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Brazil's *Literatura de Cordel*: Poetry of the People

Prints by Jotabarras and Marcelo Soares

Brazil, as a typical country of the Third World, has a huge percentage of illiteracy, which can be judged near to 50 percent of the 130 million inhabitants. These people, although considered ignorant by the elites, have their own systems of communicating. The most important of these is the so-called *Literatura de Cordel* – popular printing of narrative poems which are intended to be sung or read aloud. This way, Brazilian chapbooks is to be put between the literate and illiterate portions of the people.

There is a straight relationship between *cordel* poets and ballad singers and, in many cases, both occupations are performed by the same persons. The heritage of ballads and chapbooks originates from medieval Europe. Practically in all cultures over the world, we find this kind of oral and/or written poetry; but in Brazil, due to local conditions, it has survived and been strengthened until present times. There are still some 3000 poets active, mostly in the Northeast, but also in the big cities of the South, due to intense internal migration.

In order to understand Brazilian and, including, Third World people's behavior, it is very useful to know how the common people – who form the vast majority of those nations – comprehend the world and communicate among themselves. Also, in order to have a better knowledge of Western literature and culture, it is indispensable to know the origin and formation of their systems of communication. The Brazilian popular literature, presently the most active one, can be used as a living example of Western past activities of minstrels, troubadors and jongleurs.

Popular Culture: Some Aspects in Brazil

When we start studying any literature like Greek, English, German, Portuguese or Indian, we always find, in the beginning, almost exclusively, poetic manifestations. When time passes on, these forms give way to prose and, when we get to the 20th century, poetry occupies very little space compared to other literary expressions.

The great reason for this fact is that human societies, when they are illiterate, only have man's memory to keep

whatever is considered important. Hence, the tendency of organizing all kinds of messages in poetic form. The rhythm of the sentences, the final or initial similarities are great aids to memorization.

By studying more complex societies, we notice that there are always dominating and dominated elements, elites and commoners, nobility and peasants. As a consequence, we frequently find different opinions about the same things. The elites are usually more prepared to accept novelties from outside of their habitual context, whereas the commoners in general absorb the new "modern" concepts, little by little, and only according to their needs.

This fundamental difference is very important here because the present work deals principally with popular points of view, i.e., the way simple people or the commoners consider things that happen in their lives and ways in which they consider worthwhile to register. As there exists the tendency for these simple people to stick to archaic forms of expression, in countries like Brazil, we still find a popular literature written and sung in poetry.

As different forms of progress are always present in any human society, we must constantly be aware that communication among persons or classes is a fact which must always be considered.

Many persons have the impression that "commoners" and "elite" constitute entirely separate entities. In reality, however, this is not so. In one society, by means of direct or indirect communication, one side knows what happens to the other. For instance, the "square dance" ("quadrilha" in Portuguese) originated from the aristocratic "contre-dance" of the European courts during the eighteenth century. In the last century, it was brought to North and South America and, little by little, it became a popular dance and could be found in most rural communities. Recently, some folklorists in Brazil brought this dance back to the urban areas and, once more, it became an upper class amusement. However, it is no longer found in its natural rural form.

Popular culture includes all vital expressions of one society but, in general, it indicates a certain opposition to the official "learned" culture. Popular culture is manifested with

more vigor in societies in which class divisions are accentuated. This is why we don't call indigenous cultures as popular. They exist by themselves, independently from any other.

In Brazil today, many social non-indigenous groups live in pre-alphabetical or semi-oral stages, in opposition to minorities of highly sophisticated culture. Nevertheless, all Brazilians speak, fundamentally, the same language and accept most of the common social and religious principles. This is in contrast to the situation in Paraguay and Peru, where the boundaries between elite and commoners speaking Guarany and Quecha respectively, are very difficult to surpass.

Popular Communication

Among the expressions of popular origin, we are here interested in those which are used in communicating. Among the latter, poetry occupies a prominent position because of its dynamism and force of expression. There are also tales, anecdotes and legends presented in prose form. In countries like Brazil, however, popular narrative poetry surpasses, by far, prose aspects.

Regional or National Popular Poetry?

Many people "take a part for the whole" and mix Brazilian popular poetry with Northeastern (regional) popular poetry. This is because in the Northeastern states of Brazil we find especially strong poetic expressions both in oral and written form. In reality, however, we find popular poetry all over Brazil (and certainly, in all Latin American countries). *Literatura de Cordel* stands for the printed part of popular poetry and so represents less than one percent of all poetry really made at popular level. The far greater oral production is usually sung by the *cantadores*, either memorized by them or produced instantly.

Distribution of Popular Poetry

Until the end of the 19th century, there was popular poetry regularly manifested all over Brazil. The biggest part of the population lived in rural areas and, logically, due to the long distances, communication was very scarce, mainly, if we considered the sophisticated level of mass communication which we have now. The differences among regional expressions were then very great and so with people's poetry. At that time, the linguistic standard was still that of Coimbra or Lisbon (Portugal) but simple people could express themselves well in their own way.

There were two events, at the end of the 19th century, which modified, greatly, many aspects of popular culture and, specifically, poetry. One of these events was the European immigration towards the south of Brazil, where many different cultural molds were introduced to the detriment of locally



existing culture. Another event was the great expansion of Northeasterners towards the Amazon area. (At that time there was a great need for people in the rubber extraction coinciding with years of drought in the Northeast.) Nowadays, we can say that all the rivers which form the Amazon Basin are peopled by Northeasterners and, this way, there are Northeastern regional poetic expressions in all these regions.

There remain, however, some areas of popular poetry exempt from Northeastern influence. One is the "old pioneers' route" (*antigo caminho das bandeirantes*), from Sao Paulo City via Tiete River valley to the regions of Goias and Cuiaba. All these places, including Piracicaba, Itu, etc., are still centers of local "caipira" culture and there we find popular poetic forms called "Cururu", "Fandango", "Batuque", "Cana Verde", "Samba" and "Jongo". The most famous one is "Cururu" with its endless duels.

There is a great popular poetic area in the extreme South of Brazil, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, especially the frontiers with Argentina and Uruguay. There, the poems are generally presented in four-line stanzas. Notwithstanding the fact that the production of this poetry is essentially oral, many of the poems are now being printed by locally organized folkloric organizations called CTB (Centros de Tradicao Baucha).

With the rest of the country, we notice a powerful advance of Northeastern poetry. With the arrival of migrants in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, during the Thirties and the construction of Brasilia in the Fifties, Northeastern regional culture has, in fact, become a synonym of Brazilian popular culture. And this is not surprising: in Great Sao Paulo alone, of the 12 million inhabitants, 5 million are Northeasterners. Moreover, their popular poetry has a great advantage: the habit of printing the most popular poems. And so, we now have the *Literatura de Cordel*, symbol all over the world of Brazilian popular culture. The Northeastern sextain (stanza of six lines, each one with seven syllables) became the greatest poetic expression of Brazilian history.

The Origins of Popular Literature

We usually learn that all human actions have their beginnings recorded in the old pre-historic caves or, otherwise, in the hieroglyphics of the old Egyptians. There may be some truth in it but, in reality, what happens many times is that modern researchers have the tendency to consider the actions of ancient societies with the same points of view as if they were happening today. This gives way to many biases.

For instance, if we analyze Greek democracy, it may be presented as a model for us today. A second consideration, however, will reveal that this social system was based upon slavery. Consequently, it will seem very easy to discuss equality of a certain group of people when they have no problems with providing for their own living. After this "second thought", we will probably conclude that Greek democracy has nothing to do with what we consider democracy in our days.

Thus, when we discuss something which happened in the past, we must try to examine the phenomena with the eyes of those who lived in those times and then, if necessary, bring the facts back to our times. In order to study the origins of popular literature, we must take into consideration all the limitations of many years past.

Popular literature appears in the Western world in two stages. The first one is from the 12th century on, as a manifestation independent from the communication systems of the Catholic Church. It is characterized so far being expressed in regional languages and not in Latin which, at the time, was the official language of all Christian Europe. Little by little, the commoners got accustomed to telling their stories and composing their poetry in their local ways of expression. This was all done in a very simple form but there was no other way because all the previous official communication was in Latin and dealt with religious or learned subjects. Also, in those times, the commoners were not allowed to leave the hamlets or feuds where they lived. Communication between people from different communities was, therefore, practically nonexistent. There were only two exceptions to the structure: time of war or during a pilgrimage.

In medieval Europe there were three famous places where many pilgrims used to gather: Rome, the Holy See; Jerusalem, the Holy Land; and Santiago de Compostela, situated in the North of Spain, in Galicia where, according to tradition, was buried the holy Apostle Jacob. While the rest of the Iberic peninsula was under Arabic domination, Santiago de Compostela remained free for Christians. It was so famous during the Middle Ages that even the milky-way (as from North-European perspective, it made a bow to south-west) was called the Way of Santiago.

As a consequence, human movements concentrated in three areas. One was the South of France, Provence, where people joined before crossing the Mediterranean Sea, to reach

Palestine, almost always under Arabic domination. Another one was the North of Italy, Lombardy, where people had to pass in order to go to Rome. The third one was Galicia, the only region of Spain not taken by the Sarracenes and where the sanctuary of St. Jacob was located.

It was exactly in these three areas where popular literature started for there could be found many nomadic poets (who were among the rare persons with freedom of movement). These poets functioned as true journalists of those times, telling the news and singing their ballads of adventures and bravery.

We can thus note that medieval popular literature was in opposition to the official literature of the Catholic Church. As time passed these local ways of expression became stronger and would give rise to national languages like Italian, French-Provencal and Galaic-Portuguese. Later, other national languages were being originated along the great European rivers like the Rhine and the Danube and, later on, in the North of Europe and Great Britain. What is important for us is that these nuclei will become birthplaces of regional cultural production, transported to the rest of Europe, by means of minstrels, troubadours and ballad-singers – three categories of vagrant poets.

The Division – Popular and Learned Culture

Much later, by the end of the 18th century, after the French Revolution, a transformation which will affect all Europe took place: the rise of the bourgeoisie – the middle classes. Until so far, all non-Latin culture was common both to dominant classes – nobility and courtiers, and to the commoners. With the Industrial Revolution, and with the power taking of the middle classes symbolized by the French revolution, there followed many attempts from the new governing classes not only to seize political power but also the cultural aspects which had been so far in the exclusive hands of those who had just fallen.

One of the best examples of this overtaking is the transformation which occurred in so-called classic music. Before the rise of the bourgeoisie, there only existed "chamber music" whereby four or five instrumentalists executed their compositions for a small but selected audience. Later, in order to please the new and far more numerous exponents, it was necessary for symphonic orchestras to be created, with many more musicians. Still later, with choirs joined by elaborate sceneries, the opera was born.

We see then that selfconscious popular literature, the way we consider it nowadays, appears only at the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century. Initially, there was an increasing tendency of distancing these two concepts of culture but, in many occasions, we have approximations between popular and learned cultures, as we could see in the previous example of the square dance.



Popular Literature

The subject we are here dealing with is POPULAR LITERATURE. However, it is always good to remember that, in a society where classical music exists, there will also be popular music. The same thing happens to painting, religion, theater, sculpture, medicine and literature. In European countries and in North America, where printing systems were already common since the year 1700, it was relatively easy for commoners to publish their literary productions. So, we have abundant publication since this period.

In Brazil and in some other Latin-American countries, however, this tendency happened approximately one hundred years later. Especially in Brazil, the apogee of popular literature would be in the 20th century. At this time, North-American popular literature was already declining but would have left good products, as we will see later in this work.

The Relationship Between Oral and Written Literature

We have already said that popular culture occurs in societies where there exist elite and commoners, all participating in the same common manifestations like language, religion, ethnic origin, etc. Popular manifestations will happen, generally, in oral form. This is because communication on popular level means, in fact, exchange of information, experiences and fantasy among illiterate or semi-literate persons. And here it is time for an important observation: illiterate by no means signifies ignorant. We only have to remember great civilizations like the Aztecs and the Incas, where nobody could read and write. Even in several other civilizations, only very few people used writing systems (when these existed).

Mass education, the way we know it in our days, only came into existence after the empire of Napoleon Bonaparte, or after 1810. Its effects in Europe were only the most advanced ones – in the 20th century. And what about a country like Brazil? Even in our days, approximately half of the population has no access to regular schooling. And this is one of the great reasons for the prevailing oral forms of many Brazilians.

In popular literature, as well as in the learned one, we have, fundamentally, two aspects: poetry and prose. Poetry, stronger to the degree in which we find illiteracy, deals with the fixing of ideas, information and examples and has much possibility of expansion to public level because it is usually “sung”. Likewise, there exist specific melodies for determinate subjects. Through this, it is easier for the public to identify the subject. Later on, we will come back to this topic.

Prose

Prose includes tales and legends from one side and plays from the other. There are also sayings and proverbs but these can be both in prose as in rythmical form. Popular plays have their origin in the so-called medieval “autos” and were presented before or after some religious ceremony. They were generally critical or irreverent and, as the time passed, they started being presented in market places and on the occasion of other social gatherings. One of the characteristics of popular theater was the great participation of the people. A great part of the audience just remained on the stage and took part in the plays with exclamations and repetition of the most important words or sentences. In the beginning of the Portuguese colonization of Brazil, the Jesuit missionaries made great use of the medieval “autos” in order to convert the Indians to Catholicism and, as we know, they obtained great success.

In modern days, we still have some remnants of popular theater in Brazil with the "mamulengo", puppet theater of the Northeast, and with "Bumba-Meu-Boi" ("auto" with a cattle-farm as center of activities) and which is played all over the country in varied forms.

Stories and legends present events which may or may not have happened. They generally are intended to teach something or to show an example and are told, with more or less variations from father to son. In many cases, also, certain people, generally old ones, show great ability in story-telling to small groups. These stories, tales and legends are very important because they permit us to detect the real ways of thinking and the interests of a determinate group of people. It is exactly in such tales where we can detect prejudice, myth and forms of critic inherent to the person who tell or hear them. Nowadays, we still find many story-tellers in India and Arabic countries. In the United States, we have the famous stories of Uncle Remus, an old Negro. In Germany, in the beginning of last century, the Brothers Grimm collected a great many of popular stories which, later on, were printed and became famous all over the world as "Fairy Tales". We all know several of them like Sleeping Beauty, Red Cap, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

There is, however, something peculiar to the stories or legends, referring to the people who produce them: Their circulation is restricted and, when they are recorded and become public, they lose the interest of the people who created them. Others can be created but the "revealed" ones tend to be rejected. These legends, and popular tales, generally, become part of official educational systems - naturally, after many elements considered evil, cruel or, simply unnecessary to the narrative stream are erased. By the way, this is what always happens when something belonging to the common people is "officialized".

Poetry

Contrary to popular prose, poetry tends to remain in the minds of the people, independently of having been recorded and printed. However, it is necessary here to distinguish between "fixed" and "moving" poetry. Fixed poetry is constituted by poems and stanzas which are learned by heart and then passed on. As examples, we have nursery songs. Some of them, which we all have learned when we were children, have existed for more than 200 years and will be sung by many generations more. Other "fixed" poems are "cancioneros", rhymed stories - with strong emotive contents and teaching elements.

One of the most famous rhymed stories of Brazil is "The Death of Antoninho (Little Anthony)", the boy who killed the peacock of his teacher. There are many versions, but they all finish with Antoninho being murdered by his cruel and vindictive teacher. This is the version I, myself, learned in Guaratingueta, when I was a boy, in 1953:



*Bom dia, Papai, Mamae
Bom dia, devo voltar
Matei o pavao do mestre
Nao sei quanto hei de pagar.*

Good morning, Father and Mother
good morning, I must go back
I killed the teacher's peacock
I know not how much I'll pay.

*Meu filho, vai a aula
Porque tens de aprender
Papai, eu nao vou a aula
Porque sei que vou morrer.*

My son, go to school
Because you must learn
Father, I won't go
Because I know I'll die.

*Antoninho foi a escola
Chorando pelo caminho
Quando ia subindo a escada
Estava ainda a solucar.*

Antoninho went to school
Weeping along the way
While climbing the stairs
He was still sobbing.

*Crianças, que da escola
Agora voltando estao,
Nao viram o Antoninho
Filho de minh' estrimacao?*

Children, who from school
Are returning now,
Haven't you see Antoninho
My so beloved son?

*O Antoninho esta na escola
Deitado em uma mesa
Em seu peito um punhal cravado
Morto como um passarinho.*

Antoninho is in school
Lying upon a table
In his breast a long knife
dead as a little bird.

So far, we have talked of "fixed poetry", i.e., poetic forms that tend to maintain fixed to a certain event by means of numerous repetitions, along the years. There are other popular poetic expressions which are produced instantaneously. They are called "repentes", improvised by poets, generally singers, alone or in duets. They constitute a great delight for the public due to the swiftness and sureness of versification by the poets.

This spontaneously produced poetry is rarely recorded and is practically lost forever. However, nobody cares much about this. For the poets it is like soap bubbles: they can always make more.

Sometimes, there happens to be more poets and, in this case, we have the "desafios" (duels), real poetic battles, in which the one who can rhyme longer is considered the winner. There are also the "pelejas" (fights) and some of them have been recorded or learned by heart and so have become very famous. In the case of the Brazilian "pelejas", it is not only the ability of answering the opponent in poetic form that counts, but, mostly, accompanying him through a maze of different rhythms, with consequent different poetic structures and melodies. It is already enough for one of the two contenders to hesitate and the public will immediately show its derision.

Popular Literature in Other Countries: Africa, Europe and America

We said before that it is very common in many countries to find story-tellers. These are persons known in their neighborhood because of their ability to remember dozens or hundreds of passages and facts which are worth to be told. For some money during special occasions, they recite or sing in monotonous tones the many histories or legends of their culture.

Although much spontaneous poetry exists in these countries, prose is dominant. However, in the case of Arabic or Indian languages, prose expressions are already very similar to what we, from the point of view of European cultures, would call poetry.

In some African countries, like Nigeria, a vast body of popular literature consisting of plays exists. Such plays as "Steps for the Freedom of Nigeria", "Which is more important, English or Yoruba?", and the very funny "The Trial of Hitler" are some of the most popular. A series of plays about important African leaders, among others, "The Last Day of Lumumba", "Dr. Nkrumah in the Struggle for Freedom", and "Sylvanus Olympio" are the strongest.

In Japan we had the well-known *kusazoshi* and other forms of popular poetry and in the Philippines, the Spanish-influenced *korridos*. In China, many traditional forms of popular poetry are now being studied.

Popular Literature in Europe

In all countries there have been strong and enduring manifestations of folktales. However, in many cases, we do not know when these stories were transformed from poetry to prose. The Edda (the Germanic and Scandinavian saga) have been long perpetuated in poetic form, then transformed into prose. During the 19th century, they were registered by folklorists and disappeared greatly as popular tradition. Along the Rhine valley, we find the famous stories of "Rijnhaert De Vos", the fox which along with the wolf and the bear, caused a lot of trouble to each other and to the inhabitants of the whole region. Nobody will ever forget about "Thijl Uilenspiegel", the popular hero of the Flemish (today Belgium). He is equivalent, with his mischievous actions, to the Brazilian Pedro Malasartes - who is the Spanish Pedro Malasartes, who, in turn, is of Arabic origin.

About *THIJL*, for example, people tell that he once came to a small city of the Netherlands. The burghermaster complained about the many lazy persons who took advantage of benevolence of the city fathers and, feigning that they were sick, spent month after month in the local hospital, causing great damage to the municipal funds. Thijl, disguised as a doctor, visited all the rooms of the hospital and in a very loud voice, announced all the operations and treatments which he intended to inflict upon his patients from the next day on. The false doctor was so convincing and his announced treatments so terrifying that, the next morning, majority of his patients had escaped. The others, who were really sick, died of fear. The cityfathers had no more problems with their hospital. Thijl Uilenspiegel received a nice purse of gold coins from the burghermaster and continued with his journey.

Although prose is very well represented, poetry is much more common in popular literature in Europe. Since the beginning of the Middle Ages, we hear about troubadours and minstrels, roaming from one place to the other, and singing news and detailing interesting facts of the time. Their stories frequently included subjects linked to the Catholic Church or lives of holy people. Miracles, at that time, were the last hope of the humble people. Principally, after the Crusades, we have a greater interest in faraway places. I mentioned before that the peasants were linked to their places of origin, to the lands of their lords and the only possibilities of travelling, except during wartime, were pilgrimages to sanctuaries.

When the Muslims conquered Palestine, they prohibited the visits of Christians. At that time, the Europeans, in general, used this occupation as a pretext to organize great armies and tried to invade the "Holy Land". The movements of all those people and the mixing of armies of all several origins caused, in time, a great cultural interchange which was demonstrated by many minstrels and poets.

So we find, all over Europe, a strong popular literature, mostly poetry. This, little by little, established itself in determined regions where more people used to pass. Right after the invention of the press in 1450, the first printings of popular poetry appeared. In France, for example, a vast popular literary production started in the city of Troyes (relatively new Paris) in the year 1483. For almost 400 years, Troyes remained famous as a publishing center of popular booklets and almanacs. Some researchers believe that approximately 1,500 titles were published in Troyes. (This may be very much for Europe, but it is nothing for Brazil where, within about 100 years, popular poets printed between 15,000 and 20,000 booklets.) The booklets printed in Troyes received the name of "Bibliothèque Bleue" (Blue Library), because of the covers. They were of the same kind as the Brazilian chapbook – logically dealing with French subjects. The French booklets were generally in poetry, but some were in prose or in mixed form. Called LITTÉRATURE DE COLPORTAGE ("col" means "neck"), the vendors of these booklets used to carry them in a box which was fixed by means of a string around the neck.

Although there were a few titles compared to present-day Brazilian production, the French issues were also very great – something around 8,000,000 copies. One of the most famous booklets was the "Song of Roland". Roland was the nephew of Charles the Great and died, according to the legend, in the north of Spain, defending the retreat of the emperor. The long poem was written some 200 years after the event. After that, however, it was rewritten hundreds of times and still printed in poetic form in Brazil as well as in prose in Portugal.

Popular poetry in England was also very extensive and followed the same line of development as in France. It existed in printed form since the establishment of the first presses in the country. The poems were called *BALLADS* or *BROAD-SHEETS* because they were produced to be sung and were printed on only one side of the paper. From England, this popular production was taken to all British colonies. There were also both poetic and prose productions, but by the end of the 19th century, the verses have disappeared and were substituted with novels, also cheaply printed, but from famous authors like Charles Dickens.

In the Netherlands, in Germany and practically in all other European countries, we find a great literary production meant for the lower classes. Meantime, it was in Holland where the first pamphlets which spoke about Brazil appeared. One of them was the famous report of the German Hans Staden, saved by a French ship after having been kept prisoner by Brazilian Indians. This happened in the beginning of the 16th century.

European popular poetry became gradually extinguished during the 19th century due to compulsory education and because of the greater penetration of the daily press. It tended to remain in places where strong dialects were spoken as in Limburg (Holland), Bayern and Rhineland (Germany), Galicia



(Spain), Traz-dos-Montes (Portugal), Normandy (France) and Sicily (Italy). Regional publication can be found all over these places until the Twenties. In Portugal and Galicia, we find popular literature up to the present – but practically all in prose.

It is from the Iberic Peninsula that the name LITERATURA DE CORDEL comes. "Cordel" means "string" and the booklets were offered to the people fixed on strings like the clothes we put to dry. In Brazil, the custom has been to display the booklets on the ground, upon old newspapers, or inside an open suitcase. This permitted the vendor to escape quickly when a policeman or a tax collector approached. Even so, the Brazilian researchers have stuck to the name "literatura de cordel" and nowadays even the poets and singers use this expression.

Popular Literature in America

In general terms, we can say that the influence of the respective colonizing countries was absolute all over America. There have always been regional tendencies, due to climate, ethnical varieties and local ways of production. But, in general, both the good and the bad things in Europe have been transported to the American colonies. In this way, we can observe a continuation of all aspects of life in the country of origin with the exception, maybe, of the United States, for this place

was originally a refuge of people who wanted to be left free to practice their religion and communitary life.

The dislike for autoctone culture has been common all over America and, even nowadays, we suffer because of this, for Americans, Northern and Southern, still have much difficulty in locating their exact cultural identities. This is because they have always tried to hide their "less noble", i.e., "less European" aspects, but they never more were able to remain equal to the inhabitants of their respective European countries. In recent times, the US gave the example to the other countries of the continent by satisfying themselves in just being themselves. So far, and from the 20th century-on, only Mexico followed their example. Brazil, for example, is among the countries which demonstrated less preoccupation in analyzing their own cultural potentialities. One of the many bad consequences of this is, for example, a great delay in developing its own technology.

The arts, and especially, literature suffered very much because of this. However, among the elites, we still notice desperate efforts at competing with other countries considered more civilized. Countries like Brazil just forgot that their real culture is not in the continuous adaptation of the "white" formulae, but, essentially, in the cultural production resulting from the efforts of all the people who live within their boundaries.

The kind of consciousness was achieved initially in the field of music. As soon as the Brazilians were no longer ashamed of their popular autoctone music, they were able to transform their country into one of the greatest exporters of music in the world. And many Brazilians, for example, are astonished when they are informed that their country is the greatest producer of popular poetry in all the world and of all time. National elites, by trying so much to imitate foreign models, do not perceive that the commoners have elaborated, over the years, a series of poetic structures through which they are able to communicate their culture.

Besides all the legends and tales which are passed on from person to person, all the American countries have their popular poetry. In the US and (English-speaking) Canada, popular prose and verse have been published in booklets called CHAPBOOKS, which are, however, very rarely found these days. In the Quebec area, it is still possible to find local popular poetic productions, although these are dwindling. On the other hand, in Puerto Rico, the production is abundant. In all Central American countries, we find the equivalent of *Literatura de Cordel*: for instance, much of the Sandinista propaganda was made in poetic form.

Among the Spanish-speaking countries, it is Mexico that offers the greatest and best popular poetic production. We find it even within the American borders, mostly in California and Texas. The poems are called *CORRIDOS* and appear almost always in broadsheet form. The most famous corridos are those published during the Mexican Revolution. An example is, "El Fusilamiento del General Felipe Angeles".

*En mil novecientos veinte
senores, tengan presente
fusilaron en Chihuahua
un general muy valiente.*

In nineteen twenty
gentlemen, be aware
they executed in Chihuahua
a very valiant general.

*En la estacion de La Aurora
el valiente general,
con veinte hombres que traia
se les paraba formal*

At La Aurora station
the valiant general
with twenty men he had brought
they all marched in form.

*Alli perdio diez dragones
de los veinte que traia
y con el resto se fue
por toda la serrania.*

There he lost ten dragons
of the twenty he had brought
and with the rest he went
all over the mountains.

*En el cerro de La Morra
le toco la mala suerte
lo tomaron prisionero
le sentenciaran a muerte.*

At the hill of La Mora
he had bad luck,
he was taken prisoner
and sentenced to death.

*Angeles mando un escrito
al congreso de la Union,
a ver si de la alta camara
alcanzaba salvacion.*

Angeles sent a message
to the congress of the Union
to see if from the high chamber
he could obtain salvation.

*Pero no le permitieron,
por ser un reo militar,
y dijo a sus companeros:
- Ya me van a fusilar.*

But they didn't permit
for he was a military culprit
so he said to his companions:
- They will execute me soon.

*El reloj marca sus horas,
se llega la ejecución:
- Preparen muy bien sus armas
y tirenme al corazón*

The clock shows the time
the execution comes:
- Prepare very well your guns
and shoot me in the heart.

*"Yo no soy de los cobardes
que le temen a la muerte,
la muerte no mata a nadie,
la matadora es la suerte."*

"I am not of those cowards
who are afraid of death,
death doesn't kill anybody,
fate is the killer."

*"Yo no soy de los cobardes
que manifiestan tristeza,
a los hombres como yo
no se les da en la cabeza."*

"I am not of those cowards
who show their sadness,
to men like me
they cannot beat on the head."

*Ya con esta me despido,
por las hojas de un nogal,
fusilaron en Chihuahua
un valiente general.*

With this I say goodbye,
under the leaves of a chestnut tree
they executed in Chihuahua
a valiant general.

There is an expressive popular literature in Venezuela, Panama and Colombia, but in the Andean countries like Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, it is expressed by local Amerindian cultures. The same thing is true in Paraguay. In the other countries of South America, however, popular literature appears abundantly. In Chile, the poetic expression is known as POESIA CRIOLLA and in Uruguay and Argentina, there exist the famous PAYADAS, the spontaneous "gaucho" poetry, which is very similar to the popular poetry of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. There are not many printed poems in these three countries, but the oral production is very expressive.

In Argentina, we have the famous popular hero MARTIN FIERRO, the poor "gaucho" of one thousand adventures in the middle of the last century. He was always "the first in the battlefield but last in the payroll". There is a long poem written about this mythological character by Jose Hernandez. Martin Fierro; although he never really existed, is currently a symbolic national hero, comparable to the Brazilian Lampiao or to the American Daniel Boone. Here is a piece of advice from Martin Fierro:

*Eu nao tive mais escola
do que uma vida desgracada;
desculpem se na jogada
alguma vez me equivoco,
pois deve saber mui pouco
quem nao pode aprender nada.*

I had no more schooling
that a disgraceful life
I am sorry in poetry
I sometimes make mistakes,
'cause very little must know,
one who never learned anything.

*Homens ha cuja cabeça
so de saber se povoa;
aos sabios ergam-se loas,
mas isto devo dizer:
melhor que muito saber
e o aprender coisas boas.*

There are men whose heads
are peopled only with knowledge;
let's praise the wise,
but this I must say:
better than much knowledge
is to learn things that are good.

Popular Literature in Brazil:

The Literatura De Cordel

The fundamental difference between popular prose and poetry in Brazil is that prose rarely appears in printed form. We practically only know about it by means of the publications of folklorists and these publications are not always accessible to the greater public. Poetry, however, appears in much greater proportion, mostly the Northeastern production. Even so, the greater part of it is also lost, mostly when it is oral and improvised. Presently, there are, in Brazil, from 20,000 to 25,000 printed booklets given the general name of *Literatura de Cordel*.

Although it exists all over Brazil, these booklets had a great development in the Northeastern region, especially during the last one hundred years (exactly), because it was from this time on that the commoners were able to make use of the printing system in Brazil. The great advantage of *Literatura de Cordel* regarding all other expressions of popular literature is the fact that the commoner himself prints his productions the way he wishes.

We see here a great lesson of economy. The printing of booklets is a continuous demonstration of how one can produce something at a minimal cost. It is necessary, however, not to misunderstand things: Simple people expressed themselves by means of these humble writings because this is the only way permitted by their small income. Otherwise, they would be using more expensive material. Many folklorists think that popular manifestations must be poor. On the contrary, we think that they are important because they are produced even under poor conditions.

In *cordel* booklets, all kinds of resources to make the production as cheap as possible are employed. (Remember that the English word CHAPBOOK means "cheap book".) The paper used is newsprint. The cover is of slightly better quality. The size of the booklets is almost always 11 by 16cm. This is exactly an A-4 sheet. Also the number of pages of a leaflet is generally a multiple of eight (each A-4 sheet cross-folded offers the possibility of eight printed pages).

Nowadays, almost all leaflets have eight pages. In the past, it was very common to see booklets of 16, 32 and even 48 and 64 pages. The names were also given accordingly to the number of pages. Booklets of eight pages were called FOLHETO (this name is generic, presently); those of 16 pages were called ROMANCES and generally dealt with love, many times ending tragically; those of 32 pages and more were called HISTORIAS and were generally written by the best poets. The subject was considered more important if more space was dedicated to it. In some cases, the poet would present several volumes but, with time, due to the higher costs of paper and printing, the "historias" and "romances" have been abandoned by the people.

Classification of Literatura De Cordel

Many researchers of popular literature have been worried about this problem. One of them even published a book about it, with many subdivisions and examples. In reality all this is absurd. It would be the same thing if we divided, for instance, English Literature into heroic, obscene, outlawed, religious, and historic. And how would we classify authors with different kinds of books?

We must bear in mind that *literatura de cordel* is, in many aspects, the same as any other literature in that it has AUTHORS. These authors may have preferences for one or another theme but, in this case, they, and not the *literatura de cordel*, must be studied by themes. In Brazil there are



even institutes who divide their collections of booklets by themes and not by authors. And, of course, there is much confusion when one booklet may belong to two or more subdivisions. Anyhow, it is a great demonstration of disrespect towards the authors of *literatura de cordel*.

It is natural that the writer of booklets, because he is of popular origin, will tend to write his poems for his natural consumer: the people. Consequently, he will deal with the subjects from the point of view of the environment. If he is dealing with religion, for instance, he will write about it exactly in the way his readers are accustomed to face such a subject. Hence the great number of booklets representing the devil, the "hound" (cao) as he is generally called. According to official catholic doctrine, the devil is the extreme personification of evil. But it is not so in popular belief. Here we find the devil living among people, talking to them and, of course, at the end of the story, being beaten by the hero. The reason for this is that the reader of booklets is almost always of rural origin and feels, more than others, the fatalism of nature like rain, sun and pests and tends to attribute them more easily to supernatural interference. This is why the devil and some saints appear with some frequency in their stories and always displaying many human characteristics. All of this is part of the so-called "popular catholicism".

Included in the same subject, we find two characters very common in the booklets: Father Cicero Romao Batista and

Frei Damiao, Father Cicero, or "Padim Cico", was the founder and lifelong parson of Juazeiro (State of Ceara) and is venerated as a saint by countless Brazilians. Frei Damiao, an Italian capuchin, is still alive and travels constantly from one place to another, preaching to the commoners about the punishment of sinners. He is also considered a saint by the people. However, many catholic bishops have prohibited his preachings in their respective dioceses because they are sometimes in opposition to the modernizing tendencies of the present Church.

We know around 300 booklets about Father Cicero and as many others about Frei Damiao but, if we were to group them under one theme, we would have, at least, 200 poets of different origins and tendencies, writing, by chance, about the same subject, each without relation to the others. The same thing will happen with the popular Northeastern heroes as the "cangaceiros" (Robin Hood-like bandits) Lampiao and Antonio Silvino.

In conclusion, we can simply say that *literatura de cordel*, as a popular means of communication, deals with subjects that are of interest to the people, and by doing so, refers to subjects and persons from the popular point of view. What we suggest is that *literatura de cordel* be studied considering the authors. The better we know them, the more we will know about the people — their readers — and about the subjects they deal with.

Poetic Structures of the Cordel

The ABCs (Abeces)

There are two structures of poems that call the attention because of their presentation. One is called ABC (Abece) and is characterized so because each stanza is initiated by one letter of the alphabet. The implicit intention of an ABC poem is to deal with a subject in a total manner.

The following is an example of an ABC by Paulo Nunes Batista, one of the outstanding poets of this genre:

THE DENTIST IN ABC

*Abrindo a boca (dos outros)
no mundo onde impera a dor
de dentes, o tiradentes
dentista, restaurador—
restaura, trata, obtura:
da boca, da dentadura
e o "nosso mestre", o doutor*

Opening the mouth (of others)
In a world dominated by pain
of teeth, the toothpuller
dentist, restorer
restores, treats, fills
the cavities, false teeth,
it is "our master", the doctor

*Boca — ai começa tudo,
pois, sem boca, ninguém come
e, sem comer, não se vive
Da boca — o medico-artista
e o nosso amigo, o dentista,
de quem sempre louvo o nome!*

Mouth, here everything commences
for, without it, nobody eats,
and, without eating, no living
for we will starve
of the mouth — the doctor-artist
is our friend, the dentist
I will always praise his name!

The description of the dentist and his work will go as far as the letter "Z" and, by then, the poet will have made a total description.

The Desafios

Another structure which is very common and easily identified in *literatura de cordel* is the CHALLENGE, called "desafio" or "peleja". It consists of a poetic contest between two "singers". The challenge is one of the most common forms of oral poetry and, generally, the written challenges are simply invented or recreated from one which already happened. Usually, the poets try to increase the difficulty of the opponent by changing the theme or the poetic structure. Moreover, there is the "deixa", which is the obligation of one poet to continue with the rhyme of his opponent.

An example is the "The Contest of Antonio Correia with Manoel Camilo Santos", written by the latter. This means that the challenge was rewritten or created by Manoel Camilo Santos and that he was probably the winner.

Manoel Camilo:

*Correia pergunto a si
qual o significado
de você chegar aqui
p'ra cantar sem ser chamado
porque se veio a propósito
lhe digo, veio enganado.*

Correia:

*E porque fui informado
que você disse outro dia
que todo mundo lhe teme
na arte da poesia
vim lhe provar que não temo
a ninguém na cantoria.*

Manoel Camilo:

*Já não me lembro do dia
do lugar nem do momento
que eu tenha dito isso
mas agora eu acrescento
se você veio a propósito
como disseram eu sustento*

Manoel Camilo:

Correia, I ask you
what is the meaning
of your coming here
to sing without being invited
because, if you came for this
I tell you, you were wrong.

It's because I was informed
that you said the other day
that everybody fears you,
in the art of poetry
I came to prove that I don't fear
anyone in a singing challenge.

I don't remember the day
nor place nor moment
when I said such a thing
but now I confirm it
if you came for this purpose
as they said, I stand by it.

And, so, the contest starts and will finish when one of them is unable to continue producing instant poetry and has to give up. There will always be a subject serving as a theme. This one can be suggested by one of the poets or by a person in the audience (which may be numerous).

Forms of Verse-Making

There are many ways of producing *cordel* verses. It is important to remember that each structure has a special form to be sung. This is essential for a poetic structure to be considered popular. The musical possibility must be present even if the poem is only to be read (aloud).

The most common form is the sextain — stanzas of six verses with seven syllables each. The rhymes are usually combined in the second, fourth and sixth verses. An example of this is a poem of Elias A. de Carvalho ("The Death of Lampia"):

*Entre Alagoas e Sergipe
nos campestres ressecados
passa o rio Sao Francisco
separando os dois estados,
enriquecendo as aldeias,
fazendas e povoados.*

Between Alagoas and Sergipe,
among dry fields
flows the river Sao Francisco
separating the two states
enriching the villages
farms and hamlets.

Another very common structure is the "martelo agalopado" (galloping hammer) composed of stanzas of ten verses with ten or seven syllables each. A poem of Joao Crispim Ramos ("The People Praise Caria for His Decision" - N.B. Caria is the mayor of Feira, a city of Bahia State) serves to illustrate this structure:

*O nosso amigo Caria
Fechou o Forum de Feira
Para acabar a caeira
Que ao povo aborrecia
Todo mundo olhava e via
Mas usava a omissao
Dando aos ricos protecao
Nunca ninguem reagia
O povo abraça Caria
Pela sua decisao.*

Our friend Caria
Closed the courthouse of Feira
In order to finish with the mess
That angered the people
Everybody looked and saw
But preferred to ignore
Giving protection to the rich
Nobody ever reacted
The people praise Caria
For his decision.

Some of these prints are so pleasing that their authors started producing them for their own sake. Today, they constituted one of the most important exported items of Brazilian art.

Many people think it very strange that so many foreigners appreciate these simple graphic forms of popular art. The reason is very simple: Brazilians value their famous local artists like Portinari, Tarsila do Amaral, Walter Lewy and others. However, in each country, there are equally important artists. What they don't have are the popular printers with their regional forms of expression and their low prices. This way, a small and utilitarian expression of art became one of the most representative forms characterizing Brazil.

Cordel woodprinting responds to the need for cheap and easily accessible illustration. In the beginning of the century, printers would simply use vignettes, the common stamp-



Other well-known forms are "mourao", "quadrao" and so forth.

The researcher Sebastiao Nunes Batista found more than one hundred forms. A good poet or singer usually knows 20 different poems or more. However, in written form, popular poetry usually appears in sextains.

Illustration and Printing of Booklets

What immediately calls the attention, when we observe a booklet, is its cover. Frequently, it presents a print, almost always referring to the content of the booklet. As the matrixes of these prints are of wood, the product is called "woodprint".

like devices so abundant in any printing house. Later, they started using old cliches, bought from local newspapers, representing movie-stars and couples in love. Only in the last case, when there was nothing else available, would they resort to a woodprint. Little by little, folklorists and researchers showed much more interest in the woodprints. One of them took the works of Mestre Noza (artist living in Juazeiro, Ceara) to Paris where they obtained great success. Now, they can be found in famous places like Musee de Louvre, Smithsonian Institute and the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. At present, we find the majority of *cordel* booklets illustrated by woodprints and, in this way, a very strong means of popular art came into existence in Brazil.

Among the great printers, we find, besides Mestre Noza, Abraao Batista (Juazeiro, Ceara), Jose Costa Leite (Condado, Pernambuco), J. Borges (Bezerros, Pernambuco), Dila – one of the most famous (Caruaru, Pernambuco), Mivelvino Francisco Silva (Itabuna, Bahia), Marcelo Soares (Rio de Janeiro), Jotabarras (Sao Paulo), Franklin Maxado (Sao Paulo) and Jeronimo Scares (Sao Paulo).

The success of the Brazilian popular woodprints illustrates, once more, the saying that "Nobody is prophet in his own country".

Some Great Authors of Brazilian Popular Poetry

It is impossible to list down all the names of the cordel poets. Atila de Almeida (one of the greatest researchers in this field) listed more than 3,500. Moreover, new names appear constantly in all parts of Brazil. We prefer to speak in detail only about six, because they represent certain important moments and significant tendencies of Brazilian chapbooks.

Leandro Gomes de Barros

(Pambal, Paraiba, Nov. 19, 1965 - Recife, Pernambuco, Mar. 4, 1918)

Leandro was one of the first poets to print his verses in Brazil. He was also the most famous one. Some of his works are still printed and sold. Nobody knows exactly how many booklets he wrote but there are some 350 listed. The reason is that, formerly, people were not so keen on preserving author rights as they do now. When Leandro died, his widow sold his booklets to another great poet Joao Martins de Athayde, who continued publishing them under his own name. At that time, the name of the editor was more important as he was responsible for the sale of the booklets. The author's name usually came at the end in the form of an acrostic. The last stanza of "O Cachorro does Mortos" (The hound of the dead), of which more than one million samples have been printed, shows this:

*L-eithor, nao levantei falso
E-escrevi o que se deu,
A-quele grande successo
N-a Bahia aconteceu,
D-a forma que o velho cao
R-olou morto sobre o chao
O-nde o seu senhor morreu*

Reader, I didn't lie
I wrote what happened,
That great success
occurred in Bahia,
The way the old dog
Rolled dead over the place
Where his master died.

There are several books written exclusively about Leandro Gomes de Barros and there is no doubt that, so far, no other Brazilian popular poet could equal either his quality of verses or his penetration among the public.

Joao Martins de Athayde

(Inga, Paraiba, 1880 - Recife, Pernambuco, 1959)

Athayde has been the greatest editor of Brazilian chapbooks of all time. In 1921, he bought the author rights of Leandro Gomes de Barros from his widow. From then on, besides his own works, he also edited Leandro's. This fact caused much trouble to later researchers for he omitted the original name and put only his own. As we said before, this fact was considered normal at that time. Moreover, the poems of Leandro were then very well known and Athayde always identified himself as "Editor Proprietor".

In 1950, Athayde sold all his rights, including the ones he himself had bought, to Jose Bernardo da Silva, who established himself in Juazeiro (Ceara) creating the most famous editing house still existing, the Tipografia Sao Francisco. This way, the great production of chapbooks was transferred to the interior and far from the original Recife.

Joao Martins de Athayde himself was also a great poet. He wrote hundreds of booklets like "Historia de Joaozinho e Mariquinha" (Story of Little John and Mary), "Historia de Valente Vilela" (Story of the Valiant Vilela) and "Historia de Roberto de Diabolo" (Story of Roberto of the Devil), a medieval legend.

It was during the period of Joao Martins de Athayde that Brazilian chapbooks had their apogee. Thousands of booklets would leave his printing house every week and covered all the Northeast, the North and some communities of Rio de Janeiro. One of his prides was the fact that he himself never had to sell his booklets. He had many agents at his service and was one of the best-known persons of his time in the Northeast. With his sickness and death, Brazilian popular literature lost one of its greatest stars.

Cuica de Santo Amaro

(Salvador, Bahia, 1910 - 1965)

His true name was Jose Gomes but he signed all his works as D'ELE O TAL CUICA DE SANTO AMARO (He, the one, Cuica of Santo Amaro). Cuica was one of the most terrible and feared popular poets that ever existed. He was very fierce against corrupt and powerful people of his time. He used to be seen around Salvador inevitably wearing a tuxedo, a black coco-hat and a red carnation on his chest. He always carried copies of his most recent poems which he offered in places where many people used to gather. He also used to announce future productions about this or that crime or some news of corruption. Frequently, it happened that one of the characters depicted by him would approach him and buy the whole edition. But he always kept some samples for some friends, collectors and fans, among which was Jorge Amado, presently the most famous writer of Brazil. Amado used Cuica as character in several of his books like "Tereza Batista, cansada de guerra" (Tereza Batista back from the war) and "A morte de Quicas Berro D'Agua" (The death of Quicas Berro D'Agua).

It also happened many times that Cuica was arrested for having offended some police chief or government officer of Bahia. This is why he started carrying with him a "habeas corpus" (document issued by a judge leaving a person free until, and if, formally charged). But this document could not prevent the most angry ones from contracting a hoodlum to give him a thorough beating. On the other hand, Cuica de Santo Amaro was very much loved by the simple people whose rights he always endorsed.

His writings were always direct and biting and spared nobody. He wrote hundreds of works but very few can be found nowadays. They are among the most precious of the *Literatura de Cordel* jealously kept in big collections.

Among his numerous works, the following titles best show his ferocious spirit:

- *O prefeito que foi pegado coma boca na botija*
(The major who was caught in the act)
- *O marido que passou o cadeado na boca da mulher*
(The husband who put a hanglock on the mouth of his wife)
- *O casamento de Orlando Dias com Cauby Peixoto*
(The marriage of Orlando Dias with Cauby Peixoto - two effeminate singers)
- *Carlos Lacerda e suas diabruras* (Carlos Lacerda - famous politician - and his deviltries)
- *A capacidade do General Lott* (The capacity of General Lott)
- *Padre tarado* (The lustful priest)
- *Garotas que andam sem camisa e sem cueca* (Girls who go around with no underwear)
- *Sururu na Prefeitura* (Fighting in the city-hall)
- *O salário mínimo e o aumento . . . da fome* (minimum wages and increase . . . of hunger)
- *O beija-beija atrás da igreja* (The kissing behind the church)
- *O namoro no cinema* (The love-making in the movie-theater)

As an example of Cuica's writing, here is the initial part of his "A mulher que adulterou o esposo" (The woman who betrayed her husband). The reader can very well guess the rest of this description.

Veja bem, caro leitor
Veja só que caso sério
Veja entre as mulheres
Quanta falta de critério
Quanta mulher casada
Se entrega ao adultério

Pay attention, dear reader,
Look, what serious situation
See, among the women
What a lack of good behavior
So many married ladies
Practicing adultery.

Casas e mais casas
Teem sido encontrados
Em repartições
Dentro de reservados
Quando são gente bem
Nomes não são divulgados

Couples and couples
Have been found
In government offices
Within reserved rooms
When they are well-to-do
Names are not published.

Rodolfo Coelho Cavalcante (Algoas, Mar. 12, 1919)

Rodolfo has been living for many years in the city of Salvador and is considered the greatest living poet of the *Literatura de Cordel*. He wrote more than 1,500 booklets and one of them sold more than one million copies. This was "A moça que bateu na mãe e virou cachorra" (The girl who beat her mother and turned into a dog [bitch]). With the sales of only this booklet, he was able to buy the house in which he still lives.

Besides being a very active poet, Rodolfo Coelho Cavalcante is one of the greatest leaders of his class. He has already organized many congresses of popular poets, the first of which was in 1955. He also founded several periodicals promoting popular poetry. He is president of the National Order of Singers and Cordel Poets. As we can see, he is a very active person and a good instant-poetry maker as well.

He travels a lot and appears everywhere defending *Literatura de Cordel*. He is not afraid of speaking to high authorities and, some years ago, he was able to transform Salvador into one of the greatest centers of production and sales of chapbooks. If he had his way, *Literatura de Cordel* will never die.

Raimundo Santa Helena

According to his own story, Raimundo Santa Helena was born on April 6, 1926, between Paraíba and Ceará. He had a stormy children. His father was assassinated by Lampião. Raimundo, as a young man, joined the Navy and was sent to Europe during the World War II. He has been living in Rio de Janeiro for many years and there he is one of the leaders of the popular poets. He is the founder of CORDELBRAS, one of the most active organizations of chapbook poets and singers in Brazil.

Raimundo has a very combative spirit and is a great defender of the right of expression of the popular poet. Author of many booklets, he is a true reporter at the popular level. One of his most famous booklets is about the Malvinas War

(between England and Argentina). His productions are sometimes instantaneous. The very day a Brazilian celebrity was condemned for having killed his mistress, even before the newspapers were able to put the fact in print, he was selling his booklet "Doca Street condenado a 15 anos" (Doca Street condemned to 15 years) which he finished in the following way:

*Se tu matas porque amas —
Pensamento pueril,
Pela moral, pela honra,
Argumento imbecil,
Produto do egoísmo.
Só matarei por civismo:
Prá defender o Brasil . . .*

If you kill because you love —
Childish thought
For moral, for honor,
Foolish reasoning,
Product of egoism.
I will only kill for patriotism:
In order to defend Brazil. . .

Franklin Maxado

Franklin is presently the best-known popular poet in Sao Paulo. He was born in Feira de Santa, Bahia, and is, approximately 40 years old. He came to Sao Paulo in the beginning of the Seventies and dedicates himself entirely to *Literatura de Cordel*. He is a good engraver, has published more than 100 booklets, is a good instant-poetry maker (repentista) and declaims very well. He is the leader of *Literatura de Cordel* in Sao Paulo.

Before dedicating himself exclusively to popular poetry, Franklin was active as a lawyer and journalist. He abandoned all to concentrate on being a *cordel* poet. He travels extensively all over Brazil and knows personally almost all the poets, booklet sellers and engravers from north to south. He has also published three books, one about *Literatura de Cordel* in general, one about illustration and one about the future trends of Brazilian popular poetry.

Among the many booklets published by Franklin, some call attention because they are written according to a new and controversial orthography of the Portuguese language. One of these is "Kosmo, o Sobrevivente do Paraizo Atlantiko" (Cosmo, the survivor of the Atlantic Paradise):

*Kem já não ouviu falar
Dum kontinente perdido
Kom uma sivillização
Ke desenvolveu o sentido
De konversar kom estrelas
Em um tempo indefinido.*

Who has never heard
About a lost continent
With a civilization
That developed the senses
Of speaking with the stars
In an indefinite time.

*Nese mundo tinha tudo.
Enerjia não faltava
Akumulada dos astros
Por aparelhos ke filtrava
Os raios pra toda terra
Onde seu povo abitava*

In this world everything existed
There was no lack of energy
Accumulated from the stars
By devices that filtered
The rays to all the earth
Where the people lived.



And the end:

*M-e despeso de vocês
A-xando que fīs um bem
X-amando sua sinsera
A-tensão pro ken convem
D-o kordel astral eu kero
O ke vosé ker tambem.*

I take leave of you
Thinking that I did good
Calling your sincere
Attention for what is needed
From astral cordel I want
What you also wish.

The Urbanizing and Politicizing of Popular Poetry

So far, it should be clear to the reader that *Literatura de Cordel* is far from disappearing as a means of popular communication in Brazil. However, one thing must be pointed out: there has been one great change regarding content during the last year.

In the past, popular poetry constituted practically the only means of information and formation of many people of the interior of Brazil, especially the Northeast. Presently, after what is called the "rural exodus", the former peasants became marginal, slum dwellers, living within and around the big cities of Brazil. Some work as daily laborers in southern farms and, also, some became influential and prosperous citizens. The great social transformations that took place in Brazil during the last 20 years happened from the northeastern migrations. It is a new Brazil which moves from the North to the South, from the bottom to the top and, although there is some prejudice from those who have lived in the cities for a longer period, the tendency is to accept the newcomers, and

government agencies, as well as Church organizations, are doing their best to ease their hard beginning.

These migrants brought with them their culture and, as a banner, their popular poetry, one of the basic expressions of the common Brazilian.

The *Literatura de Cordel*, through the years, underwent a great change, not in its structure but in its essence. Formerly, it bore the messages of peace, tradition and was the only means of leisure and information. Today, it presents, among other aspects, social and political demands not only of the northeasterners and their descendants but of all the inhabitants of Brazil.

This is why the chapbooks continue being important, for the popular poets show by means of it, the real situation of the people.

In April 1983, Brazil and the whole world started to be informed of urban violence and looting in Sao Paulo. The next day, poet Jotabarro published his booklet "Um Arranca Rabo em Sao Paulo" (Riot in Sao Paulo):

*No ano de oitenta e três
Perto do ano dois mil
Na capital de Sao Paulo
No cameco de abril
Af fome obrigou o povo
A compromissar o Brasil.*

In the year eighty three
Near the year two thousand
In the capital of Sao Paulo
In the beginning of April
Hunger forced the people
To compromise Brazil.

*Há mais de dezoito anos
O povo estava amarrado
Nas cordas da ditadura
Sofrendo e angustiado
E havendo a democracia
Cobra o seu atrasado.*

For more than eighteen years
The people were attached
To the ropes of dictatorship
Suffering and frightened
Now, having democracy,
They charge all the delay.

*Os dirigentes da Pátria
Estao sabendo que o povo
Já está mais apertado
Do que pintinho no ovo
E está reivindicando
Pra si um salário novo.*

The leaders of the Fatherland
Know that the people
Are even more pressed
Than a chicken in an egg
And are demanding
New wages for themselves.

*Quem vive de salarinho
Nao vive, está vegetando
Cada dia que se passa
Os preços vao aumentando
E o povo é que se desgraça
Cam a barriga apertando.*

He who lives from a small wage
Doesn't live, he vegetates
Day after day
The prices are increased
The people are disgraced
And the belly is grumbling.

*Aqui só pode viver
A turma dos tubaroes
E quando falam em salário
Comerciantes ladroes
Aumentam todos os preços
Destruindo as ilusoes.*

Here can only live
The gang of sharks
and when one speaks of salary
The thieving merchants
increase all the prices
Destroying illusions.

*E quem vive de esperanças
Na certa morre de fome
Quem ganha salário micho
Uma vez ao dia come
E depois do desemprego
Cria ódio e perde o nome.*

And he who lives in hope
Certainly, will starve
He who receives small wages
Eats only once a day
And after being unemployed
Creates hate and loses his name.

*A pena é que esse ódio
Prejudica ao próprio povo
Por isso é que penso muito
Pra tais coisas nem me movo
Porque é o povo quem paga
O preço velho e novo.*

It is a pity that this hate
Damages people themselves
This is why I think very much
For these things I don't even move
Because it is the people that pay
The old and the new prices.

*Nao é bem aconselhável
Sair para destruir
Pos aberta mais o nó
Em vez de diminuir
A miséria cresce mais
E com outros vao dividir.*

It is not advisable
To go out in order to destroy
For the knot will be even tighter
Instead of diminishing
Misery will grow more
And will divide us.

*Vamos ter calma e pedir
Usando a diplomacia
Meios comunicativos
Que nos prometem euforia
Procurem outras melhorias
Para o pão de cada dia.*

Let's be calm and ask
Using diplomacy
Means of communication
Which promise results
Look for other means
of getting everyday's bread.

*Ma é que só pedir calma
Em nada vai resolver
Palavras nao enchem bucho
Sou obrigado a dizer
Quem é pobre também e gente
E que precisa comer.*

But only asking for calm
Will result into nothing
Words don't fill the belly
I am obliged to say
The poor are also human
And they need to eat.

*Fame tem cara de hereje
E é um espirito imundo
Tem gente que pelo pão
Transforma-se em vagabundo
Rouba, perde a liberdade
E o direito ao mundo.*

Hunger looks like heresy
And is a dirty spirit
There are people who, for bread
Are transformed into bandits
Steal, lose their liberty
And their right to the world.

*Mas falar em certas coisas
Nao é meu objetivo
Vamos deixar pra um lado
O assunto negativo
E falar sobre o quebra-pau
que a gente viu ao vivo.*

But to speak of certain things
Is not my objective
We are going to set aside
This negative subject
And will speak about the fights
Which we saw happening.

*Apareceu uns danados
Que emprego nunca acharam
Fizeram um arranca rabo
Num dia que se arretaram
Sairam doídos ca peste
E de quem tinha roubaram.*

Some damned ones appeared
Who never found a job
They caused a big stirring
One day they got angry
They left like crazy ones
And stole from those who possessed.

Foram nos supermercados
Em busca de alimentos
Enfim, os diabos famintos
Pra arranzar seus sustentos
Largaram-se pelas ruas
Saqueando até jumento.

They went to the supermarkets
Looking for food
Finally, the hungry devils
In order to get some nourishment
Swarmed along the streets
Looting even the donkeys.

Caiu na rede era peixe
Sei que a coisa melhorou
As custas de cacetadas
Mas ninguém se incomodou
Sujeitos a prisoes e mortes
A raça se destinou.

Whatever they found was good
The situation only improved
With the police sticks
But nobody cared much
Subject to prison and death
The looters were destined.

Um foi preso outro correu
Um morreu outro apanhou
Ninguém nao foi processado
Que o governo nao deixou
Cam certeza entendeu
Foi a fome que apertou.

One was arrested, the other ran
One died, another was beaten up
Nobody was charged
The government didn't permit
Certainly they understood
That hunger caused everything.

Bandidos aproveitaram
Entraram no quebra pau
Matando gente e roubando
No mais horrivel sarau
As forças saíram às ruas
Pra castigar o lalau.

Bandits took advantage
Entered the street battles
Killing and robbing people
In a horrible manner
Police forces went for the streets
To punish the mob.

Mas aqueles que a policia
Nao tinha conhecimento
De seus nomes em cartórios
Eram soltos no momento
Só iam às delegacias
Pra dar um depoimento.

But those whom the police
Did not have their names
In their files
Were released right away
They only went to the police court
To fill in declarations.

Depois que o cabra provava
Que era mesmo faminto
Logo, imediatamente,
Seu processo era extinto
Voltava a saquear
Satisfazendo o instinto.

After the person proved
That he was really hungry
At once, immediately,
His charges were cancelled
And he went back to looting
Satisfying his instinct.

Dizem que, quem nao arrisca
Morre velho e nao petisca
Quem tem isca tem peixe
E o peixe só vem com isca
E quem nao tem o recurso
Sua própria vida arrisca.

They say that he who doesn't risk
Lives long but doesn't profit
Who has bait has fish
And fish only comes with bait
And he who doesn't have the means
Risks his own life.

Quem tem força vai à luta
Quem nao tem fica parado
Fica só de assistir
No seu banquinho sentado
Ou faz assim como eu fiz
Só contando o resultado.

He who has strength goes to fight
He who doesn't, stays aside
And only watches
Sitting on his bench
Or does what I do
Only telling the results.

E deveras lamentável
Mas agora fazer o quê
O que se fez já está feito
E o que digo a você
E melhor fazer nas vistas
Que fazer sem ninguém vê.

It is really deplorable
But what must be done now?
What is done, is done
And this is what I tell you
Better act openly
Than hide from everyone.

Quem teve coragem foi
O mais fez igual a mim
Prefiro morrer de fome
Do que fazer coisa assim
Já estou acostumado
A comer barbante e capim.

Those who had courage went
The others did like me
I prefer to starve
Than do such things
I am already accustomed
To eat strings and grass.

Pobre só enche a barriga
Quando morre afogado
O pobre só vai prá frente
Depois que é empurrado
Tembém só sobe na vida
Numa escada trepado.

The poor only fills his belly
When he drowns and dies
The poor only advances
When somebody pushes him
And he only ascends in life
When he climbs a ladder.

E duro se nascer pobre
Pois só nasce pra sofrer
Isso é no mundo inteiro
Pobre nao pode viver
Somente os tubaroes
Têm direito de comer.

It is hard to be born poor
For one is born to suffer
This is all over the world
The poor cannot live
Only the sharks
Have the right to eat.

Tem pobre pra escapar
Dá uma de puxa-saco
Ou cata latas de lixos
Pra de pao pegar um naco
E como diz o palhaço
A vida é mesmo um buraco.

Some poor to escape from their fate
Fawn upon the powerful
Or collects cans among the filth
In order to buy some piece of bread
As the clown says:
Life is like a big hole.

Sou pobre mas lhe confesso
Para honrar o meu nome
Nao puxo saco nem roubo
Prefiro morrer de fome
Quem achar que isso é conselho
Por favor, ligeiro o tome.

I'm poor but I confess:
to honor my name
I don't fawn nor steal
I prefer to starve
Those who think this is advice
Please, take it fast.

Nunca assalte nem roube
Pois isso nao é aceito
Faça daqui daculá
Na sua vida dê jeito
Peça aos homens do poder
Reivindique seu direito.

Never rob nor steal
For this is not acceptable
Do whatever you can
Find a way in your life
Ask the people in power
Demand your right.

Nao entre em quebra-quebra
Que a reputação se estraga
Pois toda pessoa pobre
Uma taça de fel traga
Nao seja contra o povo
Porque o povo é quem paga.

Don't join street battles
You'll spoil your reputation
For all poor people
Have to drink their gall
Don't be against the people
For it's the people who always pay.

*J-á terminei de contar
O povo achou de direito
T-udo na vida tem jeito
A-iguns que estao a penar
B-ote a cuca pra pensar
A-uxilie a consciência
R-estará bom resultado
O povo apavorado
S-ó faz gerar violência.*

I have finished telling
The people thought it right
If life all has its way
Put your head to think
Help your conscience
Solve things patiently
There will be a good result
People's angry actions
Generate only violence.

Gone are the times when the popular poet would only refer to knights and princesses, to the days when animals could speak and to "cangaceiros" who repented. The participation, today, is direct. Although the old chapbooks are still reprinted, read and commented upon, the popular poets, now become citizens of the great metropolis, feel, better than any

other, the great problems which come to everybody. Their voices are heard stronger and stronger. And, although they try to save the spirit of nationalist and human dignity, the popular poets know very well that to overcome the peasant difficulties, much struggle is necessary. And he, as a representative of the weak, must be at the forefront of this struggle. We consider the poet Jotabarro from Sao Paulo and many others in this way. Although preaching moderation, they know that the patience of the people is exhausted.

The poem presented above is, naturally, one individual opinion and must be respected as such. However, a modern popular poet also expresses the general opinion. And this is exactly the social role of an artist — represent the human being of his time. This is why popular poetry in Brazil will continue more and more to deserve our attention.

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