for 'Misrule' of various kinds".<sup>47</sup>

The fact is that the *Boi de Carnaval* has become very popular in Pernambuco, where several teams go to the streets during Carnival, collecting money and drink, dancing without any precise choreography and with the *Boi* always "attacking" the *foliões* (revellers).

The *Bumba-meu-Boi* does not use stages or platforms. It is performed on the ground, always in the open air, with the audience standing, forming a circle around the players.

It is one of the longest Brazilian folk theatre forms. Its performances usually start in the evening and can last for up to eight hours. And, as proudly says *Mestre Salustiano*, one of the great leaders of the Brazilian folk theatre nowadays, "without repeating any character". During all this time, the actors dance, sing and act without tiring, and it is common that they drink *cachaça*<sup>48</sup> at each interval of their performance.

Trying to account for the long duration of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, Mário de Andrade claimed that the *Reisados* were too short, and that in their only episode many facts were synthetised simply by allusions in the dialogue, by the presentation of their main character, and by the performance of their conclusion. But, according to him the audiences did not find this length satisfying. Thus, he explained, the psychology of Brazilian people, who often use music as if it was a stupeficient, inevitably led to the enlargement of such

---

<sup>46</sup> Burke sees Carnival as an enactment of "the world turned upside down" which in the popular culture of the early modern Europe was a favourite theme (Peter Burke, op. cit., p. 188).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 192-193.

<sup>48</sup> *Cachaça* is a cheap and popular alcoholic drink in Brazil. It is a strong firewater made from sugar cane.

plays, fitting together two or more *Reisados*.<sup>49</sup> And, as this series of *Reisados* always ended with a *Bumba-meu-Boi*, the most popular *Reisados* were later incorporated into that episode, which became the only *Reisado*.<sup>50</sup>

Another aspect that possibly also helped to extend the duration of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, observed Mário de Andrade, was the interest in comedy. He said that such interest comes from the desire to mock and to escape the power of dominant values through laughter. Thus, this interest could have produced an inflation of episodes, adding to or increasing many sequences which, sometimes, were not that important in the form previously.<sup>51</sup>

The interest in the comic<sup>52</sup> could be also directly related to the decline of the religious aspects of folk theatre. Therefore, the need for laughter combined with themes such as heroism, courage, the daily routine of work, the profane tradition, the country, the war, the history, "contributed with their symbolism to lead astray, to confound, to disfigure, to disguise, and even to grant a new purpose to some *bailados*. A purpose that is never false (the folk is never false), but is not the original anymore."<sup>53</sup>

In the Brazilian folk theatre, as in the folk theatre of all cultures, there is an undeniable component of escape and release from the pressures of everyday life.

---

<sup>49</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>50</sup> This conflated *Reisado* lost its former denomination. *Bumba-meu-Boi* was the name adopted by the people. However, in the North-East of Brazil, it is still possible to see some *Reisados*.

<sup>51</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting that in her article on the Antrobus Soulcasting Play, Susan Pattison underlined the comic nature of the performance as an obstacle to the explanation of the Mummers' Play by those who believe in it as a 'celebration of the life-cycle' (Susan Pattison, op. cit., p. 5.)

<sup>53</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 25.

As these folk theatre forms are modern, as well as traditional, they allow an identification between their characters and situations and their audience, making it possible for them to function as a relief from the oppressions of daily life.

Thus, the humour of these plays frequently appears in the form of social criticism and political satire. In them everything and everyone can be satirised, without punishment.<sup>54</sup>

Using the grotesque as a language, they provide laughter because what is being shown, even though mirroring life, is not life itself. It is even more than life, for it is a poetic recreation of it, in which everything is *human* but is presented in a *mechanical form*, by means of such devices as men dressed as women or masked faces. As Bergson stated, "*Any arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement.*"<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, these people are in a group and not alone, what is decisive for the arousing of laughter, for "You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others".<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, the most ridiculous characters are those who represent the oppressors of real life, such as the farmer, the priest or the policeman.

By means of this theatre, people can see exposed the structure of their society and, at the same time, express and reassure the values of a common moral code, as well as find a sublimation for the oppression that is exerted upon them by those in power.

---

<sup>54</sup> Although, many a time, the performers of these plays have to cope with some repressive reactions on the part of those who are in power and do not accept such spontaneous and even ingenuous satire, mainly members of the local authorities, who are among the most common targets of this satirical theatre.

<sup>55</sup> Henri Bergson, *Laughter*, tr. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 69.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Hence, the conspicuous role that the people ascribed to the comic elements in these plays has helped to make the religious basis almost disappear, and the more they became profane, the more they became modern.

The *Bumba-meu-Boi* certainly is "the ritual performance of situations that occurred during the colonial <sup>period</sup> ~~cycle~~ of ~~the~~ <sup>raising</sup> cattle and that were kept in the collective memory, even of those social groups which moved to other regions and activities".<sup>57</sup>

But, as these folk theatre forms usually absorb new facts and all the changes that happen in the life of the region, the *Bumba-meu-Boi* always recreates and updates those old situations. So, even those who are, in time and space, distant from the original situations that are performed, are able to enjoy them.

Thus, although repeatedly performed and well known by its audiences, the *Bumba-meu-Boi* continues to charm the spectators, becoming new at each performance.<sup>58</sup>

In the *Bumba-meu-Boi* we can find more than forty different characters which, as well as the situations, are "taken from life itself", as its players say. These characters are commonly divided by the scholars into three categories: the humans, the animals, and the fantastiscs.

The presence in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* of numerous fantastic characters is worth a special consideration here. Magic and supernatural elements are, indeed, largely incorporated into the culture of the whole of Latin America. They are so intense, for instance, in a great part of the Latin-American literature, which has been usually included in the label of "magic realism" that, for many readers it has appeared to be the product of fertile imaginations. However, authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, from Colombia, Alejo

---

<sup>57</sup> Roberto Câmara Benjamin, "O Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo", p. 137.

<sup>58</sup> See Ibid. and also "A Sedução da Pastorinha: Uma Denúncia da Exploração Sexual da Mulher em um Folgado Popular Nordestino" in *Antologia Pernambucana de Folclore* (Recife: Massangana, 1988), p. 253.

Carpentier, from Cuba, or José J. Veiga, from Brazil, are mostly only recreating individuals and situations that have a real existence in the quotidian of the Latin-American peoples. A quotidian that is full of legends and myths and peculiarly orientated by mysticism.<sup>59</sup>

As the Latin-American universe has been continuously oppressed by the colonialist policy of rich and developed countries, such mysticism has become a sort of safeguard for these peoples. In fact, in this part of the world, freedom and autonomy have usually been controlled by nations who feel themselves in charge of the economic, social and, sometimes, religious "salvation" of such peoples, ignoring their own cultures and their greatness. Such oppression, which has been in the major part a form of enslavement and exploitation, has given birth to a great number of nonsensical situations, opening the way to the appearance of popular heroes and myths.

However, if the political oppression exerted upon such cultures has been a constant source for the reinforcement of their mysticism, the fact is that within that part of the inhabitants of Latin America who have not yet been touched by material development, the relationship with supernatural elements has ever been strongly evinced.

Referring to the inland region of the North-East of Brazil, with its particularly difficult conditions of survival, as an example, Marlyse Meyer says that "the frontiers between natural and supernatural are not precise".<sup>60</sup> In such a milieu, mysterious forces and magic powers are part of daily life, which is full of signs, strange creatures and fears.

---

<sup>59</sup> See Marco Camarotti, "O Realismo Mágico em 'El Reino de Este Mundo' " in *Caderno Ômega*, vol. 1 (Recife: UFRPE, 1985), pp 7-18.

<sup>60</sup> Marlyse Meyer, "Le Merveilleux dans une Forme du Théâtre Populaire Brésilien: Le *Bumba-meu-Boi*", Reprint of the *Revue D'Histoire du Théâtre*, vol. 15 (Amsterdam, 1966), p. 99.



Thus, it has been in the real life of their civilisation more than in their own imagination that these Latin-American writers have found inspiration to create their world-wide appreciated literature.

Taking into account this magic world as a characteristic feature of those who perform plays such as the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, it becomes easier to understand why it is so common to find the appearance of fantastic characters, as the *Babau* or the *Diabo*, or even of an ox that dances, dies, is divided into pieces, distributed and, then, resurrects.

On the other hand, through such fearsome supernatural characters, both the performers and the audience experience the exorcism of the bad spirits, rendered by the comic nature of the play, in which the death and resurrection of the ox reproduces unconsciously a ritual of ancient functions. Functions that are still performed in their everyday life by all the magic beliefs and practices that help them to remove any danger that threatens their lives.<sup>61</sup>

Marlyse Meyer says that in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, which, notwithstanding its rudimentary plot, is beautiful to see and to listen to, "its invention, the variety of its music and its dance, get us back to an original world, where men, animals and nature are part of the same universe, are subjected to the same dangers, to the same fears, stemming from the same mysteries".<sup>62</sup>

### 3.3.2 - Chegança

The *Chegança* has been known since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its subjects are related to episodes of sea-life and to the fights between Christians and Moors,

---

<sup>61</sup> Marlyse Meyer, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

which come from ancient Iberian traditions largely spread by means of *romances* that celebrated the great nautical expeditions, and by performances known as *Mouriscas*, which usually performed the combat between Christians and Moors. But, sometimes, there are also references to the adventures of Charles, King of France, and his twelve knights.

The *Chegança* has plenty of music and dance. It is composed of Brazilian songs and some popular Portuguese narratives in verse (*xácaras*). It uses more singing than dialogue.

Some *Cheganças* have the fight against the Moors as their principal element, ending with a battle in which the Christians win and the Moors are baptised. These are called *Chegança dos Mouros*.<sup>63</sup> Others have as their central theme the episodes of sea-life and are called *Chegança dos Marujos*, or *Fandango, Barca*, etc.

In the *Barca* of the state of Paraíba, for instance, the main episode is the old *xácara* of the *Nau Catarineta*, which also appears in the *Fandango* of Pernambuco and is a very well known theme in Portugal which spread along the Brazilian seacoast. The *Nau Catarineta*

---

<sup>63</sup> Metin And throws light on the appearance of Moors in folk theatre forms and explains how they began to be identified with evil. He says that in the Medieval tales of chivalry, both Christian and Muslim knights were

"praised for their prowess in battle and their faithfulness in love and friendship. Valour is no more the prerogative of one side than evil the prerogative of the other, and Christian minstrels extol the knightly virtues of Saladin, who ranks among the heroes of the tales along with Frederick Barbarossa and Richard Lion-Heart. The Crusaders, too, respected the culture of their Muslim foes and brought home with them knowledge and objects till then unknown in the West. Popular folklore, however, had always a black bogeyman, and as it was popularly believed that Saracens and Moors were black, the medieval bogeyman was often portrayed as a Saracen. When the Turks invaded Europe in the fifteenth century, Europeans made no distinction between Saracens (as Arabs were generally named), Moors or Turks, so the Turk was commonly assumed to be also black, a colour, furthermore, denoting evil. The Saracen and the Turk became one in the popular mind. So in the most widespread form of the traditional English folk-play, the combat between good and evil is symbolized by the fight between St. George and an adversary who is variously named as the Saracen Knight, the Turkish Knight, the Black King of Morocco, the Turkish Champion, and other such names, and all shown as black."

(Metin And, op. cit., pp. 8-9.)

is a ship which got lost on the ocean for "seven years and one day", searching the lands of Spain and the beaches of Portugal. During the trip, hunger and thirst lead the crew to the practice of cannibalism. But, invariably, there is a happy-end, for, when the Captain is to be killed and eaten after a draw, the crew finds out that all the problems that they had been facing were a stratagem of the Devil. This had taken possession of the *Gajeiro* (Top-Man) to steal their souls. They then struggle against the Devil and reach the port of Lisbon. In it there are no Moors, however there is a fight, this one caused by the abduction of a beautiful *saloia* (a peasant girl).<sup>64</sup>

The *Chegança*, generally an open air form, is performed during Christmas time, on the ground or on a wooden structure which represents a boat. This flatboat, built as scenery for the play, albeit it can still be seen today, was more frequent in the past.

The players dress as mariners, in accordance with naval hierarchy. They are the Pilot, the Admiral and other members of the crew of a ship. Among them there are also a priest, a doctor and two sailors called *Ração* (Food) and *Vassoura* (Sweep-brush) who are responsible for the food and for the cleansing of the boat and, in the performance, are in charge of the major part of the comic and satiric moments of the play.

**It is 6 January. In Laranjeiras, a small and ancient village in the state of Sergipe, there is festivity everywhere. It is the celebration of Saint Benedict and of Our Lady of the Rosary, the patron saints of the black people. Early in the morning, the steep hill, on top of which is**

---

<sup>64</sup> The *Chegança* and its variants are intended to be played by men, and all their characters are habitually male. But, besides the *Saloia* of the *Barca*, there are also, sometimes, three Moorish princesses who can be played by girls, as it is in Sergipe. However, the *Marujada*, in the state of Alagoas, is played by twenty-five, among whom five are men and twenty are women (See José Maria Tenório Rocha, *Folgedos e Danças de Alagoas* (Maceió: SEC-AL/CAF, 1984), p. 77). This singularity was also remarked by Melo Morais Filho who noted that the *Cheganças* could be of women (Cited by Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 75).

the church of the two saints, is brightened by the passage of colourful folkloric teams. They come singing through the streets until they reach the staircase that gives access to the church. At 10:00 am begins the *Missa das Taieiras* (Mass of the *Taieiras* ),<sup>65</sup> which is attended by the *Taieiras* and a group of other devotees from the village, nearly all black. After the mass, the other folkloric teams that had been waiting outside the small temple, enter the church to pay tribute both to the saints and to the *Taieiras*. The last team to enter the church is the *Chegança Almirante Tamandaré*.<sup>66</sup> Their entry is full of emotion. Their singing is beautiful and fills the space with powerful energy. In their faces, in their voices, in the way they play the *pandeiros* (small tambourines), there is plenty of enthusiasm, faith and pleasure. Inside

---

<sup>65</sup> Although Mário de Andrade has said that the *Taieiras* had disappeared (Mário de Andrade, op. cit., pp. 32, 55 and 67), they are still alive in Sergipe. The *Taieira* is a religious dance whose function is to accompany the queens of Our Lady of the Rosary, singing and dancing to honour the saints of the black people. Its performers believe that if they do not do it, they can be punished by Saint Benedict. It is traditional to the period of Epiphany. The performers are female in the major part, although some of them are male, performed by young boys, as is the case of the *Rei* (King). The main characters are the *Rainhas* (Queens), women who are crowned annually after the mass, with the crown of the image of Our Lady of the Rosary. Beatriz G. Dantas explains the relationship between the *Taieiras* and the royalty: "During the Brazilian slavery, the slaves used to choose, through the brotherhoods of Our Lady of the Rosary and with the permission of the civil and religious authorities, black queens and kings, who were known as kings of the Congo". However, she adds, "For the black it was a way of perpetuating political institutions of the old Africa, the monarchy", while for the white it was "an easier way for the domination of the slaves", for they used the king, to whom the blacks had to obey, as an intermediary in the control of their behaviour. These sovereigns were in charge of persuading the slaves to work and also of holding back any attempt of rebellion against the lords. She says: "For the coronation of such kings, whose mandate was annual or for life, festivities and pompous processions were organised to accompany them until the church where they were crowned by the priest". So, the *Taieira*, as well as other similar dances, would be derived from these processions (Beatriz G. Dantas, *A Taieira de Sergipe* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1972), pp. 57-59).

<sup>66</sup> According to Beatriz G. Dantas, the participation of the *Chegança* in the celebration of the saints is justified by its performers with the fact that the *Chegança* would be the outcome of a *promessa* (a religious promise) that the crew of a boat made to the Virgin of the Rosary when they faced a storm and were saved by her miraculous intercession (Beatriz G. Dantas, *Chegança* (Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE/MEC, 1976), pp. 5-6).

the church, with their bodies making continuous movements to the sides, which imitate the swinging caused by the sea waves, they perform the second *jornada* of the *Chegança*, that is, *O Anau Perdido* (The Lost Boat).<sup>67</sup> In this episode they represent a storm, followed by disagreements among the crew and accusations of inability against the pilot who decides to throw himself into the ocean and, finally, the end of the tempest, which is attributed to the miracle of the Virgin.

When the whole ceremony is finished,<sup>68</sup> the *Chegança Almirante Tamandaré* leaves the church and goes through the streets, stopping in some specific places to perform the other *jornadas* of the play.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> The first one, *O Embarque* (The Boarding), had been already performed at the River Cotinguiba, in whose valley is the village of Laranjeiras. There, they had embarked and navigated for a while, before going to the church.

<sup>68</sup> After the mass and the entry of the several teams, the priest goes back to the high altar for the ceremony of the coronation of the queens of Our Lady of the Rosary. The women kneel down on the steps of the high altar and the cardboard crowns that they wear are withdrawn. Someone brings the silver crown of the Virgin of the Rosary on a tray. The priest takes hold of it, places it on the head of each queen, blesses them all and leaves. The silver crown is put back on the image of the Virgin and the cardboard crowns are again worn by the queens. The *Taieiras*, still in genuflection, and forming two rows along the central nave, sing the *bendito*, that is, their praise song to the saints. Afterwards, they stand up and offer flowers to the Virgin, while singing and dancing. In following that, they make some different choreographic movements, among them the *combate* (combat), in which they go in pairs to the centre of the rows, beat small sticks that they carry in their hands and spin around themselves. Then they leave the church, walking to the front door without turning their backs to the high altar, as do the other teams in their turn. They continue to sing in the streets, stopping in one or another house for a visit. There they eat, drink and collect money. This *romaria* (pilgrimage) will be repeated until late in the evening, being interrupted only for lunch and a little rest in the house of the lady who organises the festival, and also to take part in the afternoon procession (See Beatriz G. Dantas, *A Taieira de Sergipe*, pp. 19-25).

<sup>69</sup> These are: 3) *A Rezinga Grande* (The Big Quarrel), in which the *Piloto* and the *Patrão* argue about the distribution of the rations among the sailors. The *Piloto* is stabbed and a doctor is summoned to cure him, as well as a priest to hear his confession. The *Piloto* survives and they pray in gratitude; 4) *O Contrabando dos Guardas-Marinha* (The Smuggling of the Midshipmen), in which the midshipmen are arrested because they are carrying contraband. They ask the other members of the crew to intercede on their behalf. They are finally released and pray; 5) *Agulha de Marear* (Sea Compass), in which the *Gajeiro* and the *Patrão* argue and the former is accused of having lost the instrument of orientation. He is arrested and also asks for the help of the crew. All the other sailors look for the *agulha de marear* that is finally found; 6) *A Mourama ou Combate* (The Moors or Combat), in which the Christians fight against

In the late afternoon, joining the other teams, they take part in the religious procession of the two saints along the main streets of the village.<sup>70</sup>

Now it is nearly six o'clock in the evening. Lots of people are already waiting for the *Chegança* in the central square of the village, in front of the mother church, in whose staircase and courtyard, everybody knows, will be performed the main and last *jornada* of the play.

The performance begins as soon as the group of men of varied age, dressed as sailors, come singing and playing their *pandeiros* and reach the front of the church. The people make room for them and they form two rows, in whose centre stays the *Piloto*. Their arrangement, to a certain extent, reflects the hierarchy of the characters. In this position they will stay till the end of the performance, gently swinging their bodies in the rhythm of the songs. Each time that one or more characters are in charge of the scene, the player(s) moves forward to the centre of the rows. The only exception are the Moors. These stay apart from the Christians, usually on the staircase of the church.

After some introductory songs by the members of the crew, the Moors approach the boat and declare that they bring a proposal for the

---

the Moors, an episode that is considered the most important of the play by its performers.

The *Chegança Almirante Tamandaré*, as well as the *Nau Catarineta* of Cabedelo-Parafba, is one of the few teams that still perform almost the whole original plot of the play.

<sup>70</sup> This kind of procession, which mingles the religious and the profane, for some centuries has been part of the strategy of the Church to convert pagan ceremonies into Christian elements. It started in Portugal after the fourteenth century and was introduced in Brazil by the Jesuits at the beginning of colonisation. These allowed the Indians to take part in religious processions, singing and dancing, and it would be repeated later on with the Negroes. However, the profane would reach such a proportion within these processions that, in the seventeenth century, the Church began to complain about the excesses and to prohibit their performance.

Christians: their religious conversion. As a reward for that, they offer many riches and marriage to Turkish princesses. Their attempts, normally two or three, are always rejected. Then Christians and Moors fight, without stopping singing. When the Moors are at last defeated, they are arrested, including the princesses, and "*jogados no porão*" ("thrown in the hold"), that is, the space between the two rows of sailors. They refuse to accept Christian baptism and are threatened by the *Piloto*. Although they are constrained, the baptism finally takes place, by means of slaps and jostling, and with great comic quality. Afterwards, they all sing the farewell song.

The spectators begin to depart, taking different directions, mingled with those who, a short while before, were Christian sailors and Navy officers, or Moorish kings, princesses and warriors. Some of them go straight home or stay in groups along the surrounding streets, while others will continue to have fun, for the festivity will not end before dawn.

According to Mário de Andrade the strong presence of Moorish traditions in Brazil have no historical support and can only be understood as a symbol of religious order. He says that in the colony, in the seventeenth century, there was still the fear of a possible Moor attack. At that time, Portugal sent constant warnings about a probable Moor or Turk invasion, as well as English, French and Dutch attacks. This fear was founded on assaults which had been made by the Algerians in Portuguese possessions such as the Azores. However, as such attacks never happened, the fear disappeared. The main evidence for his theory would lie in the fact that such customs from the Iberian heritage only preserved

the idea of the opposition Christians - Moors. He argues that in Portugal there were many strong Moorish traditions and that, in Brazil, only some of them were adopted, besides the fact that these were soon disappearing. The only element that seems to have persevered with much intensity it was the traditional hatred against the non-believers.<sup>71</sup>

In his turn, Roberto Benjamin states that, in the Brazilian folk customs in which appear the combat between Christians and Moors and the celebration of the Christian victory, it looks at first sight as though their intention is to represent historical facts taken from the fights of Christian nations of Europe against the Moslem who had invaded their territories and were threatening their sailing and commercial activities. However, he believes that the analysis of such customs demonstrate that their aim is really to proclaim the triumph of Christianity and not the historical narrative of those combats.

For him, this is clearly made explicit in some of these folk forms by the challenge made to the Moor chief, namely, that the fight will be won by those who deserve divine protection. Through elements of this nature, he concludes that the representation is "catechetical, apologetic, civic-religious" and not exactly historical.

Following this path, he points out that several other folkloric manifestations, in spite of their mutual differences, belong to the same category. The point is that, in these customs, the Moors are replaced by other non-believers, such as Indians and Negroes, and their historical foundations can be as diverse as the conquest of Mexico or the *Quilombo dos Palmares*. But, he says, all of them present a Christian and a non-Christian party; a combat; the victory of the Christians; and the conversion of the non-Christians.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

He points out that the most difficult fight faced by Christianity was the one against the followers of the Moslem faith. Notwithstanding their origin, the Christians used expressions such as "Turks", "Moors" or "non-believers" to name them (Ibid., p. 99).

<sup>72</sup> Roberto Câmara Benjamin, "Cristãos e Mouros" in *Encontro Cultural de Laranjeiras : 20 Anos* (Aracaju: SEC / FUNDESC, 1994), pp. 311-313.



In her turn, Beatriz G. Dantas reminds us that many scholars have underlined the religious origin and the initial catechetical function of folk customs like the *Chegança*. Then, she observes that the *Chegança*, like other customs which perform the dispute between Moors and Christians, transmit at the present time "not only a way of belief but also a message of social legitimacy", for the dominant religion of the society in which it is performed is "challenged, put to the test and wins". For her, the whole *Chegança*, with all its themes, can be seen as a symbolic representation, communicating values that help to maintain the established social order.<sup>73</sup>

This characteristic of the *Chegança* is probably what has led it to be the most grave of the Brazilian folk plays. Although it also presents comic elements, there is indeed a remarkable difference between the irreverence and comedy of, for instance, the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, and the *Chegança*. A difference that inevitably calls to mind the distinction made by E. R. Leach, who observed that all over the world "men mark out their calendars by means of festivals" which involve varieties of behaviour. He says:

"... if we look at the general types of behaviour that we actually encounter on ritual occasions we may readily distinguish three seemingly contradictory species. On the one hand there are behaviours in which formality is increased; men adopt formal uniform, differences of status are precisely demarcated by dress and etiquette, moral rules are rigorously and ostentatiously obeyed.

(...)

In direct contrast we find celebrations of the Fancy Dress Party type, masquerades, revels. Here the individual, instead of emphasizing his social

---

<sup>73</sup> Beatriz G. Dantas, *Chegança*, p. 28.

personality and his official status, seeks to disguise it. The world goes in a mask, the formal rules of orthodox life are forgotten.

And finally, in a few relatively rare instances, we find an extreme form of revelry in which the participants play-act at being precisely the opposite to what they really are; men act as women, women as men, Kings as beggars, servants as masters, acolytes as Bishops..."<sup>74</sup>

### 3.3.3 - *Pastoril*

It is Christmas Eve and, on a stand near the church, a little shepherdess sings, dressed in red, while she waits for the others who have gone in search of news about the birth of Jesus. She falls asleep and dreams. Then, enter the other shepherdesses, some dressed in red, others in blue. Singing, they introduce themselves and announce that Jesus is already born in Bethlehem and decide to begin a journey to the place where it has occurred.<sup>75</sup> This trip will constantly be made difficult because of the stratagems of the Devil (here generally called *Lusbel*). However, the representatives of Good, such as the angel Gabriel, will always come to the aid of them.

One of *Lusbel*'s stratagems is to appear to the girls as a very attractive shepherd and try to seduce them but this is useless, for a

---

<sup>74</sup> E. R. Leach, op. cit., pp. 132 and 135.

<sup>75</sup> Ascenso Ferreira thought that the word *jornada* (journey), which is used to indicate each sequence of the *Pastoril*, could be explained by this journey that they take in search of Bethlehem. However, such designation already existed in the Spanish *autos sacramentales*. It has been used to designate the act of a comedy since medieval times. On the other hand, it is also commonly used in other Brazilian folk forms to name their diverse episodes.

star comes to guide the shepherdesses. Disguised, *Lusbel* tempts *Diana*,<sup>76</sup> for his intention is to turn them away from Bethlehem. He pretends to believe in God and says that he wishes to accompany them. However, a real shepherd appears and comes to regard *Lusbel* with suspicion when the devil gives him and some of the shepherdesses a strong wine, which makes them nearly drunk. After *Diana*, he tries to seduce the *Mestra*, but the angel Gabriel appears and prevents it. Then, the pilgrims are escorted by an old hermit who is also walking to Bethlehem. Suddenly, one of the shepherdesses meets *Herodes* who has been guided by *Lusbel* to make his decision to kill the first-born children. *Herodes* tries to force her to say where the new-born Jesus is but she escapes. The shepherdesses, horrified with the murder of the children, continue their journey. *Lusbel*, who is delighted with the orders given by *Herodes* to his soldiers, reappears and, one more time, tries to seduce the shepherdesses, being again repelled by the angel. In Bethlehem each shepherdess offers a gift (linen clothes, fruits, perfumes) to the new-born baby and sings praises to him. In his turn, *Herodes*, who sees the head of his own son brought to him by a soldier, asks God for forgiveness and kills himself. *Lusbel* appears to demand his soul but the angel tells him that *Herodes* belongs to God, for he has been saved by repentance. Then they all celebrate the defeat of *Lusbel*, around the manger, and sing their farewell.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> She is the only one dressed in both red and blue. She plays apart, in the middle of the two groups of shepherdesses: those in red (commanded by the *Mestra*), and those in blue (commanded by the *Contramestra*). During almost all the performance, they sing and dance, playing their *pandeiros*.

<sup>77</sup> The whole plot, developed as it has been reported here, has almost disappeared in present performances and the characters, mainly the male ones, have become more and more reduced.

Traditional to Christmas time, the *Pastoril* is performed on stages or wooden platforms, both in open and closed spaces. It belongs to the theatrical tradition which includes the "mystery plays", the "miracles" and the Spanish "*autos sacramentales*". It has been known in the state of Pernambuco probably since the sixteenth century and initially celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ. Hermilo Borba Filho tells the legend of its origin:

"... Saint Francis of Assisi, who wanted to celebrate suitably the birth of Jesus, in 1223, decided to make a live representation of the biggest event of the Christian calendar. With the permission of the Pope he put an ox, a donkey and a manger into a grotto and laid down the baby boy in the straw, putting images of Mary and Joseph at the side of the manger. Inside the grotto he said a mass, attended by a great number of friars and peasants from the surrounding region. During his sermon, when he was saying the words of the Gospel '... put him in a manger', in his arms appeared a luminous little boy."<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, it is believed, since then the performance of nativity scenes have been mounted all over the world.

The majority of the characters in the *Pastoril* have usually been female. It is, indeed, the only one of the Brazilian folk plays in which it is usual, essential, for the presence of women as performers to predominate. However, since some decades ago, it has become common to find religious-satirical *Pastoril* teams, performed only by young men. On the other hand, formerly, there were several male characters which were performed by men, but nearly all of them are no longer included and, today, the most common male character

---

<sup>78</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, pp. 145-146.

is the *Velho* (Old Man) who, in so far as the *Pastoril* has become more and more profane, has turned to be in charge of the comic parts and is much alike to the clown in the circus, because of his make-up, his costume, his wig and his behaviour. During the performance, he incites the audience, mainly the men, who are normally excited by the charm of the girls and by the short clothes worn by them, to choose and vote for each of the two colours that characterise the groups of shepherdesses. In reality, the *Pastoril* has seen the *Velho* become its main attraction, and the *jornadas* become a mere pretext for his presence and for his obscene jokes.

At the present time the religious *Pastoril* can still be found, although closer to its contemporary non-religious form than to its original and, undoubtedly, its totally profane version has become the most popular of the two. It has turned more and more to the comic, probably because its organisers wish to attract a more numerous audience,<sup>79</sup> and the dispute between the two groups and colours has arisen as a natural accretion to the play, a provocative element to arouse the interest of the audience.

This has eased the appearance of a completely profane version of the *Pastoril*, in which the sexual elements have become the central motive and the plot has been replaced by a simple sequence of jokes, intermingled with songs and dances which, in their turn, are also far removed from the ancient themes of religious devotion.

This profane *Pastoril*, with its obscene nature, is chiefly found in the littoral of the state of Pernambuco. It is performed at any period of the year, mainly during summer, although it has become more scarce today.

Such *Pastoril* has several names as, for instance, *Pastoril de Ponta-de-Rua*, which reveals that this is a different form of *Pastoril*, for it is not played near a church as the religious *Pastoril* generally is, but anywhere, preferably far from the churches.

---

<sup>79</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, p. 161.

It has less characters than the religious one. There are two groups of *Pastoras*, who are played not by young girls, but by women who, mostly, are prostitutes. The central character, however, is the *Velho*, who is indeed responsible for the popularity of the form. The actor who plays the *Velho* is always the artistic director and manager of the team too, and the teams are habitually known by the name chosen by him for his character. Then we have: *Pastoril do Velho Barroso*, *Pastoril do Velho Faceta*, etc.

The profane *Pastoril* is all improvised and everything in it is related to sex, as has been noticed by Mello and Pereira.<sup>80</sup> Sexuality is present, for example, in the costume of the *Pastoras*, which leaves the major part of the body exposed; in the dance, whose movements are extremely erotic; in the stick used by the *Velho*, which he refers to and handles as the male sexual organ.

Although it does not develop any plot, the performances can last for hours. Its interest depends on the verve of the *Velho*, on his ability to make jokes, to tell humorous stories, to sing ambiguous songs, and to create funny situations. But, it also depends on the sensuality of the *Pastoras* and on their suggestive hip movements when dancing.

Such eroticism, although appreciated by the audience, has been present to some degree for a long time. As early as 1801, the Bishop Azeredo Coutinho requested from the government of Pernambuco the interference of the police to prevent the *Pastoril*, because of the obscenity to which "so beautiful and innocent entertainment" had been turned. However, the repression exerted by the government has never been able to stop the play.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Luiz Gonzaga de Mello and Alba Regina Mendonça Pereira, *O Pastoril Profano de Pernambuco* (Recife: Massangana, 1990), p. 94.

<sup>81</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, p. 162.

If this profane version has derived from the much more ancient religious *Pastoril*, the original *auto*, in its turn, can be seen as a result of the policy of the Catholic Church which, in many moments of its history, has had to absorb pagan customs, in order to guarantee its power, its control of society and, hence, its own survival.<sup>82</sup> It is clear that the Church used the apparent adoption of such customs as a strategy, whose intention was to convert them for its own interests, mainly as a means of catechesis.<sup>83</sup>

However, the religious *Pastoril* has shown an increasing propensity for becoming more and more profane too. Mello and Pereira call attention to the fact that its religious plot has tended to disappear, changing the *auto* into a sort of *bailado* or dance, for the majority of the teams are no longer patronised by the Church, but by other institutions, such as the school, or even by some individuals who have a particular affection for this form.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the religious *Pastoril* has become more irreverent and comic, more spontaneous and freer from moral and ethical prohibitions in the last decades.

Mário de Andrade attributes the inspiration of the *Pastoril* to the Portuguese *Vilhancicos*, which were short plays related to the Catholic calendar, combining pastoral

---

<sup>82</sup> A similar process occurred in England, where Christian and pagan practices were often in conflict, since the rise of Christianity. In order to reach its purpose of salvage and imposition of the new religion, the church worked upon primitive ceremonies, such as the agricultural fertility festivals, transforming them into seasonal Christian celebrations. For some scholars, such intervention of the Church would result in the loss of the ritualistic sense in the Mummers' Play (See Alan Brody, op. cit., p. 112).

<sup>83</sup> That is what has happened since the beginning of the Brazilian history, when the Jesuits made use of artistic expressions to convert the Indians. The major effect on the Indians was the loss of their own forms of expression. A sample of this is what happened to their musical instruments. As the Jesuits rejected the rustic indigenous instruments, for these were made with bones and other similar materials, the Indians were urged to learn instruments such as the organ and the harpsichord to substitute for the native ones (See Bruno Kiefer, *História da Música Brasileira*, 2. ed. (Porto Alegre: Movimento, 1977), pp. 10-11 and Jean de Léry, *Viagem à Terra do Brasil* (São Paulo: Martins, 1972), pp. 164-165).

<sup>84</sup> Luiz Gonzaga de Mello and Alba Regina Mendonça Pereira, op. cit., p. 18.

and allegoric elements, songs, dances and discourses. A theatre not ~~z~~specifically created by the people but well adapted for their enjoyment.<sup>85</sup>

In the religious *Pastoril*, there is another element that deserves attention here. It is the character *Diana*. Not only because of the nature of her name,<sup>86</sup> but also because of her position of maternal leadership in relation to the two groups of shepherdesses and the fact that, in their journey, she is the first one to be tempted by *Lusbel* in the original plot of the play.

Carlo Ginzburg quotes a passage of a text which comprised a list of beliefs and superstitious practices to be eradicated from the parishes and "included around 906 by Regino of Prüm in a collection of instructions for bishops and their representatives (*De synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis libri duo*)". It says:

"One mustn't be silent about certain wicked women who become followers of Satan (I Tim. 5, 15), seduced by the fantastic illusion of the demons, and insist that they ride at night on certain beasts together with Diana, goddess of the pagans, and a great multitude of women; that they cover great distances in the silence of the deepest night; that they obey the orders of the goddess as though she were their mistress; that on particular nights they are called to wait on her."<sup>87</sup>

Such reference is not the only one that Ginzburg has found regarding Diana and her nocturnal society of followers.<sup>88</sup> He has also found it in other texts.

---

<sup>85</sup> See Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> She is the only shepherdess who has ever been identified by the same proper noun.

<sup>87</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

<sup>88</sup> Diana is one of the several names attributed to the goddess who led the throng of 'wicked' women. She appears also as Herodias, Oriente, Pharaildis, Artemis, etc.



Ginzburg recognises that this nocturnal goddess, who dominated "a primarily female ecstatic religion", has a contentious character. The chronologically and geographically dispersed documentation on which his study is based, the incapacity to explain how it persisted through the years, and the existence of other documents that seem to disprove it, are reasons for that. But, in spite of this, he states that she is "a hybrid,<sup>89</sup> belated descendant of the Celtic divinities".<sup>90</sup> According to him, "Diana and Herodias offered the clerics a thread with which to trace their way through the labyrinth of local beliefs. As a result a feeble and modified echo of those women's voices has come down to us."<sup>91</sup>

These women who followed Diana were originally pointed out as "wicked", possibly because of distortions introduced by the clerics but, certainly, after some time the Church must have incorporated them into the worship of Christ, whose fight turned to be always for the sake of Good.

Another interesting element that is worth noting here is that the nocturnal goddess Diana had many magic powers, such as the prediction of future, and, in the *Pastoril*, it used to be common to find a character called *Cigana* (Gypsy). The Gypsies not only have been traditionally persecuted in many cultures, where they have been linked to robbery and other evil habits, but their women have been known for their ability to read hands and foresee the future.

In the past, the *Cigana* used to appear in the plot of the *Pastoril* pretending to be interested in the worship of the new-born Jesus, but in reality sent by Herod to kidnap the child. Trying to avoid the kidnapping, a shepherdess called *Açucena* was stabbed by the

---

<sup>89</sup> As hybrid is the character of *Diana* in the *Pastoril*.

<sup>90</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.. p. 94.

*Cigana*, died and was then resurrected, making the *Cigana* regret what she had done and to be converted to the Christian faith.<sup>92</sup>

Through this kind of connection it would perhaps be possible also to understand why in the *Pastoril* there were, since the beginning, a predominance of female characters and players. ~~Even remotely~~, <sup>possibly</sup> it could ~~probably~~ <sup>historic</sup> be related to the "female aspiration to a separate world composed only of women and governed by a maternal, wise goddess",<sup>93</sup>

As the followers of Diana, the shepherdesses of the original religious *Pastoril*, travelled a long distance, were victims of diabolical temptations and followed a maternal and wise leader.

### 3.3.4 - Mamulengo

The *Mamulengo* is the folk puppet theatre of the North-East of Brazil and uses the proper stage for glove or stick puppets, that is, a booth. Hidden by tenting, one or two puppeteers, normally male, handle the puppets. Commonly performed in the open-air, it can also be held in a closed room.

The majority of the puppets are sculpted in wood, but they can also be made of other materials. Such primitive sculptures represent the heads and hands of the puppet, and even the rest of the body. However, their forms, even when they represent human beings, are ever more unreal than real.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Gustavo Barroso, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

According to him, such character would be based on Lamia, Greek myth who kidnapped children, and her Eastern versions (Ibid., pp. 112-113).

<sup>93</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>94</sup> Santos states that the style is non-naturalistic and "close to a formal synthesis", for eliminating the details of the natural images, the form of the puppets only suggests the figures but is able to express the idea or the essence of each element (See Fernando Augusto Gonçalves Santos, "Place au Mamulengo

In front of the pavillion there are three or four *Tocadores* (Musicians) who play and sing during a great part of the show and, sometimes, engage in dialogue with the puppets. Their instruments are the accordion, the triangle, the bass drum or *zabumba*, and the rattle or *ganzá*, a small white tin tube with pebbles or seeds inside it.

Their participation is essential for the performance, and many times it is they who make the success of the show and establish the engagement of the audience.

Together with them there is the *Mateus* or *Arrelinquim* (Harlequin), who comes from the *Bumba-meu-Boi*. The *Mateus / Arrelinquim* is a human actor who acts as a mediator among the puppets, the *tocadores* and the spectators, improvising all the time. He is also the one who collects the money from the audience.

As with the other Brazilian folk plays, the *Mamulengo* is not written. The dialogues are created at the moment of the performance and they depend on the reaction and participation of the spectators. Dialogues as well as the situations performed are extremely critical, obscene and funny.

The dramatic structure of the play is divided into independent *passagens* (passages) whose sequence is not logical and which do not follow any strict notion of time and place. Using only slight elements, the setting can easily turn to totally different locales. Santos says: "The action is condensed, concise, limited to the elements which are essential and indispensable...". The language is also concise and schematic, "full of sonorous inventions, adages and phrases which are current in the oral tradition" and the whole show has "a strong poetic realism", which is linked to the habit of the people of the North-East of Brazil of expressing themselves through metaphors".<sup>95</sup>

---

Brésilien!" in *Marionnettes en Territoire Brésilien* (Charleville-Mézières: Institut International de la Marionnette, 1994), p. 14.

<sup>95</sup> See Ibid.; pp. 13-14.

The *Mamulengo* is either urban or rural, although it is more usually found in the countryside today.<sup>96</sup> Its performances, as those of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, last about seven or eight hours.

Besides the musicians and the *Mateus*, who can be enrolled among the characters of the *Mamulengo*, due to their participation and interference in the action of the play, there are the puppet-characters: the Presenter, who can have different names; *Quitéria*, his lover;<sup>97</sup> *Cabo 70*, a policeman who is always ridiculed by the smart Presenter; and many others, such as doctors, priests, solicitors, etc., besides the animal characters (mainly snakes and oxen), and the fantastic ones, such as the Death, the Devil, ghosts and other mythical figures.

It is also common that in the performance of the *Mamulengo* there are included groups of puppets playing scenes of the other folk plays, as the *Bumba-meu-Boi* and the *Pastoril*, or carnivalesque groups, such as the *Maracatu*.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Santos points out that the *Mamulengo* has shown a tendency to turn away from the urban areas and concentrate in the small villages of the interior. According to him, its natural habitat are the *sítios*, that is, small properties which are usually rented by employees of the sugar industry and where they develop a subsistence agriculture. In his opinion, it is there that the *Mamulengo* is still played "in its purest style" (See Fernando Augusto Gonçalves Santos, op. cit., p. 13).

<sup>97</sup> According to Santos, *Quitérias* are the most characteristic heroines in the *Mamulengo*. For him, they resemble the "ancient Joans and present Judys of Punch, the Madelons of the Guignol, the Gretas of Kasperl and the Verushkas of Petrouchka...". She is sensual, dissimulated and talkative. Usually she is married to *Capitão Manuel de Almeida*, a rich landowner who she incessantly deceives with *Simão*, *Tiridá* or *Benedito* (Ibid., p. 14).

<sup>98</sup> *Maracatus* are a tradition in the state of Pernambuco. They are processional carnival groups, compounded chiefly by black people, remnants of ancient retinues that accompanied the African kings who were chosen by the slaves, during the period of black slavery in Brazil. They are symbols of the cultural resistance of the race, for they represented a way of maintaining the kingship and the religion they had in Africa. This was the best alternative they found to keep worshipping their kings and gods without the interdiction of their owners who, in their turn, used the custom to control their slaves, as has been aforementioned.

The word is probably originated from *maracá*, that is, *instrumento* (instrument) and *catu*, that is, *bom*, *bonito* (good, beautiful), from the *Tupi*, or would come from the African Bantu, according to Mário de Andrade and Artur Ramos.

The *Maracatus* present aspects of historical, as well as totemic and religious survival. Roberto Benjamin points out that they, like the *Taieiras* and the *Congos*, are strictly traditional folk forms. They

Early in the evening some people arrive at the corner of a quiet street, in front of a grocery store that also functions as a bar. As has happened several other times before, they have been contracted by the owner of the store to perform their *Mamulengo*, for the performance helps to increase the sale of drinks. There they rig up their rustic pavillion, which is covered by two lateral and one frontal cloth, on which can be seen paintings that represent characters and scenes of the play. Also, in rough and incorrectly written words, they bear the name of the *Mamulengo*, besides some eulogistic references to the team. Inside the booth, there is a small table on which are put two benches and three old suitcases. Inside the suitcases are the puppets which, for many hours that night, will cheer up the people who are already gathering together in front of the pavillion. The *Tocadores* approach and take their places near the frontal cloth. *Mateus* has also approached. Everything is ready now. The *Mestre Mamulengueiro* (puppeteer), after having drunk some doses of *cachaça* "*pra esquentar*" ("to warm up"), takes his place and begins the *função* (show), assisted by the *Contra-Mestre*, who will be in charge of the performance of some characters, and by one or more assistants, who will eventually handle a choreographic puppet or group of puppets and will sing in chorus with the musicians.

---

do not allow improvisation and their evolution has been characterised by loss and simplification. Now, their symbolism is no longer remembered by those who still play them (See Roberto Câmara Benjamin, "A Sedução da Pastorinha...", p. 252).

The musicians begin to play cheerful music and suddenly there appears a black puppet that shouts: "*Pára, Tocador, pára!*"<sup>99</sup> But the *Tocadores* continue to play and then it is the spectators themselves who shout: "*Pára, pára! Num tão ouvindo Benedito mandar parar ?*"<sup>100</sup> Finally they stop and *Benedito* thanks the audience. Then he says to the musicians: "*Quem manda tocar aqui sou eu! Entenderam bem? E eu ainda num dei ordem nenhuma. Pera aí, pois eu preciso ver se a minha doce Quitéria já está toda nos trinquês*".<sup>101</sup> Turning to the interior of the pavillion, he says: "*Quitéria, minha flor! Meu docinho de amendoim! Tu já tá pronta, nega, tá?*"<sup>102</sup> From inside, she answers: "*Tou, meu raio de lua queimado pelo sol...*"<sup>103</sup> Then, *Benedito* orders the *Tocadores* to start playing: "*Ataca aí um baião bem puxado, minha gente, que Quitéria hoje tá a fim de balançar o esqueleto e vem aí com dois quentes e três fervendo!*"<sup>104</sup> The musicians restart to play and *Quitéria* appears, swaying voluptuously, leaving *Benedito* "*aceso*" (sexually excited).<sup>105</sup> He embraces her and

---

<sup>99</sup> "Stop, musician, stop!".

<sup>100</sup> "Stop, stop! Didn't you hear *Benedito* say to stop playing?"

<sup>101</sup> "I am the one who gives the order to play! Did you understand? I didn't give any order yet. Take it easy, for first I need to check if my sweet *Quitéria* is all spruced up".

<sup>102</sup> "*Quitéria*, my flower! My little peanut butter! Are you ready, are you?"

<sup>103</sup> "I am, my sunburnt moonbeam..."

<sup>104</sup> "Strike up a very well played *baião*, folks, for *Quitéria* today is keen to dance and to show off, in a flamboyant manner!".

<sup>105</sup> Characters such as *Benedito* or *Professor Tiridá* frequently refer and demonstrate their sexual potency and the size of their sexual organ, as also occurs in the Turkish *Karagöz* and in other forms of puppet theatre.

they dance with great and obscene effusiveness. They push one another to each side of the booth, fall on its edge and simulate a sexual intercourse. But, suddenly, *Quitéria* leaves *Benedito* and disappears, returning immediately with a sweeping-brush with which she begins to beat *Benedito*, swearing at him. During her attack, he does not react, only groans and asks her why he is being beaten up. Without stopping, she says that it is because he is cheeky, for he was flirting with *D. Miquelina*'s daughter who is among the spectators. He denies it, vowing fidelity to her and, taking advantage of an unguarded moment of *Quitéria*, to grasp and kiss her ardently. At the beginning, *Quitéria* rebels against it but soon she gives up. After recovering from the kiss, she tells *Benedito* that she has to leave, for she needs to make some arrangements for the party that they are organising. Alone, *Benedito* begins a long, flaunting and nonsensical praise to his male charm and his bravery. Afterwards, he orders the *Tocadores* to play, for it is time to rehearse for the ball. Appearing at the other corner of the booth, the *Capitão João Redondo* asks the *Tocadores* who had given permission for the party to take place. They say that it had been *Benedito*. The *Capitão João Redondo* and *Benedito* argue and this turns into a physical struggle won by *Benedito*, who leaves the other draped over the frontal edge of the booth.<sup>106</sup> He is removed from the

---

<sup>106</sup> Such fights are very popular and characters who represent the oppressors are generally beaten, cheering up the audience. This also happens in other forms of puppet theatre in the world, as shows Metín And: "In Algiers, Karagöz expressed anti-French sentiments on the screen. One example is where Karagöz is seen beating French soldiers with large size phallus. Satan appears on the screen in French uniform. The French authorities banned all Karagöz performances in 1843 for expressing anti-colonial ideology" (Metín And, op. cit., p. 76). Also in Brazil, such theatrical expression of rebellion against the oppressive authorities has, many a time, led their performers to the sorrows of prohibition and persecution.

scene and *Benedito* is arrested and taken to the police station. There he asks for the presence of his solicitor, *Doutor Sabe Nada* (The Doctor who Knows Nothing), who tries to impress favourably the other people, talking in a very ostentatious but preposterous manner. He loves aphorisms and hollow phrases and, after each one which he utters, he increases the value of his remuneration. *Benedito* is finally set free but, as soon as they leave the police station, *Benedito* beats the solicitor, because he has insisted on overcharging him.

Afterwards, many other episodes are performed, in which can be seen a priest and his assistant, the Devil and many other characters, including some animals, such as the *Cobra* (Snake), the *Onça* (Jaguar), etc.

Now it is already late at night and the puppets say farewell with music and much joy. While the *Mestre Mamulengueiro* and his assistants dismantle the pavillion, the spectators, still excited, take the way back home, commenting with enthusiasm on the feats of their heroes, with whom they have just shared some of the funniest and most pleasant hours of their lives. An enthusiasm that will probably last until the next performance.

The *Mamulengo* is, among the Brazilian folk forms, perhaps the most arbitrary. Not only because of its mockery and satire, but also, as Metin And saw in the puppet theatre of Turkey, because it is "often shamelessly erotic, as if liberties could be taken by the little

---



figures which would have been inadmissible in a performance by flesh and blood actors."<sup>107</sup>

Peter Schumann also throws light on this point:

"Puppet theatre, the employment and dance of dolls, effigies, and puppets, is not only historically obscure and unable to shake off its ties to shamanistic healing and other inherently strange and hard to prove social services. It is also, by definition of its most persuasive characteristics, an anarchic art, subversive and untameable by nature, an art which is easier researched in police records than in theatre chronicles, an art which by fate and spirit does not aspire to represent governments or civilizations, but prefers its own secret and demeaning stature in society, representing, more or less, the demons of that society and definitely not its institutions."<sup>108</sup>

Nobody knows when the *Mamulengo* began to be played and how this puppet theatre was introduced in Brazil and intermingled the European tradition with probable forms of puppet theatre that may have been practised by the African slaves. Probably it happened at the beginning of the Brazilian history, possibly through José de Anchieta, the Jesuit who introduced the theatre into the colony as a means of catechising the Indians. But the first documents that register the performance of puppet theatre in Brazil are from more than two hundred years after the voyages of discovery.

It is believed that it came from the same nativity scenes from which originated the *Pastoril*, having lost its religious nature in the nineteenth century.

For Santos, the Brazilian *Mamulengo* has connections with the *Vidouchaka* and the *Karagöz*, from Turkey; with the Italian *Pulcinella*; the *Guignol de Mourguet*; the Austrian

---

<sup>107</sup> Metín And, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Schumann, "The Radicality of the Puppet Theatre". *The Drama Review*, vol. 35, n. 4 (T132) (New York, 1991), p. 75.

*Kasperl*; the Czech *Kasparek*; the German *Hanswurst*; the Russian *Petruchka*; the English *Punch*; and the Spanish *Don Cristobal*, that is, a lineage of "popular anti-heroes", situated in a "historic marginality" and incorporating "the same signs systems which are found in all the archetypal heroes who have been invested with collective values" and of whom the audiences are accomplices. However, in spite of its resemblance with this traditional European puppetry, the *Mamulengo* acquired a face and an identity of its own "which is still unknown in the European world of puppets".<sup>109</sup>

The *Mamulengo* expresses the hardness of the life of the people of the North-East through a critical and satirical view of their reality that is, at the same time, permeated by magic. By means of "their puppets the people take revenge for everything that has been inflicted on them".<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Fernando Augusto Gonçalves Santos, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.

## **Chapter 4**

### **RELEVANT FEATURES OF THE FOLK PLAYS OF THE BRAZILIAN NORTH-EAST**

## 4.1 - Possible Bases for Comparison

Discussing the work of the French ethnologist Lévy-Brühl, Mary Douglas says that because of his ideas "the general tendency in England has been to treat each culture studied as wholly *sui generis*, a unique and more or less successful adaptation to a particular environment."<sup>1</sup>

However, cultures are not so uniform and *sui generis*, and many scholars have already remarked how profitable can be a comparative approach between them for the understanding of cultural aspects in general. Mainly if the cultural ranges within which the comparison is made is not too vast, for the more limited it is, "the more significant the results".<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, as Henry Glassie remarks in his study on the Irish Christmas Mumming, although so similar, the folk plays performed all over the world "provides us with an index to the geographical identity of its players", which can be easily attained through comparison".<sup>3</sup>

But, notes Mary Douglas,

"The right basis for comparison is to insist on the unity of human experience and at the same time to insist on its variety, on the differences which make comparison worthwhile. The only way to do this is to recognise the nature of historical progress and the nature of primitive and of modern society. Progress means differentiation. Thus primitive means

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

undifferentiated; modern means differentiated. Advance in technology involves differentiation in every sphere, in techniques and materials, in productive and political roles."<sup>4</sup>

Modernisation has become a reality in some parts of the large extension of the Brazilian territory but, as it has already been remarked, it has been delayed in others parts of the country due, chiefly, to the inadequate and misconduted political action of its governments. The North-East is one of these regions where the holding back of development has been more evident, and where, in some areas, it seems to have even been everlasting.<sup>5</sup>

However, in spite of the lack of an effective modernisation and of policies that could eradicate social problems such as illiteracy and starvation, which affect a great part of its population, the North-East has also experienced the advent of technology, even if in disproportion with the rest of the country, and unequal between the littoral and the inner parts of the region.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 78.

However, it is worth mentioning that such differentiation cannot be taken as an absolute value for, even in the world produced by progress, there is some evident sameness. Examples of this can be seen in the architecture of the big cities and even in the daily behaviour of the people.

<sup>5</sup> In comparison with England, for example, the North-East of Brazil is materially and technically less equipped. However, "no one would frankly base a cultural distinction on purely materialistic grounds. The facts of relative poverty and wealth are not in question" (Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 94). As a matter of fact, it would certainly be a great mistake to use the criteria of material development to support any comparison between distinct cultures. What is more, the concept of "progress" itself appears to be very debatable, for it tends usually to give support to risky and unreliable value judgements.

<sup>6</sup> It can be seen, for instance, in the folk theatre. The late Ginu (Januário de Oliveira), one of the most traditional *mamulengueiros* of Pernambuco, introduced the use of a microphone in his *Mamulengo*, some years ago, being soon followed by others. Actually, technology has affected all the folk forms, making not only the character of *Quitéria*, in the *Mamulengo*, appear in the form of an industrialised plastic doll, but also the *Calunga* (a totemic doll, traditionally black), in the *Maracatu*, become sometimes blonde, resembling a Brazilian television presenter who was very famous in the last years. On the other hand, mainly in the urban areas, the number and frequency of the spectators have been conditioned by the TV programming.

Really, in the North-East, as in the whole country, contrasts are visible everywhere. Contrasts that concern culture, landscape, and also the social conditions of the population.

But, the point is that, modernisation by itself, at any level, is not necessarily an enemy of folk theatre, as many people have tried to suggest. Folk theatre results from deeper and less material stimuli; and modernisation, instead of a threat, can be a source of renewal. So, nothing really hinders their ~~peaceful~~<sup>peaceful</sup> ~~coexistence~~ coexistence.

England is an example of this. It is, today, more developed and industrialised than the North-East of Brazil and still presents the performance of a folk theatre form as the Mummers' Play. A play whose shape is now very different from the past, but that continues to have an important role within some, although few, English social groups.

It was aforementioned that Susan Pattison, in her report of the Antrobus community, remarks that in the last decades there were rapid and radical social changes in that area. But Antrobus is only a sample of a transformation that occurred in other parts of the country, making farming become less labour-intensive and changing the life of places <sup>such</sup> as Antrobus, where the men "no longer work locally on farms, but are employed in occupations as various as electrician, crane driver, chemical engineer and brewery worker."<sup>7</sup>

So, if these men still perform the Antrobus Soulcaking Play every year, it is not motivated by its probable relation to ancient rituals of fertility, for they "are no longer intimately concerned with the problems posed by the specific seasons of the year, and no longer rely directly upon the fertility of land and livestock for their livelihood."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Susan Pattison, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

In the North-East of Brazil, the differences that occurred during the same period were equally significant but unquestionably slower and less radical. Today, the majority of the folk theatre players of Brazil, with few exceptions, still earn their living in the same activities in which their fathers used to work. If they live in the countryside, they are still farm labourers; if living in the urban areas, they are joiners, hawkers, drivers, cleaners, etc. Within their cultural environment, even in the case of those who are still farm labourers, any connection with ancient ritual origins would now sound as false and far-fetched as such a view would be in England. Nevertheless those who work on the farms remain in touch with the land, agriculture and the rotation of the seasons.

The diversity of personnel participating in this folk theatre produces both a play as pastoral as the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, and also a play such as the *Chegança*, whose shape is so distinct and is far away from pastoral themes.

Although produced in countries which are separated by a long distance and by diverse history, geography and culture, the English Mummers' Play, for instance, presents many points in common with the categories of folk theatre performed in the North-East of Brazil. Notwithstanding, <sup>the</sup> they also show significant contrasts ~~that can be found inclusively~~ within these similitudes.<sup>9</sup> Looking into them, I think, it becomes possible to realize how these folk theatre forms operate inside the social groups who perform them.

## 4.2 - Ritual Symbols

Following the notion of ritual symbolism found in Victor Turner and Mary Douglas, Margaret Robertson, <sup>on</sup> her account of Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland, points to

---

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, although such points can also be pointed in comparison with the folk theatre of the rest of Europe and of other continents, this is not the aim of this thesis.

ritual symbol as "an object or an action which, by analogy or association, expresses a cultural value or norm or a cultural abnormality or evil..."<sup>10</sup>

In order to explain how these symbols work expressing and communicating the cultural values of that community, she observes that these symbols form a system, divided into two groups:

1) *Symbols of escape*

These are the "abnormal" symbols, through which the mummers seem to escape, temporarily, "from the usually rigid gender and moral rules of their society" (E<sub>2</sub>: wearing the clothes of the opposite sex is wrong, for it is a gender aberration);

2) *Symbols of reaffirmation*

Through which the mummers reaffirm these cultural norms from which they are trying to escape temporarily, and which are not easy to follow all the time.<sup>11</sup>

Like the Christmas Mumming of Newfoundland and the English Mummers' Play, the Brazilian folk theatre also presents these two groups of symbols and, in this chapter, I will try to indicate such aspects, trying to select those that seem to be the most relevant ones in the Brazilian plays, looking at both objects and actions as ritual symbols of social relationships.

The aim is, then, to examine critically, in the social context of the plays, if their background can be read by means of their symbolism and how it is expressed.

---

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Robertson, "The Symbolism of Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland", *Folklore*, vol. 93, ii (London, 1982), p. 178.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.



As the universe is huge and diversified, the elements indicated are based on the fact that they occur in at least one category of the plays. An example of this is the hobby-horse which, although a very important element and with different forms, only appears in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*.

### 4.3 - Essential Characteristics

Like the Turkish mimes, studied by Metín And, the basic communicative media of the Brazilian folk theatre are "(1) Linguistics; (2) Para-linguistics; and (3) Body motion or, in its new terminology, kinesic devices such as gestures, movements, facial expressions, postures and others."<sup>12</sup>

Devices that are, for the most part,

"... used for comic effects but also to transmit the message of the play. Since they work simultaneously they render the message very explicitly. They are easily recognizable even by an uninitiated audience. Since most of the time various characters are rendered as stereotypes, body motions and linguistic features are often used indexically, and by vocal and gesture idiosyncrasies they are more or less stereotyped indices. To achieve the followability of the performance and heighten the comic effects, the following are the main devices used: Repetition - Exaggeration - Contrast and Incongruity."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Metín And, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

What he says, although written to characterise the Turkish traditional performances, can equally be said with regard to the Brazilian folk theatre.

Its several patterns were certainly introduced into Brazil by the Portuguese colonisers. There, they incorporated aboriginal elements of the Indian nations that already lived in the land, as well as African traces that were brought later on by the practice of black slavery. Hence, they soon acquired a new feature due to the peculiarities of the new country and of the new man who was arising.

From the Indians, probably through the first tribes catechised by the Jesuits, these folk forms would absorb many characters. In some plays there became common, for instance, the appearance of *Caboclos* or *Índios Guerreiros* (Indian Warriors),<sup>14</sup> or of *Pajés* (Indian chiefs). Also the *Caipora* (from the *Tupi* "*caá-y-pora*", that is "the one who lives in the forest"), a small elf of the forest who, in the Indian mythology, protects the animals against the massacre by cruel hunters and usually brings adversity. Indian characters could be seen in the past even in the *Pastoril*, together with the traces of the rural life of Portugal which predominated in the play.

On the other hand, the lewd dances which were introduced in the *Pastoril*, as well as in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* and in the *Mamulengo*, are undoubtedly an African influence. This African presence is so intense in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, in which there are many black characters, such as *Catirina*, *Mateus* and *Bastião*,<sup>15</sup> that Hermilo Borba Filho has stated

---

<sup>14</sup> They are chiefly present in the North and in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* of Maranhão, where they appear as "secondary characters, wearing Amerindian costumes of feathers and small mirrors" and "do a warlike Amerindian dance" (José Possi Neto, op. cit., p. 8). The North and the Centre-West is where the major concentration of the current Indian population of Brazil is found.

<sup>15</sup> *Bastião* used to appear as a runaway slave, chased by the *Capitão do Mato*, who was contracted by the landowner to capture him. *Bastião*, who was always smarter than his persecutor, not only remained free but also defeated and humiliated him, cheering up the audience of slaves. After the end of slavery, the *Capitão do Mato* was replaced by the *Valentão* (Tough Man) or *Tutunqué*.

that it is "a performance of Negroes".<sup>16</sup>

Another interesting aspect of these plays which is related both to the Indian and African cultures is the use of whistles during their dances, either to initiate and stop them or to accompany their rhythm. Whistles are elements which were much used among the American Indians and among the Africans with the magico-religious function of calling up the benefice or exorcising the harm.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, if one of the folk theatre forms of the North-East of Brazil can be more properly related to Kirby's theories, it is indeed the *Bumba-meu-Boi*.

In the North-East of Brazil the influence of elements such as Winter-Spring, seen as a representation of the duality death-life, is far from reality, for differences between the seasons scarcely exist. The calendar has never been so important for the performance of the folk plays, although they have been ever linked to some religious festivity. Parody has been a strong characteristic of such plays and the cure, in the case of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, has been the main element of its plot. However, one of the most reasonable of all arguments seems to be the notable presence of African and Indian elements in the formation of Brazilian culture. From them, derive the appearance and dissemination, despite the official Roman Catholicism of the country, of shamanistic practices (today inclusive among the middle and upper-classes), such as the *Candomblé* and the *Umbanda* or *Xangô*, which are syncretistic religious practices that have *curandeirismo* (faith healing), spells and trances as their most relevant expressions, and were, as happened to the folk theatre, to Carnival and other folk customs, strongly repressed in the past by the public authorities. Moreover, a great number of the folk performers in the North-East

---

<sup>16</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> See Mário de Andrade, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-66.

have usually been followers of these practices and, in some cases, tokens of their ritualistic elements can be found in the folk customs of the region, either during the preparation of the performances<sup>18</sup> or in the performance itself, as is the case of the episode of *João Carneiro* and *Recombelo* in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, and the usual dancing to a drum present in these plays.<sup>19</sup>

Beatriz G. Dantas, for instance, speaks of *Bilina* (Umbelina Araújo), the organiser of the *Taieira* in Laranjeiras. She is a black woman, descendant of Africans, who became known in Sergipe as *mãe de santo* of a group of a black cult founded by her *nagôs* forefathers. Her status and prestige gave her the necessary support to promote the folkloric festival in Laranjeiras. There, the tradition of the *Taieiras* and the religious cult are approached, and certain elements of the dance are even reinterpreted in terms of the system of Afro-Brazilian beliefs.<sup>20</sup>

According to Dantas, the religious meaning of the *Taieira* was originally inspired by Catholicism, but today, in Laranjeiras, it is mixed with elements of the Afro-Brazilian cults, whose influences are neither explicit nor entirely conscious on the part of the performers of the *Taieiras*. These influences did not change the form of the custom, but are "surreptitiously revealed" through some details. Although Bilina always insists that the *Taieiras* and the *Xangô* are separated, she can only explain some rituals of the custom by making use of her religious beliefs. One example is the greeting that they make to the port

---

<sup>18</sup> The carnivalesque groups, for instance, usually perform an *oferenda* (offering) to their protective *santos* (saints) before going in procession through the streets. Also many of their participants are *mães* or *pais de santo*, as are called the leaders of these cults; or *filhos* or *filhas de santo*, that is, their devotees.

<sup>19</sup> For Metfn And, the dancing to a drum is, in the present-day Anatolian dances, the most important single motive within the "myriad of signs of the kinship between these dances' shamanistic influences" for, without it "a shaman cannot induce trance or ecstasy" (Metfn And, op. cit., p. 26).

<sup>20</sup> Beatriz G. Dantas, *A Taieira de Sergipe*, p. 27.

during the Christmas period, which is said to be in honour of the African goddess of the waters, *Iemanjá*, who is identified in laranjeiras with Our Lady of the Conception.<sup>21</sup>

Beatriz G. Dantas believes that such syncretism "represents an attempt to maintain the religious meaning of the dance, which is more and more threatened by the gradual secularisation of society".<sup>22</sup>

Although it has become rare today, in some performances of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, before the resurrection of the dead ox, there can occur the partition of its body. The pieces are offered according to the social position and prestige of those worthy of being mentioned in the ox's will.<sup>23</sup> Because of it, some scholars have associated the play with the totemic communal feast.<sup>24</sup> One exception is Câmara Cascudo who preferred to connect it with the ancient protocol of hunting, by which the best parts of the prey might be given to the authorities, and the others to the friends.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Saint Benedict is identified with *Ogum* and Our Lady of the Rosary with *Teô*.

<sup>22</sup> Beatriz G. Dantas, *A Taieira de Sergipe*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>23</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, for instance, recorded the following will in the *Boi-Calemba* of Natal, Rio Grande do Norte:

"A rabada é da mulher casada, / a tripa gaiteira da moça solteira, / a tripa mais fina é da menina, / o corredor é de seu doutor, / o coração é do capitão, / o chambari bote pra aqui, / o que o boi cagou é dos cantadô, / o que o boi perdeu isso é dos Mateu, / do boi o rim é do Arlequim, / o mocotó de trás é de seu João Braz, / as mãos da frente é de seu João Bente. / Tem uma comadre, / mora em Afogados, / ela me encomendou, / do boi a rabada. / Tem uma prima, mora em Recife, / que me encomendou / do boi o chifre."

(Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 12.)

<sup>24</sup> Mentioning the Greatham Sword Dance Play, Alan Brody reports that, when the lock of swords is formed about the clown, this makes his will, leaving to his three sons his cow, his lapp-board and shears, and his "backbone for fiddlesticks, small bones for fiddle strings". For the King, he leaves "the ringbone of my eye for a jack-whistle" (Alan Brody, op. cit., p. 76). He relates this episode to the fertility ritual of the Buophonia, in which "an ox is murdered for a communal feast", and to the Omophagia, or communal meal, both examples of the totemic ceremony (Ibid., p. 80).

<sup>25</sup> Luiz da Câmara Cascudo, *Tradições Populares da Pecuária Nordestina*, p. 51.

However, whatever its probable origin, the point is that this sequence, where it has been performed, has become one of the most exciting and funny of the play, full of witty remarks and satire.

On the whole subject of the death, partition and resurrection of the ox some interesting clues are given by Carlo Ginzburg in his extensive study of witchcraft. He says that the theme of the resurrection of animals, expressed in myths or ceremonies, is a very ancient and a specific cultural trait which can be documented in the most diverse times, places and cultures. This includes versions which appears in continents as distant as Europe and Africa, inspiring also "certain rituals performed by the hunting population which lives in the boundless Arctic band between Lapland and the northern islands of the Japanese archipelago inhabited by the Ainu", in many different moments of their history, and which comprise some shamanistic practices.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in some places, as in the Alpine region, for instance, "the feat is accomplished by the procession of the dead or by the nocturnal goddess who leads it".<sup>27</sup> He says that the followers of Oriente, "sometimes slaughtered oxen and ate their meat; then they gathered the bones and put them inside the skin of the dead animals. Oriente would then strike the skin with the pommel of her wand, and the oxen were instantly revived: but they were no longer capable of working".<sup>28</sup>

Ginzburg reconstructs an extensive series of analogies featuring in the fairy tale of *Cinderella* which, in some of its numerous variants, includes "the gathering of the bones and the subsequent resurrection", finding a hidden homology between the heroine and the one who offers assistance to her (an animal or a fairy godmother). For him, "Cinderella

---

<sup>26</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., pp.134-135.

He points out shamanistic components and themes in many myths and cultures. According to him, "Figures and themes echo each other, bounce back off each other, until they compose, not merely a chain, but a sort of magnetic field - which explains how, starting from diverse viewpoints and proceeding independently, it has been possible to arrive at analogous conjectures" (Ibid., p. 139).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

(like Thor, St Germanus, Oriente) can be thought of as a reincarnation of the 'mistress of the animals' ".<sup>29</sup>

He says:

"In Perrault's version the assistant is a fairy, Cinderella's godmother. More often, the same tasks are performed by a plant or by an animal - a cow, a sheep, a goat, a bull, a fish - whom the heroine protects. For this reason the animal is killed by the stepmother or at her command. Before dying, it entrusts its bones to the heroine, begging her to gather, bury, and water them. In some cases the bones are magically transformed into gifts; in others the heroine finds gifts on the grave, on which a tree has sometimes grown. In three versions the animal assistant - a sheep or a lamb in Scotland, a cow or a fish in India - rises from the bones and consigns the magical gifts to the heroine."<sup>30</sup>

Ginzburg attaches the ecstasies of the followers of the goddess to those of the shamans - men and women - of Siberia or of Lapland, for in both

" ... we find the same elements: the flight of the soul to the realm of the dead, in the shape of an animal, on the back of animals or other magical vehicles. The *gandus* or wand of the shamans of Lapland resembles, on the one hand, the horseshoe-shaped wand used by the Buryat shaman and, on the other, the broomstick on which the witches claim they rode to the Sabbath. The folkloric nucleus of the Sabbath - magic flight and

---

<sup>29</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

metamorphosis - seems to derive from a remote Eurasian substratum".<sup>31</sup>

Beliefs about the cohorts of the dead, that were "previously considered more or less innocuous superstitions", says Ginzburg, "were forcibly assimilated to the stereotype of the Sabbath", due to "the pressure of bishops, preachers and inquisitors", during the times in which Christianity "had begun to be corrupted by the errors introduced by the Roman Church". Such beliefs only lost their "diabolical aura" after the seventeenth century, when with the diminished persecution of witchcraft they began "to be considered with detachment, in a historical perspective".

He mentions a custom that existed in Frankfurt in which every year "a number of youths were paid to take a large cart covered with leaves from door to door, to the accompaniment of songs and predictions which, to prevent errors, they had been taught by experienced people". In this Frankfurt ceremony, which was reported by a Lutheran pastor, called P. C. Hilscher, in 1688, the spectators recognised "a representation of the 'furious army' - the cohorts of the dead, at whose head alternated various mythical figures" and their reaction "allows us to identify a ritual in this ceremony".

However, although aware that such youths, who were paid and instructed by other people, may seem much more close to the image of professional actors than to that of "followers of secret youthful associations possessed by demonic fury", Ginzburg believes that for some it was "a canvas on which to sketch a kind of theatrical representation, was for others part of a core of memories that could be reactivated and transmitted".

---

<sup>31</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

He recognises in Horagalles, Thor, St Germanus D'Auxerre, Oriente and other myths, variants of the same myth, "whose roots lie in a remote Eurasian past: a divinity, sometimes male, but more often female, the generator and resuscitator of animals" (*Ibid.*, p. 135).



The Frankfurt custom was seen by him as an example of "rediscovery or reinvention of a tradition", "proves once more that popular culture (especially urban) in pre-industrial Europe was anything but static" and also suggests more general reflections..

He remarks that all rituals "search for their legitimacy in a real or imaginary past". So,

"Since the invention of a ritual always presents itself as a reinvention, the apparent artificiality of the situation described by Hilscher is by no means exceptional. The establishment of a ritual - a profoundly contradictory occurrence insofar as the ritual is by definition untouched by the flow of time - presupposes the conflict between those who hark back to a tradition, usually presented as immemorial, and those to whom it is alien".<sup>32</sup>

But Hilscher does not inform us "when the Frankfurt ceremony was instituted, or at what time of year it took place, or who imparted the instructions to the youth who celebrated it". Thus, Ginzburg poses two questions about the nature of those instructors: were they "old people, harking back to a remote lived experience, who resuscitated customs by now fallen into disuse?" or were they "scholars who, on the basis of literary competence, sought to resuscitate ancient rituals, true or imaginary?"

For him the second hypothesis is possible because in the same epoch many German scholars had been interested in the relationship between Christmas and Carnival customs with the Greek and Roman festivities, such as the Saturnalia. He gives the example of a scholarly work by M. Lipen (Lipenius), published in Leipzig and states:

"Among the numerous testimonies discussed therein was a sermon against the January calends delivered on the day of the Epiphany in the year 400 by Asterius, Bishop of Amasea in Cappadocia. Besides condemning the

---

<sup>32</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-183.

tradition, also customary in Rome, of exchanging gifts at the beginning of the year, Asterius denounced certain rituals widespread in his diocese. Charlatans, conjurors, and some of the populace (*demotai*) divided into groups and ran from door to door: amid shouts and applause they wished prosperity on the inhabitants of the house and demanded money from them; the siege was lifted only when, out of weariness, the requests of the importunate were met. The begging went on until late in the evening; children also took part in it, distributing apples for double the sum of money they were worth. On the same occasion, on a cart like those one sees in a theatre, among soldiers disguised as women, a fictitious sovereign was enthroned who was derided and mocked".<sup>33</sup>

However, he discards the hypothesis that the Frankfurt ceremony is an erudite commemoration. "inspired by some antiquarian less inclined than Lipenius moralistically to condemn pagan ceremonies", based on the reaction of the spectators for, if they were able "to decipher the full significance of the ceremony, it could not be based on a series of erudite references".

Ginzburg says that "the alms-collecting rounds continued well beyond the fifth century" and that in some cases "the custom has survived to our day". These groups of masked children and adolescents have been recognised as "a representation of the cohorts of the dead, who traditionally appeared with especial frequency during the twelve days" and are connected to the forays of children in the USA and in England on the night of Halloween (31 October). He also says that, concerning the Frankfurt ceremony, the meaning of the ritual was certainly shared by actors and spectators.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

In the image of the Sabbath, he distinguishes "two cultural currents, of diverse origin: on the one hand, as elaborated by inquisitors and lay judges, the theme of a conspiracy plotted by a sect or a hostile social group; on the other, elements of shamanistic origin which were by now rooted in folk culture, such as the magic' flight and animal metamorphosis".<sup>35</sup>

This calls to mind, *mutatis mutandis*, the nature and the conditions of the Brazilian folk plays and performers. Being a permanent stimulus for reunion and for common expression, in which the assumption of other identities on the part of the performers, in a universe characterised by the realm of imagination and by the proposal of different realities, the folk plays have always been taken as a sort of menace for those who are not interested in allowing the awareness of the people and their consequent strengthening as a mass with voice and will. Seen in this light, it becomes possible to understand why these customs have frequently been repressed and persecuted by local policemen or other authorities who, even when they have not prohibited their performances, have in some way interfered in them, distorting or emptying their meaning and their effectiveness. At least, as it has become more common nowadays, taming them to the point of turning these plays into mere harmless banalities or exotic attractions for tourists. For such people and their practices, who happen to be seen "in the arena of conspiracy", the social place appears to be that of "marginality" and "imperfect assimilation", as was common for the figures who constituted "the historical antecedents of witches and sorcerers".<sup>36</sup>

In fact, the Brazilian folk performers, as the witches studied by Ginzburg, have been put in a social and political state of marginality, included only because they are part of the

---

<sup>35</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., p. 300.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

masses. A condition which seems to sound as a metaphor for the following statement by Ginzburg: "In a society of the living (...) the dead can only be impersonated by those who are imperfectly integrated into the social body".<sup>37</sup>

Whatever the origins of the folk theatre, time has eroded the religious significance which Mário de Andrade held to. Contemporary features have imposed themselves on traditional symbols.

In the case of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, for instance, the great importance of the ox in the life of the Brazilian people may well be supported by its mystic and symbolic significance but this is likely now to be backgrounded for all except scholars. The value of the ox today lies principally in its usefulness.<sup>38</sup>

As Mário de Andrade pointed out,

"... the social profane elements which are contained in theatre (...) are little by little becoming excessively important and destroying the primitive religious purpose of theatre. Moreover, these profane elements tend to prevail. It was what happened to the Greek tragedy. It was what happened to the Japanese Noh, or in India, as to the *Ludi* of pagan Europe. It was what happened to the Medieval Mysteries, from which the Farces were detached. And it was what happened here too. The *Chegança*, as well as

---

<sup>37</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., p. 300.

<sup>38</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 24.

It is worth mentioning that the cult of the ox is linked to the birth of Christ, for it has been believed that the ox was one of the animals at the manger. But, on the other hand, it was inevitable that the ox became so important in a region predominantly rural, where it provides not only food and survival, but other elements too, such as the hide. This is a strong component of the life of the countryside people in the North-East. It is used to make footwear, clothes, furniture, etc. Of the ox, according to a very known saying in Brazil, we can make use of everything. The only thing that cannot be used is its *berro* (yell).

some Reisados and Pastoris, are already profane theatre, evolved from a primitive theatre of essentially religious function."<sup>39</sup>

The primitive religious nature can still be traced nowadays, in spite of the over-laying of so many profane elements. This religious significance has no longer any effective value in such performances. In the case of the religious *Pastoril*, which differs from the profane *Pastoril*, and is the most religious of all folk theatre forms in Brazil, the theme continues to be the worship of the new-born Jesus by a group of little shepherdesses. Notwithstanding this, it is no longer the worship of Jesus that truly attracts the interest of its players and of its audience today. This interest now is much more related to the dispute between the two groups of shepherdesses (the red and the blue ones), to the gracefulness of the girls and to the witticisms of its buffoon.

However, as we have seen with regard to the English Mummers' Play, this religious origin is no more what grants meaning to such performances, for it is now lost in the distance of the centuries and cannot be traced anymore. And, as the original religious objective of the rituals from which these folk plays derive became forgotten, it was made possible for them to absorb legends and historical events, as it is the case of St. George in the Mummers' Play, and of the Moors in the *Chegança*; as well as the daily facts of social and political life.

If this folk theatre keeps on being performed, it is no longer because of this probable primitive religious significance, but for different reasons, that can be found in the relationship between this theatre and those who perform it.

It is also worth noting that the existence of the folk theatre in Brazil, as in other parts of the world, has been threatened by civilisation. Mário de Andrade, for example, believed that civilisation was forcing the folk theatre to struggle and was stifling it. For him, the

---

<sup>39</sup> Ma'rio de Andrade, op. cit., p. 26.

question was not that civilisation was in itself destructive, but that it creates conceptions which are, in fact, preconceptions. He argued that so-called savage peoples have developed organically complex cultural forms and institutions, and that the onset of civilisation imposes different cultural forms from a different tradition and way of thinking upon the primitive. Primitive cultures retain a ~~w~~holistic view of the world with no divisions between the various forms of life, God, Human, Animal and Vegetatory. Such a view, except among those marginal groups who reject the values and structures of the society they live in, would not be of much use in developed industrial societies, which rely upon a synthetic view of the world for their cultural forms, endlessly dividing and sectionalising the forms of life to enable their manipulation. One of the examples given by him is that civilisation is able to create the concept of hygiene but not hygiene itself, which existed even before the beginning of civilisation. So, civilisation requires that cultural forms be intellectually determined and arranged into concepts, which clashes with the structures of the primitive culture.<sup>40</sup>

According to him, the decline of the folk theatre could be possibly accelerated by those in power and the rich, who were interested in following the preconcept of modernisation and progress elaborated by the agencies of civilisation, and by the process of urbanisation. Thus, to reach a position comparable with great urban centres, as São Paulo, New York, London or Paris, where the folk theatre forms no longer have a place,<sup>41</sup> it became usual in the main cities of the North-East of Brazil to instigate the persecution of folk theatre teams by the police, the politicians and other people in power,<sup>42</sup> due to the "antiquated" and "primitive" nature of their plays.

---

<sup>40</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

<sup>41</sup> For, in such centres, individualism became predominant and cosmologies are no more integrated.

<sup>42</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

#### 4.4 - The Present Situation

There has undoubtedly been many losses and a steady decline in the folk theatre of the North-East of Brazil, and the teams which have survived have had to struggle hard to keep themselves alive. However, the decadence that Mário de Andrade pointed out in the forties, with great sorrow, and which led him to foresee the probable death-warrant of this folk theatre, has never been sufficiently strong to annihilate it.

The existence of such decline naturally points the direction to a question: has there been any kind of revival of these plays, as it occurred with the English Mummers' Play? Perhaps the best answer could be that in Brazil there has not properly happened any kind of revival, at least in the same terms of the English folk revival, although many artists and intellectuals have been collecting elements of the folk culture and using them in their own creative works. However, their attitudes toward the folk culture, which in many cases has led to the flourishing of the sophisticated culture, have tended to be much more that of individual appropriation than of opening the way and stimulating the conditions for the practice of such folkloric expressions. So, the interference in folk culture exerted by these people who originate from other cultural substrata has, in a great part, been much more for their own benefit than for the benefit of the folk culture itself.

On the other hand, if we take into account some examples of teams and individual artists who have not only based their works on the folk plays and dances but have entirely assumed their peculiar characteristics and shape, the establishment of the difference between 'traditionalist' and 'revivalist' becomes very difficult. For some people, such as Mr.

---

Ron Shuttleworth, 'traditionalist' is one who learned from his father. But would not someone who learned from a traditionalist team or *Mestre* be also traditionalist? Or should we take the amateur/professional aspect as the one which possibly could clarify such definition? By this way, then, teams such as the *Mamulengo Só-Riso* and the *Balé Popular do Recife*, as well as solo artists such as Antonio Carlos Nóbrega and Walmir Chagas, both from Pernambuco, who have developed remarkable careers, have to be considered 'revivalist' and not 'traditionalist', although they have learned their art from traditional *Mestres*, such as *Mestre Ginu*, *Mestre Solón*, *Mestre Salustiano*, *Mestre Honório*, *Capitão Antonio Pereira*, *Velho Faceta* or *Velho Barroso*.

Moreover, if they play not only for pleasure, entertainment and to give voice to their feelings but chiefly to earn a living, they are not constrained strictly to follow the tradition, changing and interfering in many of the traditional aspects, such as text and costumes, as well as introducing some alien elements to the traditional folk forms, as with the case of elaborated lighting and props. In fact, these teams and performers are 'revivalists'. But, unlike the English revivalist teams, who are all amateurs, they are indeed professionals.

In the North-East of Brazil, the closest attitude to the revivalism practised in England has been the formation of teams of students in schools or similar institutions, stimulated by teachers and enthusiasts of the folk plays and dances, although they usually tend to be short-lived. It is also worth mentioning the attitude of some scholars, intellectuals and artists who, being aware that the dissolution of many traditionalist teams has been caused much more for lack of material resources and poverty than for lack of interest or meaning, have in some way helped to revitalise teams that were in material decline. Unfortunately, among these people, mainly among those who are or intend to be in power, such revitalisation has usually been directed to personal gains and political resource, although exceptions can be pointed out.



The point is that, although less performed today than they were before, the folk theatre forms of the North-East of Brazil have changed and will certainly continue to change, but they will be always alive, because they express the feelings of the people, providing for them entertainment and a voice. Such transformations, far from signifying a decadence or a possible disappearance, seem to point out that they have and will still have in the future an important place within the culture of the North-East of Brazil.

On the other hand, if there are numerous difficulties in tracing the origins of the Brazilian folk theatre forms, the fact remains that the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, the *Chegança*, the *Pastoril*, and the *Mamulengo* have persisted and not only because of any probable and remote religious meaning.

They are still performed because, expressing the life and the soul of those who perform them, they become an effective instrument not only of pleasure but also of natural education, for what they reflect is not the perspective of the dominant class. On the contrary, they are a response to the oppression in which these people live and also to the universal need of self-education that exists inside all human being.<sup>43</sup>

## **4.5 - The Most Relevant Aspects**

### **4.5.1 - Variant Versions with Different Names**

The Brazilian folk theatre forms, as the English Mummers' Play, have varied names. However, they do not have a generic classification as there is in England, for their scholars

---

<sup>43</sup> In this regard, see Paulo de Carvalho Neto, "Conceito e Realidade do Teatro Folclórico Latino-Americano" in *Estudos de Folclore em Homenagem a Manuel Diegues Júnior* (Rio de Janeiro: Comissão Nacional de Folclore, 1991), p. 246.

have never agreed upon a common general classification. This is not only because their names depend on the region where they are performed. As Mário de Andrade has affirmed, people are customarily negligent with the terminology that they use, which allows the same form to be called in many different ways.<sup>44</sup> So, even in the same region it is usual to find different nomenclature for the same play.

The names most used by the people of the North-East are:

a) For the *Bumba-meu-Boi*:

*Cavalo-Marinho, Boi-Bumbá, Boi-de-Reis, Boi Surubi and Boi Calemba.*

b) For the *Chegança*:

*Fandango, Barca, Nau Catarineta and Marujada.*

c) For the *Pastoril*:

This is the commonest denomination used today. But, in the past, it was usual to find references as *Pastorinhas, Bailes Pastoris, Presépios, and Lapinhas.*

d) For the *Mamulengo*:

*João Redondo, Cassimiro Coco, Babau, Briguela, and Mané Gostoso.*

Even the expression "folk theatre" is used only by a few researchers. Some use the expression *folguedos* (which means "frolics" or "merry-makings"), but Mário de Andrade adopted the expression *danças dramáticas* (dramatic dances), due to the strong

---

<sup>44</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 44.

In another section of this same book, Mário de Andrade has said that this large variety of terminology used by the Brazilian people to label their folk forms, requires an enormous effort on the part of the scholars to understand and classify all the extant variants. This effort is not only because of the great quantity of expressions, but mainly because the correlation between these titles and the plays is barely clear. For him, this want of precision is due to the fact that the Brazilian folklore is not old enough to map the field of study (Ibid., p. 98).

importance of the music and the dance in such theatre. In his turn, Hermilo Borba Filho preferred to name these plays as *espetáculos populares do Nordeste* (popular shows of the North-East). However, the people themselves always refer their theatre as the *brinquedo* (plaything).

#### 4.5.2 - Seasonal Performances

The folk theatre forms of the North-East of Brazil can be performed all over the year. But they all have their proper season, which is usually that one between early December and Twelfth Night.

In the case of the *Mamulengo*, although it has lost contact with its probable common origin with the *Pastoril*, being both at the beginning a celebration of the birth of Christ, it is still at Christmas time that it is most frequently performed.

Fernando Augusto Gonçalves Santos says that in the rural zone the seasonal aspect is more influential and is extended from August to January. He also states that the performances in the rural zone, different from the urban area, are not necessarily connected to events or festivities, the performance itself constituting the sole attraction.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, the connection with festivities and their proper seasons is becoming less and less explicit today for all these plays, for their purpose has changed and the fulfilment of the seasonal and religious calendar is no longer essential, as it must have been in the past. As they are generally performed in the open air, they are much more related to the period without rain, depending on invitations and on the convenience of the players themselves.

---

<sup>45</sup> Fernando Augusto Gonçalves Santos, *Mamulengo: Um Povo em Forma de Bonecos* (Rio de Janeiro: MEC/FUNARTE, 1979), p. 42.

This can be taken as a signal that these plays are performed nowadays only because communication, entertainment and meeting are now their fundamental basis. To which we can add the opportunity of earning a little bit of money to help their players make a living, in the case of the Brazilian players.

In England, as several scholars have seen, in a world that changed so much, the folk theatre became much more a chance for reunion, for the pleasure of being together with those who share similar values, for the collection of money for charity, for social criticism and, sometimes, to maintain the sense of community.

This was also what I could observe, accompanying the "Coventry Mummers", during their performances in the villages of Stretton-on-Dunsmore (30.06.93) and Stoneleigh (26.12.93), both in Warwickshire. From Mr. Ron Shuttleworth, for instance, I heard that the performance is "a social event". According to him, they usually meet in a club on Wednesdays, for rehearsals and, sometimes, for performances. But, frequently, they drink and talk all the time and do not rehearse at all, he said.

In a leaflet of the team, they state: "We defend our non-adherence to the ritual calendar on the grounds that frequent practice is necessary to improvisation and a relaxed performance and vital in maintaining the year-long enthusiasm of our Men."

#### **4.5.3 - Performances in the Open-air and on the Ground**

This is the most common, as we have seen, although the Mummers' Play and the Brazilian folk theatre forms can be performed anywhere, even on stages or in closed spaces.

What really matters is that these plays function in such communities as a potent channel of communication. They constitute actually an instrument of education, for they serve to

reflect and reinforce the collective cosmology and to help these people not only to be aware of the social structure and of their position inside them, but also to respond to each particular situation.

So, if these plays are a means for the reaffirmation of a communal identity, the physical proximity between players and spectators becomes a great support, for, as it is more intimate and enjoyable, it can provide a more powerful circuit of communication.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, in my opinion, it is in the open air and on the ground that these folk theatre forms attain the complete achievement of their aims

#### 4.5.4 - Performances in Procession

Mário de Andrade has said that all the Brazilian "dramatic dances" were divided into two distinct parts: the *cortejo* (procession), characterised by songs and steps that permitted the promenade of the players, wandering through the streets, till the place where the play was to be performed; and the *embaixada*, the dramatic performance itself, which required a fixed arena, a room, a platform, a patio, or the front side of a house or church for its performance.

This *cortejo*, he added, either by its organisation, or by the songs and dances used during it, has already taken on a specifically spectacular dimension. It is already theatre, and for Mário de Andrade it was also the element that gave birth to the Greek theatre. He believes that this *cortejo* derives from more ancient religious customs, from pagan sources, such as the ritual celebration of the Kalends, which predate the Greek theatre

---

<sup>46</sup> As says Peter Harrop, "A certain degree of physical proximity between performers and audience enables greater interaction and, consequently, increased enjoyment all round" (Peter Harrop, "Mumming in Bampton", p. 45).

itself. Customs which are "almost universal and always tied to this <sup>process</sup> ~~truly complex~~ of Death and Resurrection (of the year, of the spring, of the vegetation, of the animal, of the god, of the king...) in the collective psychology".<sup>47</sup>

Though the *cortejo* is not usual today it still exists in the *Chegança* of the state of Sergipe, where the performers always come in procession through the village where it is being performed. The players sing and dance during the procession,<sup>48</sup> stopping at some previously chosen places, where they perform each *jornada* or episode. This takes all the day, and the last *jornada* is normally played in front of a church in the centre of the village.<sup>49</sup>

Ascenso Ferreira, as I have mentioned before, following Sílvia Romero and Pereira da Costa, thinks that the *Bumba-meu-Boi* began with a strolling team that visited the great sugar mills in order to get food and drink from their owners, as many Carnival groups used to do.<sup>50</sup>

But if the *cortejo* is no more a constant element in these Brazilian folk performances, from time to time it is again used by some teams.

What appears to be worth noting is that the function of these processions nowadays is no longer that of a ritual celebration. When performed now, they do the work of a preliminary arrangement, whose main objective is to announce the performance, gathering and leading onlookers for it.

---

<sup>47</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., pp. 29 and 55.

<sup>48</sup> These are specific songs called *marchas de rua* (songs of street).

<sup>49</sup> Some Brazilian folk dances also use the procession at present. It is, for instance, the case of the *Taieiras*, as we saw in the previous chapter.

<sup>50</sup> See footnote n. 37 in the previous chapter.

This is also apparent in the performances of the Mummers' Play, in which the procession is still a frequent element.

In a video on the mummers of Symondsbury (Dorset), there is, for example, an interesting opening sequence: humming, an old man comes down a hill and enters the village, knocking on every house. People begin to follow him. The old man arrives in front of a pub and sits down on an outside table to drink beer with two other men. Then, a boy goes up a slope, seeming to look for something. Suddenly, his face expresses great joy, for a group of mummers is coming down a street, singing with the accompaniment of an accordion, till they reach the pub, in front of which the performance will be held.<sup>51</sup>

#### 4.5.5 - Well-known Plots

This is one of the most singular constants of world-wide folk theatre.

In the Mummers' Play, as in anyone of the Brazilian folk plays, the plots are always the same, and the only variations are quite few. In all the cases the spectators are aware of the situations that will be performed, no matter how long each performance will last.

However, this fact, as I have commented before, instead of diminishing the interest and enjoyment of the audience, seems to reinforce them, favouring the participation of the audience in the performance.

First of all, if there are little changes and novelties in the plots, it is possibly because they are not frequent in their own lives as well. Besides that, more than elements of surprise, what these people expect from their plays is the expression of their own cosmological

---

<sup>51</sup> *Walk in St George*, 16mm Film by Peter Kennedy, Alan Simpson and S. Coles, Film 3, Video 6, b&w, 25'50" (London: Vaughan Williams Memorial Library - The English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1954).

system, which needs to be constantly checked and reinforced. So, well-known plots are important, for they allow them an immediate and untroubled perception of their reality.

#### 4.5.6 - Comic and Melodramatic Nature

Laughter is something essential in the Brazilian folk theatre forms, and it is also present in the Mummers' Play. A comicality that is in general based on deviations from reality and on nonsense, which can lie in the use of words or in the situations themselves, such as the case of the death and resurrection of the combatant, in the Mummers' Play, and of the ox, in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*. It is also frequent that in both the English and the Brazilian forms, there are grotesque and ridiculous elements and scenes, such as the figure of a man dressed as a woman (Bessy or Dame Jane in the Mummers' Play, or *Catirina* in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*), or the handling of oversized objects (the medical instruments of the Doctor in both the Mummers' Play and the *Bumba-meu-Boi*). This is a kind of humour in which the characters are treated as stereotypes, whose costumes, make-up and behaviour give an immediate depiction of their nature and function as soon as they appear.<sup>52</sup> The humour is concentrated in and expressed through the actor's body and utilises violent images. These elements give support to Eric Bentley's characterisation of the farce as "a veritable structure of absurdities", or "joking fully articulated as theatrical characters and scenes".<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Eric Bentley says: "Comedy makes much of appearances: it specializes, indeed, in the *keeping up* of appearances. Unmasking in comedy will characteristically be the unmasking of a single character in a climatic scene - like that of *Tartuffe*. In farce, unmasking occurs all along" ( Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (London: Methuen, 1966), p. 242.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 244 and 234.



He proposes that we regard misery "as the basis of comedy and gaiety as an ever-recurring transcendence", the way through which we approach comedy and tragedy, being both "a way of trying to cope with despair, mental suffering, guilt, and anxiety", although with different treatments.<sup>54</sup>

Following the distinction elaborated by Bentley, these plays are more properly related to the world of farce than to that of conventional comedy,<sup>55</sup> for farce "affords an escape from living, a release from the pressures of today, a regression to the irresponsibility of childhood".<sup>56</sup> And, in the words of Jean Paul, humour is something that helps us to live.<sup>57</sup>

As Bergson has observed, if we assume that in the theatre there is "both a magnified and a simplified view of life", we will find more information in comedy than in real life.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, Elaine Turner notes that form not only makes explicit a subject which expresses a specific world view, but also functions as an ordering device. It is through form that "a work speaks of and to its social world". So, form is both the container and the result of what it contains. Following her point of view, we will see that

---

<sup>54</sup> Eric Bentley, op. cit., p. 301.

<sup>55</sup> I am aware of the difficulty in defining comedy. However, as the central aim of this study is the analysis of the relationship between specific forms of folk theatre and their audience, it is important to try to comprehend the nature of comedy in order to understand why it is so present in such plays. Above all, what really matters here is that in them laughter is predominant, and even what they have of the "solemn" is not necessarily "serious".

<sup>56</sup> Eric Bentley, op. cit., p. 298.

<sup>57</sup> Cited by V. Propp, *Comicidade e Riso*, tr. Aurora Fornoni Bernardini and Homero Freitas de Andrade (São Paulo: Ática, 1992), p. 158.

<sup>58</sup> Henri Bergson, op. cit., p. 67.

there is a relationship of "specific art forms to specific societies over the range of their histories". So, specific art forms are chosen "as modes of social expression".<sup>59</sup>

She has demonstrated that tragedy is an external manifestation of the critical dialogue that arises within society when there is a change of a reality structure to its opposite. Thus, "all the implicit meanings and unquestioned assumptions that lay behind and reinforced the established structure come into question.". She says that the tragic form becomes viable and imminent at the moment of intersection as the social cosmology moves from one reality structure to the other. So, "its social function is to elaborate the unspoken, underlying 'self-evident' assumptions of the existing cosmology."<sup>60</sup>

Hence, if Tragedy originates from the confrontation of different cosmologies, Comedy can be seen as adequate for the expression and reinforcement of shared cosmologies.

According again to Bentley, melodrama and farce "are both arts of escape and what they are running away from is not only social problems but all other forms of moral responsibility. They are running away from the conscience and all its creations, as at the orgies that the classical scholars have sometimes talked about."<sup>61</sup>

It is perhaps wrong to describe the style of acting required in the Mummers' Play as melodramatic, since this imposes on an earlier theatrical form the terminology of a later genre. The development of popular melodrama in London, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, owes much to the influence of the folk theatre. The enclosures of the period 1770 to 1830, the rapid and inexplicable rise in population in those years and the consequent flooding of people from the land into the city created such a sudden breaking

---

<sup>59</sup> See Elaine Turner, *Applying the Anthropological Model, "Cultural Bias", to the Drama, Using Tragedy as an Example* (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1991), pp. 11, 12, and 310-311.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>61</sup> Eric Bentley, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-256.

with the past as Victor Turner describes, leading to a social crisis in need of a new synthesis.<sup>62</sup>

Cut off from their roots and left to cope in the nightmare world of the emerging metropolis a new form was necessary to cope with the disorientation experienced. If this form was escapist in its solution of the triumph of Good over Evil, it also rerehearses the rural virtues and the injustices practiced upon the defenceless. Given no opportunities to rehearse their problems and search for solutions, because of the monopoly of the patent houses until 1843, melodrama developed in small illegal theatres, in which the performers manifested a strong identification with their audiences because of their common origins and experiences. Coming from outside the established theatre traditions, these performers took with them the only acting style they knew which derived from the rural folk plays. The disruption of form, whilst giving the new theatre a vital energy, coarsened the acting style, which became characterised by large gestures, grimaces, and a declamatory delivery for the speeches. The tendency to use these declamatory speeches, the use of asides and soliloquy, point clearly to the folk origins. As do, however idealised their forms of expression, the dramatic features of the popular melodrama: goodness beset by badness, a hero beset by a villain, heroes and heroines beset by a wicked world".<sup>63</sup>

With the melodrama this style of theatre represented a transitional phase of redression which moved on to the later forms of melodrama, bereft of subversive danger and of no threat to authority. The later development of theatre in England has tended to make us see the style of melodrama in a comic and contemptuous light. The Mummers' Plays in the present age have moved in performance towards the comic option and away from any

---

<sup>62</sup> Turner's ideas on these social processes will be discussed later in the specific context of the society and the folk plays of the North-East of Brazil.

<sup>63</sup> Eric Bentley, *op. cit.*, pp. 205 and 200.

attempt to arouse pathos. The early popular melodramas reversed these priorities, which seems to point to a mixture of these elements in the folk-playing of the eighteenth century.

In the folk plays of North-East Brazil this mixture of the comic and the savage still exists and it is this which gives it its subversive potential.<sup>64</sup>

#### 4.5.7 - The Combat

In the Mummers' Play the combat is ordinarily materialised as a sword fight between two characters, while in the Brazilian folk theatre it is between Moors and Christians, as can be seen in some *Cheganças*, more precisely those called *Chegança dos Mouros*.

This is also a sword fight, although between groups of characters, which is common but not universal in European folk plays, according to Léopold Schmidt.<sup>65</sup> In contrast to the Mummers' Play, in which one of the combatants dies and is resurrected, in the *Chegança* the aftermath of this combat is the conversion of the Moors through baptism, which the Church has always regarded as a symbolic ritual of re-birth, being born again.

The combat between two characters can also be found in the *Mamulengo*, in which the main character is always fighting someone else, usually a policeman, using not a sword but his cudgel, which has a lot of funny names, for example, *Deus-me-Perdoe* (God-Forgive-me).

---

<sup>64</sup> As Peter Davison points out in his study, *The British Music-Hall*, in that other popular nineteenth century theatre form, many of the performers strove to achieve a balance in their songs which left the audience poised between laughter and tears (Peter Davison, *The British Music-Hall* (New York: Oak, 1971) p. 237).

<sup>65</sup> Léopold Schmidt, *Le Théâtre Populaire Européen* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1965), p. 147. Schmidt says that they are more ancient and common in the places that belonged to the Old Roman Empire. For him, all the *Morescas* are essentially the stylised combat of groups that became the source of sword dances.

In general, there is a combat in all the forms of the Brazilian folk theatre. If this is not explicitly by a sword or a cudgel fight it is there by other means, which can be oral and not necessarily physical.

What really matters is the antagonism between Good and Evil. An antagonism that is made evident as well in the dispute between the two groups of girls in the *Pastoril*.

This dispute between Good and Evil, which normally places each of them in well defined positions, can be seen, at a first glance, due to its apparent Manich<sup>a</sup>eism, as a naïve position, a view liable to error. We know that Good and Evil have not such a clear and absolutely divided existence, but that they coexist in the heart of every human being and society. However, these disputes do not represent a misconception of the attributes of men and society. They are probably only a means to approach and realise the nature of these basic components of life, and the way they usually occur and manifest themselves. They are, then, a key element in the process of self-education carried out by these plays within such communities.

#### 4.5.8 - The Death and Resurrection<sup>66</sup>

Death, states Léopold Schmidt, is a fundamental subject of all folk theatre,<sup>67</sup> and so it is in the Brazilian folk theatre.

It was aforementioned that Mário de Andrade has noticed that in a great number of "dramatic dances" the death and resurrection of their main character occurs. For him, this was a primitive mystic notion that could be found in the rites of the cult of the seasons, which culminated, sublimely spiritualized, in the death and resurrection of the God of the Christians.

He has said that in those "dramatic dances" whose origin is strongly connected with the Iberian Peninsula, that is, the *Pastoril* and the *Chegança*, there is no death and resurrection. Notwithstanding this, they present the struggle between Good and Evil., which can be seen as related to the notion of death and resurrection. This struggle is commoner in the *Chegança* than in the *Pastoril*, and it is normally found in episodes in

---

<sup>66</sup> Metín And has pointed out two fundamental symbolic themes in the mummeries which spread all over Anatolia and Europe: the death and resurrection of one of the characters and the abduction of a girl. For him:

"In both themes one can recognize the symbolical notion of the death and sprouting of the vegetable world. When the death or abduction occurs, not only the characters concerned but also the whole assembly of onlookers pretend to mourn over the death or the abducted girl. And when the dead person comes to life and the abducted girl returns, the actors as well the onlookers express their joy."

(Metín And, op. cit., pp. 51-52.)

In the folk theatre forms of the North-East of Brazil, however, the abduction of the female has not been a central incident and only occurs in some variants of the *Chegança*. This is the case with the episode in which the *Saloia* is abducted and rescued in the *Barca* of Paraíba, and the abduction of the three Moorish princesses in the *Chegança* of Sergipe. For Mário de Andrade, the sexual opposition of sailors and *saloias* seems to be traditional in the *bailados* of maritime inspiration. For him, the episode of the abduction of the *Saloia* evoked Iberian themes known since the twelfth century, in which women were abducted and maidens were demanded as tribute from the Christians by the Moors (See Cirinéa do Amaral César, op. cit., pp. 15-16).

<sup>67</sup> Léopold Schmidt, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

which the characters have to face dangerous situations but escape uninjured. In the *Chegança* we can point out, for instance, the episode in which the boat almost sinks because of a storm; the episode in which the pilot is wounded during a dispute with the *Patrão* (Boss);<sup>68</sup> the episode in which the midshipman is arrested as a smuggler; and that one in which the captain is chosen by lot to be killed and eaten, when the boat loses its course for a long time and there is nothing left to feed the crew.<sup>69</sup>

Although the majority of the variants of the *Chegança* do not present a death and resurrection in their plots, there is <sup>an</sup> ~~one~~ exception that Mário de Andrade did not notice. In the state of Paraíba the play includes an episode in which the *Gajeiro* falls from the mizzen top-sail, dies and is resurrected.<sup>70</sup>

According to Mário de Andrade, the complex of death and resurrection does not appear in the "dramatic dances" generated in more technically advanced civilisations, but only in those that are closer to primitive cultures. The *Bumba-meu-Boi*, in which the ox is killed and then resurrected, would be a good example of this.

His explanation is that, because of his technical imperfection, the primitive man transfigured into religious practice all those factors in life that could not be managed, thus originating the cult of the vegetation, of the spring, etc., as well as instituting the conception of death and resurrection of the earth, of the sun, of the ox, etc.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Although the episode of the wounded pilot always require the presence of a quack doctor who, according to José Maria Tenório Rocha, "resurrects the *Piloto* with his fine medicines"(op. cit., p. 73).

<sup>69</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

The episode of the captain chosen to die normally occurs in the variants called *Nau Catarineta*, *Barca*, *Fandango*, *Marujada* and *Chegança de Marujos*.

<sup>70</sup> Cirinéa do Amaral César, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>71</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 22.

Probably it was like that in the remote past. However, contradicting what Mário de Andrade has affirmed, in all the types of Mummers' Play, which are performed in a technically advanced country as England, the complex of death and resurrection still appears.

Certainly the importance of the ox for the Brazilian people must have facilitated the creation and maintenance of the episode of the death and resurrection of the ox in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*.<sup>72</sup>

In Brazil it is really in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* that we find the best representation of the element of death and resurrection. Habitually this is in its last and principal episode. The death of the ox can be caused by *Mateus*, *Catirina* or other character, whereas the resurrection, despite all the variations that can be found, is usually in charge of a quack doctor. The method used to resurrect the ox also varies. It can be, for example, the enema using a little boy caught among the onlookers as if he were a syringe. A method which provokes not only the laughter of the audience but frequently some animosity and quarrels too.

There is also a reference to the death of the ox included in the *Boi de Carnaval*, the processional and carnivalesque version of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*. José Maria Tenório Rocha says that the ox, in Alagoas, used to die on Shrove-Tuesday.<sup>73</sup>

On the subject of death and resurrection, there is only one exception in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, registered by Hermilo Borba Filho. In the *Bumba-meu-Boi Misterioso de Afogados*, one of the most important teams of Pernambuco some decades ago, there was no death and resurrection. The ox, after being beaten, collapsed, and the doctor easily reanimated it

---

<sup>72</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>73</sup> José Maria Tenório Rocha, op. cit., p. 170.



with one of his potent medicines. To justify it the leader of the team, the late *Capitão* Antonio Pereira, alluded to the fact that the ox was dead, "during all the time and six months more", but that its intestine was alive.<sup>74</sup>

As this was quite unusual, he was sometimes asked to give an explanation for the shift. His answer was that the ox could not die and be restored to life, for the only being who had died and been resurrected was Jesus. So, if the ox was resurrected it would be against his faith.<sup>75</sup>

The truth regarding the presence of the complex of death and resurrection in these plays, independently of the degree of development of the societies in which they are performed, appears to be the fact that man, be he primitive or civilised, continues to be essentially the same everywhere. The duality life-death remains a mystery for him and his basic interrogations are still waiting for a satisfactory explanation.

Regarding the resurrection, it can possibly reflect an ancient attempt of establishing communication "between the visible and invisible, between the world of sense experience, governed by scarcity, and the world beyond the horizon, populated with animals". On the other hand, animals are profoundly identified with the dead because they are both "expressions of otherness". This is why they are always linked in so many myths and rituals.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> See footnote n. 25 in the previous chapter.

<sup>75</sup> See Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup> See Carlo Ginzburg, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

#### 4.5.9 - The General Succession of Incidents and Run of Dialogue

The plots of the Brazilian folk plays are arranged in a detached and episodic manner that does not follow any logical sequence. The episodes are called *partes* or *jornadas*. The name *jornadas*, as we saw, is certainly an influence of the Spanish *autos sacramentales*, for it is traditionally used in all Iberian theatre. Although the expression normally means "acts", in the *Chegança* and in the *Pastoril* it corresponds to each musical presentation.

Because of their nature the episodes can be played in different progressions. They can also acquire new situations and characters, for the folk habitually assimilates all new information in their creations. Similarly, they can be reduced in length, compressing what can last more than eight hours, if this is required when the teams are contracted by official institutions to perform for tourists or to take part in any official event. And all this without causing any damage to the whole or to the enjoyment of their onlookers.

With regard to this aspect, Mário de Andrade has said that the *Bumba-meu-Boi* could be compared to a revue or musical comedy, because of its variegated numbers.<sup>77</sup>

There is not much difference in the structure of the Mummers' Play except with regard to the duration of the performances. However, even being very short, these also easily absorb any new information. In the same way, there is not a logical development in their plots, and the arrangement of the episodes can perfectly be modified without harm.

In all these plays, we can observe that the dialogues run freely, and are always subject to the contribution of the spectators and to the suggestive circumstances of the moment of the performance. And this is possible only because in this kind of theatre "participation" is much more the objective than simple "contemplation".

---

<sup>77</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 51.

#### 4.5.10 - The Use of Recurring Formulae, Duplications and Repetitions

In the Mummers' Play, it is common to find the use of recurring formulae and the duplication of characters as well as the multiplication of situations such as the combat. But the dialogue also "shows the tendency to cumulative repetition characteristic both of folk rhymes and of ballads", as noted Chambers with regard to the dialogue of the dispute.<sup>78</sup> It can be seen in the following verses:

"Fool - A fool, a fool, a fool

A fool I heard thou say,

.....

Ginger B. - Behold, behold, behold,

A man of poor estate!

Not one penny to infold!

.....

Allspice - With a hack, a hack, a hack,

See how I will skip and dance!

For joys that we have found!

..... "79

Or:

"Turkey Snipe - No purse will I pull out,

---

<sup>78</sup> E. K. Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

No money will I pay.  
 But my sword I will draw out  
 And have satisfaction of thee this day.  
 Battle, battle, battle I will call,  
 And see which on the ground shall fall.

King George - Battle, battle, I will cry,  
 To see which on the ground shall lie."<sup>80</sup>

The Brazilian folk theatre also uses recurring formulae, such as those calling for room at the beginning of the performance (named *Pedido de Abrição de Porta*, that is, "Request for Opening the Door") or at the entrance of a new character, as well as some calling-on verses, which briefly name and describe the personages due to appear.

The duplications, chiefly of characters, are equally usual, as is the repetition of effects, both in the action and in the dialogues and songs. In the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, for instance, *Babau* and *Jaraguá* are ghosts. During their appearance, they assault the audience all the time trying to frighten them. The same assault is repeated by the *Boi* and other characters, including *Mateus* and *Bastião*, when these want to widen the area of the performance. *Mateus* and *Bastião* are both clowns, and as clowns habitually do, they repeat continually the gesture of beating other characters, either to make a "payment" or to make them go out of the circle of the performance at the end of the episodes.

In the *Mamulengo* the knock<sup>about</sup>~~down~~ is also constant. Most of its episodes begin with a dance which invariably ends <sup>in</sup>~~with~~ a knock<sup>about</sup>~~down~~.

---

<sup>80</sup> Alan Brody, op. cit., p. 132.

There is a good example of repetition in the verses of the songs of the *Fandango* of Pernambuco, reported by Hermilo Borba Filho in his book *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*:

".....  
Os marinheiros por não gostar  
Ao senhor seu C Mestre  
Se foram se foram queixar.

O C Mestre nos arrespondeu  
Quem quiser quiser comer  
Coma coma do que é seu.

Assim se faz na embarcação  
Que nós trabalhamos sem ter  
Sem ter razão.

....."81

---

81 ".....  
As the sailors were discontented  
To the lord Mr. *C Mestre*  
They have gone gone to complain.

The *C Mestre* replied  
Who wants wants to eat  
Eat eat what is yours.

So it is done in the boat  
In which we work without having  
Without having rights.

....."  
(Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, p. 75.)

Another example is taken from the *Chegança* of Sergipe, reported by Beatriz G. Dantas:

"M - O inferno treme treme

Uma vez por dia

C - O s Anjos cantam

Cantam Ave-Maria

M - O inferno treme treme

Duas vezes por dia

....."82

#### 4.5.11 - Oral Theatre

In the eighteenth century, in England, many chap-book versions of the Mummers' Play were disseminated, but customarily they have been transmitted orally from generation to generation of performers.

---

<sup>82</sup> "M - Hell trembles trembles  
Once a day

C - The Angels sing  
Sing Hail Mary

M - Hell trembles trembles  
Twice a day

....."  
(Beatriz G. Dantas, op. cit., p. 20.)

This is also what has happened to the folk theatre of Brazil. However, the leaders of the *Chegança* and its variants are used to having their texts written in notebooks, which they call *mapas*, that is, "maps". Such manuscripts as exist, as occurred with the chap-book versions of the Mummers' Play, have contributed to the corruption of the original texts. Mainly because they are written by almost illiterate people and correspond to "a scrawly and confused guide-book, a real puzzle".<sup>83</sup>

The nearly general illiteracy among the folk theatre performers has made traditional the oral method of transmission, but as these plays are a spontaneous and collective instrument which conveys the world view of specific and integrated social groups, they do not need to be written.

Their aim is not to reach the degree of literature, of an elaborated artistic manifestation, as usually happens with the plays of the sophisticated theatre. On the contrary, these plays are totally open to improvisation and to continual transformation; to adapt readily to any new circumstances of social life. Thus, they cannot stay quiet and limited by the boundaries of written words.

#### **4.5.12 - The Use of a Bald and Declamatory Style of Speech**

As well as for the Mummers' Play, this is the most usual in the Brazilian folk theatre. But it is not due to any inability on the part of the players, as has been suggested by Alex Helm.<sup>84</sup> On the contrary,

---

<sup>83</sup> Cirinéa do Amaral César, *O Fandango de Itamaracá* (Recife: Dissertation / UFPE, 1989), p. 40.

<sup>84</sup> I have already argued Helm's point of view in the chapter on the English Mummers' Play.

"The technique which folk play actors acquire undoubtedly is a technique: that this is the case is demonstrated by the fact that performers frequently hold shared value judgements as to the effectiveness of a particular performer. (...) In some instances these men have been tutored by their colleagues, and in most instances they have spent some considerable time doing what any actor must do: observing their fellow performers and attempting to emulate those aspects of another's performance style which they feel is appropriate."<sup>85</sup>

On the other hand, as Peter Harrop remarks, there are good and bad folk play actors because, like any other actors, "they strive towards a goal which is rarely achieved". In fact, "they do not necessarily act as they do because it is any easier (or more difficult) than alternative techniques. Not to appreciate this is to be hidebound by the naturalistic conventions of much contemporary drama".<sup>86</sup>

In the North-East of Brazil this can be seen mainly with regard to the most specific and important characters, such as *Mateus* and the *Velho*. It is usual to hear some *Mestres*, or leaders, refer, for example, to a *Mateus* performer who "was the best of all" they had met. Moreover, chiefly in the case of Brazil, as the values which are being expressed by such plays are shared by their participants, the intoning delivery of the words does not hinder the communication.

---

<sup>85</sup> Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays*, p. 458.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 458-459.



#### 4.5.13 - The Use of Laudatory Self-descriptions and Vauntings

These are much found in the Brazilian folk theatre. Characters as *Professor Tiridá*, *Simão* and *Benedito*, in the *Mamulengo*, or *Mateus* and *Bastião* in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, are constantly exaggerating their own abilities, their sexual prowess, their courage in fighting or their cunning. See, for instance, what *Benedito* says about himself in the *Mamulengo* of Manuel Amendoim (Goiana, Pernambuco):

"Benedito véio da fiança,  
cabelo no peito qui dá trança,  
mundrunga de pau seco jereba  
é pau qui inverga mas não se quebra.  
Moro na grota grande,  
querido das moças,  
dador de lapada,  
endireitador de cacunda."<sup>87</sup>

Such elements are among the best sources for the laughter of the audience. Furthermore, they are related to the typical and strong liking for the hyperbolic to which the oversized objects aforementioned are also connected.

In the Mummers' Play these vaunted self-presentations are mainly among the combatant characters, such as St. George, the Turkish Knight, and the Black Prince of Paradise. Chambers recorded this, for example:

"I am St. George, who from Old England sprung,

---

<sup>87</sup> Here he compares himself to a wood that can be bent but does not break; says that he is the favourite of the women, and boasts about his bravery in fight (Hermilo Borba Filho, *Fisionomia e Espírito do Mamulengo* (São Paulo: Compainha Editora Nacional, 1966), p. 158).

My famous name throughout the world has rung.

Full seven years in prison I was kept,

And out of that into a cave I leapt,

And out of that into a rock of stone;

'Twas there I made my sad and grievous moan.

Many were the giants that I did subdue;

I ran the fiery dragon through and through,

'Twas I that freed fair Sabra from the stake.

What more could mortal man then undertake?"<sup>88</sup>

The fact is that such characters represent the people themselves in many aspects; they personify their lust, their self-respect, their dreams, as well as the unconscious disgust of these communities in regard to the pressures exerted upon them in the daily life by those in power.

They become a kind of heroes for these people. They sometimes triumph over moral conventions, which makes possible, for example, that, in the Mummerys' Play, St. George is at times he who slays and not he who is slain; and that allows *Benedito* or *Simão*, in the *Mamulengo*, to evade the social rules.

#### 4.5.14 - Use of Verses and Rhymes

Verse and rhyme are a constant feature in the Brazilian folk theatre, both in the songs and in the dialogues. In the *Chegança* and in the *Pastoril*, which are for the most part sung, they are predominant. But even in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* and in the *Mamulengo*, in

---

<sup>88</sup> E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 25.

which there is more dialogue than chant, the verses and the rhymes are ever present, aiming at both a lyric and a comic effect. In the *Mamulengo* of the rural area they are commoner, and can, at times, assuming a narrative form, constitute entire episodes.<sup>89</sup>

Many of the rhymes, however, are due only to the singular pronunciation conferred by the folk to some words, as we can see in the following passage:

"*Cantadeira* - Mestre Domingos,  
cadê suas calça?  
*Mestre Domingos* - Saí na carreira,  
deixei na casa de Ináça."

Here, the word *calça*, used instead of *calças* rhymes with *Ináça*, a female name whose correct form is *Inácia*.<sup>90</sup>

In the *Chegança* the verses are probably a remnant of the European *romance*, a kind of sung poetry that was very common in Spain and Portugal and whose apogee was in the fifteenth century. In its turn, this *romance*, which in England was called *ballad*, was derived from the *canções de gesta*, epic chants in which the people sang the heroic deeds of medieval Knights.

For the most these verses are *loas*, that is, a sort of monophonic chant influenced by the Gregorian chant.

---

<sup>89</sup> Fernando Augusto Gonçalves Santos, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>90</sup> "*Cantadeira* - Master Domingos,  
where are your trousers?  
*Mestre Domingos* - I was in a hurry,  
I left them in the house of *Ináça*."  
(Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 83.)

Beatriz G. Dantas says that the Iberian source "is easily identified in the verses and in the structure of the melody and rhythm of several songs". However, she adds, it is difficult to distinguish with accuracy which of them are really derived from Iberian songs.<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, the songs are not the same in all teams and, among them, there are variations which belong to the Brazilian folk song repertory.

Deffilo Gurgel, in regard to the *Boi Calemba* of the state of Rio Grande do Norte, points out five different categories of songs:

- 1) Chants of greeting and praise
- 2) Chants which precede the entry of each character
- 3) Chants which belong to each character
- 4) Chants of the ritual of the ox - especially *baianos* and *aboios*
- 5) Chants of farewell and enclosure.<sup>92</sup>

In the religious *Pastoril* there are mainly *loas*, while in the profane version the words *samba* and *cançoneta*, are normally used to name the rhythm of their chants. However, the difference between them even its players are not able to establish, for the rhythm is quite the same.<sup>93</sup>

Notwithstanding any possible origin or classification, these verses and rhymes have in the Brazilian plays the same function that they seem to have in the Mummers' Play and in

---

<sup>91</sup> Beatriz G. Dantas, *Chegança*, p. 7.

<sup>92</sup> Deffilo Gurgel, *Manual do Boi Calemba* (Natal: Nossa, 1985), p. 41.

<sup>93</sup> Mello and Pereira believe that the name *cançoneta* may be an influence of the music used in the *Commedia dell'Arte* and in operettas. But, with regard to the use of the word *samba*, they think that it is not influenced by the homonym popular rhythm originated in Rio de Janeiro, but probably by a folk rhythm of the rural zone of the North-East, also called *samba* (Luiz Gonzaga de Mello and Alba Regina Mendonça Pereira, op. cit., p. 64).

all forms of folk theatre everywhere, i.e., to be chiefly at the service of fun and of the development of the action.

Here are some examples:

From the *Mamulengo*:

"*Quitéria* - Sou namorada de Simão  
 mas vocês num ignorem não,  
 que já que ele num tá  
 eu vou logo me arrumá.  
 Mestre! ô Mestre!... num tem aí um rapaz bonito  
 pra eu namorar com ele?";<sup>94</sup>

From the *Bumba-meu-Boi*:

"*Padre* - Alô, bela menina,  
 o que é que há?  
 me dá uma garrafa de cana  
 pro Padre tomar...  
 .....  
 Alô, bela menina,  
 aperta minha mão,  
 o Padre vai roubar  
 a mulher de Sebastião.";<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> "*Quitéria* - I'm the girlfriend of *Simão*  
 but don't you misjudge me  
 for as he isn't here  
 I'll soon sort out myself.  
 Master! hey Master!... isn't there a hunky lad  
 to go out with me? "

(Fernando Augusto Gonçalves Santos, op. cit., p. 130.)

<sup>95</sup> "*Padre* - Hello, pretty girl,

From the Mummers' Play:

"Presenter - What canst do and what canst cure?

Doctor - All sorts of diseases,

Just what my physic pleases;

Pains within and pains without;

If the devil is in, I can fetch him out.

I have a little bottle by my side;

The fame of it spreads far and wide.

The stuff therein is elecampane;

It will bring the dead to life again.

A drop on his head, a drop on his heart.

Rise up, bold fellow, and take thy part."<sup>96</sup>

And still from the Mummers' Play, an excerpt that is almost a synthesis of the topic:

"Presenter - Room, room, brave gallants all,

Pray give us room to rhyme;

We're come to show activity

---

What's up?  
give me a bottle of *cachaça*  
for the Priest drink...

.....  
Hello, pretty girl,  
shake my hand,  
the Priest is going to kidnap  
the wife of *Sebastião*."

(Collected in a performance of the *Bumba-meu-Boi Misterioso de Afogados*, on campus of the Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco - UFRPE (Recife - Brazil), on 11 November 1980.)

<sup>96</sup> E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 8.

This merry Christmas time";  
 ..... "97

#### 4.5.15 - Use of Verbal Jesting (Word-play, Nonsense, Topsy-turvydom)

Laughter is indispensable in the folk theatre of the North-East, as it generally is in the folk theatre of other parts of the world. To provoke the laughter of the spectators, the performers lay hold of many different techniques which vary from an unusual use of the gestures and movements of the body to the dismantling of the structure and meaning of the spoken language.

The words are mostly used because of the magic power that their sounds can create rather than because of their literal meaning. Enjoying more the sounds than the meanings, the performers frequently play with the words of their texts, making puns or inverting ideas, for example. A practice that also serves as a motif in the use of rhyme mentioned above.

In one of the *João Redondo* plays collected by Altimar Pimentel, there is a dialogue between *Benedito* and *Mané Brás* that can be taken as a sample of what I have said:

" .....

*Benedito* - Rapais, quem é você?

*Mané Brás* - Inhô?

*Benedito* - Rapais, quem é você?

*Mané Brás* - Inhô? Inhô? Eu tou em Cabedelo.

---

<sup>97</sup> E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 6.

*Benedito* - Rapais, eu tou preguntando... Eu tou preguntando por seu nome.

*Mané Brás* - Inhô?

*Benedito* - Você é mouco?

*Mané Brás* - Se eu gosto de coco? Não sinhô.

*Benedito* - Rapais, diz o seu nome.

*Mané Brás* - Se eu tou com fome? Oxente! Eu em casa jantei, meu fio.

*Benedito* - Rapais, eu tou preguntando por teu nome.

*Mané Brás* - Num tou com fome não sinhô.

*Benedito* - Rapais, quem é você?

*Mané Brás* - Se eu vou me escondê? Vou nada!

..... "98

This kind of dialogue, absurd and senseless, is very common in the Brazilian folk plays. From the same *João Redondo*, another two examples of nonsensical speech: greeting the audience, *Benedito* says that he is going to have a training, "*primeiro que tudo, segundo do que nada*"<sup>99</sup> ; and, asked by the *Delegado* (Police Chief) about her marital status, *Dona Rosita* (Ms. Rosita) answers that she is not single, married or widow. She states: "*Sou mulhé*".<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> In this long and funny dialogue, *Benedito* repeats questions like "who are you?", "what is your name?", etc., and *Mané Brás* always misunderstands, answering with puns that are founded in rhymes such as *mouco* (deaf) / *coco* (coconut) and *nome* (name) / *fome* (hunger) (Altamar de Alencar Pimentel, *O Mundo Mágico de João Redondo*, 2. ed. (Rio de Janeiro: FUNDACEN-MEC, 1988), pp. 79-82).

<sup>99</sup> "First than all, second than nothing".  
(*Ibid.*, p. 151.)

<sup>100</sup> "I'm a woman".  
(*Ibid.*, p. 153.)



One of the two servants of the *Engenheiro* (Engineer), in the *Bumba-meu-Boi Misterioso de Afogados*, measures the land and informs the calculus: "...doze para doze nada, deu quarenta."<sup>101</sup>

In another performance of the same team, the *Capitão* asks the *Padre* whether he is priest or missionary and he answers: "*Eu sou mestiço*".<sup>102</sup>

In the Mummers' Play the verbal jesting also occurs frequently, as can demonstrate the following expressions: "I went up a straight crooked lane"; "I said 'No thanks, yes if yer please' "; "I met a bark and he dogged at me".<sup>103</sup> Or a dialogue like this:

King - A doctor! A doctor! Ten pounds for a doctor!

Doctor (*enters*) - Here am I, what is thy will with me?

King - Here's a man fallen upstairs and broken his neck

Doctor - Fallen upstairs and broken his neck! I never heard tell of such a thing.

King - Downstairs I mean, Doctor; thou's so full of thee catches. Where dost thou live, Doctor?

Doctor - I live in Itty-titty, where there's neither town nor city, wooden churches with black puddings for bell-ropes; little dogs and cats running about with knives and forks stuck in their paws, shouting, 'God Save the Queen'.

King - How far dost thou travel, Doctor?

---

<sup>101</sup> "... twelve to twelve nil, it was forty".  
(Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 33.)

<sup>102</sup> "I'm half-caste".  
(Performance held on campus of the UFRPE, 11.11.80.)

<sup>103</sup> E. K. Chambers, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

Doctor - From the fireside to the bedside.

King - What, and no further?

Doctor - Yes, the cheese-and-bread cupboard.

King - I thought thou was a cheese-and-bread eater. What is thy fee,  
Doctor?

Doctor - My fee is I9 I9s II-3/4 d, but I9 I9s I-3/4s I'll take from thee.

..... "104

This shallowness in the text from the point of view of meaning seems to be a common feature of folk theatre everywhere, which suggests that the action is the most important element of such performances.

As Brody pointed out with regard to the Mummers' Play, the words "are either treated with almost mystical reverence, no matter how nonsensical they may appear, or they are dealt with simply as skeletal ideas which guide the players to the action and leave them free to improvise as broadly as they please."<sup>105</sup>

#### 4.5.16 - Singing and Dancing

Singing and dancing play an important part in the folk theatre in general. In Brazil, in some plays, such as the *Chegança* and the *Pastoril*, the chant and the choreography are even predominant, but they are among the most important elements in all of them, which led to Mário de Andrade coining the expression "dramatic dances", as aforementioned.

---

<sup>104</sup> Alan Brody, op. cit., p. 141-142.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

There is also singing and dancing in the Mummers' Play, but not with equal intensity. Such difference is certainly due to the strong and peculiar relationship of the Brazilian people with music, which Mário de Andrade, for example, has considered as one of the elements responsible for the enlargement of these plays. Music and dance participate of the daily life of the Brazilian people, and could not be absent from their theatre, for they represent a valuable vehicle of expression for them.

Although the Brazilian folk plays predominantly use the music which has traditionally been played in each form, they have always been able to incorporate different and contemporary music, which seems has not occurred in the case of the Mummers' Play. In the *Pastoril*, for example, the shepherdesses usually receive money from the audience in order to dance special numbers, which generally utilise popular rhythms like the *frevo*,<sup>106</sup> and sometimes they can even sing popular hits which have been played on the radio.<sup>107</sup>

#### 4.5.17 - The Musical Instruments

As music is an essential component of the everyday life of the Brazilian people, it naturally occupies a fundamental place in this folk theatre, and, as we saw, in plays like the *Chegança*, its presence is stronger than that of the dialogues.

Indeed, in Brazil and in all the Brazilian folk theatre forms, the music seems to be even more important than it is in England and in the Mummers' Play. However, the instruments played in both countries are quite similar. They are instruments such as the fiddle, the rattle, the drum and others, usually made by the players themselves.

---

<sup>106</sup> *Frevo* is a rhythm typical to the carnivalesque period in the North-East of Brazil, mainly in Pernambuco and Bahia.

<sup>107</sup> See José Maria Tenório Rocha, op. cit. p. 92.

#### 4.5.18 - The Use of Improvisation

Improvisation is one of the strongest elements of the Brazilian folk theatre, mainly in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* and in the *Mamulengo*. In these, the improvisation, stimulated by the *cachaça* drunk during the intervals of the numerous scenes and by the reaction and the participation of the spectators, is one of the reasons for the long duration of their performances.<sup>108</sup>

In the Brazilian folk theatre, as in the Mummers' Play, the improvisation tends "to minimize the importance of the words in favor of the action", subordinating "the importance of the words to the burlesque action they surround".<sup>109</sup>

The remarkable use of improvisation is made possible because of the freedom given to the performers, the necessity to incorporate relevant novelties or new material to delight the audience and elicit their response, and because of the long tradition which lies behind the performers, which is shared by them and the audience. In this sense, the strength of the improvisation lies in the performers ability to make fresh and to adapt a well-known theme within a well-known framework. Were the performers to rigidly repeat the same pattern of action, as frequently is the accepted case in established indoor theatre, the audience would soon be bored by the lack of surprise and variety. Similarly, were the performers to depart entirely from the established patterns and produce something with no or little resemblance to what has been seen before, the audience's attention would not be held and they would reject it. This process is well-known in popular theatre forms throughout the world, where

---

<sup>108</sup> The Mummers' Plays are shorter than the Brazilian folk forms. However, they are usually performed several times in the same day, in different places, and, among these performances, their players drink whiskey, cherry and, mainly, beer.

<sup>109</sup> Alan Brody, op. cit., p. 30.

star performers create dazzling improvisations on traditional material and structures. Avant-garde companies have in recent years striven for a similar process, using the concept of the actor's "score". The actor is given the freedom to improvise on, but not depart from, the agreed sequence of actions in the performance. In all cases what is significant is the interplay of rules and the freedom to reinterpret them.

The point is, as reminds Roger Caillois, that

"Rules are inseparable from play as soon as the latter becomes institutionalized. From this moment on they become part of its nature. They transform it into an instrument of fecund and decisive culture. But a basic freedom is central to play in order to stimulate distraction and fantasy. This liberty is its indispensable motive power and is basic to the most complex and carefully organized forms of play. Such a primary power of improvisation and joy, which I call *paidia*, is allied to the taste for gratuitous difficulty that I propose to call *ludus*, in order to encompass the various games to which, without exaggeration, a civilizing quality can be attributed. In fact, they reflect the moral and intellectual values of a culture, as well as contribute to their refinement and development."<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Roger Caillois, op. cit., p. 27.

*Paidia* and *ludus* "are not categories of play but ways of playing", he says (Ibid., p. 53). He characterises *paidia* as frolicsome and impulsive exuberance, the manifestation of a kind of uncontrolled fantasy, of anarchic and capricious nature, while *ludus* would be a tendency "to bind it with arbitrary, imperative and purposely tedious conventions..." (Ibid., pp. 12-13).

#### 4.5.19 - Male Performers <sup>111</sup>

In his time, Mário de Andrade noticed that only the *Pastoril* and the *Maracatu* were performed by men and women. All the other "dramatic dances" were performed only by men, and the female characters were played by young men.<sup>112</sup>

In our days, little has changed. Analysing this aspect in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, Hermilo Borba Filho thought that it reflected a vision of the woman as someone inferior. For him, if in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* there were no actresses, this was not simply due to a matter of tradition. He believed that it was essentially because of the prejudice against women, for the people of the North-East of Brazil, in general, still consider the woman as someone consecrated solely to household affairs.<sup>113</sup>

This opinion touches popular traditional values. In the Greek theatre women were excluded from the stage; in the Elizabethan theatre women were not allowed to appear on stage, and the female parts were played by men or boys. A situation that only changed from the second half of the seventeenth century on.

In the last decades the women's movement, demanding greater freedom and rights, has advanced in many parts of the world. Women have struggled hard to gain access to activities that were seen before as "work of men", and they have succeeded in entering to vocations and professions formerly monopolised by men.

---

<sup>111</sup> It is worth noting that, in his study on witchcraft, Carlo Ginzburg has stated: "In the private experience of ecstasy we have seen a tendential sexual specialization delineated: on the one hand, the predominantly female escorts of the nocturnal divinities; on the other, the generally male groups engaged in the battles for fertility" (Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., p. 190).

<sup>112</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>113</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 16.

In the North-East of Brazil, at least in the greatest urban centres, women have also striven for their personal rights, claiming for equality with men. And, indeed, there has been more and more women in activities which were supposed before to be solely male. But, there, this changing role of women has not only been a fulfilment of the demands of the women's movement. The economic condition of many women who have been apart from the women's movement has forced them to look for professional work outside their homes.

In fact, in spite of all progress of the women's movement in the North-East of Brazil, women's condition is still swayed by prejudice. In such society, dominated by men, women only rarely can be found in the same prestigious positions as men, especially in the countryside.

Borba Filho also noticed that in the Brazilian folk theatre, the actors who play female characters never try to hide their male condition. Furthermore, usually these female characters do not have a good temper. They are so rough that they are frequently beaten by the male characters in the performances. And this goes against the conventional view of what could normally be expected to happen to females either in life or in theatre, although this clearly does happen.<sup>114</sup>

In the Mummers' Play there is not as much knockabout as in the Brazilian folk theatre, but the actors who play the female roles also do not hide their male condition. However, if it is most common in the Mummers' Play today that all the players be male, it is certainly not because "in the magico-religious rites in which they are rooted women had no active part".<sup>115</sup> The fact remains that also in England women are still striving to change their position in a society that has been traditionally patriarchal.

---

<sup>114</sup> See Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 16.

<sup>115</sup> Violet Alford, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

#### 4.5.20 - Cross-dressing

Although using actresses to perform female roles sometimes, the Brazilian folk plays continue to have male actors playing female roles. The *Bumba-meu-Boi* is the best example. Nowadays, young girls usually perform the *Damas*, but the *Catirina* is still being played by a man, perhaps because of the importance of the role.

However, the most interesting aspect of this Man-in-Woman's Clothes,<sup>116</sup> is that there is no intention on the part of the performer to look like a real woman. As happens in the Mummers' Play, many a time they wear a moustache or a beard,<sup>117</sup> and even their behaviour is never exactly similar to the female. Hairy legs can also be seen all the time and, if they disguise the voice, their falsetto is so exaggerated that it only reinforces their male condition.

Jean E. Howard, in her study of cross-dressing in Renaissance England, states that there is a subversive or transgressive potential in cross-dressing, which has caused many controversies on the subject throughout history. Biblical prohibitions and invectives from preachers, many a time joined by the fury of those in power, have repressed and almost

---

<sup>116</sup> In England, the female character played by a man is normally called the "man-woman" by the scholars. By his turn, Brody (op. cit., p. 6) prefers "female", for he thinks that the traditional expression is a distortion, connoting an hermaphroditic nature. On the other hand, Violet Alford (*Introduction to English Folklore*, p. 82), uses the expression "man-in-woman's clothes", whereas E. C. Cawte uses the term "she-male" (*Ritual Animal Disguise* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1978), p. 210). In Brazil, there is no agreement among the scholars too. Such characters can sometimes be referred by the use of an expression similar to that of Alford, or by the word *travesti*, which, I think, is completely inadequate, for *travesti* is the word used to refer a man who wears woman's clothes intending to look like a woman.

<sup>117</sup> Goethe, the German dramatist, in an article about cross-dressing in the Roman theatre of his time, comments that "one cannot deny that sometimes Columbine fails to hide her blue beard completely". However, in that case, according to him, it occurred because supporting roles were not well cast in the Roman theatre, in which it was not taken much care in the staging of plays (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Women's Parts Played by Men in the Roman Theater", tr. Isa Ragusa in *Crossing the Stage* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 49).



banished it. Jean Howard notes that cross-dressing, as fact and as idea, threatens the normative social order, whose stability depends on maintaining absolute distinctions between male and female, and customarily is "based upon strict principles of hierarchy and subordination, of which women's subordination to man was a chief instance, trumpeted from pulpit, instantiated in law, and acted upon by monarch and commoner alike."<sup>118</sup>

However, the repression of cross-dressing was never sufficient to do away with it, for as with any social practice, "its meaning varied with the circumstances of its occurrence, with the particulars of the institutional or cultural sites of its enactment, and with the class position of the transgressor."<sup>119</sup>

As we have seen earlier, in the ~~seventh~~ <sup>nineteenth</sup> section of this chapter, the social condition of women in the North-East of Brazil is not alike in the English Renaissance, but is still dominated by a substantial prejudice.

However, even taking into account the significance of this secular bias against women,<sup>120</sup> and even recognising that such sex-reversal impersonations "certainly does

---

<sup>118</sup> Jean E. Howard, "Cross-Dressing, the Theater, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England", in *Crossing the Stage*, p. 20.

Further on, in the same essay, she cites Stephen Greenblatt, who "argued that modern notions of sexual difference originate later than the Renaissance and that in at least some Renaissance discourses there appears to be only one sex, women being but imperfectly formed or incomplete men", which would make a transvestite theatre "a natural, indeed, almost an inevitable, product of such a culture". But, as cross-dressing, at that time, was also seen "as *unnatural*, as a transgression of a divinely sanctioned social order", she explains: "the real point is that the Renaissance needed the idea of two genders, one subordinate to the other, to provide a key element in its hierarchical view of the social order and to buttress its gendered division of labor" (Ibid., p. 24).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>120</sup> Prejudice that is also found in modern England, although, perhaps, in a minor proportion. But, on the other hand, there are no more official restrictions concerning women as theatrical performers, neither in England nor in Brazil. So, we are inclined to think that this cannot any longer be taken as a major motive for the presence of cross-dressing in these plays.

evoke association with primitive and classical concepts of the androgynous fool",<sup>121</sup> these figures indubitably continue to be performed in such plays due to their transgressing character as a grotesque dismantling of the human shape and behaviour, and to the consequent fun that it produces.

Such characters, which are seen not only in the Mummers' Play but also in many other English customs (as in the Christmas Pantomime, for instance) as well as in other countries, are really a kind of Fool or Clown. So, if they are performed by men, these female characters and their rough behaviour can be better accepted by the audience, as it also occurs with regard to the behaviour of puppet-actors.

#### 4.5.21 - Fools

Clowning appears in all cultures, since the early times, and it can be manifested by various forms, with diverse names and guises too.

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of the Brazilian folk plays is certainly their numerous comic characters. These can generally be found in folk theatre forms around the world. ~~Although they vary in number from place to place, their function seems to show "a close affiliation to the Greek *hilarodi* white-clad clowns who sang to their own accompaniment and the Roman *phallaphori* (the soot-daubed, phallus-bearing knockabout comedians of the Attelanae)".~~<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Alice I. Richardson, *Mummers' Plays in the Americas* (New York University: Phd thesis, 1976), p. 24.

<sup>122</sup> ~~Ewan MacColl, "Folk Theatre" (Birmingham City Archives, Charles Parker Archive Ref. n. CPA/1/7/4), p. 1.~~

~~stet~~ Examining the comic characters of the English Mummers' Play, Ewan MacColl suggests that at least two of them, the Captain and the Doctor, "have their genesis in primitive theatre". For him, they possibly go back as far as the *Attelana Follula*, farces which were very popular in Republican Rome and that, in their turn, were "probably influenced by the Greek farces of Tarentum and other cities".

According to him, the Captain's first appearance in literature "is in the plays of Plautus, where he turns up as Miles Gloriosus; thereafter he reappears fairly regularly under a variety of titles in both folk and written drama". He is present, for instance, in the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* or even in the character of the Shakespearean Falstaff, ever with "the balance of braggadocio and cowardice, two qualities which have always informed the folk Captain". On the other hand, the Doctor "can be traced back even further, to the ridiculous physicians created by the mountebanks of Athens and Sparta in the 5th-century, B.C. Four-hundred years later he turns up again in the Roman farces and later still in the libretti of the *Commedia dell'Arte*". He is also in Molière, in Ben Jonson and in Shakespeare. For MacColl, "It would seem, indeed, that every great period of the European theatre has returned to, or extended, the basic characters of the primitive life, death and resurrection rituals of the folk".<sup>123</sup>

These clowns come from that deep need common to all human beings which was referred<sup>to</sup> by Jung; that universal demand of the collective unconscious of mankind which gives birth also to the work of art and to jokes and all other forms of humour.

In the case of the clowns, they are the most legitimate representatives of those unconscious elements that usually generate conflict in individuals. Lucile Hoerr Charles remarks that this is the reason why everything they do is always exaggerated.

---

<sup>123</sup> Ewan MacColl, "Folk Theatre" (Birmingham City Archives, Charles Parker Archive - Ref. n. CPA/1/7/4), pp. 1-2.

~~Everyone has inside them aspirations and feelings which cannot be  
Exaggerating their attitudes, they symbolise the size and quality characteristic of those  
expressed because of social repression. The exaggeration of the clowns  
agents of conflict, which are "relatively neglected elements in the life of the individuals in  
reveals these.~~

the community". At the same time, they underline and support their insight. So,  
"Earthiness, poverty, renegade irresponsibility, irreverence and license of all sorts - these  
are the constant elements in clowning."<sup>124</sup>

On account of their function, clowns are always concerned with things that are not  
considered as proper, says Lucile Hoerr Charles, things that are commonly a cause of  
embarrassment, astonishment, and shock, ~~even if not much. Thus,~~

"A clown holds the licentious thing in his hands, psychologically speaking;  
he is objective at the same time that he has a most intimate and  
thoroughgoing relationship with the tabooed thing. He goes through a  
ritual of impersonation as if he were the outrageous thing itself or its  
personification; yet at the same time he knows, his audience knows, and  
both he and his audience know that the other knows, that he is not that  
thing."<sup>125</sup>

In fact, to break the rules is the main function of clowns, as observes John J.  
Honigmann, citing A. Goldenweiser, for "In dress, speech, and action he does the opposite  
of the proper, following rather the proscribed and improper."<sup>126</sup>

As we identify ourselves with every clown, lending him our own powers, and we  
experience, through imagination, the actions that he performs before us, Lucile Hoerr

---

<sup>124</sup> Lucile Hoerr Charles, "The Clown's Function", *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 58, Jan / Mar (1945), p. 33.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>126</sup> John J. Honigmann, "An Interpretation of the Social-Psychological Functions of the Ritual Clown", *Character and Personality*, x/3, iii (1942), p. 224.

Charles compares him to a priest, who performs a rite "both in his own and in our behalf", which works as a sort of exorcism, for this rite is

"... the locating, naming, bringing to a head, and expressing of a psychological element which has been causing trouble in the unconscious; a renegade element, which for the sake of self-integration and further progress in personal living should be brought up to consciousness, released, to a certain extent experienced and consciously related to, and so assimilated into the personality of the beholder."<sup>127</sup>

The Brazilian folk theatre is replete with characters who fall into the categories of fool or clown. Even in the *Chegança*, which is the least comic of all the Brazilian folk theatre forms, there are, in some of its variants, comic roles or sections, usually through the intervention into the action of *Raçaõ* and *Vassoura*. Beatriz G. Dantas points to one such untypical section in which even the *Padre* is involved. This is the episode in which the converted Moors are baptised: "Paradoxically the scene of the baptism is comic".<sup>128</sup> In this unusual scene, the *Padre*, instead of using water, passes the hem of his cassock over the heads of the bended Moors. These make gestures making it clear that he stinks and, at the same time, try to lift up his cassock, making the audience laugh.

In the *Bumba-meu-Boi* the clowns are *Mateus*, *Bastião* and *Catirina*. In the *Pastoril*, this is the function of the *Velho*. In the *Mamulengo* it is the turn of heroes as *Professor Tiridá*, *Benedito* or *Simão*, who bear a resemblance to European puppets such as Punch, Pulcinella and to the Turkish *Karaghoz*

---

<sup>127</sup> Lucile Hoerr Charles, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>128</sup> Beatriz G. Dantas, op. cit., p. 24.

All of them, as their ancestors and as the fools of the English Mummers' Play, represent the people themselves. They are smart, cunning, sly, tricky and full of moral imperfections, but their rule-breaking behaviour is enjoyed by and rewards their audience. As these characters belong to the oppressed side of the society, and their "bad" behaviour is always helping to ridicule those who have the control of our lives, the people naturally identify with them.

The temporary abandon of rational control and the misconduct of these characters represent the marginal condition in which the people habitually live. If the people love such characters it is because with them they feel safer; with them, they cross the line between the states of oppressor and oppressed, in whose margins lie danger, for to be in the border, is to be in an undefinable state.<sup>129</sup> So, such characters help the people to experience a kind of rite of passage. They become a means through which the people can, for a little while, change state. Being in the margins, these characters are also in contact with danger and, consequently, at a source of power.<sup>130</sup>

Their unruly and obscene behaviour are as symbolic as everything we do. And if they behave anti-socially it is because there is no fear of punishment or any other bad consequence, for, as it is a theatrical representation and not reality itself, danger can be controlled.

---

<sup>129</sup> See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 97.

<sup>130</sup> See Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, tr. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), and Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 97-98.

#### 4.5.22 - Quack-doctors

Mentioning the figure of the doctor as a comic character in the *João Redondo*, Altimar Pimentel believes that he is a protest against mercantilism in the practice of medicine.<sup>131</sup>

However, I think, such a character, both in England and in Brazil, does not represent an allusion to real doctors, but to charlatans, mainly to street sellers who sell miraculous medicines and are still very common in the North-East of Brazil, a region where unemployment has made more and more people turn to low-paid unskilled jobs as a means to support and sustain themselves and their families. There, they can be found even in the biggest cities, in the markets or other public places, joining the street pedlars. *O Homem da Cobra* (The Man of the Snake) is how the people name them, for they usually use a harmless but long snake to attract the attention of their onlookers. Scattered on the ground or on small tables, they put their magical products which, according to what they cry in extensive, humorous, and very persuasive speeches, are efficient enough to cure an enormous list of the most diversified but familiar diseases.<sup>132</sup>

On the other hand, this kind of "doctor" has been much ~~more~~ closer to the people than those graduated at the academies. <sup>This is particularly true</sup> chiefly in the North-East of Brazil, where the health services are not satisfactory, and public health continues to be one of the most serious social problems, with the majority of the population still in need of adequate medical assistance.

---

<sup>131</sup> Altimar de Alencar Pimentel, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>132</sup> Their speeches are not only long; they are nearly endless, for they restart the list of prodigious powers from time to time, because of the arrival of new individuals to gather the group of probable purchasers-to-be placed in a circle around the seller. They speak so much and so continually that it became usual in the region the use of the expression "*fula que nem o homem da cobra*" (speaks as much as the man of the snake) to characterise any people who are too much talkative.

With regard to this sort of street seller, Mr. Ron Shuttleworth, leader of the "Coventry Mummers", told me once that they were also habitual in England, even in London, until some time ago.<sup>133</sup>

The doctor is also in the *Chegança* and in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* and, in both, his function is similar to that of the doctor of the Mummers' Play and of the *Mamulengo*, that is, fun and satire. But his importance is strongest in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, in which he is called upon to restore to life the dead ox.

His speech, his medical instruments and the nature of his medical examination, are always great sources of laughter. The speech uses an intricate word-play that emphasises the extraordinary professional abilities of the character and mingles the most obscure and complex medical language (not necessarily that of the medical manuals) with trivial terms and expressions. The result is, of course, something incomprehensible but, at the same time, irresistibly funny. His explanations of the physical condition of his patient, for instance, are remarkable exactly because of their absurdity. On the other hand, the instruments that he uses are equally extravagant, and most of them are in the oversized category. But these elements of humour are still reinforced by the absolutely paradoxical

---

<sup>133</sup> In the first volume of *London Labour and the London Poor*, Henry Mayhew quotes Joseph Strutt who said of the Mountebank that nobody knew "at what period this vagrant dealer in physic made his appearance in England" but that it was clear that "he figured away with much success in this country during the last two centuries". Also that these mountebanks usually prefaced the vending of their medicines "with pompous orations, in which they pay as little regard to truth as to propriety". In his turn, Mayhew states:

"I am informed by a gentleman observant of the matter, that within his knowledge, which extends to the commencement of the present century, no mountebank (proper) had appeared in the streets of London proclaiming the virtues of his medicines: neither with nor without his 'fool'. The last seen by my informant, perhaps the latest mountebank in England, was about twenty years ago, in the vicinity of Yarmouth. He was selling "cough drops" and infallible cures for asthma, and was dressed in a pellwig and an embroidered coat, with ruffles at his wrist, a sword to his side, and was a representation, in shabby genteel, of the fine gentleman of the reign of Queen Anne."  
(Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 1, 2. ed. (New York: Dover, 1968), p. 205.



way used to examine the patient. A sample of this is to put the stethoscope on the tail, in the case of the ox-patient, and on the foot or the private parts, in the case of the human patient.

#### 4.5.23 - The Devil as a Comic Figure

The devil is present in the Brazilian folk theatre as a comic figure, as is Beelzebub in the Mummers' Play.

Making merry over the devil seems to have been the way found by folk religiosity to get rid of the fear imposed by its figure.<sup>134</sup>

For Cirinéa César, the Devil appears because he is a natural symbol of Evil. His presence is not a signal of primitivism, she says, but a form of sublimation for, in the Brazilian plays, the Devil, after promoting much confusion, is always punished.<sup>135</sup>

Indeed, as the Fool, with whom he can sometimes be identified, the Devil, in these plays, provide an opportunity to exorcise the burden of guilty conscience imposed upon the people by centuries of Christianity.

---

<sup>134</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 61.

This also could be said about a character such as the *Padre*, who is constantly mocked in such theatre. Not because of lack of respect, but just for play. As reminds Hermilo Borba Filho, it is only an actor performing a priest and not the priest himself who is there. This is justified by the character's own words, in accordance with a collection made by Borba Filho:

"Quem me vir assim dançando  
 não julgue que fiquei louco.  
 Não sou padre, não sou nada,  
 virei secular há pouco."  
 ("Who sees me dancing  
 don't think that I'm mad.  
 I'm not a priest, I'm nothing,  
 I became secular recently.")

(Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 7.)

<sup>135</sup> Cirinéa do Amaral César, op. cit., p. 30.

#### 4.5.24 - The Use of Masks or Blackened Faces

~~The covering of the face in ancient times it seems that~~ <sup>can be traced to</sup> the human face ~~began to be covered in rituals to~~ which symbolically separate the sacred and the profane.<sup>136</sup>

In the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, both ~~the~~ masks and ~~the~~ blackened faces are used. They both "dissemble the face of the actor, transferring to the movements of the body the meanings that in the sophisticated theatre are supposed to be transmitted by the facial mobility". However, as they are fixed, they "freeze an expression, which is at the same time known and identifiable of the character and, on the other hand, stimulates the imagination of the spectators and is full of mystery".<sup>137</sup>

Borba Filho, emphasising the importance of the mask in this play, stated that "the actors who do not use masks lay hold of a strong make-up based on coal or flour, which becomes similar to a mask".<sup>138</sup>

The function of the mask, he proposed, as in the Greek theatre, is to make it easy for the actors (except those who perform the *Capitão*, *Mateus* and *Bastião*, for these characters are present in all the episodes) to play different characters, for the performances are long and the characters numerous.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> It is really curious that the word "Masca", used in Italy in 643 AD had the meaning of "witch" (See Carlo Ginzburg, op. cit., pp. 265-266).

<sup>137</sup> Roberto Benjamin, "O Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo", p. 157.

The mask, then, requires a great ability on the part of the actors with regard to the gestural language, the corporal expression and to the handling of any framework.

<sup>138</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 8.

<sup>139</sup> Metin And, comparing the Greek tragedy with the Ta'ziyeh of Iran, says that in the Greek theatre the use of masks "is the outcome of economy of rules among other functions, whereas in Ta'ziyeh the use of masks is made to serve other purposes, especially that of showing supernatural beings such as demons, beasts, giants and djinns" (Metin And, op. cit., p. 118), which also occurs in the case of some fantastic characters of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*.

As the masks in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* are sometimes made of goat-skin,<sup>140</sup> Borba Filho thought that they could be related to the ancient festivals of the god Dionysus, in which

the satyrs wore goat-skins, for the goat was the animal with which the god was identified.<sup>141</sup>

For Deffilo Gurgel, the blackening used by characters as *Mateus* and *Catirina* aims to evoke their former condition of slaves.<sup>142</sup>

In the *Pastoril*, the *Velho* always uses a sort of make-up, similar to a mask, that was referred to by Borba Filho.

In the Mummers' Play, however, the masks and blackened faces have certainly a different function. It is not so long, its characters are not so numerous, and its players have no slave ancestors. For the first scholars of the Mummers' Play, the masks and blackened faces were a traditional form of disguise linked to a probable ritual origin. But the more recent scholars have other opinions. This is the case, for example, of Susan Pattison who says in her article on the Antrobus Soulcaking Play:

"Lest there be any chance of mistaking the 'actors' for the actual characters they represent, make-up is exaggerated and facial disguises, such as false noses and beards, make little attempt at reality. As in Expressionist theatre, the audience is kept aware at all times that the characters before them are

---

<sup>140</sup> It is also used the *papier-marché* or rubber (generally taken from the inner tube of a tyre).

<sup>141</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 8.

Another approximation that he saw between the *Bumba-meu-Boi* and the festivals of Dionysus was the fact that both actors and spectators drink during all the performance, as did the satyrs and bacchantes in those Dionysian ceremonies.

<sup>142</sup> Deffilo Gurgel, op. cit., p. 36.

types and the creations of actors, so that they are free to laugh at them and thereby contain their fear."<sup>143</sup>

The use of masks and costumes of any kind in these plays does not aim to deceive the spectators, making them believe that the actors are someone else.

Roger Caillois, in his study of games, observed that only the spy and the fugitive disguise themselves intending to deceive other people.<sup>144</sup> Although, actually, the disguise tends "to stress their difference from the common world..."<sup>145</sup>

Caillois also remarked that there is a pleasure in being or passing for another, for "the mask disguises the conventional self and liberates the true personality."<sup>146</sup>

Indeed, the use of a costume or a mask seems to allow liberation and escape from the customary shape and behaviour that are imposed by social life.

In the mainline established theatre, actors have tended throughout history to divide into two categories, those who believed they were the character on stage and those who were always aware they were an actor playing a role. These categories cut across masked and unmasked theatres. Some actors in using masks, stare at the mask, come into communion with it and absorb the persona of the mask into themselves. Others attempt to fit their movement and gestures to the shape of the mask. Theatre folklore has many anecdotes pertaining to the first category, telling of times when the mask took over the actor and imprisoned him, refusing to let him escape. The same folklore for the second category tells of detached observers and agents hiding behind the mask, disguising their true nature and

---

<sup>143</sup> Susan Pattison, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>144</sup> Roger Caillois, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>145</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 2. ed. (London: Temple Smith, 1970), p. 32.

<sup>146</sup> Roger Caillois, op. cit., p. 21.

purposes. In both cases the mask is dangerous and unpredictable. Many plays and films have exploited this dangerous duality and in doing so they point to performances which differ from the safe and predictable run of theatre to create something more alive, imminent and exciting. In the North-Eastern Brazilian folk theatre, the masked performers can be grouped in the second category of actors. During intervals in the action when they are not involved, they move easily as actors to talk to spectators and to drink, returning into the action when required with little gesture to transition. But following Richard Schechner's argument on such transitions, the Brazilian actor is not the character but not not the character. He is not himself but not not himself. In the interstices between actor and character is generated the excitement and the perceived possibility of social action for change.

As Caillois says, in different but related context: "On the occasion of unrestrained excitement or riot, which is popular and valued for its excesses, the use of masks is supposed to reinvigorate, renew, and recharge both nature and society".<sup>147</sup>

That is possibly why it is so common that people disguise themselves during Carnival. So, in a country as Brazil, where Carnival became one of the richest and most stimulating traditions, it is usual that serious social disturbances occur during that period, many a time with tragic consequences, for encouraged by disguise and by the climate of license and tolerance, many *foliões* often go too far.

But, the difference between Carnival and folk theatre is, perhaps, that, while in Carnival release and freedom are the predominant objectives, in folk theatre these are controlled by the presence of limited boundaries which permit that the social values of each community be both expressed and reinforced. The lack of these boundaries and the great extent of its

---

<sup>147</sup> Roger Caillois, op. cit., p. 87.

excesses has frequently attributed unpleasant characteristics to Carnival, although its manifestations also express the same social and cultural values.

In the forms of folk theatre that we have been studying, people masquerade in strange costumes and facial disguises "to entertain and amuse but also to escape from and to reaffirm their value system", as says Margaret Robertson with regard to Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland.<sup>148</sup>

Therefore, these plays seem to be "a ritual of transition, of liminality", for, through them, the social mores are "temporarily forgotten and also remembered".<sup>149</sup>

#### 4.5.25 - The Use of a Bladder

This element is an essential part of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*. It is carried by *Mateus* and *Bastião* on a stick or simply tied to the hand by a string. These characters use the bladder constantly. Sometimes to beat the onlookers, in order to make room for the performance; at others, to beat one of them who did not want to give money during the collection (or even to thank the money collected); or to beat the other characters for the most varied reasons. Everytime for the great enjoyment of the audience.

This bladder, that also appears in the English Morris Dance, in which it is carried by the Fool, who wears a calf's tail, could probably be linked, at the primeval times, to "the belief that the power of an animal could be acquired by wearing his skin".<sup>150</sup> But, if we take

---

<sup>148</sup> Margaret Robertson, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> R. J. E. Tiddy, op. cit., p. 79.

into account what we have been observing with regard to the meaning of these customs at present, we must admit that, nowadays, this belief makes no more sense.

What appears to be closer to an explanation is the excitement, movement, intimacy, and joy that such an element can produce when handled by characters as the Morris Fool or *Mateus*.

#### **4.5.26 - The Use of the Hobby-horse**

The hobby-horse is not a constant element of the Mummers' Play, although it exists in some of its variants. In the same manner, in Brazil it only appears in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*. But in this category it is constant and even indispensable. It is ridden by the *Capitão*, who is responsible for the team, for the progression of the action, giving orders and commanding the calling-on of the characters. The hobby-horse is so important for the play that, in some places, the name that was attributed to it everywhere, *Cavalo-Marinho*, became the name of the play itself. But in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* there is also another character similar to the *Cavalo-Marinho*. This is the *Burrinha* (a young donkey), ridden by a cowboy. On the other hand, there are other hobby-animals in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, besides the *Cavalo-Marinho* and the *Burrinha*. They are the *Ema* (a Brazilian ostrich), the *Cobra* (snake) and the chief character, the *Boi*.

However, the presence of hobby-horses and other animal masks has been recorded not only in the English Mummers' Play and in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* of Brazil, but also and with a great intensity in the folk theatre of other parts of the world. For this reason, many scholars have been interested in tracing the origins of such characters. And they have generally agreed that these animals are remnants of ancient fertility cults, as well as of shamanistic practices.

These customs come probably from ritual practices that reach back <sup>to</sup> the beginning of the Christian era or even some earlier date. They have been linked, for instance, to festivities such as the Kalends of January and the Saturnalia, ~~which later changed into Carnival.~~

Animal guisers seem to have been always loved by the people but reprobated by the members of the Church, as was the case of St. Augustine, who not only considered that this was a filthy practice, but also advocated that it was worth severe punishment.<sup>151</sup>

The fact is that hobby-horses have existed since ~~the~~ antiquity. An amusement that, up to the present, has been also known in the simple form of a child's plaything, which was probably used in those former times, not solely to the delight of children, but likewise for relaxation of the mind of great men, as it is reported, for instance, for the Greek philosopher Socrates.<sup>152</sup>

But, if in the past animal masks were connected to fertility cults, this is no longer the motive <sup>for</sup> ~~of~~ their presence in these contemporary folk plays. Today, they seem to be related to the ~~purpose of~~ temporary breaking of rules and to the strong social satire attached to these plays, as well as to their powerful theatricality. A quality that was pointed out by Richard Southern in his description of the Padstow Horse, on the north coast of Cornwall: "It is when the Padstow Horse dances that we see a remarkable example of the fact that the essence of the theatre resides in the effect made on an audience by the way what is done is done".<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> See Violet Alford, "The Hobby Horse and Other Animal Masks", *Folklore*, vol. 79, Summer (London, 1968), pp. 122 and 125.

<sup>152</sup> See Brian W. Rose, "A Note on the Hobby Horse", *Folklore*, vol. LXVI (London, 1955), p. 363.

<sup>153</sup> Richard Southern, *The Seven Ages of the Theatre*, 4. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 42.



As <sup>with</sup> ~~the~~ other hobby-horses or ~~the other usual~~ animal masks, and ~~as~~ the *Cavalo-Marinho*, the *Burrinha*, the *Ema* or the *Boi* of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, the Padstow Horse is "savage and terrible"; ~~for~~

"It tips its great circle up into a waving disc that transcends any relation to the shape of horse or man. Its skirts swirl round following the wind of its going, and just that particular command that the great player seeks, with his technique, to exert over an audience is imposed on us as we watch, with a tribute untouched by grudge or criticism. This mask, in a ceremony deriving from the springs of civilization, is as potent in theatrical effect today as an enchanting ballerina." <sup>154</sup>

On the other hand, the hobby-horse can also be seen as a symbol of the male dominance, in a society in which horses are normally owned and driven by men. <sup>155</sup> As in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, in which the *Cavalo-Marinho* is driven by the *Capitão*, the owner and leader of the team, the one who gives the orders.

#### 4.5.27 - The Use of Colourful Clothes

This is a characteristic of the Brazilian folk theatre, except for the *Chegança*.

The costumes, at the most, are simple. <sup>156</sup> At times they are also time-worn, for it is an enormous difficulty for these teams to buy and preserve the clothes. But, in any case, they are ever colourful. The glaring colours are preferred, and the cloth more frequently used is

---

<sup>154</sup> Richard Southern, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>155</sup> See Margaret Robertson, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>156</sup> In the case of revivalist teams, as also occurs in England, they can be more sophisticated.

the *chita* or *chitão*, a sort of cotton cloth very popular in the North-East of Brazil, not only because it is cheap, but also because it is a typical colourful fabric. Taffeta and satin are much used too, mainly because of their brightness.

As in the Mummers' Play, the costumes use many accessories, especially ribbons and bells, and are commonly accompanied by head-gears.

#### 4.5.28 - The Use of Military Uniforms

As the majority of the characters of the *Chegança* are sailors, their players use old-fashioned military uniforms, which vary to suit the hierarchical position of each one. Those who are not mariners, such as the king and the princesses of the Moors, naturally dress in pursuance of their condition.

But, in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, the *Capitão* also wears a military uniform, possibly due to its origin, as it was attributed by Ascenso Ferreira.<sup>157</sup>

Military uniforms are used in the Mummers' Play too, habitually by those who fight in the combat.

In both cases, we could allege that military uniforms, for these people, are symbols of courage and heroism, values with which they need to identify themselves and feel strengthened in order to cope with the pressures of daily life.<sup>158</sup>

---

<sup>157</sup> See footnote n. 18 in the previous chapter.

<sup>158</sup> In some cases, as in the *Mamulengo*, and in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, there are characters who wear uniform and are a target for knockdown and ridiculous. But these are those policemen to whom I referred before and with whom the people do not want to be identified, for they are among the main agents of the social oppression exerted upon their lives.

#### 4.5.29 - The Participation of the Spectators

In sophisticated theatre, with the passing of time, many devices have been developed aiming to separate onlookers and performers. The spectators have been turned into passive beings whose function is only to stay quiet and silent all the time, sunk in a dark hole, in respectful attitude, expressing themselves only by applause at the end of the show. This passivity and quietness are so intense, in general, that the most tired and bored among the spectators sometimes feel themselves stimulated to a good sleep.

The point is that

"Conventional drama demands the suspension of disbelief and the acceptance of alternative realities; the folk play, while demanding nothing, offers much. Rather than leaving the world of reality to enter the theatre through a special and private door, the performers of the folk play find their audience within the real world. The audience is then confronted by the juxtaposition of normality with the abnormal, of reality with the representational, of the acceptable with the impossible."<sup>159</sup>

In folk theatre the spectators are traditionally active, unquiet, noisy.<sup>160</sup> Everywhere folk theatre is performed the relationship between players and audience is exactly the opposite of what happens in sophisticated theatre. Moreover, the participation of the spectators is one of the most sought <sup>after</sup> ~~for~~ aspects of all folk performance.

---

<sup>159</sup> Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays*, p. 469.  
See Chapter 1, footnote n. 117.

<sup>160</sup> "The mummers' audience did not sit quietly. Their laughter was great and loud. They felt free and nearly obligated to comment on the happenings, goodmanning each performer. One woman is remembered for her comical wish that her doctor were half so good as the one who rushed to the dead man's side" (Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, p. 90).

In the Mummers' Play, performed generally on the ground, the onlookers place themselves in a circle around the players, as happens in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, which naturally facilitates such participation.

But, if in some variants of the *Chegança*, in the *Pastoril* or in the *Mamulengo* a kind of rustic stage is frequently used, the participation of the audience presents the same intensity. Even in such performances the spectators can mix and make contact with the actors, for they are always standing, in the same circle of lights as the actors and completely free to move anytime and anywhere they want.

The physical proximity with the players and the many possibilities provided by the open structure of the plays are a constant stimulus to the participation of the spectators. Thus, the audience instigate the characters, animate their behaviour, make all kinds of comments or suggest to them a lot of things to do, for what is being performed before them is their own lives and problems. And the situations are similar to those with which they have to deal day by day.

As Borba Filho has said, in reference to the *Mamulengo*: "The participation of the audience is total, in talking and encouraging the puppets, although they already know all the stories."<sup>161</sup>

In the Mummers' Play the audience can sometimes seem uninterested or apathetic, as noted Peter Harrop<sup>162</sup> and as I heard from a member of the Coventry Mummers. But this is not the most usual. On the contrary, they are really exceptions, what permits us to suppose that they have been motivated by circumstantial causes.

---

<sup>161</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, p. 120.

<sup>162</sup> Peter Harrop, "Mumming in Bampton", p. 46.

In the North-East of Brazil, this fact is rare and, on the whole concerns those performances contracted by official institutions to be seen by tourists. As this kind of spectator normally does not partake of the same values and symbols as the players, their contribution is reduced to a minimum and their interest is much more connected to the picturesque and exotic nature of these performances.

The intimacy between performers and audience is so intense that it allows situations, as can be seen, for example, in the video on the Antrobus Soulcaking Play, in which Beelzebub, during his first speech, unexpectedly snatches away a glass of beer from the hand of a surprised onlooker. He drinks the beer at one gulp, spitting out the froth, for the enjoyment of all present at the pub. It is the same closeness in the aforesaid performance which allows the Wild Horse to suddenly attack a female spectator, giving her a start, in the way the *Boi*, the *Burrinha*, or the *Jaraguá* in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* operate.

Peter Harrop has observed that the folk play presents not only the usual two modes of interaction of a dramatic performance, namely, the interaction between performers and spectators and the interaction between the characters themselves. In fact, in the folk play, "the individual performer can interact with the audience on three levels". These levels are: (1) the interaction between the audience and performer-as-himself, as in the case of a character who, after being killed, prefers to sit on a chair or kneel against it in order to make it easier to get up, or who chat informally or drink with his acquaintances while he is temporarily uninvolved with the action, or even when one actor, through a sign, tells another one to speed up the performance; (2) the interaction between the audience and the performer-as-performer, which allows a performer to step out of character and tell jokes or poke fun at individuals in the audience, as well as creatively capitalise on any error; (3) the interaction between the audience and the performer-as-role, which is inevitable because, by definition, it is common to all dramatic forms.

Harrop also remarks that on any of these three levels, "each performer can react with other performers", and that "interaction on either of the first two levels tends to be improvisatory and to be viewed by the performers as part of the performance rather than of that which is performed".<sup>163</sup>

This is why the *Mateus* of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, for example, may step out the character and talk to one or more spectators about their particular subjects, tell jokes or fibs, or simply act and say the traditional and expected lines of the character, as well as the case of the girl, who in the *Chegança* of Laranjeiras, walked into the performers to say good-bye to her godfather, who performed one of the sailors. In the same manner, in the Ramlila at Ramnagar, the informality of the actors allows that, during the interval, the *svarupas* (the boys who play the deities) "remove their crowns and stretch their limbs" or that "they eat the sweets" which had been served them in the last episode before the interval. Also, there can be seen "a member of the audience offering a special tribute to the actor and the tribute becoming almost a part of the performance".<sup>164</sup>

#### 4.5.30 - The *Quête* (Begging for Money)

Even though the Brazilian folk players are not professionals in a strict sense, they perform for money, which is traditionally obtained through a *quête*, even when the team is being paid under contract.

Hermilo Borba Filho has said that money is a sort of fixed idea either in the lives of the players of the *Bumba-meu-Boi* or in the performance itself. As the performers usually do

---

<sup>163</sup> Peter Harrop, "Towards a Morphology of the English Folk Play", pp. 80-81.

<sup>164</sup> Anuradha Kapur, op. cit., pp. 125 and 140.

not have enough money to buy the material that they need to make their costumes, they mention and lament it at every opportunity they have. In the same manner, in the performance, money is a permanent motif. It is always being referred to, though not directly but through the use of subterfuge.<sup>165</sup>

There is a *quête* in the *Mamulengo*, in the *Chegança* and in the *Pastoril* too. In this the money is replaced by votes that the spectators donate to the colour (and girls) that they prefer, at the incitation of the *Velho*. But, undoubtedly, it is in the *Bumba-meu-Boi* that the most traditional forms of *quête* can be seen, as well as the most comic ones, incorporated in the performance of the play almost as one of its episodes. One of these *quêtes* is called *sorte* (luck). The player puts a dirty handkerchief on the shoulder of a spectator who has to give him some money. However, it does not work out sometimes, and the players have to try another form of *quête*.<sup>166</sup>

In the Mummers' Play the *quête* is also constant, and it is normally preceded by varied formulae, as this quatrain registered by Brody and used by the character Little Devil Doubt, who carries a broom:

"Money I want and money I crave  
If you don't give me money  
I'll sweep you all to the grave."<sup>167</sup>

Unlike the Brazilian folk players, for the performers of the Mummers' Play, such money is not relevant for their financial solvency. However, besides any financial support that the

---

<sup>165</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>167</sup> Alan Brody, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

money collected can provide, what appears to be also a strong reason for the maintenance of a *quête* in these plays is the amusement and fellowship that this collection can render.

#### 4.5.31 - The Actors are not Professionals in a Strict Sense

Borba Filho has stated that the players of the *Bumba-meu-Boi* are professionals, for they only perform for money, by contract or by a *quête*.<sup>168</sup>

Such an argument is questionable for, although this characteristic may depend on the attitude of the players, it seems that to be a professional does not mean being solely paid for something that is done. First of all, the money that the performers receive from a contract or a collection is not enough to constitute a substantial part of their financial solvency, let alone to guarantee their own maintenance or of their families, especially if we think about the number of personnel in each team among whom the money must be divided.

On the other hand, to play, in a general sense, notes Roger Caillois, means to waste time, energy, and even money sometimes, as occurs with these folk players, to whom the money that they collect is never enough to support the material expenses of the performance itself. Moreover, professional actors cannot prioritise enjoying their work, for many a time it is the need for money which dictates their choice and not their own will. As Caillois says, professional actors, as well as boxers, cyclists or jockeys "are not players but workers. When they play, it is at some other game."<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 10.

<sup>169</sup> Roger Caillois, *op. cit.*, p. 6.



For these Brazilian people the theatre can hardly be the main occupation, one to which they could dedicate all their energy and time, including an intensive period of training and rehearsal, as it is with professionals. For them, this is their playing more than their work.

In spite of the importance and the strong meaning that the theatre has in their lives, it is not their profession. As with the actors of the Mummers' Play, they need to have other activities in order to secure their daily survival. At least for the majority of these performers, their theatre, in the monetary sense, is only, to use an expression of their own, a *biscate* (an odd job).

As a quatrain says used in some *quête* songs of the Plough Play:

"We are not the London Actors,  
That act upon the stage;  
We are the country plough lads,  
That ploughs for little wage."<sup>170</sup>

#### 4.5.32 - Sexual Themes

As these plays mirror the life of those who perform them, the sexual themes could not be absent from their plots.

Among the categories of the Mummers' Play, this is the distinctive feature of the Wooing Play, and because of it the combat and the death and resurrection do not appear as its central action. In the Wooing Play there is always a 'female' who, "however fragmented the action, is wooed and won by a clown. A second, older 'female', often

---

<sup>170</sup> E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 103.

carrying a bastard child whose fatherhood she tries to assign to the clown, is also common."<sup>171</sup>

One of the sexual themes which can be found in the Brazilian folk plays, although only in a few plays, as has been mentioned before, is the abduction of the female, which also occurs in some versions of the Mummers' Play and, more frequently, in other European folk theatre forms.

Although Hermilo Borba Filho has said that the *Bumba-meu-Boi* "is asexual",<sup>172</sup> there are, at least in some of its variants, traces of sexual themes of various kinds. Roberto Benjamin, for example, in his article entitled "The Seduction of the Little Shepherdess: A Denunciation of the Sexual Exploration of the Woman in a Folk-Play of Pernambuco", sees the situation found in some versions of the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, in which the *Pastorinha* is seduced by the *Capitão*, as a depiction and denunciation of the historical (and current) custom of the men of the upper class sexually abusing and exploiting women from the lower classes whose economic well-being depends on the goodwill of the slave-owner / employer, on whom they also rely for protection.

His description of the episode is clear:

"The little shepherdess enters, looking for the cattle that she has lost. There are no other characters present. So, she is alone. Then, the *Capitão*, riding the *cavalo-marinho*, enters and begins the dialogue of the seduction. The little shepherdess offers opposition at the beginning but at last she surrenders. As it is in life, nobody *saves* the woman from the sexual exploitation, no other human, animal or fantastic character comes to help

---

<sup>171</sup> Alan Brody, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>172</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*, p. 11.

her avoid it. The little shepherdess plays the fate of the *folk woman* seduced by the *lord*." <sup>173</sup>

Any consideration of social protest due to the inclusion of this episode must be muted because of the absence of any great feeling generally about to liberation of women in this society. The episode, for the great majority of the audience is much more liable to provoke laughter than indignation.

A similar episode, between a little shepherdess and a character named *O Fúria* (The Fury), was collected by Ascenso Ferreira in the *Pastoril*. <sup>174</sup>

Also in the *Mamulengo* it is common to find episodes in which a female is seduced by a male, as well as the performance of sexual intercourse. This, however, is never taken as an offence by the audience, but as an occasion for amusement, for it is never really made explicit but only suggested by means of the typical magic of theatre and, particularly, of puppets.

In another article, Roberto Benjamin analyses another sexual theme found in the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, in the episode of the *Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo*. The intention of this character, seems to be to create ambiguity, for the puppet usually uses a costume and a mask similar to those of the actor.

Benjamin says that, taking into account such secondary languages as the costume and the expressive movements of the actor, especially during the dance, he could assess and understand the function and meaning of this character. For him, it is " the mythologic representation of a cursed being, through the image of standing homosexual anal coition,

---

<sup>173</sup> Roberto Câmara Benjamin, "A Sedução da Pastorinha ... ", p. 254.

<sup>174</sup> Ascenso Ferreira, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

whose punishment it is to wander around the world, in the position of coitus, perennially."<sup>175</sup>

What Roberto Benjamin has said about the *Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo* could be matched by the usual development of the episode in the *Bumba-meu-Boi Misterioso de Afogados*, in which the *Padre* was summoned to solve, by means of baptism, the problem of a strange character who had come into the circle, and whose entry had startled *Bastião*, for he had "*uma coisa em cima e outra em baixo*" ("something over him and another underneath"). Moreover, *Bastião* tells the *Capitão* that the *Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo* "*só quer saber do meu*" (literally, "only wants to know of what is mine"), which is an expression used as a joke by the people to insinuate that someone is interested in submitting other people to the practice of sodomy.

Another curious thing was the voice used by the player who performed this character. He talked in a high and soft voice, which is a feature generally attributed by these social groups to effeminate men.

On the other hand, the presence of a so conspicuous reference to homosexuality, is not a reason for surprise, for in a society as that of the North-East of Brazil, the prejudice against homosexuals is, perhaps, as strong as that against women. And such practice, as a rule, is seen as something abnormal, evil, diabolic, and, positively, worthy of punishment, as a mark of the deep influence of the Christian religions in the formation of the values and ideas of this society.

But, as we saw, humour is an essential instrument of expression for these social groups. Thus, these "evil" figures and all the rejection and fear that they can imply become, once

---

<sup>175</sup> Roberto Câmara Benjamin, "O Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo", pp. 157-158

For him, the *Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo* can be compared with other Brazilian myths, as the *Mula-sem-Cabeça* (she-mule without head), which belong to the category of cursed beings condemned to be roaming, because of a sexual transgression (Ibid., p. 158).

more, a target for mockery, ridicule and fun. It cannot be ignored, however, that the presence and treatment of these characters (and women) are indicative and expressive of strong social attitudes in the audience which we might consider reprehensible. Not everything in folk theatre is socially progressive.

#### 4.5.33 - Obscenity

As we know, scholars generally agree that all theatre, including folk theatre, was born from religion and that, due to many factors, the religious purpose has gradually been replaced by profane interests.<sup>176</sup> In the most primitive religions, as can be inferred from evidence that were found in objects and accounts attributed to ancient cultures, obscenity played a decisive role in many religious observances. Violet Alford, for example, has stated that there is an obscenity proper to the seasonal rite, for it was seen as good fertility magic.<sup>177</sup>

The point is that, in spite of any religious origin, ancient or more recent, as in the case of the *Pastoril*,<sup>178</sup> obscenity has become an important feature in the Brazilian folk theatre, which has been one of the major reasons for its furious disapproval on the part of the Church.<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>176</sup> I have previously referred that Mário de Andrade, for instance, has said that the interest in the comic elements and in the problems of everyday life could be the main reasons for the decline of the religious objective (See the section entitled *Bumba-meu-Boi* in the previous chapter and also Mário de Andrade, op. cit., pp. 24-25).

<sup>177</sup> Violet Alford, "The Hobby Horse and Other Animal Masks", p. 134.

<sup>178</sup> As it was pointed out, the *Pastoril* began as a celebration of the birth of Christ. Only later the element of obscenity was incorporated.

<sup>179</sup> In the North-East it is still possible to see middle-class parents who punish their children, when found among the spectators of such a "source of sin", for having disobeyed their prohibition.

But, as today the bonds with the fertility rituals of the past are nearly totally forgotten, why has obscenity turned out to be so substantial a feature of these plays? Undoubtedly because obscenity is something directly related to everyday life, for it is, according to Havelock Ellis, a "permanent element of human social life and corresponds to a deep need of the human mind."<sup>180</sup>

On the other hand, because it is also a good source of comic interest, for the obscene has always been, as points out Franca Rame, "the most effective of all weapons in the struggle to free people from the disease with which Power infected people when it planted in their minds a sense of guilt or shame, and an anxiety over sinfulness."<sup>181</sup> However, despite its efficiency, such obscenity is never shocking, as I have said, for it is softened by non-naturalistic expression and by comicality.

It is also worth noting that the audience of this folk theatre always mixes children and adults, men and women, young and old people without any constraint, for all enjoy the plays in the same way. And why does it happen? Probably because such theatre is indeed

---

<sup>180</sup> Havelock Ellis, "More Essays of Love and Virtue", quoted by Hermilo Borba Filho (*Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, p. 126) and by Henry Miller ("Obscenity and the Law of Reflection" in *Henry Miller on Writing* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 178).

<sup>181</sup> Franca Rame in Dario Fo, *The Tricks of the Trade*, tr. Joe Farrell (London: Methuen, 1992), p. 196.

In his book, *The Rainbow of Desire*, Augusto Boal states that, in almost fifteen years working with Theatre of the Oppressed workshops in various European countries, there appeared to him new forms of oppression. Used to deal with concrete and visible problems such as "racism, sexism, intolerable working conditions, insufficient wages, police abuses of power, and so on", he could not at first but consider oppressions such as 'loneliness', the 'impossibility of communicating with others', 'fear of emptiness', as "superficial and scarcely worthy of attention". Facing them, he questioned: "But where are the cops?". Little by little, and discovering, for instance, that in countries like Sweden or Finland the percentage of suicides was much higher than in the Third World countries, he changed his opinion. Then, at the beginning of the 1980's he began to develop a new technique of the Theatre of the Oppressed called *The Cop in the Head*, which recognises that "the cops are in our heads, but their headquarters and barracks must be on the outside". The aim of the new technique is "to discover how these 'cops' got into our heads, and to invent ways of dislodging them" (Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire*, tr. Adrian Jackson (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 7-8).

obscene but not pornographic or prurient, as Borba Filho has reminded.<sup>182</sup> Although aware that to discuss the nature and meaning of obscenity "is almost as difficult as to talk about God"<sup>183</sup> and that nobody knows what the word *obscene* means,<sup>184</sup> Borba Filho agreed with D. H. Lawrence who said that pornography offers, invariably, an affront to sex and to the human spirit, for it is "the attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on it."<sup>185</sup>

Thus, the obscenity in the Brazilian folk theatre, due to its spontaneous nature, avoids that we consider it as pornographic, for its aim is to make the audience laugh, working as a sort of catharsis.<sup>186</sup> That is, obscenity functions as a technical device.<sup>187</sup>

After all, as Roberto Benjamin says, "Putting on the scene the quotidian, satirising the weaknesses of the most powerful, and joking at their own miseries, the people could not exclude from the performance the grotesque and the obscene."<sup>188</sup>

#### 4.5.34 - The Relief of Fears by Witticism

Obscenity is only one of the technical devices employed by the folk theatre in general to create comedy. A comedy whose main purpose seems to be to provide liberation for an

---

<sup>182</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, p. 127.

<sup>183</sup> Henry Miller, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>184</sup> See D. H. Lawrence, "Pornography and Obscenity" in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 170.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>186</sup> Hermilo Borba Filho, *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*, p. 127.

<sup>187</sup> See Henry Miller, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>188</sup> Roberto Câmara Benjamin, "O Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo", p. 137.

oppressed people who, during centuries, have been subservient to the dominant values of the lords.<sup>189</sup>

In England, in Brazil and everywhere this has been a remarkable peculiarity of the folk theatre: relief for the pains of the people and, at the same time, encouragement for their dreams and needs, as well as their wish for change. Laughter, then, plays an essential role in this theatre, for, in jeering at the dominant values, "the people reach, innocently, the sacrilege itself, in a serene absence of sin."<sup>190</sup>

As *Mimicry*,<sup>191</sup> is a symbolic game, it helps people to reach a better comprehension of reality, and learn how to deal with and dominate it, avoiding its constant menaces. Indeed, "without a theatre of mask and trance, of simulation and vertigo, the people perish - and this is as true of the most complex and large-scale society as it is of the most obscure

---

<sup>189</sup> But, in fact, more than the offer of an escape from the real world, "the folk play would seem to highlight its absurdity by means of the contrasts that are seen to exist between the three levels at which it is performed" (Peter Harrop, *The Performance of English Folk Plays*, p. 469).

<sup>190</sup> Mário de Andrade, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>191</sup> *Mimicry* is one of the four types of games classified by Roger Caillois. It is a game in which simulation has the major role, and that means "incessant invention" (Roger Caillois, op. cit., p. 23). The other three categories of games are: *Agôn* (in which predominates the spirit of competition - ex.: football); *Alea* (in which chance predominates - ex.: lottery); and *Ilinx* (in which vertigo is dominant - ex: bodily movements producing dizziness) (Ibid., pp. 12-13).

It is worth mentioning, however, that the link of *simulation* and *mimicry* seems to be inadequate. These terms have different natures, for *simulation* comprises the idea of "desire to be", while *mimicry* means "pure imitation". So, when a Brazilian folk player performs, for instance, the role of a soldier or of a landowner, his intention is not to represent someone with whom he would like to change place, but only to draw an imitation of a person who has a real oppressive existence in his world and who he intends to criticise instead of admire. It is a position similar to that of a Brechtian actor. His aim is imitation and not simulation. This is also what occurs in groups as the *Teatro Campesino*, founded by Luiz Valdez, in the US, in 1965, to protest against the exploitation of the Mexicans who live in that country. The work of the *Teatro Campesino*, which is strongly committed from the political point of view, is emblematic and symbolic, using much physicality and humour. When performing characters who represent their bosses, their objective is to satirise and not try to be seen as one of them.



aboriginal band".<sup>192</sup> As Franca Rame has observed, "in all forms of popular entertainment, by the use of the grotesque, hatred, fear and resentment are exorcised and dispelled."<sup>193</sup>

In his turn, mentioning the Punch and Judy show, Caillois states that "To acclaim the wicked and triumphant puppet is cheap compensation for the thousands of moral constraints and taboos imposed upon the audience in real life."<sup>194</sup>

Referring<sup>to</sup> the traditional story of the Punch and Judy show as an example,<sup>195</sup> he indicates that ugly and cynical types, grotesque and immoral or even sacrilegious<sup>196</sup> are not exactly approved by their audiences, but "its boisterous pleasure provides a catharsis".<sup>197</sup> A catharsis that is made possible only because the characters and situations are a symbolic representation of the social pattern of these human groups, because they are congruent with the social constitution. Then, the comic behaviour and the nature of these types become able to provide a breach in the rigid control exerted by the conscious level of people's minds, opening way to the disclosure of what they have been hiding in their unconscious. The congruence between the social reality and its representation in the

---

<sup>192</sup> Victor Turner, *Anthropology of Performance*, 2. ed. (New York: PAJ, 1992), p. 128.

Although Turner uses Caillois' scheme, he thinks that it is defective, for sees society "solely from the positivist perspective of social structure", failing "to take into account the dialectical nature..." (Ibid., p. 127).

<sup>193</sup> Franca Rame in Dario Fo, op. cit., p. 211.

<sup>194</sup> Roger Caillois, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>195</sup> In the traditional story, "Punch kills his wife and child, refuses alms to a beggar whom he gives a beating, commits all manner of crimes, kills death and the devil, and for a finale, hangs the executioner who has come to punish him on his own gallows" (Ibid., p. 85). In the same manner, in the *Mamulengo*, characters such as *Simão* can frequently beat his wife and even his own mother.

<sup>196</sup> Such types, he says, are usually reincarnated by the guignol, by contrast to "wire marionettes, fairylike and graceful..." (Ibid., pp. 84-85).

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

performance is what allows comedy to be the perfect expression of any subversion intended to the social pattern, as a means of relaxation.

This has certainly been the chief ingredient for the satiric constitution of the Brazilian folk plays, although it had been progressively reduced and, in some cases, even tamed by the repressive action of the dominant culture.

However, as these are unconscious and spontaneous forms of expression, they not only absorb values that are imposed on them, but along with this they still manifest a rebellious and wild nature which can, at any time, oppose and contradict those alien values, thwarting the intent of those in power and of their official institutions.

This same satiric humour I could observe in the performances of the Mummers' Play, although its intensity here is less relevant than it is in the Brazilian folk plays. Such difference, which is indeed slight, is due only to the natural singularities of the two cultures, which include temperament and specific characteristics of social, religious and political pressures.

It is also true that the social backgrounds of the performers in the two countries is widely different. Throughout the revivals in the British Mummers' Plays, the background of many, even most of the performers has been in the field of education. One associates the players with teachers. The specific background of education in Britain over the last fifty years has been one of a long period of expansion followed by a long period of retraction and restraint, producing disillusionment in many teachers, contradicting the excitement and enthusiasm of the earlier periods. It is possibly this which produces the ironic tone in the humour. It certainly creates a certain distance between the performers and the performance. Underlying the revival of traditional folk forms in Britain is a belief in the value of keeping these forms alive because they embody themes, ideas and feelings which have at other times sustained the people with whom they have been associated. In

the present day it can be seen as a radical act to preserve the past as a counter-balance against the forces working to fragment society and destroy community relationships. Which is what can give the Mummers' Plays its symbolic function. The Brazilian performers are not afforded the luxury of this distance and work much more inside the immediate social pressures of the communities they live in. They are therefore less concerned with the past and the future and are much more concerned with the present. This is what gives the North-East Brazilian folk theatre its symbolic function. However enjoyable the British folk theatre is and however important are the values it works to preserve, it can never have the immediacy, excitement and level of audience participation experienced in North-East Brazil. In Britain ideology arises out of education. In Brazil the performance is a part of the political battle.

## **Chapter 5**

**THE SOCIETY AND THE FOLK PLAYS OF THE BRAZILIAN  
NORTH-EAST: FROM THE BASIC SOCIAL DIMENSIONS  
TO AN ATTEMPT TO ANALYSE SOCIAL DRAMA**

## 5.1 - Problems of Methodology

At the beginning of this thesis it was stated that the ideas of certain scholars would be utilised during the course of pinning down the distinctive features of the North-East Brazilian folk theatre. What was also pointed out was the difficulty of constructing a comprehensive methodology whilst at the same time setting out a full description and analysis of that theatre. During the course of the thesis, the work of many theorists and critics has been referred to, to throw light on and confirm the facts and opinions expressed in the main text.

It is now time to set out the problems which stand in the way of the construction of a comprehensive methodology through which to relate the folk theatre of North-East Brazil to its contextual society.

## 5.2 - Mary Douglas and the Grid/Group Functions

According to Mary Douglas, there are two basic dimensions that characterise the relationship between the individual and society.

These basic dimensions are:

1) *Grid* - which consists of the rules that organise the interaction of individuals in the interior of a human society, controlling their behaviour. So, it is "a dimension of individuation".<sup>1</sup>

2) *Group* - which is comprised of the experience shared by a specific segment of society. So, it is "a dimension of social incorporation".<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Douglas, *Cultural Bias*, Occasional Paper n. 35 of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1979), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Such dimensions were set down by her, dividing experience into the interaction between social context and cosmology. To find them she followed "the polarising of sociological thought between individualism and group behaviour", which are "always present as possibilities".<sup>3</sup>

She says that *grid* and *group* "are a function of order and constraint in social relations"<sup>4</sup> and that they are "a formula for classifying relations which can be applied equally to the smallest band of hunters and gatherers as to the most industrialised nations."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, by the application of the criteria of the concepts of grid and group it becomes possible to comprehend the structure of these relations.

Elaine Turner, who has applied this model to Tragedy, says:

"The dimensions of group/grid are the elements which invest the society, the individual, and all their machinations with meaning and value. They work both as constrictions within the vast mass of unstructured possibilities and as validators, investing worth and meaning beyond the limits of immediate experience. They provide a context of signification giving the individual focus and value within both a social and a cosmological context; they invest the person with meaning and his actions with significance and acknowledged effect."<sup>6</sup>

From these basic dimensions derive four different cosmological structures, which depend on the intensity of each element present in the relationship grid/group. They are:

---

<sup>3</sup> Mary Douglas, *Cultural Bias*, p. 7

<sup>4</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

<sup>6</sup> Elaine Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

1) *Strong Group / Strong Grid (G/G)* - in which the pressures of group membership and role are high. It is an integrated world view.

2) *Weak Group / Weak Grid (g/g)* - in which the demands of membership and role are low. The world view is individualist.

3) *Strong Group / Weak Grid (G/g)* - in this, the membership of the group is predominant and roles are not important.

4) *Weak Group / Strong Grid (g/G)* - here, the membership of the group is not important; all meaning comes from the duties and the accomplishment of the roles.

The first two of these structures, Elaine Turner remarks, "are primary in that they are the major systems on which most societies are based. The other two systems are largely, by necessity, either outgrowths of or sets within the two larger cosmological systems."<sup>7</sup>

Social interaction produces a specific comprehension of reality. This, once accepted and internalised in the consciousness of individuals, will constitute "a collective moral consciousness about man and his place in the universe."<sup>8</sup> And this cosmology will emerge in every action or speech.

Elaine Turner states that "one could draw assumptions about possible expression from one's knowledge of the social cosmology, and it is my contention that one can read the cosmology back from its artifacts."<sup>9</sup>

So, applying Mary Douglas' model, either society or its manifestations can be read through each other, for the cosmologies and the cultural artifacts which express them are seen as strongly linked to the social system.

---

<sup>7</sup> Elaine Turner, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Douglas, *Cultural Bias*, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Elaine Turner, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

The proposition on which the model of "Cultural Bias" is founded is that *reality* is *social consensus* instead of *fact*. For Mary Douglas the perception of symbols and their interpretation is socially determined. She assumes that *reality* is a notion based on the need of individuals to justify one to another in their actions, which also determines the value system of any society.<sup>10</sup>

But, one of the most interesting aspects of Mary Douglas' model is that it is not judgemental and can deal with any reality system, whatever be its nature.

In this regard, Elaine Turner states:

"The model not only implies that reality itself is a matter of social consensus but also suggests that all reality systems have both advantages and disadvantages, insights and blindnesses inherent in their construction of meaningful reality out of the components of experience. The model is thus non-judgemental since all systems are implicitly equally valid in their own terms."<sup>11</sup>

Such a model links the social structure, which constructs reality through the binomial relationship individual-society, directly with "the languages through which the society expresses itself and gives itself and its members justification and significance."<sup>12</sup>

For this reason, the "Cultural Bias" model uses Basil Bernstein's concept of language codes together with Mary Douglas' own anthropological analysis of the structure of human society.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Elaine Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.



### 5.3 - Basil Bernstein's Socio-Linguistic Approach

Bernstein tries to analyse the relationship between social structure, language-use and subsequent behaviour, because "In some way the form of the social relationship acts selectively on the speech possibilities of the individual, and again in some way these possibilities constrain behaviour."<sup>13</sup>

His studies are founded on Sapir's theory of the way language controls culture. Through Sapir he searched for the mechanisms that make systems of communication based on the speech able to change the experience of those who use them.

He distinguishes two general types of linguistic codes, called *elaborated code* and *restricted code*, which are "functions of a particular form of social relationship or, more generally, qualities of social structure."<sup>14</sup>

On a linguistic sense, they can be defined "in terms of the probability of predicting for any one speaker which syntactic elements will be used to organize meaning".<sup>15</sup> So, as the elaborated code has a great range of syntactic alternatives this prediction is reduced, as well as it is increased in the restricted code, in which the alternatives are very limited. If the elaborated code facilitates "the orientation to symbolize intent in a verbally explicit form",<sup>16</sup> the restricted code inhibits it.

According to Bernstein, the elaborated code is "universalistic with reference to its meaning inasmuch as it summarizes *general* social means and ends". With respect to its

---

<sup>13</sup> Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control*, Vol. 1, 2. ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77

model, it is particularistic. So, only some people have access to it and "to the potential universalistic character of its meanings". And this access will entirely depend on access to the social positions in the social structure that make available such type of speech model.

In the case of the restricted code, it is "particularistic with reference to its meaning inasmuch as it summarizes *local* means and ends" and universalistic with respect to its model, which gives all people access to it and to its local condensed meanings.

Because of its nature, an elaborated code requires longer periods of formal and informal learning whereas the abbreviated structures of a restricted code may be easily learned, not requiring much time or formalities.<sup>17</sup>

The restricted code is what is more frequently found. It is produced by social forms which can vary but which are able to condense meanings, because the speech "is played out against a background of communal, self-consciously held interests which removes the need to verbalize subjective intent and make it explicit."<sup>18</sup>

Unlike the elaborated code, which requires a complex verbal planning, the non-verbal elements play an important role in the pure form of the restricted code and it is through components such as intonation, stress, expressive features, etc., that individual intent will be signalled.

They are indeed

"... a major source for indicating changes in meaning. These expressive features will tend to reinforce a word or phrase rather than finely discriminate between meanings. The utterances will be well ventilated. They will tend to be *impersonal* in that the speech is not specially prepared to fit a particular referent. How things are said, rather than what is said,

---

<sup>17</sup> See Basil Bernstein, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

becomes important. The intent of the listener may be taken for granted. Finally, the content of the speech is likely to be concrete, descriptive and narrative rather than analytical and abstract. The major function of this code is to reinforce the *form* of the social relationship (a warm and inclusive relationship) by restricting the verbal signalling of individuated responses."<sup>19</sup>

The elaborated code conveys individual responses, aiming to produce a verbal arrangement which "closely fits specific referents", because it comes from a different kind of social relationship. So, "If a restricted code facilitates the construction and exchange of 'social' symbols, then an elaborated code facilitates the construction and exchange of 'individuated' symbols."<sup>20</sup>

Although the elaborated code "is associated with the middle-class and adjacent social strata", Bernstein has said that the codes "are not necessarily clear functions of social class", in spite of the fact that "in advanced industrialized societies the association will have a high degree of probability". However, "Class is only one of many principles of social stratification and differentiation".

Bernstein also makes clear that the usage of the codes depends on the form of the social relationship and not of the personality and intelligence of the speakers. He says that these factors "may influence the *level* within each code but the latter is not inevitably a function of these psychological factors."<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Basil Bernstein, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

#### 5.4 - Some Preliminary Conclusions

Utilising successfully the model of "Cultural Bias" in her study of tragedy, Elaine Turner has demonstrated how valuable it can be as an alternative approach to other disciplines. Her objective was to show that "there was a direct, active relationship between the creation and use of specific forms and the societies in which they had been conceived, implying a signifying feed-back system between society and the artifacts it creates", as well as that there is an "active inter-relationship between form and content" which implies that "forms may be viewed as interactive, meaning-making devices which are more likely the manifestation of organising perspective than content."<sup>22</sup>

The folk theatre forms performed by the people of the North-East of Brazil comprise a speech system which acts as a medium of communication. Those who perform these plays know each other very well and they partake of a reality that is well-known by all individuals, which demands no complex verbal planning, allowing the communication to be shortened and condensed. The subjective intents do not need to be verbalised and can be made explicit solely by means of non-verbal components, through socialised symbols. Summarising the values and the structure of such communities the plays act as a kind of *restricted code*, which contributes to a personal and social integration.

Bernstein's diagram can be useful for the understanding of the social ground which has produced the folk theatre forms of the Brazilian North-East, mainly if we take into account its relation to Mary Douglas' concept of *Group* and *Grid*.

Elaine Turner remarks that the primary function of any language (speech and symbol) is to confirm the system. "Whenever G/G speaks", she says, "it speaks, ultimately, of relationship and the integrity of the whole. Thus, it needs no more than a restricted

---

<sup>22</sup> Elaine Turner, op. cit., p. 1.

language code (Bernstein) which defines and confirms the relationship of the parts to the whole; reiterates the good of the whole; and establishes the relationship between the whole and its parts."<sup>23</sup>

It will be precisely the relationship between the whole and the parts what will allow the meaning to be explicated.

In the *G/G* system, *Grid* and *Group* state the value of individuals and one of its advantages is that "every element within it is deemed indispensable to its integrity and thus has automatic value. All members, no matter how apparently insignificant, are ascribed places within the hierarchy. Each has value and relevance; all are assumed necessary and beneficial to the proper functioning of the 'natural order'."<sup>24</sup>

The *G/G* system "proposes a homogeneous society organised in an explicit hierarchy which is confirmed and mirrored by a corresponding cosmological hierarchy of which it is a functioning part."<sup>25</sup>

If we take into account that the appearance of ritualism in human societies is linked to the importance that these societies attribute to organisation and social control,<sup>26</sup> we will certainly be able to understand why the folk theatre has been performed in so many parts of the world.

Large problems arise, however, when we try to apply this method of sociological analysis to the folk theatre of North-East Brazil. If we start with Elaine Turner's work in utilising this form of theoretical discourse in the study of tragedy, it is immediately apparent that Elaine Turner had the distinct advantage of working with fixed texts arising,

---

<sup>23</sup> Elaine Turner, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> See Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 56.

however problematic exact dating might be for the earlier plays, at specific moments in specific social spaces. More than enough material exists on both sides to chart the interrelatedness of *Macbeth* and early Jacobean society.

One of the major difficulties in applying this form of critical analysis to the subject of this thesis is that no such fixed texts exist. The task of relating the present text, such as we can record and set down, is hampered by the lack of earlier texts. The folk theatre works between tradition and contemporary innovation. We can set down the traditional elements and hazard hypotheses as to their origins and social significance but, whereas it is clear that a long period of development and adaptation has taken place, we lack any of the intermediate texts that stand between the origins and the present. It is clear that some process has been going on but we have no access to direct evidence. Without these intermediate texts, Elaine Turner's claim to be able to read a society back from its artifacts is all in vain. To try to read Brazilian society back from contemporary performances is faced with insurmountable problems.

Elaine Turner's study of tragedy has one other built in advantage which the study of a folk theatre is denied. Her case is built upon identifying the dominance of the tragic form in G/G societies, where the beliefs which hold that society together are coming under attack from contesting and conflicting cosmologies. This presumes the pre-existence of a stable G/G society, which North-East Brazil certainly is not. Nor, for different reasons, is Britain. Both these societies are in a dynamic state of flux. Britain is caught between the contradictions of re-asserting the past imperial values of "back to basics" and some fundamental concepts of "Britishness" and the erosion of many forms of social and community cohesion which cannot coexist with the encouragement of unfettered individual enterprise. In this situation, with education as one of the main areas in which these contradictions are played out, it is not surprising that the folk play performers are

drawn largely from the ranks of the teachers. In this marginalised area, the performers signally assert the values of tradition and team-work in a framework which enables them to comment on the deficiencies of contemporary society.

The folk theatre of North-East Brazil has some comparison with this. Whatever the stated public values of Brazilian society, there is no way a society in which many individuals can be considered as disposable because they stand in the way of economic development can be described as a G/G society. In fact, it is difficult to find where one would place contemporary Brazilian society, especially the North-East area, within Douglas' frames. In comparison with the British Mummers, the Brazilian folk players are less marginalised because Brazil does not have the level of welfare and institutionalised protection of the individual which still exist in Britain. Their assertion of traditional values is more trenchant because that tradition is more closely linked with a direct opposition to the status quo. Similarly, the ability of this theatre to make interventionist criticism, however much their activities are circumscribed by authority, is much stronger and directly relevant.

At the outset of the research reflected in this thesis, it was hoped that a direct comparison between the Mummers' Plays and the North-East Brazilian folk theatre would yield rich veins of analysis. The attempt to do this has thrown up many interesting insights, but the attempt to construct a comprehensive comparison foundered on the difficulty of moving beyond counting the factual recognition of certain features occurring in both forms. From what has been written above it is clear that for such a comprehensive comparison to be made, it would be necessary to look at each theatre form within the specific context of the social dynamics of their societies. This would be an important task to undertake. Whether it could be done by any one individual working on both sides of the

comparison is open to doubt. The attempt, however, utilising Mary Douglas' sociological analysis, in a flexible way, would be well worth while.

Bernstein's constructs of restricted and elaborated codes has something to offer to any future research in these areas. Here, though, the difference between the English Mummers' players and the folk performers of North-East Brazil becomes crucially important. The revivalist nature of the British Mummers' Plays, which recognises the long breaks in any idea of a continuous tradition, means that the performers are using an elaborated code, accessible largely to people like themselves of a certain level and direction of education. The areas of improvisation and the incorporation of contemporary critical material into the traditional structures is of vital importance to keep the form alive and socially functioning. The English Mummers' Plays need innovation to open their accessibility to wider audiences and to mark out their social relevance. In North-East Brazil the situation is very different. There the performers exist within an unbroken tradition and their rapport with the audience enables them to use a restricted code, easily accessible. There is a good case to be made that this accessibility only exists for those who inhabit the world of the performers and that that accessibility does not extend to outsiders. This is quite crucial if we consider that those in authority do not inhabit the world of the performers and have therefore no access to it (see footnote n. 21). Such an argument leads to identifying an area of licence, or leakage, where what is being communicated by the performers escapes censorship or restraint because it is not understood by the section of the audience who would be likely to apply such restrictions. This gives the North-East Brazilian folk theatre a more important social function than can exist at this time in the Mummers' Plays. The pursuit of such a comparative study would again necessitate a detailed examination of both theatre forms in the dynamic context of their societies but would certainly be productive to undertake.



### 5.5 - Victor Turner and the Dynamism of the Social World

For Victor Turner, "human social life is the producer and product of time, which becomes its measure - an ancient idea that has had resonances in the very different work of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Henri Bergson".<sup>27</sup>

Turner believes that the social relations have a dynamic quality and that the social world "is a world in becoming, not a world in being", for "there is no such a thing as 'static action'". He states that he is also "a little chary of the terms 'community' or 'society' " - though he does use them - for "they are often thought of as static concepts". A view that "violates the actual flux and changefulness of the human social scene". Then, "The metaphor of social and cultural systems as machines, popular since Descartes, is just as misleading".<sup>28</sup>

Richard Schechner has stated that, for Turner, the basic human plot is this: "someone begins to move to a new place in the social order; this move is accomplished through ritual, or blocked; in either case a crisis arises because any change in status involves a readjustment of the entire scheme; this readjustment is effected ceremonially - that is, by means of theater".<sup>29</sup>

So, the way people play is perhaps "more profoundly revealing of a culture than how they work, giving access to their 'heart values' ".<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors*, 7. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 23-24.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Schechner, quoted by Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, p. 124.

For Turner, there are ways in which

"social actions of various kinds acquire form through the metaphors and paradigms in their actors' heads (put there by explicit teaching and implicit generalization from social experience), and, in certain intensive circumstances, generate unprecedented forms that bequeath history new metaphors and paradigms".<sup>31</sup>

Studying the Ndembu social life in Africa, Turner saw that one of its most arresting properties was "its propensity toward conflict". He says that conflict "was rife in the groups of two dozen or so kinsfolk who made up a village community" and manifested itself "in public episodes of tensional irruption" which he called *social dramas*. Arising from the opposition between the interests and attitudes of groups and individuals, *social dramas* seemed to him "to constitute isolable and minutely describable units of social process". At first, he did not think it to be a universal type, but later he became convinced that *social dramas*, with much the same temporal or processual structure as he had detected in the Ndembu case, could be isolated for study "in societies at all levels of scale and complexity", what was particularly the case "in political situations".<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the processual approach of *social drama* appeared to be "decisive as a guide to the understanding of human social behavior".<sup>33</sup>

Although aware of the importance of the situations of cooperation and interaction inside human groups, Turner concentrates a great interest on the conflict situations, because he

---

<sup>31</sup> Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

agrees with Freud's view that "disturbances of the normal and regular often give us greater insight into the normal than does direct study".<sup>34</sup>

He remarks that the situation in an Ndembu village "closely parallels that found in Greek drama where one witnesses the helplessness of the human individual before the Fates; but in this case (...) the Fates are the necessities of the social process".<sup>35</sup>

For him, conflict "seems to bring fundamental aspects of society, normally overlaid by the customs and habits of daily intercourse, into frightening prominence. People have to take sides in terms of deeply entrenched moral imperatives and constraints, often against their own personal preferences. Choice is overborne by duty."<sup>36</sup>

## **5.6 - The People and the Plays of the North-East Brazil: An Attempt at an Analysis of Social Drama**

*Social Drama* is a unit of "aharmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations", comprising "four main phases of public action", accessible to observation, namely,

1) *Breach* - When the social relationships break the rules that orient them, that is, when occurs a breach of "regular, norm-governed social relations" between "persons or groups within the same system of social relations" or any other "perduring system or set or field of social interaction".

---

<sup>34</sup> Victor Tuner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> Victor Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), p. 94.

<sup>36</sup> Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphor*, p. 35.

2) *Crisis* - It supervenes the breach and during it the breach tends to be widened and extended "until it becomes coextensive with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the conflicting or antagonistic parties belong". This stage "is always one of those turning points or moments of danger and suspense when a true state of affairs is revealed, when it is least easy to don masks or pretend that there is nothing rotten in the village". Each public crisis has what Turner calls liminal characteristics, "since it is a threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process, but it is not a sacred limen, hedged around by taboos and thrust away from the centers of public life. On the contrary, it takes up its menacing stance in the forum itself and, as it were, dares the representatives of order to grapple with it. It cannot be ignored or wished away".

3) *Redressive action* - This replication to the crisis, which can be or judicial (and rational) or metaphorical (and symbolic) through ritual, depending on the nature and severity of the crisis. It is constituted by 'mechanisms' that are "swiftly brought into operation by leading or structurally representative members of the disturbed social system", in order to limit the spread of crisis. They can be informal or formal, institutionalised or ad hoc and "vary in type and complexity with such factors as the depth and shared social significance of the breach, the social inclusiveness of the crisis, the nature of the social group within which the breach took place, and the degree of its autonomy with reference to wider or external systems of social relations. They may range from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal

machinery, and, to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes of resolution, to the performance of public ritual".

4) *Reintegration* or *Schism* - It consists of the reintegration of the disturbed social group, or "the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between the contesting parties...".<sup>37</sup>

For Turner, a *social drama* "may provide materials for many stories, depending upon the social-structural, political, psychological, philosophical, and, sometimes, theological perspectives of the narrators", and its dramaturgical phase begins "when *crises* arise in the daily flow of social interaction. Thus, if daily living is a kind of theatre, social drama is a kind of metatheatre, that is, a dramaturgical language about the language of ordinary role-playing and status-maintenance which constitutes communication in the quotidian social process".<sup>38</sup>

In Brazil, whose history has been an extensive field for the development of *social dramas*, a *breach* looks to have occurred in the first moments of the colonisation, when the settlers forced the Indians to quit their own traditions and adopt the Christian habits, as well as to do the hard and slavish agricultural work. But, if the enslavement became impossible and was replaced by the black slavery, the ritual interference in the aboriginal culture must have not been difficult, for the Indians, full of childlike curiosity and interest for novelties, accepted the new religious and social rituals brought by the foreigner intruders without resistance, for these certainly appeared to them as a kind of interesting plaything. But such intrusion would have tragic consequences for the Indian culture and would later make it almost split up, although some of the few tribes that are still alive have

---

<sup>37</sup> Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors*, pp. 37-41 and *The Anthropology of Performance*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>38</sup> Victor Turner, *Anthropology of Performance*, pp. 33 and 76.

maintained, more or less preserved, part of their cultural values and rituals. On the other hand, if the Indian ritual aftermath, following the *crisis* caused by the take-over of the colonisers, was never so perceptible as it was in the case of the Negro culture, it was probably due to the fact that the cultural destruction of the former owners of the Brazilian land was gradually accompanied by their physical extermination.<sup>39</sup>

Certainly the *crisis* within the indigenous culture must have not been entirely realized by the Indians, because the Jesuits were clever enough to attract their attention to the Christian artifacts, absorbing at the same time some of the ritual customs of the Indians in their own ritual forms. Thus, the *crisis* was softened and the *redressive action* which replicated it could be able to help the construction of a new social and cultural system.

In its turn, the *breach* inside the Black culture was stronger and the culture of the African slaves faced a more severe *crisis*. Accordingly, a more intense *redressive action* replicated it, bequeathing a relevant contribution to the formation of the Brazilian culture.

In fact, these folk theatre forms seem to have arisen in the colonial period as a kind of *redressive action*, a metaphorical and symbolic ritual which has tried to respond to the permanent conflict that has characterised the life of the communities who perform these plays, a direct result of their relationship with the constant oppression exerted upon them by those in power and by a social structure that has kept them apart of any privilege.

We can say about the folk theatre of the Brazilian North-East what Victor Turner has said on the ritual of *Umbanda*, the popular Afro-Brazilian custom which he documented in

---

<sup>39</sup> As we saw, in five centuries of history, they were reduced from about three millions to approximately three hundred thousands. An extermination that is still taking place in the North and the Centre-West of the country, for they have systematically been killed by people who are interested in taking their lands, which are generally rich in ore. There is also the extermination through the simple contact with the white men, which have transmitted fatal diseases to the Indians (as flu, for instance), destroying many entire tribes, besides the crimes committed against the environment, which have unrecoverably damaged the Indian culture and existence.

Rio de Janeiro in the seventies. As happens with that cult, it is possible to regard the folk plays of the people of the North-East as *redressive performances*, "in the sense that they restore order and redress violations of integrity" in the lives of those who gather to perform them.<sup>40</sup>

The participants of these plays are generally poor (nearly all black or *mulatos*) and have "only a restricted set of status-roles open to them". Then, in such plays, "they can enjoy a multiplicity of roles, (...) and be a multitude of 'selves' ".<sup>41</sup> In fact, the plays are "a liminal space-time 'pod' in which they can distance themselves from immersion in the status-role structures of the present" by identification with heroes such as *Simão* or *Mateus*, etc., or with the situations that are performed.<sup>42</sup> An instrument that helps them to cope with a social organisation that, for centuries, has been dominated by the whites in a post-slavery and post-feudal society which still bears traces of those archaic and cruel structures.

These plays, as well as Carnival and *Umbanda*, provides them with "fantasies of being other than their circumscribed lives (...) allow them to be".<sup>43</sup>

All these plays have, in a certain sense, generated out of a conflict situation. They possibly arose from situations provoked by the clash between the powerful white landowners and their black slaves who, having had to leave behind the social and cultural stature that they had in their former country, were forced to endure an inhuman and

---

<sup>40</sup> Victor Turner, *Anthropology of Performance*, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

This is what happens with the plays, with the Afro-Brazilian cults and also with carnival.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

He observes that in Portuguese, the term *fantasia* (fantasy) also denotes a carnival disguise and "one is supposed to don one's most cherished 'fantasy' openly" (Ibid.).

shameful state of submission. This seems to be what has led to the creation of artifacts such as the *Bumba-meu-Boi*, for instance, which have functioned as symbolic proposals of change and also as vehicles for the affirmation of their pride, through which they can try to restore order and redress the violations of their integrity. They also come from the conflict between paganism and Catholicism and from the attempt to replace pagan beliefs by Christian values, as seems to have been the case in the *Pastoril* and in the *Mamulengo*. A conflict that can be expressed, for instance, in the combat between Moors and Christians, as we see in the *Chegança*.

These plays, which have become more and more secularised, seem to be part of what Turner calls "the subjunctive domain of Brazilian culture", a domain of the "politically circumscribed", in fact, "a complex rehearsal system for the problems of 'real', 'indicative', social life in the work and domestic situations".<sup>44</sup>

The point is that subjunctivity, which includes the folk plays and other institutionalised modes as carnival, soccer, and the electronic media, "plays a major role in Brazilian culture", and due to political oppression, "its performative genres acquire, paradoxically, an indicative character". In them, "individuals of the poorer classes can acquire a measure of prestige, fame, and even some secular power".<sup>45</sup>

The performance of these folk plays has a redressive function, unlike the *Umbanda*, which is directed to crises in individual lives and the "ethical and ontological units involved

---

<sup>44</sup> Victor Turner, *Anthropology of Performance*, p. 61.

Turner says that "culture, like verbs in many if not all languages, has at least two 'moods', indicative and subjunctive", which "in any particular situation, are almost hopelessly intermingled". For him, a *social drama* "is mostly, at least, on the surface, under the sign of indicativity", that is, "consisting of acts, states, occurrences that are factual, in terms of the cultural definition of factuality", while the subjunctive "contains the dialectical, that is, the notion that an idea or event generates its opposite..." (Ibid., p. 41).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 61.



(...) are primarily individuals, not collectivities", because it is directed to "the ongoing life of the group to which the members belong".<sup>46</sup>

### 5.7 - Another Preliminary Conclusion

As ritual forms, these plays present semantic poles and, through the exchange of their performances qualities, they achieve "genuinely cathartic effects, causing in some cases real transformations of character and of social relationships". This exchange of qualities "makes desirable what is socially necessary by establishing a right relationship between involuntary sentiments and the requirements of social structure". So, "People are induced to want to do what they must do. In this sense ritual action is akin to a sublimation process ...".<sup>47</sup>

Social action can then be instigated by symbols, for ritual symbols are 'multivocal' and "condense many references, uniting them in a single cognitive and affective field". But, although susceptible of many meanings,

"...their referents tend to polarize between physiological phenomena (blood, sexual organs, coitus, birth, death, catabolism, and so on) and normative values of moral facts (kindness to children, reciprocity, generosity to kinsmen, respect for elders, obedience to political authorities and the like). At this 'normative' or 'ideological' pole of meaning, one also finds reference to principles of organization: matriliney, patriliney, kingship, gerontocracy, age-grade organization, sex-affiliation, and others. The drama of ritual action - the singing, dancing, feasting, wearing of bizarre

---

<sup>46</sup> Victor Turner, *Anthropology of Performance*, p. 67.

<sup>47</sup> Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 56.

dress, body painting, use of alcohol or hallucinogens, and so on, causes an exchange between these poles in which the biological referents are ennobled and the normative referents are charged with emotional significance."<sup>48</sup>

Even the origins of any ritualism are conditioned to the quality of the social structure. Of the four cosmological structures classified by Mary Douglas only three

"... predispose towards ritual in its most magical and concentrated sense. Where grid is strong and group weak, magic is at hand to help the individual in a competitive society. He trusts implicitly his know-how, his private destiny or star, and in the power of the rules. He celebrates their efficacy with solemn feasts. Where both group and grid are strong, magicity supports the social structure and moral code. Where group is strong and grid weak, magicity protects the borders of the social unit. Only in the area of zero organisation are people very uninterested in ritual or magic. Here it is the inner experience that counts."<sup>49</sup>

One interesting observation is that when a *redressive action* fails, it usually causes a regression to *crisis*. "At this point", says Turner,

"direct force may be used, in the varied forms of war, revolution, intermittent acts of violence, repression, or rebellion. Where the disturbed community is small and relatively weak vis-à-vis the central authority, however, regression to crisis tends to become a matter of endemic,

---

<sup>48</sup> Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 55.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 144.

pervasive, smoldering factionalism, without sharp, overt confrontations between consistently distinct parties."<sup>50</sup>

The social ground from which the folk plays of the North-East of Brazil have emerged and on which they have been played, has always been characterised by an unequal confrontation of powers and by a constant use of mechanisms of repression on the part of the central authority.

The strong social inequality of the region has not been transformed, for, as a ~~redressive~~<sup>means</sup> ~~to redress~~<sup>machinery</sup> these plays are not able ~~enough~~ to handle crises or ~~for attaining~~<sup>make</sup> peace between the contending sides of the social structure, although to overcome crises and to ~~get~~<sup>attain</sup> peace have permanently been their objective. On the other hand, these customs have more and more been wiped out by the poverty of their performers, as well as by accusations of being archaic artifacts incompatible with the modern times on the part of individuals who are situated far from the interests of such people, or still by political strategies which have attempted to transform these plays into instruments of the interests of the elite in power.

However, this folk theatre remains ~~to be~~<sup>as</sup> one important *redressive action* created by the people of the North-East of Brazil, which has not only helped them to face the difficult conditions in which they have ever lived, but also has been for them a meaningful source of pleasure, entertainment, pride and voice, continually affirming and strengthening a shared and mutually accepted cosmology.

The same could, of course, be applied to the English Mummers, but the redressive force of the performances would largely apply to the performers and only to a much lesser degree to the audience. Should a crisis arise in society in which theatrical performances might play an important part, the British theatre, with its much richer theatrical heritage,

<sup>50</sup> Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 41.

would be more likely to call upon the many forms of sophisticated political theatre available, than to foreground folk theatre. Were such a crisis to arise in Brazil, then the popular forms of expression, such as the folk theatre and carnival, might well take on a wider significance in intensifying the crisis and in participating in any process of redression.

In any event, the application of Victor Turner's concepts to the life crises of the oppressed group and to the wider range of Brazilian society, the interaction and interrelatedness of both processes, is also an important area of research which remains to be pursued in the future.

## **CONCLUSION**

"Material culture as well as ideas and beliefs", says Metín And, "do spread from one culture to another over the ages even though widely distant from one another in time and space".<sup>1</sup>

~~As we saw,~~ The Brazilian folk theatre is historically and structurally connected to the folk theatre performed in England and elsewhere. Such association is not solely a matter of borrowing, of cultural transference or influence (be it spontaneous or forced) but, above all, it comes from a universal heritage and is a consequence or an answer to a common need of the people wherever they can be.

Theatre is, notably, a social event and not an individualised activity, which is more crucial in the folk theatre. As in all other sort of games,<sup>2</sup> in theatre isolation is never desirable. Furthermore, it really requires more than one person to exist, and this gathering is already in itself a potential source of pleasure.

~~In fact, When people such as those who perform the folk theatre of the North-East of Brazil look for such entertainment, frequently after hours of hard work in other activities, and carrying on their shoulders the burden of an uncertain day by day, full of difficulties, it is above all because they want to meet other people, people like them, who partake of the same world, the same reality.~~

Hence, they play ~~upon~~ <sup>with</sup> this common reality and, by this formal playing, they reach ~~at once~~ a bounded but pleasant refuge in fantasy. In complicity with their audience, the players disguise themselves and simulate other people on behalf of both actors and onlookers. Through this shared experience, they attain not solely pleasure but also the

---

<sup>1</sup> Metín And, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Among the other types, some are individualised, but "play lacks something when it is reduced to a mere solitary exercise" (Roger Caillois, op. cit., p. 39).

benefit of a better learning of their own reality and of the relief of their individual and social pains.

Such relationship is made real because the whole range of values that constitute their social background is communicated through the language of symbols that is used in these performances.

So, what occurs in this folk theatre is as Margaret Robertson observed in Newfoundland: "By expressing, by analogy or association, and by reasserting the cultural values in the mummering ritual, mummers seem to have strengthened and reestablished the values of their society for another year."<sup>3</sup>

These plays are, indeed, a good support to help men to both maintain and renew their cosmology.

The element of death and rebirth is an example. It can have various functions for the audience. For children, for example, it can be a source of fun, because of the incongruity of the situation, while for older people, who feel themselves closer to death, it can mean a stimulating victory over death. It might symbolise the death of an old life and the birth of a new one. More than a remnant of the primitive cult of the seasons, it could be seen as a symbol of the perennial possibility of men to change. To be transformed and to transform their reality.

Certainly all forms of folk theatre stem from ancient religious rites whose function was possibly very much alike to the present one. Traces of this origin, we saw, were pointed out by some scholars in England and in other parts of the world, including Brazil.

Most of all, it seems unlikely that these plays have had a single origin. One of the most relevant aspects of the folk theatre forms of the North-East of Brazil is the singular shape

---

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

of each one. If we confront, for example, the *Bumba-meu-Boi* and the *Chegança*, we will have to admit how different they are, from the point of view of the humour, of the characters's behaviour (*Ração* and *Vassoura* are exceptions in the *Chegança*), of the costumes, of the plot.

Would they, then, have a single and the same origin?

~~They certainly are remains of primitive ritual forms which are probably more ancient than the Greek theatre, and that must have given birth to the Greek theatre itself, as well as to all theatrical forms in general, through different and multiple directions.~~

Metín And, ~~for instance,~~ affirms that theatre "did not arise directly from the ancient agricultural rites". ~~For him, there was first a multiplication of variants of the rites from which then would the theatrical genres be developed.~~ <sup>First, variants of the rites multiplied, and then from this common source the different theatrical genres developed."</sup> <sup>4</sup>

However, as this origin is impossible to be traced nowadays, everything we can say about it will always be ~~merely putative, only~~ conjecture, for nothing on this matter can any longer be proved.

~~On the other hand,~~ <sup>T</sup> the searching for the ancient origins of this theatre will be useless, not only from a historical and scientific perspective, but also from the point of view of their significance for the societies in which they are performed today.

These plays are dynamic forms of expression and, if they functioned in the past as a representation of religious beliefs, this is no longer what has kept them alive within these communities. Even if, in them, we still find some religious expression.

What seems to keep them alive is the power of the mirror attributed by Hamlet to the theatrical representation,<sup>5</sup> by which all men are able to express themselves and their

---

<sup>4</sup> Metín And, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> See William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 15. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 65. In the third act, scene 2, Hamlet says to the Players:

"Hamlet. Be not too tame neither, but let your



environment in an amusing and effective manner, moved by the stimulus which has guided mankind to the exciting experience of play, since the first moments of its existence; an experience that makes possible for men, the recognition of their own nature and of the structures of life and society, learning and, simultaneously, strengthening or renewing the values of their social system.

The point is, as it was for our ancestors, that men continue to face the same unsolvable questions, which arise from coordinating and satisfying the spiritual and material needs of the individual and of the group (How can we defend ourselves against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune? How can we be good and live in an unjust world?), and the tension that is caused by such enigmas laying claim for light and for remission. So, although these plays have lost their probable primitive religious function, they still represent a kind of magic experience.

The folk theatre forms of the North-East of Brazil, although derived from European sources, have been transformed and adapted to the contingencies of the new environment. Furthermore, they continued to change, impelled by the dynamism pertinent to cultural life, soon acquiring a new meaning and developing their own shapes.

In fact, they have turned to be an important instrument of self-education which helps people to be aware of their condition and to take their own decisions, in spite of all attempts of manipulation, emptying of meaning and distortion on the part of those in

own discretion be your tutor, suit the action  
to the word, the word to the action, with this  
special observance, that you o'erstep not the  
modesty of nature: for any thing so o'erdone  
is from the purpose of playing, whose end  
both at the first, and now, was and is,  
to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature,  
to show virtue her own feature, scorn her  
own image and the very age and body  
of the time his form and pressure..."

power and their dominant culture. So, they constitute, undeniably, a permanent manifestation of social and cultural resistance.

Unlike illusion, which is mere deception, invention and fantasy, which are basic elements of dream are also a means to create reality and to construct the future. Fiction, then, is not an opposite to reality, but only a representation of reality itself, which is able to propose and stimulate a new reality.

Seen in this light, the folk theatre of the North-East of Brazil, as theatre in general, will certainly keep on being performed. Its shape will certainly change, for the times will be other and will dictate a new formal orientation.

If man and society have been always subject to transformation, the fact remains that their deepest needs will be the same ever. As says Cirinéa Cézár, it is perfectly plausible to imagine "a man surrounded by technology and still keen to see the *Gajeiro* fall from the mizzen top-sail and be exorcised and resurrected."<sup>6</sup>

I agree with Tekla Dömötör who doubts that the folk theatre is or will be gone forever, declaring that

"Even with the growing impact of mass media on folk-culture, the desire for creative self-expression in the form of acting is very evident in our days. People are not satisfied with being only on the receiving end of this process; they do not want to be passive onlookers; they want to express themselves in acting, too. (...) I believe that sooner or later, a new type of folk-play will again be created, written and performed by non-professional groups. Myth and magic will acquire new meaning in this new kind of folk-play, and so will social conflicts and aspirations. (...) new forms will be

---

<sup>6</sup> Cirinéa do Amaral Cézár, op. cit., p. 30.

found, expressing our common hopes and fears, and the desire to laugh at others - and at ourselves."<sup>7</sup>

There will be both the disappearance of some of these forms of social ritualism (each time that their corresponding social actions, those in which they were founded, have no further relevance), and the appearance of new ones. This will always depend on increasing social changes and on the renewal of world views, which points again to how strong the relationship is between these forms of expression and the social environment which produces them.

If we "think of cosmology as a set of categories that are in use" and are "like lenses which bring into focus and make bearable the manifold challenge of experience"; "something very flexible and easily disjointed", whose spare parts "can be fitted and adjustments made without much trouble", and to which an occasional "major overhaul is necessary to bring the obsolete set of views into focus with new times and new company", we will recognise that a gradual and slow conversion is always taking place.<sup>8</sup>

Any *radical* change in this folk theatre will only be possible when "an obvious disharmony between past and present" has been developed, for "most of the time adjustments are made so smoothly that one is hardly aware of the shifts of angle..."<sup>9</sup>

Theatre attends to a basic need for universal expression, helping to fill the gap between men and the knowledge of life. About theatre we can say the same that Leonardo Sciascia

---

<sup>7</sup> Tekla Dömötör, "Folk Drama as Defined in Folklore and Theatrical Research", *Narodna Umjetnost*, Special Number (Zagreb-Yugoslavia, 1981), p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> See Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*.

said referring to literature, that is, men "could understand nothing of himself, or of the universality of man, if literature was unable to teach it him".<sup>10</sup>

Ginzburg says that "going into the beyond, returning from the beyond" is an elementary narrative nucleus which has accompanied humanity for thousands of years and constitutes "the matrix of all possible narratives". He states:

"The countless variations introduced by utterly different societies, based on hunting, on pasture and on agriculture, have not modified its basic structure. Why this permanence? The answer is possibly very simple. To narrate means to speak here and now with an authority that derives from having been (literally or metaphorically) there and then. In participation in the world of the living and of the dead, in the sphere of the visible and of the invisible, we have already recognized a distinctive trait of the human species."<sup>11</sup>

Theatre is a human and social phenomenon, an opportunity for meeting, communion and participation, and not for the passive aesthetic appreciation of a distant product for which we cannot interfere or contribute. This is what happens in the case of our relationship with other artistic manifestations, for their products have been previously made and are already formally finished. Theatre, on the contrary, depends on the meeting of players and spectators being, simultaneously, process and product.

The fact is that the professionals of the conventional or sophisticated theatre have, systematically, in many of the numerous tendencies of the modern theatre, blocked or, at least, reduced the active and creative participation of the audience to the minimum, which

---

<sup>10</sup> Leonardo Sciascia, *The Captain and the Witch in Death of an Inquisitor & Other Stories*, tr. Ian Thomson (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), p. 143.

<sup>11</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

inevitably results from their living presence and from their most subtle emotional responses, giving a weakened and passive characteristic to what could be a powerful relationship.

This separation, which has been also promoted by the dictatorship of the author and of the "sacred" text, seems to have been intensified and made indispensable since the appearance of the director (or *régis seur*) as a *metteur-en-scène*, in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The *metteur-en-scène*, due to the heterogeneous nature of the audiences of the new times, instead of a mere organiser of the performance, turned to be responsible for the attribution of a unified meaning to the performance, and so began a new and very successful supremacy in the structure of the sophisticated theatre. At the most, the shows became identified with their directors, to whose purposes the actors, as well as the other members of the team, are entirely subjected. Theatre began, since then, to be confounded with the artistic creation of a sole individual, losing contact with the spectator as a creative element too.

Many of these products have been delirious and obscure, despite their aesthetic qualities; and their language, strongly elaborated, expressing a very peculiar symbolism, hardly gets to be communicative, at least for many of their spectators.

Some of them actually seem to be ashamed of their theatrical condition, for they suggest a competition with other forms of expression, as the cinema and the video, to which things like the advanced technological devices appear to be more suitable, and to which passive onlookers are certainly the ideal audience, apparently the only one appropriate.

But is this the real nature of theatrical relationship? Effacing the active participation of the audience, will we not be obliterating the essence of theatre?

At best, we would be creating something new, perhaps a hybrid form, situated between theatre on one hand, and cinema and fine arts on the other.

Would this be, then, the best choice for the sophisticated theatre at present? Or would it only lead to the increasing of the chronic aesthetic and financial crisis that has put it in constant risk in the contemporary world? Has theatre the power to compete with the industrialised artistic manifestations, which are, by their own nature, so much closer to the possibility of a naturalistic representation of reality? Or would its power reside precisely in its crafty and non-reproducible nature? As well as in its non-naturalistic expression; in the importance of the live presence of the actor and of the language of his body; in its singular, ephemeral but strong and participative existence as artistic product?

Apart from the comprehensible technological euphoria of our times, is theatre really equipped to join such technological outburst in an absolute way or only relatively?

The folk theatre, with its shameless theatrical expression, with its proper language, which is both personal and universal, contemporary and eternal, has ever demonstrated itself to be a profitable source of nourishment to the popular and even to the sophisticated theatre.

Perhaps the dictatorship of the *metteur-en-scène* and the invalidation of the creative participation of the spectators, have been the most crucial paths taken by the contemporary sophisticated theatre.

Even the word *spectator* does not help much in avoiding the notion of the audience as a passive element. Augusto Boal, for example, expresses it very well when he says that *spectator* is "a bad word". For him, the spectator "is less than a man and it is necessary to humanize him, to restore to him his capacity for action in all its fullness. He too must be a subject, an actor on an equal plane with those generally accepted as actors, who must also be spectators."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, tr. Charles A. and Maria Odilia Leal McBride (London: Pluto Press, 1979), pp. 154-155.

He says:

According to him, the spectators have been passive victims of finished visions of the world imposed upon them, "since those responsible for theatrical performances are in general people who belong directly or indirectly to the ruling classes...".<sup>13</sup>

If theatre in general will have a place in tomorrow's world, and I do believe so, it will certainly be on account of its unique character. Because, unlike the other forms of artistic expression, theatre relies on the physical and concrete presence of people and on the progression of the relationship between actors and audience.

This singularity allows it enough vigour to keep on being performed in a world full of technology, side by side with those other forms of expression which have originated and are continually stimulated and nurtured by the technological progress, those for which technology means language itself.

As the folk theatre in the North-East of Brazil (and elsewhere) has ever been a means of expressing the human emotion by a direct and crafty shape; as it continues to have the feature of social reunion and celebration, of festivity and pleasure that has been since its primordial times; as it changed from its attributed original character of religious ritual to become a social ritual which, with the power of synthesis and revelation and attending to substantial needs of the human existence, mirrors and reassures the system of values that is the structure of the society to which belong its participants; as it continues to

---

"In the beginning the theater was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air. The carnival. The feast.

Later, the ruling classes took possession of the theater and built their dividing walls. First, they divided the people, separating actors from spectators: people who act and people who watch - the party is over! Secondly, among the actors, they separated the protagonists from the mass. The coercive indoctrination began!".

(Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, p. 119.)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

communicate existentially to its audience, it is possible to foresee that it will still be performed well into the future.

As the late *Capitão* Antonio Pereira said once: "Indeed, this *Bumba-meu-Boi* seems to be something that helps the whole mankind."



## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## 1. Books

Alford, Violet. *Introduction to English Folklore*. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1952.

----- and Gallop, Rodney. *The Traditional Dance*. London: Methuen, 1935.

Allday, Elizabeth. *Stefan Zweig: A Critical Biography*. London: W. H. Allen, 1972.

Almeida, Renato. *História da Música Brasileira*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: F. Briguiet, 1942.

Amico, Silvio D'. *Storia del Teatro Drammatico*. Vol. 1. 5. ed. Milano: Garzanti, 1968.

And, Metín. *Drama at the Crossroads*. Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1991.

Andrade, Manuel Correia de. *A Terra e o Homem no Nordeste*. 3. ed. São Paulo:  
Brasiliense, 1973.

Andrade, Mário de. *Danças Dramáticas do Brasil*. Vol. 1, 2 and 3. São Paulo: Martins,  
1959.

Araújo, Alceu Maynard. *Cultura Popular Brasileira*. São Paulo: Melhoramentos / INL,  
1973.

Armstrong, Lucille. *A Window on Folk Dance*. Huddersfield: Springfield, 1985.

Azevedo, Fernando de. *Brazilian Culture*. 2. ed. Tr. William Rex Crawford. New York:  
Hafner, 1971.

Barba, Eugenio and Savarese, Nicola. *The Secret Art of the Performer*. Tr. Richard  
Fowler. London: Routledge, 1991.

Barrand, Anthony G. *Six Fools and a Dancer*. Plainfield-VT: Northern Harmony, 1991.

Barroso, Gustavo. *Terra de Sol ( Natureza e Costumes do Norte)*. Rio de Janeiro:  
Benjamin de Aguilá, 1912.

-----, *Ao Som da Viola*. Rio de Janeiro: Departamento de Imprensa  
Nacional, 1949.

- Beckwith, Martha Warren. *Christmas Mumming in Jamaica*. New York: Vassar College, 1923.
- Bello, José Maria. *A History of Modern Brazil (1889-1964)*. Tr. James L. Taylor. Stanford-California: Stanford University Press, 1966.
- Benjamin, Roberto Câmara. *Folgedos e Danças de Pernambuco*. Recife: FCCR, 1989.
- Bentley, Eric. *The Life of the Drama*. London: Methuen, 1966.
- Bergson, Henri. *Laughter*. Tr. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell. London: Macmillan, 1911.
- Bernstein, Basil. *Class, Codes and Control*, Vol. 1. 4. ed. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.
- Black, Jan Knippers. *United States Penetration of Brazil*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977.
- Boal, Augusto. *Theater of the Oppressed*. Tr. Charles A. and Maria Odflia Leal McBride. London: Pluto Press, 1979.
- , *Técnicas Latino-Americanas de Teatro Popular*. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1979.
- , *The Rainbow of Desire*. Tr. Adrian Jackson. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Borba Filho, Hermilo. *Diálogo do Encenador*. Recife: Imprensa Universitária / UFPE, 1964.
- , *Espetáculos Populares do Nordeste*. São Paulo: São Paulo, 1966.
- , *Fisionomia e Espírito do Mamulengo*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1966.
- , *História do Espetáculo*. Rio de Janeiro: O Cruzeiro, 1968.

----- . *Apresentação do Bumba-meu-Boi*. 2. ed. Recife: Guararapes, 1982.

Boyes, Georgina. *The Imagined Village*. 2. ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994.

Brandão, Théo. *O Auto dos Caboclinhos*. Maceió: Instituto Histórico de Alagoas, 1952.

Brockett, Oscar G. *History of the Theatre*. 3. ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1977.

Brody, Alan. *The English Mummers and Their Plays*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

Burke, Peter. *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 2. ed. Hants: Scolar Press, 1994.

Burns, E. Bradford. *A History of Brazil*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

Burns, Elizabeth. *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life*. London: Longmann, 1972.

Cacciaglia, Mario. *Pequena História do Teatro no Brasil*. Tr. Carla de Queiroz. São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz / EDUSP, 1986.

Caillois, Roger. *Man, Play, and Games*. Tr. Meyer Barash. New York: The Free Press, 1961.

Calogeras, João Pandiá. *A History of Brazil*. Tr. Percy Alvin Martin. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963.

Camacho, J. A. *Brazil: An Interim Assessment*. 2. ed. Westport-Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972.

Carneiro, Edison. *Dinâmica do Folclore*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1965.

----- . *Folgedos Tradicionais*. Rio de Janeiro: Conquista, 1974.

Carvalho, Luiz Maurício Brito. *Por um Teatro do Povo e da Terra*. Recife: FUNDARPE, 1986.

Cascudo, Luiz da Câmara . *Tradições Populares da Pecuária Nordestina*. Rio de Janeiro:

Ministério da Agricultura, 1956.

-----, *Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: MEC / INL, 1962.

-----, *Ensaio de Etnografia Brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: MEC / INL, 1971.

-----, *Literatura Oral no Brasil*, 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio / INL-MEC, 1978.

Castro, Josué de. *Death in the Northeast*. 2. ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.

Cawte, E. C.; Helm, Alex; and Peacock, N. *English Ritual Drama*. London: The Folk-Lore Society / University College, 1967.

Cawte, E. C. *Ritual Animal Disguise*. Cambridge: D. S Brewer, 1978.

Chambers, E. K. *The Mediaeval Stage*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903.

-----, *The English Folk-Play*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.

Chauí, Marilena. *Seminários: O Nacional e o Popular na Cultura Brasileira*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983.

-----, *Conformismo e Resistência*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1986.

Coelho, Germano "et. al.". *Movimento de Cultura Popular: Memorial*. Recife: PCR / FCCR, 1986.

Conniff, Michael L. and McCann, Frank D. (eds.). *Modern Brazil: Elites and Masses in Historical Perspective*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Cornford, Francis MacDonald. *The Origin of Attic Comedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934.

Costa, Pereira da. *Folclore Pernambucano*. Recife: Arquivo Público Estadual, 1974.

Dantas, Beatriz G. *A Taieira de Sergipe*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1972.

-----, *Chegança*. Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE / MEC, 1976.

- Davison, Peter. *The British Music-Hall*. New York: Oak, 1971.
- Ditchfield, P. H. *Old English Customs*. London: Methuen, 1901.
- Dort, Bernard. *Théâtre Réel*. Paris: Seuil, 1971.
- Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols*. London: The Cresset Press, 1970.
- . *Implicit Meanings*. 5. ed. London: Routledge, 1991.
- . *Cultural Bias*. 2. ed. London: Occasional Paper n. 35 of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1979.
- . *Purity and Danger*. 8. ed. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Durkheim, Émile. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. 2. ed. Tr. Joseph Ward Swain. London: Allen and Unwin, 1976.
- Edmundo, Luiz. *O Rio de Janeiro no Tempo dos Vice-Reis*. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, 1932.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*. Tr. Philip Mairet. London: Harvil Press, 1960.
- . *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. 2. ed. Tr. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964.
- Facó, Rui. *Cangaceiros e Fanáticos*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1965.
- Faoro, Raymundo. *Os Donos do Poder: Formação do Patronato Político Brasileiro*. 2. ed. Porto Alegre: Globo / USP, 1975.
- Ferreira, Ascenso. *Ensaio Folclóricos*. Recife: DEC / SEC - PE, 1986.
- Fiechter, Georges-André. *Brazil Since 1964: Modernisation Under a Military Régime*. Tr. Alan Braley. London: MacMillan, 1975.
- Fo, Dario. *The Tricks of the Trade*. Tr. Joe Farrell. London: Methuen, 1992.
- Frazer, James. *The Golden Bough*. 12 vol. London: MacMillan, 1890.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogia do Oprimido*. 5. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1978.

- Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo*. 4. ed. Tr. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press / The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964.
- Gailey, Alan. *Irish Folk Drama*. Cork: The Mercier Press, 1969.
- Gallop, Rodney. *A Book of the Basques*. London: MacMillan, 1930.
- Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 2. ed. New York: Gordian Press, 1975.
- Gennep, Arnold Van. *The Rites of Passage*. Tr. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*. Tr. Raymond Rosenthal. London: Penguin, 1992.
- Glassie, Henry. *All Silver and no Brass*. 2. ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.
- Gurgel, Deffilo. *Manual do Boi Calemba*. Natal: Nossa, 1985.
- . *João Redondo: Teatro de Bonecos do Nordeste*. Petrópolis: Vozes / UFRN, 1986.
- Halpert, Herbert and Story, G. M. (eds.). *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland*. 3.ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.
- Hardy, Thomas. 3. ed. *The Return of the Native*. London: Penguin, 1985.
- Harrison, Jane Ellen. *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*. 4. ed. London: Merlin Press, 1989.
- . *Mythology*. London: George G. Harrap, undated.
- Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens*. 2. ed. London: Temple Smith, 1970.
- Ianni, Octávio. *As Metamorfoses do Escravo*. São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1962.

----- . *Crisis in Brazil*. Tr. Phyllis B. Eveleth. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

Julião, Francisco. *Cambão - The Yoke: The Hidden Face of Brazil*. Tr. John Butt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

Jung, C. G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 2.ed. Tr. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge, 1990.

----- . *Man and His Symbols*. London: Aldus Books, 1964.

----- . *Man, Art, and Literature*. Tr. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.

----- . *The Symbolic Life*. Tr. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

Kapur, Anuradha. *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and Gods*. Calcutta: Seagull, 1990.

Kidd, Ross. *The Popular Performing Arts, Non-Formal Education and Social Change in the Third World: a Bibliography and Review Essay*. Toronto: NUFFIC-CESO, 1982.

Kiefer, Bruno. *História da Música Brasileira*. 2. ed. Porto Alegre: Movimento, 1977.

Kirby, E. T. *Ur-Drama: The Origins of Theatre*. New York: New York University Press, 1975.

Kostelanetz, Richard. *Conversing with Cage*. New York: Limelight, 1991.

Koster, Henry. *Viagens ao Nordeste do Brasil*. Tr. Luiz da Câmara Cascudo. São Paulo: Compainha Editora Nacional, 1942.

Kucinski, Bernardo. *Brazil: State and Struggle*. London: Latin America Bureau (Special Brief), 1982.

Kühner, Maria Helena. *Teatro Popular: Uma Experiência*. Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1975.



- Leach, E. R. *Rethinking Anthropology*. 3. ed. London: The Athlone Press / University of London, 1968.
- Léry, Jean de. *Viagem à Terra do Brasil*. São Paulo: Martins, 1972.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Totemism*. 2. ed. Tr. Rodney Needham. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.
- Lima, Carlos de. *Bumba-meu-Boi*. 3. ed. São Luís: Edição do autor, 1982.
- Lima, Rossini Tavares de. *Folguedos Populares do Brasil*. São Paulo: Ricordi, 1962.
- Lopez, Luiz Roberto. *Cultura Brasileira: De 1808 ao Pré-Modernismo*. Porto Alegre: UFRGS, 1988.
- Macedo, Sérgio D. T. *O Livro da História do Brasil pelo Prazer de Ler*. Rio de Janeiro: Edições de Ouro, undated.
- Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor*. Vol. 1. 2. ed. New York: Dover, 1968.
- Morais Filho, Mello. *Festas e Tradições Populares do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: F. Briguiet, 1946.
- "et. al.". *Bailes Pastoris na Bahia*. Salvador: Progresso, 1957.
- Mello, Luiz Gonzaga de and Pereira, Alba Regina Mendonça. *O Pastoril Profano de Pernambuco*. Recife: Massangana, 1990.
- Mitchell, Simon (ed.). *The Logic of Poverty: The Case of the Brazilian Northeast*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
- Moog, Vianna. *Bandeirantes and Pioneers*. Tr. L. L. Barret. New York: George Braziller, 1964.
- Mostaço, Edécio. *Teatro e Política: Arena, Oficina e Opinião*. São Paulo: Proposta, 1982.
- Mota, Mauro. *Bê-a-Bá de Pernambuco*. Recife: Massangana, 1991.

- Neves, Guilherme dos Santos. *Nau Catarineta (Versões Capixabas)*. Vitória: Comissão Espírito-Santense de Folclore, 1969.
- Ortiz, Renato. *Cultura Brasileira & Identidade Nacional*. 3. ed. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985.
- Pickard-Cambridge, Arthur. *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*. 2. ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- Pimentel, Altamar de Alencar. *O Mundo Mágico do João Redondo*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: FUNDACEN / MEC, 1988.
- Prado Júnior, Caio. *Evolução Política do Brasil e Outros Estudos*. 4. ed. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1963.
- Prado, José Nascimento de Almeida. *Baile Pastoril no Sertão da Bahia*. São Paulo: Departamento de Cultura, 1951.
- Propp, V. *Comicidade e Riso*. Tr. Aurora Fornoni Bernardini and Homero Freitas de Andrade. São Paulo: Ática, 1992.
- Ramos, Arthur. *O Negro Brasileiro*. Vol. 1. 2. ed. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1940.
- , *O Folclore Negro do Brasil*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Casa do Estudante do Brasil, 1954.
- , *O Negro na Civilização Brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Casa do Estudante do Brasil, 1956.
- Rocha, José Maria Tenório. *Folguedos e Danças de Alagoas*. Maceió: SEC-AL / CAF, 1984.
- Rodrigues, José Honório. *The Brazilians: Their Character and Aspirations*. 2. ed. Tr. Ralph Edward Dimmick. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969.
- Roett, Riordan (ed.). *Brazil in the Sixties*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1972.

- Romero, Sílvio. *Contos Populares do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1954.
- Rosenbaum, H. Jon and Tyler, William G. (eds.). *Contemporary Brazil: Issues in Economic and Political Development*. 2. ed. New York: Praeger, 1972.
- Roubine, Jean-Jacques. *A Linguagem da Encenação Teatral (1880-1980)*. Tr. Yan Michalski. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1982.
- Santos, Fernando Augusto Gonçalves. *Mamulengo: Um Povo em Forma de Bonecos*. Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE / MEC, 1979.
- Schmidt, Léopold. *Le Théâtre Populaire Européen*. Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1965.
- Schwartz, Stuart B. *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society*. Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Sciascia, Leonardo. *The Captain and the Witch in Death of an Inquisitor & Other Stories*. Tr. Ian Thomson. Manchester: Carcanet, 1990.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. 15. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- . *The Tempest*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.
- Shuttleworth, Ron. *Introducing the Folk-Plays of England*. Coventry: published by the author, 1984.
- Skidmore, Thomas E. *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1964-85*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Smith, T. Lynn. *Brazil: People and Institutions*. 2. ed. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963.
- Soares, Renan Monteiro. *Aspectos Sociológicos da Pecuária Nordestina*. Recife: Imprensa Universitária / UFPE, 1968.
- Sodré, Nelson Werneck. *Síntese de História da Cultura Brasileira*. 6. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1978.

- Southern, Richard. *The Seven Ages of the Theatre*. 4. ed. London: Faber and Faber, 1973.
- Strutt, Joseph. *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*. London: Methuen, 1801.
- Tiddy, R. J. E. *The Mummers' Play*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923.
- Turner, Victor. *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957.
- , *From Ritual to Theatre*. New York, PAJ, 1982.
- , *Anthropology of Performance*. 2. ed. New York, PAJ, 1992..
- , *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors*, 7. ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Vieira, César. *Em Busca de um Teatro Popular*. São Paulo: Centro Cultural Equipe / UNESCO, 1977.
- Wagley, Charles. *An Introduction to Brazil*. 2. ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.
- Watson, Ian. *Song and Democratic Culture in Britain*. London: Croom Helm, 1983.
- Wickham, Glynne. *A History of the Theatre*. Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1985.
- Woods, Fred. *Folk Revival*. Poole-Dorset: Blandford Press, 1979.
- Zweig, Stefan. *Brazil: Land of the Future*. 2. ed.Tr. Andrew St. James. London: Cassel, 1942.

## 2. Articles

- Abrahams, Roger D. " 'Pull Out Your Purse and Pay ' . A St George Mumming from the British West Indies". *Folklore*, vol. 79. London, 1968.
- . "British West Indian Folk Drama and the ' Life Cycle ' Problem". *Folklore*, vol. 81. London, 1970.
- . "Folk Drama" in *Folklore and Folk Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- . "In and Out of Performance". *Narodna Umjetnost*, Special Number. Zagreb-Yugoslavia, 1981.
- Alford, Violet. "Morris and Morisca". *JEFDSS*, vol. II, n. 1. London, 1935.
- . "Some Other Hobby Horses". *Folklore*, vol. 78, Autumn. London, 1967.
- . "The Hobby Horse and Other Animal Masks". *Folklore*, vol. 79, Summer. London, 1968.
- Armstrong, Lucille. "The Verdiales Festival in Málaga (Spain) - December 28th 1971". *Folklore*, vol. 83, n. 4. London, 1972.
- . "A Sheperd's Dance in the Basque Country - December 1976". *Folklore*, vol. 88, n. 2.London, 1977.
- Bagby, Beth. "El Teatro Campesino: Interviews with Luis Valdez". *The Drama Review*, vol. 11, n.4 (T36). New York, 1967.
- Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. "El Teatro Campesino: From Actos to Mitos". *Theatre Quarterly*, vol. IX, n. 34. London, 1979.
- Beatty, Arthur. "The St. George, or Mummings', Plays: A Study in the Protology of the Drama". Reprinted from the *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters*, vol. XV, Part II. Wisconsin, 1906.

Benjamin, Roberto Câmara. "O Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo" in *O Obsceno: Jornadas Impertinentes*. São Paulo: HUCITEC / INTERCOM, 1983.

-----, "A Sedução da Pastorinha: Uma Denúncia da Exploração Sexual da Mulher em um Folgado Popular Nordestino" in *Antologia Pernambucana de Folclore*. Recife: Massangana, 1988.

-----, "Cristãos e Mouros" in *Encontro Cultural de Laranjeiras: 20 Anos*. Aracaju: SEC / FUNDESC, 1994.

Bogatyrev, Petr. "Semiotics in the Folk Theater" in *Semiotics of Art*. 2 ed. Cambridge-Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1977.

-----, "Forms and Functions of Folk Theater" in *Semiotics of Art*. 2. ed. Cambridge-Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1977.

Brecht, Bertolt. "Notes on the Folk Play" in *Brecht on Theatre*. Tr. John Willet. London: Methuen, 1964.

Camarotti, Marco. "O Realismo Mágico em 'El Reino de Este Mundo' " in *Caderno Ômega*, vol. 1. Recife: UFRPE, 1985.

Carvalho Neto, Paulo de. "Conceito e Realidade do Teatro Folclórico Latino-Americano" in *Estudos de Folclore em Homenagem a Manuel Diegues Júnior*. Rio de Janeiro: Comissão Nacional de Folclore, 1991.

Cawte, E. C. "More on the Mummers' Play". *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 85, n. 338. 1972.

-----, "Even More About the Mummers' Play". *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 87, n. 345. 1974.

Charles, Lucile Hoerr. "The Clown's Function". *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 58, Jan / Mar. 1945.

- Davis, R. G. and Diamond, Betty. " 'Zoo Suit' on the Road". *Theatre Quarterly*, vol. IX, n. 34. London, 1979.
- Dawkins, R. M. "A Visit to Skyros". Reprint of *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, n. XI, Session 1904-1905. London, 1971.
- , "The Modern Carnival in Thrace and the Cult of Dionysus". *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. XXVI. London, 1906.
- Dean-Smith, Margaret. "Folk-Play Origins of the English Masque". *Folklore*, vol. LXV. London, 1954.
- , "The Life-Cycle Play or Folk-Play: Some Conclusions Following the Examination of the Ordish Papers and Other Sources". *Folklore*, vol. 69, December. London, 1958.
- , "Disguise in English Folk-Drama". *Folk Life*, vol. 1. Cardiff, 1963.
- , "An Unromantic View of the Mummers' Play". *Theatre Research*, vol. VIII, n. 2. 1966.
- Dömötör, Tekla. "Folk Drama as Defined in Folklore and Theatrical Research". *Narodna Umjetnost*, Special Number. Zagreb-Yugoslavia, 1981.
- Firestone, Melvin. "Christmas Mumming and Symbolic Interactionism". *Ethos: Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology*, vol. 6, n. 6. 1978.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. "Women's Parts Played by Men in the Roman Theater". Tr. Isa Ragusa in *Crossing the Stage*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Green, Thomas A. "Toward a Definition of Folk Drama". *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 91, n. 361. 1978.
- Green, A. E. "A Note on the Form 'Mummerin' ". *Folk Life*, vol. 9. Cardiff, 1971.

- , Review of the book *The English Mummers and Their Plays*, by Alan Brody. *English Dance and Song*, vol. XXXIV, n. 3. London, 1972.
- , "Popular Drama and the Mummers' Play" in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Harrop, John and Huerta, Jorge. "The Agitprop Pilgrimage of Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino". *Theatre Quarterly*, vol. V, n. 17. London, 1975.
- Harrop, Peter. "Mumming in Bampton". *Folk Life*, vol. 18. Cardiff, 1980.
- , "Towards a Morphology of the English Folk Play" in *Lore and Language*, 5 / 2. 1986.
- Helm, Alex. "In Comes I, St. George". *Folklore*, vol. 76, Summer. London, 1965.
- Honigmann, John J. "An Interpretation of the Social-Psychological Functions of the Ritual Clown". *Character and Personality*, x / 3, iii. 1942.
- Howard, Jean E. "Cross-Dressing, the Theater, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England" in *Crossing the Stage*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Hymes, Dell. "Breakthrough into Performance" in *Folklore: Performance and Communication*. The Hague: Mouton, 1975.
- Kennedy, Douglas. "The Sword Dance and the Play" in *English Folk Dancing: Today and Yesterday*. London: George Bell & Sons, 1964.
- Kennedy, Peter. "The Symondsburry Mumming Play". *JEFDSS*, vol. VII, n. 1. 1952.
- Kirby, E. T. "The Origin of the Mummers' Play". *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 84, n. 333. 1971.
- , "Mummers' Plays and the Calendar". *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 86, n. 371. 1973.
- Lake, H. Coote. "Mummers' Plays and the *Sacer Ludus*". *Folklore*, vol. XLII, n. 2. London, 1931.



- Lawrence, D. H. "Pornography and Obscenity" in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*. London: Heinemann, 1970.
- Legg, A. T. "The Symondsburry Mumming Play: Its True Meaning". *The Dorset Year Book*. 1960 / 1.
- Levine, Robert M. "Elite Intervention in Urban Popular Culture in Modern Brazil". *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 21, n. 2. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984.
- Lichman, Simon. "The Gardener's Story: The Metafolklore of a Mumming Tradition". *Folklore*, vol. 93, i. London, 1982.
- Meyer, Marlyse. "Le Merveilleux dans une Forme du Théâtre Populaire Brésilien: Le *Bumba-meu-Boi*". Reprint of the *Revue D'Histoire du Théâtre*, vol. 15. Amsterdam, 1966.
- Miller, Henry. "Obscenity and the Law of Reflection" in *Henry Miller on Writing*. New York: New Directions, 1964.
- Morgan, Gareth. "Mummers and Momoeri". *Folklore*, vol. 100, i. London, 1989.
- Morton, Carlos. "The Teatro Campesino". *The Drama Review*, vol. 18, n. 4 (T64). New York, 1974.
- Newall, Venetia. "The Turkish Knight in English Traditional Drama". *Folklore*, vol. 92, ii. London, 1981.
- Pattison, Susan. "The Antrobus Soulcaking Play: An Alternative Approach to the Mummers' Play". *Folk Life*, vol. 15. Cardiff, 1977.
- Peate, Iowerth C. "Mari Lwyd - Láir Bhán". *Folk Life*, vol. 1. Cardiff, 1963.
- Pessar, Patrícia R. "Three Moments in Brazilian Millenarianism: The Interrelationship Between Politics and Religion". *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 28, n. 1. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991.

- Pettitt, Thomas. " 'Here Comes I, Jack Straw:' English Folk Drama and Social Revolt". *Folklore*, vol. 95, i. London, 1984.
- Pickering, Michael and Green, Tony. "Towards a Cartography of the Vernacular Milieu" in *Everyday Culture*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987.
- Possi Neto, José. "The Bumba-meu-Boi [Brazil]". *The Drama Review*, vol. 21, n. 3 (T75). New York, 1977.
- Read, Karen. "The Symondsburymumming Play, and the People Who Uphold It". *E. D. and S.*, vol. 46, n. 3. 1984.
- Ribeiro, René. "Messianic Movements in Brazil". *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 29, n.1. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1992.
- Robertson, Margaret. "The Symbolism of Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland". *Folklore*, vol. 93, ii. London, 1982.
- Rocha, José Maria Tenório. "Os Pastoris Profanos do Nordeste: o Pastoril dos Estudantes de Alagoas" in *Estudos de Folclore em Homenagem a Manuel Diegues Júnior*. Rio de Janeiro: Comissão Nacional de Folclore, 1991.
- Rose, Brian W. "A Note on the Hobby-Horse". *Folklore*, vol. LXVI. London, 1955.
- Saer, D. Roy. "The Supposed *Mari-Lwyd* of Pembrokeshire". *Folk Life*, vol. 14. Cardiff, 1976.
- Santos, Fernando Augusto Gonçalves. "Place au Mamulengo Brésilien!" in *Marionnettes en Territoire Brésilien*. Charleville-Mézières: Institut International de la Marionnette, 1994.
- Schechner, Richard. "From Ritual to Theatre and Back" in *Ritual, Play and Performance*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1976.
- Schumman, Peter. "The Radicality of the Puppet Theatre". *The Drama Review*, vol. 35, n. 4 (T132). New York, 1991.

- Siegel, Marcia B. "Liminality in Balinese Dance". *The Drama Review*, vol. 35, n. 4 (T132). New York, 1991.
- Skidmore, Thomas E. "Race and Class in Brazil: Historical Perspectives". *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 20, n. 1. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1983.
- Slater, Candace. "Miracle Stories and Milagres in Northeast Brazil". *Journal of Latin American Lore*, vol. 16, n. 1. Los Angeles, 1990.
- Spooner, B. C. "The Padstow Obby Oss". *Folklore*, vol. 69, March. London, 1958.
- Suassuna, Ariano. "Folk Theatre in Northeastern Brazil", *Américas*, vol. 16, n. 11. Washington-DC, 1964.
- Tenório, José Maria. "Os Pastoris Profanos" in *O Obsceno: Jornadas Impertinentes*. São Paulo: HUCITEC / INTERCOM, 1983.
- Wace, A. J. B. "North Greek Festivals and the Worship of Dionysus". Reprint of *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, n. XVI, Session 1909-1910. London, 1971.
- "More Mumming Plays in the Southern Balkans". Reprint of *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, n. XIX, Session 1912-1913. London, 1978.

### 3. Unpublished Works

- Cézar, Cirinéa do Amaral. *O Fandango de Itamaracá*. Dissertation. Curso de Especialização em Artes Cênicas / UFPE, 1989.
- Harrop, Peter. *The Performance of English Folk Plays: A Study in Dramatic Form and Social Function*. PhD thesis. University of Leeds, Institute of Dialect and Folklife Studies, 1980.

MacColl, Ewan. "Folk Theatre". Article. Birmingham City Archives, Charles Parker Archive - Ref. n. CPA/1/7/4.

Richardson, Alice I. *Mummers' Plays in the Americas*. PhD thesis. New York University, 1976.

Turner, Elaine. *Applying the Anthropological Model, "Cultural Bias", to the Drama, Using Tragedy as an Example*. PhD thesis. University of Warwick, 1991.

Ward, Barry James. *A Functional Approach to English Folk Drama*. PhD thesis. Ohio State University, 1972.

#### **4. Films and Video Tapes**

*Walk in St George*. 16 mm Film by Peter Kennedy, Alan Simpson and S. Coles. Film 3, Video 6, b&w, 25'50". London: Vaughan Williams Memorial Library -The English Folk Dance and Song Society. 1954.

*Soulcaking at Antrobus*. 16 mm Film by John Murray, Sue Pattison, Tony Green, Vic Johnson and Malcolm Smith. Colour, 25'30". Leeds: Leeds University Television Service and the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies. 1974.

*Sword Dancers*. Video. Cyril D. Cox Folk Collection, vol 5 - 43. London: Vaughan Williams Memorial Library - The English Folk Dance and Song Society. 1986 / 1987 / 1980.

*Cavalo Marinho de Condado (Boi Estrela de Antonio Honório da Silva)*. Video by Antonio Carlos Nóbrega. Condado, 1987.

*Interview with Mestre Salustiano and Lêda Alves*. Video by John Murphy. Recife, 29.07.1991.

## 5. Other Materials

Almanaque Abril. 21. ed. São Paulo: Abril, 1995.

Unassigned manuscripts aiming an "exposition of the relationship of music and drama"  
(from internal evidence it would appear that the document probably originates  
with Ewan MacColl. Birmingham City Archives, Charles Parker Archive - Ref.  
n. CPA/1/7/4.

Tape transcripts of discussions by the 'Critics Group'. Birmingham City Archives, Charles  
Parker Archive - Ref. n. CPA/1/8/9.

Interview with *Capitão* Antonio Pereira. Recife, 11.09.80.

Interview with *Mestre* Salustiano. Olinda, 08.12.88.

Interview with Mr. Ron Shuttleworth. Stretton-on-Dunsmore (Warwickshire), 30.06.93.

Letter by Peter Harrop, dated 03 April 1995.

Letter by Ron Shuttleworth, dated 21 February 1995.

Letter by Ron Shuttleworth, dated 03 April 1995.

## MAPS





Design: Solange Coutinho



## ILLUSTRATIONS



COVENTRY MUMMERS  
Stretton-on-Dunsmore  
- 30.06.93 -



COVENTRY MUMMERS  
Stoneleigh  
- 26.12.93 -

(Photos: The author)





REISADO  
Japarutuba (Sergipe)  
- January / 1990 -  
(Photo: Roberto Benjamin)



REISADO  
Laranjeiras (Sergipe)  
- January / 1991 -  
(Photos: The author)





*Morto-Carregando-o-Vivo*  
Recife (Pernambuco)  
- 1979 -  
(Photos: Roberto Benjamin)



*Capitão and Mateus*  
 Recife (Pernambuco)  
 - 1979 -  
 (Photo: Roberto Benjamin)



*Erna and Catirina*  
 Recife (Pernambuco)  
 - 1979 -  
 (Photo: Roberto Benjamin)





Dança dos Arcos  
Recife ( Pernambuco )  
- 1995 -  
(Photo: Jorge Clésio da Silva)





*Boi*



*Babau*



*Bastião, Burnha, Boi and Mateus*  
Recife (Pernambuco)  
- 1995 -  
(Photos: Jorge Clésio da Silva /  
Ricardo Bigi de Aquino)





# BOI DE CARNAVAL

Recife (Pernambuco)

- 1991 -

(Photo: Roberto Benjamin)

Tracunhaem (Pernambuco)

- 1990 -

(Photo: Roberto Benjamin)





MISSA DAS TAIEIRAS (Coronation)  
 Laranjeiras (Sergipe)  
 - 1991 -  
 (Photo: The author)



Religious procession  
 (Saint Benedict and Our Lady of the Rosary)  
 Laranjeiras (Sergipe)  
 - 1991 -  
 (Photos: The author)





CHEGANÇA (Procession)  
Laranjeiras (Sergipe)  
- 1991 -  
(Photo: Roberto Benjamin)





CHEGANÇA (*Missa das Taieiras*)  
Laranjeiras (Sergipe)  
- 1991 -  
(Photo: Roberto Benjamin)





MALE PASTORIL  
Recife (Pernambuco)  
- 1980 -  
(Photo: Roberto Benjamin)

PROFANE PASTORIL (*Velho Faceta* and *Pastoras*)  
Paulista (Pernambuco)  
- 1972 -  
(Photo: Roberto Benjamin)





MAMULENGO  
Cabo (Pernambuco)  
- 1995 -  
(Photo: Jorge Clésio da Silva)





MARACATU  
Olinda (Pernambuco)  
- 1992 -  
(Photos: Solange Coutinho)