

LIFE IS AN INVERTED CIRCUS: GRUPO GALPÃO'S
ROMEU E JULIETA ADAPTED FROM
PENNAFORT'S TRANSLATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S

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Among the various manifestations of late modernism occurring in Brazil is Grupo Galpão, a street theatre company founded in 1982. Combining elements of circus, the improvisation of *commedia dell'arte*, the exuberant creativity of classic and Renaissance dramaturgy, and the vanguard movement of contemporary theatre with the production of the regional-cultural imagination inscribed in the Brazilian performative code, the members of this group represent a new generation of directors and actors whose work, as it reveals Brazil as an **apparently** not serious carnivalesque nation, also challenges the public to reflect on present and past concerns. With Grupo Galpão, Brazilian issues of memory and of the *continuum* and *discontinuum* of religious, economic, and social history are situated in an atemporal time and presented theatrically to an often unprepared public. These artistic

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efforts are characterized by a backgrounding of the political moment that is, in fact, present, although masked by humor and laughter.

Grupo Galpão was born of the experience of Brazilian actors with the directors of the Free Theatre of Munich, Germany. The group began its activities in the streets of Belo Horizonte; their objective was to rupture the predictability of stage performance and create a new cultural spectacle inserted in the old concept that all theatre performance aims at functioning as a starting point for reflection and at answering, metaphorically, questions related to “*a nossa origem, nosso ser brasileiro, num painel de crítica a tipos e situações da nossa realidade*” (“Galpão Encena o Incesto de *Álbum de Família*”).

Faithful to this objective, the *mineiro* troupe, looking for a artistic reconsideration and reconstruction of works of the past, not only recaptures canonical themes and texts which have been widely explored, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Peter Brook’s concept of the play as a tragedy of precipitousness was adapted to the interior of Brazil, but also recovers works that have been almost forgotten, such as *A Comédia da Esposa Muda que Falava Mais do que Pobre na Chuva*, a burlesque by an unknown author. The works that Grupo Galpão selects have been adapted to the Brazilian reality, enriched by the conventions of *commedia dell’arte* and/or by Greco-Latin dramaturgy, joining and superimposing different elements and temporalities (classic, ancient, traditional, modern, vanguard).

Since they began performing, in 1982, Grupo Galpão has mounted productions of thirteen plays, not only in Minas Gerais but in Curitiba, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Brasília, São Paulo, Recife, and Porto Alegre; they have also performed extensively in other Latin American countries, Western Europe, and Canada. Their 1990 production of Nelson Rodrigues’s *Álbum de Família* won eight awards given by Empresas Cauê for best *mineiro* theatre, and in 1996 they were recognized by the state of Minas Gerais for outstanding professional achievement in theatre. In October of 1998 the group toured Spain and Holland, giving sixteen presentations altogether, including performances on the streets

of Cadiz, Madrid, Malaga, and Toledo. Today Grupo Galpão's repertoire includes not only Brazilian plays but also such works of classic Western drama as Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire* and Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*. In their adaptations of canonical texts, Grupo Galpão combines elements of dance, circus, pantomime, and Brazilian literature and folklore with the conventions of classical Western performance to forge uniquely national works. Their dramaturgy, thus, is well within the tradition of modern Brazilian theatre.

Significant productions in this tradition include Teatro de Arena's *Eles Não Usam Black Tie* in 1958, *Chapetuba Futebol Club* in 1959, and *O Testamento do Cangaceiro* in 1961, all of which made use of Brazilian regional materials and motifs. Particularly noteworthy were Teatro de Arena's 1956 staging of *École des Maris*, which combined elements of the Brazilian circus with Molière's continental wit and sophistication, and Teatro Oficina's 1963 exhibition of Gorky's *Petit Bourgeois*, in which Russian revolutionary ideals were juxtaposed with Brazilian political realities (George, 1992: 44-5, 61).

In 1967 Teatro Oficina became the first company in Brazilian theatre history to apply consciously Oswald de Andrade's modernist concept of anthropophagy to a dramatic work with their staging of his 1937 play, *O Rei da Vela*. This theory asserts that for Latin American art to achieve authenticity, it has first to "devour" European legacy. Andrade's solution in the search for Brazilian artistic identity is to assimilate ancient cultures and then modify them to fit national needs. Oficina's mounting of the world premiere of this play combined avant-garde theatre techniques of the 1950s and 1960s in a Brazilian version of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* that parodied Brazilian theatre traditions such as the comedy of manners, *revista*, melodrama, and operetta (George, 1992: 78). In 1978 Grupo de Teatro Macunaíma adapted Mario de Andrade's modernist classic of the same name, and in 1982 they continued to work in the anthropophagic mode with a staging of *Romeo and Juliet* that featured songs by the Beatles; both productions made a particularly Brazilian statement against authoritarianism, repression, and the discourse of power (George, 1992: 111-116).

A contextualized study of Grupo Galpão's reconstruction of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* requires a critical eye capable of going back to the artistic practices of the Elizabethan theatre and then of returning to the present, stopping to focus carefully on those theories essential to understand a new approach to the play. This retrospective methodology proposes that Shakespeare's text, as well as Galpão's adaptation, can be illuminated by the aesthetics of anthropophagic rupture that arose in Brazil during the 1920s with modernism and developed offshoots such as concretism and tropicalism.¹ The Brazilian modernist movement is paradoxically distinguished by the assimilation of the artistic-ideological concepts of the European vanguard and by its radically nationalistic character. It is by means of this apparent logic of contradictions that Galpão's *Romeu e Julieta* familiarizes itself with its English precursor. But to arrive at this present cohabitation immersed in the tension between the local and the global, the dramatic art moved through a trajectory, crossing the paths of modernism, concretism, absurdism, tropicalism, and postmodernism in the same way that literature did. As Eneida Maria de Souza reminds us, "*As rupturas epistemológicas caminham passo a passo com as rupturas verificadas na linguagem das artes, pela construção de novos paradigmas ...*" (2). From this point arises the discussion inherent in postcolonial thought about the belief or unbelief in a central hegemonic culture that produces widely exported new ideas. *Romeo and Juliet* is included in this catalog of exports, of tragic models to be reread, rethought, reproduced, represented and re-presented.

It remains for us to determine if the European model of cultural centrality can be sustained under the light of deconstruction and under the aesthetic rupture of Oswald de Andrade's nationalistic anthropophagic manifesto: "*Só antropofagia nos une. Socialmente. Economicamente. Filosoficamente... Absorção do inimigo sacro. Para transformá-lo em totem.*" (3, 7). His anthropophagic poetics demands the making of a specific literary code able to encompass the Brazilian past. This code, which would inspire the new language, would

break with traditions, as well as with the social and moral paradigms of the time. Authors who would follow this poetics would attack canonical texts by means of parody and sarcasm, eating them up to become strong. With the publication of the play *O Rei da Vela* in 1937, Andrade introduces the anthropophagic metaphor to the stage, reinforcing its political dimensions.

In 1992 Grupo Galpão mounted their production of *Romeo and Juliet*, using anthropophagic techniques in order to establish a national scenic art by devouring the Shakespearean model, incorporating some national literary, musical, and popular traditions, and re-embodying them in a Brazilian street play. In this translation and representation, folk language rituals and rhythms were especially chosen to illustrate the moments of tension derived from the *agon* resulting from the feud between opposite forces in the play. According to Walter Benjamin, a literary work of art has as its main objective neither communication nor expression but production of an aesthetic experience (261). Therefore, the translation that limits itself to focus on the two first goals—communication and/or expression—will distance itself from its own essence, taking shape as a bad representation of the original. Starting from this principle, the act of translation will not function as an instrument of precision in the mounting of the new text, but as an element of free mediation that points at poetry and invites the translator into the realm of intertextuality. Translation makes possible a type of transposition which brings the component of change in its genesis. After the moment of assimilation comes the moment of metamorphosis leading to intertextuality, which, in turn, “*se afigura como uma rica e inesgotável fonte de tradução, não de uma língua a outra, mas de uma idéia a outra, de uma tradição a outra, enfim, um exercício de tradução e de diálogo entre culturas*” (Alves and Viana 10).

Grupo Galpão performs this role by adopting an anthropophagic, carnivalized, and circus-like form of representation of street theatre and staging a Brazilian version of *Romeo and Juliet* marked by a nostalgic mode and by a form of artistic imitation. Director Gabriel

Villela, his assistant director Arildo Barros, and the dramaturge Antonio Carlos Brandão, working with a translation by Onestaldo de Pennafort and using techniques of addition, deletion, substitution and inversion, have created a new play which enhances and perpetuates the qualities of the original.

Galpão's *Romeu e Julieta* retains many elements of the original. Both are set in Verona and Mantua, although in Galpão's a number of speeches and scenes have been deleted in whole or in part. All of the main characters appear except Paris and Lord and Lady Montague. However, the Brazilian adaptation, for street theatre convenience, is divided into seventeen scenes instead of the traditional five acts, and the chorus that introduces acts one and two in the Elizabethan play has been replaced by a *mineiro* narrator costumed and made up as Shakespeare, who opens and closes the play and comments intermittently on the action, using language that suggests the style of the Brazilian novelist Guimarães Rosa. This syncretized character creates and/or transforms Portuguese words into *mineiro sertanês* mainly by means of agglutination and affixation and by manipulating the fixed grammatical norms to explore the poetic-communicative potential of the language. In this context of linguistic invention, the dichotomy between the more static system of a socio-formal nature and the individual and functional expressive impulse of language is resolved and the two become interdependent. Thus, in the monologue which opens the first scene, the speaker uses metaphors and neologisms to transform the Verona of this version of the play into a Brazilian landscape: "*A guerra entre os Montecchio e os Capuleto/Arrepia até a mesmice destas pedras/e o carregume destes secos.../Alumiando o negrume deste pó...*" (Brandão 2). Similarly, in this same passage, the narrator's figurative description of love as a *gã* meaning *gana* (hunger of love) is another Rosa-like interference.

Shakespeare's use of polysemy and his taste for playing on words often encumber the translator-adaptor's task. One of the strategies adopted by Brandão to circumvent this difficulty is the choice of linking

either different senses of the same word or similar senses and/or sounds of different words. One example is the monologue that concludes scene two, in which the narrator combines puns with onomatopoeia: "*A noite produziu, depois engoliu / Depois do frio da boca cuspiu/Um Romeurio de melancolia*" (Brandão 3). The neologism "*Romeurio*" joins the protagonist's name to the word "*rio*". The musicality and meaning of this invented word suggest both a river of melancholy and the sad murmur of the water. Moreover, "*Romeurio*" also evokes "*romaria*" (pilgrimage,) pointing us forward to scene eight where Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time and engage in some spritely word play on "*Romeo*" and "*romeiro*" (Brandão 11). A similar linking of pun with onomatopoeia is seen near the end of the monologue: "*Quando o sol nos seus vazios/Desamarra os sonhos em que se fia/Mas no remôo dos ventos o senhor pressente...*" (Brandão 3). Here the representation "*remôo*" plays on Romeo's name and simultaneously suggests the mournful sound of the wind described in the line. In the ninth scene another term is made up to describe the lover's interdependence: "*A ambos o amor coloca no seu mais topo a/romeumar sem fim até ancorarse no porto Julieta*" (Brandão, 1992:14). The verb "*romeumar*" replaces "*remar*" (to row), producing a romantic sea image and a ship metaphor that portrays Romeo as a boat seeking a safe harbor in Juliet's love. In the epilogue, the narrator uses neologisms to describe the lovers as united eternally in heaven in a way that they never were able to experience on earth: "*Romeolua e estrelajulia celebram o circoceu das paixões...*" (Brandão 41).

In writing these speeches, the author deals with the words and sentences not only as linguistic facts but also as logic, psychologic, and aesthetic entities in order to achieve both communicative and emotional goals. His language innovations, like Shakespeare's and Rosa's, are strategically adapted to the poetic necessities of the moment without impairing the attentive audience's understanding. But it seems that the most significant aspect of this story teller's role is to present the controlling metaphor of the production: the notion that life is an inverted

circus. By introducing this conceit, he transforms Jaques's comparison of the world to a stage in *As You Like It* into a more Brazilian trope with connotations of Bakhtinian carnival. The narrator repeats this metaphor throughout the play, and in the seventh scene he openly invites the audience to put on their masks and join the players in their inverted circus. In his concluding monologue heaven is described as a circus of passions where Romeo and Juliet now reside, as moon and star respectively. Near the end of the epilogue he says, "*Eu desarmo o miúdo circo meu*" (Brandão 41).

The circus, as already mentioned, has long been a part of Brazilian theatre history. Joining this tradition, Galpão incorporates juggling, tightrope walking, and acrobatics into their production. Actors wear clown make-up and Romeo appears on stilts, carrying an umbrella and playing an accordion. The actors drive a 1974 Veraneio station wagon into a playing space which suggests a circular arena under the big tent, where the show is performed.

But the circensian elements in this production are not merely entertaining; in fact, they carry much thematic weight. The tightrope and the stilts, as well as the juggling, suggest in a very physical way the notion that living is dangerous, life is fragile, disruption is likely, change is inevitable, and all is unstable in this circus of inversions. As the narrator says, "*Verdade maior é que se está sempre num balanço*" (Brandão 13). Moreover, this notion is reiterated often through the many anthropophagic inversions enacted in the play: Romeo appears on the balcony and Juliet appears below; the lovers speak of hands when they meet, but Romeo pays more attention to Juliet's feet; in the wedding scene, the lovers kneel at the foot of crosses which suggest the grave; and the old car that carries the actors and functions as part of the playing space is reminiscent of a hearse. But one of the most striking inversions is the desacralization of death. Death is portrayed as a comedy and as a party. There is a playful atmosphere in mourning, evoking conflicting feelings in the audience, an emotion between laughing and crying. Mercutio dies dancing and throwing kisses. Tybalt dies standing,

holding a sword and scaring the audience— in a typical circus scene (Interview with Arildo Barros). These episodes transgress the conventional understanding of tragedy, entangle the audience's horizon of expectations and point out the fluidity between living and dying.

Further evidence of Grupo Galpão's anthropophagic rendering of Shakespeare's tragedy is the inclusion of elements of *mineiro* folk culture. The actors are costumed in the baroque colors of the cities of Minas Gerais. They carry branches of rue, crosses and plastic flowers, and fight with plants called in Brazil swords of St. George instead of real rapiers. They play popular instruments, such as the *sanfona* and the *violão*, and many of the musical compositions are in traditional *mineiro* modes such as *seresta*, *modinha*, and *Diamantinense* waltz. Each song connects to a particular event in the play and foreshadows, echoes, or ironically comments on the action. The production opens with a children's chant that establishes the central situation of forbidden love and consequent death that will unfold:

*Você gosta de mim, ô maninha
Eu também de você, ô maninha
Vou pedir a seu pai, ô maninha
Para casar com você, ô maninha
Se ele disser que sim
Tratarei dos papeis
Se ele disser que não
Morrerei de paixão. (Brandão 2)*

The intertext between Romeo's point of view and the chorus's voice is the thematic focus of the adolescents' love story, in which the acceptance or rejection of the suitor's proposal will eventually lead to either a happy or a tragic *denouement*.

At the beginning of the seventh scene, Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio enter singing "*Cinzas no coração*," the words of which allude to two stock characters of *commedia dell'arte*, Pierrot and Harlequin,

who represent pathetic love and volatile love respectively, the latter foreshadowing Romeo's inconstancy in giving up Rosaline. This scene closes with an intermingling of two folk songs that echo the cynical and disenchanted mood of "*Cinzas no coração*," this time using the metaphors of flower and ring:

*O anel que tu me deste
Flôr vem cá
Foi de vidro e se quebrou
Flôr vem cá
O amor que tu me tinhas
Flôr vem cá
Era pouco e se acabou
Lá ia lá ia ia ia. (Brandão 10)*

Near the end of the play when the nurse gives Romeo the ring that Juliet has sent him to pledge her fidelity, the chorus of the second song comments once more and ironically on their ill-fated love (Brandão 30). The ring made of glass is a presentation of fragility, of the breakable quality of feelings in the semiotic web of love. The simplicity of the words of these tunes contrasts with the complexity of the plot. This technique of apparent contradictions aims at the audience's immediate emotional comprehension and response, which is eventually part of the whole aesthetic-expressive process.

Further into the play and right before the balcony scene, Romeo sings another brief lyric that reflects the love he has just experienced and declared, representing the female love object as a flower and introducing the notion of heaven that foreshadows the lover's tragic end:

*É a ti flôr dos céus que me refiro
Nesse trino de amor, nesta canção
Vestal dos sonhos meus por quem suspiro*

E sinto palpitar meu coração. (Brandão 14)

This *Diamantinense* waltz, briefly heard earlier in scenes nine and ten, is repeated after Juliet is discovered and thought to be dead by her family. Its lyrics echoes past events, its hermeneutics evinces *saudade*, functioning as a semiotic thread that connects the important scenes of love and death and links the love motif of the balcony scene to the death motif in the discovery scene:

*Oh, oh, dias de risonha primavera
Oh, oh, noites de luar que tanto amei
Oh, oh, tardes de verão ditosa era
Em que junto de ti amor gozei*

*Quem me dera outra vez esse passado
Essa quadra ditosa em que vivi
Quantas vezes eu na lira debruçado
Cantando em teu colo adormeci*

*Não te esqueças de mim, por piedade
Um só dia, um só instante, um só momento
Não me lembro de ti sem ter saudade
Nem me podes fugir do pensamento.* (Brandão 38)

Spring, summer, moon and the lyre are the signs which symbolize lost happiness never to be found again. The factual moments are gone, leaving behind their traces, their only remaining asset—the dream and hope of everlasting remembrance. Also of great emotional significance in the play is the duet sung by Romeo and Juliet at their wedding. It is a romantic folk ballad, “*Amo-te muito*,” that employs hyperbolic similes to declare eternal love:

Amo-te muito

*Como as flôres amam
O frio orvalho
Que o infinito chora
Amo-te como
Sabiá da praia
Ama a sangüínea e
Deslumbrante aurora
Oh não te esqueças
Que eu te amo assim
Oh não te esqueças
Nunca mais de mim. (Brandão 24)*

In ironic contrast to this song is the one that they sing after their first night together. “*Última Estrofe*,” a love story in the *seresta* tradition, is the longest narrative composition in the play. The refrain contains an extended apostrophe to the moon. The lyrics are replete with melancholy imagery that foreshadows their unfulfilled dreams, as reiterated in the duet:

*Lua, vinha perto a madrugada
Quando em ânsias minha amada
Nos meus braços desmaiou
E o beijo do pecado
Teu véu estrelado
A luzir glorificou
Lua, hoje eu vivo tão sozinho
Ao relento sem carinho
Na esperança mais atroz
De que cantando em noite linda
Esta ingrata volte ainda
Escutando a minha voz. (Brandão 32)*

The imagery that recurs throughout the songs recalls the tropes of moon and sun that permeate the language of Shakespeare's text. Moreover, it also suggests the folk motif of *lua branca*, as seen in the passage that Romeo sings as he enters in the fourth scene. "*Lua branca*," by Chiquinha Gonzaga in *modinha* style, is often performed as part of the *seresta* tradition of small Brazilian towns. In this song the speaker asks the moon to release him from his hopeless passion for an unattainable woman who has left him:

*Ó lua branca, de fulgores e de encantos,
se é verdade que ao amor tu dás abrigo,
Vem tirar dos olhos meus o pranto,
Ai, vem matar esta paixão que anda comigo.
Ai, por quem és, desce do céu, o lua branca,
Esta amargura do meu peito, ó, vem, arranca;
Dá-me o luar de tua compaixão,
Ó, vem, por Deus, iluminar meu coração.
E quantas vezes lá no céu me aparecias,
A brilhar em noite calma e constelada,
E em tua luz então me surpreendias
Ajoelhado junto aos pés da minha amada.
E ela a chorar, a soluçar, cheia de pejo,
Vinha em meus lábios ofertar um doce beijo.
Ela partiu, me abandonou assim.
O lua branca, por quem és, tem dó de mim. (Brandão 4)*

This motif refers to the impossibility of fulfillment for Romeo and Juliet and also ties into the pattern of Galpão's anthropophagic inversions. Throughout the play, the conventional symbolism of sun (male principle) and moon (female principle) is reversed; Romeo is associated with the night and moon while Juliet is represented as the sun and day. The weaving of the song motifs into the warp of the plot complicates the play, conferring on it yet one more quality—that of a *sui generis*, tragic,

circus-like folk musical, representative of today's multiform discourses in this multicultural end of the millennium.

Nouvelle histoire—nouveaux objets. As José Roberto O'Shea states, "*A tradução é um processo hermenêutico complexo, que faz o tradutor ir além da mera equivalência verbal, para se constituir em um mediador entre dois textos, duas culturas*" (181). Also, for Mário de Andrade, it is the copy (the "false" document) that legitimates the model as it ransoms the originality of the latter in the process of reduplication. The copy transports the object to a new *locus* and, in Andrade's logic, Grupo Galpão's intercultural translation of *Romeo and Juliet* has transported the English tragedy of precipitation to Brazilian grounds by finding a new form of articulation between the two cultural systems and by raising up a discursive no man's land, or yet a middle-land, where different cultures recognize one another through the projection of their differences. It is exactly this alternative discourse that changes old objects into new ones, adding a new dimension to often time-worn aesthetic-political practices. There is, of course, a crossing point or intersection between being or being the other, which is a condition of possibilities proper to cultures. The critical look will certainly avail itself of the interstitial nature of literature to understand that the space left between the two objects in question must be able to guarantee or confer to the second one, in this case Galpão's *Romeu e Julieta*, its unique position in the gallery of dramatic art.

Deborah Root describes some theatre performances of today, stating that "the museum collapses into the shopping mall, where cultural difference becomes another commodity to be bought and sold" (viii). She also states that universalist discourses of high theory are no longer able to account for the subtleties of colonial representations. Her book *Cannibal Culture* can be seen as a *fin de siècle* reconsideration of Oswald de Andrade's problematization of national identities, authenticity, the notions of origin and copy, and their corresponding ambiguities of perception and understanding, of remembrances and forgettings. Taking the European model as its starting point, Grupo

Galpão's work can be characterized, then, by its rediscovery of old Brazilian traditions; by its capability of manipulating and intermingling time, culture, place, and subject as it focuses these traditions; and by its reflection on the particular, the local, the regional, and the national in an attempt to reach the global. Galpão's theatre practice is unique in that it resists classification, participating in the traditions of both erudite and popular art. In this minefield of uncertainties, street theatre, lacking major fixed theories, consequently invents the new, which really isn't all that new after all.

Note

- 1 Tropicalism, the great aesthetic-political movement of the 1960s and 1970s, was an offshoot of Oswald de Andrade's anthropophagy project. It is characterized by the breadth of its questionings, the plurality of its artistic scope (including music, theatre, cinema, literature, and painting) and by its massive acceptance and visibility. It represents a passionate necessity to re-invent the country and includes an ironic vision of Brazilian progress and modernization. The main representatives of the movement are Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil (music), Glauber Rocha (film), Hélio Oiticica and Antonio Diaz (painting), Torquato Neto (poetry), and Augusto Boal (theatre).

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