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Dark Satire as Political Criticism in
Dias Gomes' *O Bem-Amado*

Mark J. Nelson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Dark Satire as Political Criticism in Dias Gomes' *O Bem-Amado*

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This thesis examines the Dias Gomes' play turned telenovela, *O Bem-Amado*, to demonstrate the use of satire and dark humor to make political commentary during the tumultuous sociopolitical era in Brazil from the early 1960s through the late-1970s. This era in Brazil is characterized by the overthrow of the leftist democratically elected civilian government by a corporate-backed hardline military dictatorship in the early part of 1964, which lasts for approximately 20 years. The result of this authoritative military rule causes many artists and intellectuals that oppose the dictatorship's repression to flee into exile abroad or adapt to the changing sociopolitical environment. Those who are not forced into exile begin to procure and find new avenues to express their dissatisfaction with the lack of free political expression. Dias Gomes becomes an accomplished playwright during the late 1950s and 1960s and uses the stage to make sociopolitical commentary and criticism. However by the late 1960s his pieces are continually being censored by the regime. At this time the television soap opera has become immensely popular in the country and the writer receives an invitation by an old colleague to begin writing telenovelas. Through this invitation, the playwright continues to make political commentary through his ability to portray the authentic Brazilian social experience. *O Bem-Amado* stands out as one of these authentic Brazilian portrayals of a corrupt Northeast Brazilian mayor that does anything to protect his political image. Dias Gomes employs dark humor and satire to point out the follies of the old politician, while at the same time he critiques corrupt authoritarian governments in general. This satiric humor proves to be the right aesthetic to get by the censors of the then authoritarian military regime and make public his sociopolitical criticisms.

Keywords: satire, dark humor, political criticism, military dictatorship, Alfredo Dias Gomes, *O Bem-Amado*

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Introduction

The works of Dias Gomes contained political messages that challenge the social reality of Brazil. His works attempted to uncover the Brazilian reality through authentic and humoristic portrayals of the country's interior middle class. Throughout the majority of the writer's professional career as a playwright and writer of telenovelas, there existed a form of government-sanctioned artistic repression that assisted in creating some of Dias Gomes' most successful and poetic literary productions. The theater and melodrama produced by the author in the 1960s-1970s during the military dictatorship in Brazil formed one of the most popular examples of resistance during this era. This resistance to the artistic censorship and repression has often created within the world of art and literature new innovations and imaginatively aesthetic ways of sociopolitical criticism of the social elite and the system of power they have erected. Alfredo Bosi comments on this resistance in art and literature when he writes: "No entanto, como sempre acontece, no fazer-se concreto e multiplamente determinado da existência pessoal, fios subterrâneos poderosos amarram as pulsões e os signos, os desejos e as imagens, os projetos políticos e as teorias, as ações e os conceitos" (119). The artist's personal life experiences combined to shape his or her view of the world. These life experiences led Dias Gomes to adopt a free-speech world view that was contrary to the ruling elite and expressed this ideology in his satiric literary works. Leonard Feinberg affirms the following about satirists:

He exaggerates. He understates. He pulls things out of context. He attributes obviously false motives. He stacks the cards in every way he can. The satirist has to exaggerate, to overstate, in order to attract attention, for he is usually expressing and unpopular point of view—unpopular not because it is original but

because it reaffirms inconvenient principles which society pays lip service to but does not practice. (90)

From this ideology, Dias Gomes created satirical pieces that allowed him to apply sociopolitical commentary and criticism of the then government and society. This utilization of satire gave birth to the dark satire in the telenovela *O Bem-Amado* as a medium for political criticism.

Satire & Dark Humor

Satire intends to create and highlight negative portrayals of its individual target. Alvin B. Kernan writes:

Satire has most often been regarded from the same orthodox perspective and treated as a negative literary genre which shows not the action of some essential force—as comedy, tragedy, and epic do—but rather the bumbling confusion which occurs in the absence of good sense and with the loss of traditional values.

(3)

Satire, therefore, always has some element of disturbing subject matter contained within it. Distortion and exaggeration are major components of effective satire. The author uses these distortions to emphasize the negative qualities he criticizes. Feinberg explains, “The satirist distorts in many ways. He minimizes the good qualities of the person or institution that he is attacking and magnifies the bad ones” (90). Writers of satire have a goal in mind of showing their audience the bad, dirty, and corrupt aspects of society. They desire to make the audience uncomfortable while simultaneously entertaining them. Feinberg goes on to say, “Because men prefer to believe what is comforting rather than what is true and because men’s institutions

support them in their illusions, the satirist feels justified in using unfair devices to achieve what he regards as a desirable purpose, exposure of the fake and foolish and evil” (91). The disparaging portrayals of the individuals and institutions in satiric works therefore do not demonstrate the author’s personal negative view of the world, but rather his or her criticism of the horrors of mankind’s ineptness. Kernan elaborates:

The scenes of idiocy and greed which they construct are not the product of misanthropy, but the works of serious artists trying to catch the grotesque shaped toward which the human form and the world are being forced under the weight of stupidity. Their works are not the reflections of a distorting, crazy-house mirror, but rather images of a crazy world reflecting in a “steel glass”, a perfectly ground and uncompromisingly honest mirror. (5)

Although it seems to be a carnivalesque circus of frivolity and laughter, the distorted and humorous aesthetic employed by the satirist contains a serious aspect of criticism. Satirists use the distortion of satire to pass judgment on their target. George Test states, “Whether the target is vice of folly, absurdity or enemies of the state, the satirist is concerned with passing judgment” (28). Judging individuals and institutions makes up the job description of the satirist. The author’s main concern always centers on finding ways to condemn those in society that he or she feels is immoral or amoral. Gilbert Highet remarks, “The second impulse is openly avowed by many satirists. They wish to stigmatize crime or ridicule folly, and thus to aid in diminishing or removing it” (241).

The target or objective of the satirist can be many different individuals or institutions in society. The writer wants to unmask his object of criticism by isolating that one individual or institution and exaggerating its deplorable acts. Governments, politicians, and religion are

especially prone to such satiric attacks. Test affirms, “It has been used to attack governments and to bolster governments, it has been used to attack religion and to defend religion” (28).

Government and religion receive a great amount of satirical criticism, with the former being the most popular target. Politics and governments are most prominent in people’s lives because they affect them in every aspect of public life. Political opinions, beliefs, and criticisms come to the forefront of daily discussion that find their way easily into art and literature.

Matthew Hodgart elaborates more on the relationship between satire and politics:

There is an essential connection between satire and politics in the widest sense: satire is not only the commonest form of political literature, but, insofar as it tries to influence public behavior, it is the most political part of all literature.

Both are felt to be rather discreditable: the word ‘politician’ has an unfavourable sense, and satirists keep apologising for their wicked tongues. (33)

There exists almost an inseparable connection between politics and satirical commentary. One cannot not exist without the other in literature. Hodgart comments, “ Most of the great satirists have in fact been deeply interested in politics, and most have been against the established government of their countries” (33). In order to express their distaste with the ruling political elite of their time, satirists often utilize their works to propagandize and divulge their political objections of contemporary institutions. Usually these political objections are due to a general lack of freedom and expression. Hodgart again explains, “The enemies of satire are tyranny and provincialism, which often go together. Tyrants dislike any form of criticism, because they never know where it will lead to; and in provincial life free criticism is felt to be subversive of good order and decency” (33). The two forces of government control and artistic

expression fundamentally contradict and oppose each other at every turn in history. The long-standing war between the two creates a constant flow of attacks from both sides.

Dias Gomes' satirical attempt to criticize government in Brazil during 1970s came with a tinge of dark humor. Satire and dark humor are wound together by similar objectives. Lisa Colleta describes their relationship. "Dark humor and satire share certain formal characteristics, however, and the deflationary wit and lacerating use of irony and derision of dark humor has much in common with satire" (6). Dark or 'black' humor is also defined by Wes D. Gehring when he states, "At its most fundamental, black humor is a genre of comic irreverence that flippantly attacks what are normally society's most sacredly serious subjects—especially death. In fact, death is both the ultimate black comedy joke and its most persuasive" (1). Joking about death contains an element of blasphemy in most societies. It has an almost religious connotation that can shock an audience and cause laughter simultaneously. Dias Gomes' attempt to ridicule government through satire, combined with the dark humor of a protagonist's obsession with death to obtain political glory, creates the perfect storm for political derision. Both satire and dark humor take center stage in Dias Gomes' 1962 theatrical piece turned 1973 Brazilian telenovela, *O Bem-Amado*.

The Brazilian Telenovela

With the advent and arrival of television in 1950, Brazil had its first taste of the video novela in 1950 with *Sua vida me pertence* written by Walter Forster. The radio still dominated the early years of television in Brazil from 1950-1960 (Távola 70). However, Brazilian television studios were initiating and exploring more and more with the newfound video technology. At first in the early 1950s there were five broadcasting stations in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

They consisted of: TV de Vanguarda, Stúdio 4, TV Comédia, Grande Teatro Tupi, and Câmera Um (62). These were the early pioneers in bringing theater to the TV in Brazil. Actors of the original TV theater productions came from the theater, radio, as well as the film industries.

Távola clarifies that in the beginning of television all three art forms were equal:

Ao mesmo tempo em que o teleteatro e a telenovela desenvolviam-se como técnicas específicas da televisão, o teatro invadia o vídeo. As emissoras de tevê cada vez mais abriram as portas para artistas e diretores de rádio e do teatro, proporcionando-lhes novo campo de trabalho. Ultrapassadas as barreiras entre artista de teatro, rádio e televisão, deu-se o entrosamento saudável entre os profissionais. (71)

The television broadcaster that had the most success during these first few years and for a total of fifteen years from 1952-1967 was TV de Vanguarda from São Paulo (63). TV de Vanguarda put on classic theater pieces from foreign countries as well as national pieces. Távola goes on to explain, “O programa ia ao ar aos domingos e o público o recebia com entusiasmo e interesse. A TV de Vanguarda é obra fundamental na formação da teledramaturgia brasileira” (64). One of the early producers of the pioneer TV station understood the necessity to begin performing pieces from Brazilian texts and authors. He created adaptations that attempted to show the reality of Brazilian society (Távola 65). During these fifteen years of pioneering success, there were three main periods of broadcasting. The first between 1950 and 1960 live transmissions, the videotaped between 1960 and 1962, and the daily chapters between 1963 and 1967 (Távola 65).

The other growing television theater broadcaster, TV Tupi also had success when it aired *Suspeito, O homen sem passado*, and *Sangue na terra* in 1954. The production of *Suspeito* was the first telenovela that dealt with the Brazilian Northeast (Távola 70).

Thirteen years after the birth of television in Brazil came the first telenovela broadcast in the form of daily chapters. This was primarily due to the arrival of the videotape to Brazilian television in 1960. No longer did the director have to put on a live broadcast but could use the more advanced technology to tell a story. It could then also be played for future generations; similar to a book that could be read over and over again. The name of the first telenovela with daily chapters was titled, *2-5499 Ocupado*. It aired from July through September 1963 on São Paulo's TV Excelsior and became a groundbreaking moment for the new genre in Brazilian television (Távola 75-76).

As television grew and became more popular in the beginning of the 1960s, so did the number of families that owned a television set. These statistics show the monumental growth of television set ownership during the early 1960s.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Rio</u>	<u>São Paulo</u>
1960	251,336	324,469
1961	270,669	347,228
1962	356,512	467,970
1963	377,077	469,938
1964	411,400	577,430

(Távola 80)

The viewing audience almost doubled in Brazil's major markets in the years between 1960 and 1964 giving the telenovela something it had never had before: a huge audience.

In the early 1960s, the new director at TV de Vanguarda, Benjamim Cattán, decided to make the telenovela experience a more literary and theatrical one. He wanted the public to understand and appreciate the literary basis for the TV productions. He himself would go out in

front of the cameras before each piece and describe the time period and motives for each piece (Távola 82).

Soon after the first telenovela in the form of daily chapters established itself in 1963, came two others that cemented this new genre, *A moça que veio de longe* in 1964 also by TV Excelsior, and *O direito de nascer* in 1964-1965 by TV Tupi. This last telenovela was the most successful to date, aired for seven months, and set the tone for all future Brazilian telenovelas (Távola 86).

Only after more resources could be brought to the production of the telenovela in Brazil would it continue its progression and truly become a national artistic symbol. The country would see drastic changes politically, economically, and socially that would provide for a more polished product. Távola comments:

A década de 60 na televisão brasileira é conhecida como a da profissionalização, que engendrou a expansão impressionante do novo meio de comunicação. Os avanços tecnológicos foram igualmente fundamentais para a racionalização da produção. O videoteipe, por exemplo, revolucionou as técnicas de produção e permitiu o começo de uma política interestadual de tevê, germe da estratégia de programação nacional dominante. (90)

By the end of the 1960s, the Brazilian telenovela could take its next step towards mass national acceptance and appeal. The framework had been laid and the market existed for the further development of the telenovela in the country. From November 1968 through November 1969 another great milestone in the Brazilian telenovela was aired. *Beto Rockefeller* was broadcasted on TV Tupi and created new themes and spaces for discussion on TV. Távola describes, “Beto Rockefeller, obra de Bráulio Pedroso, conseguiu superar o esticamento

artificial e mudanças de horário e apontou o caminho para a telenovela: a atualização dos temas, o cotidiano da população, impasses e esperanças da sociedade real” (93). Some of these new spaces and themes dealt with everyday social problems of the middle class Brazilians. Lília Junqueira explains, “A ruptura atinge também o tratamento das desigualdades sociais, na medida em que os scripts passam a incorporar as formas nacionais de desigualdade e discriminação” (53). The national sociopolitical criticism began to appear on television with the emergence of *Beto Rockefeller*. The door had been opened for other writers like Dias Gomes to add their societal commentary.

By this time, the television broadcasting station Rede Globo had been leading in the production of telenovelas. However, *Beto Rockefeller* had dominated the ratings during 1969 and changed the way Rede Globo would write and produce their telenovelas into the 1970s. Globo responded with the hugely popular *Irmãos coragem* by Janete Clair in 1969-1970 that had even more Brazilian themes such as the typical Brazilian colloquial speech of the interior as well as indirect allusions to authoritarian politics (94). Junqueira reveals Rede Globo’s prominence and impact:

Em 1966 a Rede Globo passa a exibir telenovelas. Nas décadas seguintes ela se torna um conglomerado de produção cultural e desponta como maior produtora de telenovelas, à medida que vai se tornando mais autônoma com relação às definições internas do texto telenovelístico tais como a criação e autoria. A década de 70 é marcada por um processo de modernização tecnológica, pela estabilização da TV Globo e pela diversidade dramática. (53)

A Rede Globo would begin to dominate Brazilian television programming in the 1970s as resources, technology, and talent converged. The telenovelas became more complex and had

more plots centered on the Brazilian reality instead of stories based on foreign literature and culture. The Brazilian telenovela became such a huge and successful production for Rede Globo that it began to export them to other countries because of their artistic qualities.

Even though the new technology of television had brought theater and literature to the TV set in Brazil, it was often looked down upon in intellectual circles as a lesser art form because of its mass appeal and commercialism. The original technological art form was film from which much of the societal intellectual debate derived. Michèle and Armand Mattelart expand on this:

In Brazil, the television writer is not a second-class citizen among intellectuals and creators, even though the very existence of the Cinema Novo and the debates it set off did set up a hierarchy of audiovisual creation and, like anywhere else in the world, the majority of the intellectual class looked down on the television sector. (85)

Television's appeal to the everyday Brazilian makes it not appear as intellectual as theater or film. The instant technology of pressing a button in your own house and watching what you want changed the way people in Brazil accessed art, literature, and culture. Now the poorer middle class Brazilian had more access to art and literature by way of the TV set. Dias Gomes became uniquely positioned for this cultural transition and was invited to transform his theatrical productions into complex television melodramas that would attempt to educate the masses about Brazil's culture and society. The Mattelarts chronicle this attitude:

It is not surprising, therefore, that part of the Brazilian intellectual class contests the conception of popular art supported by fiction creators like Dias Gomes. The debate is not a new one. Some productions had the particular distinction of giving

it public visibility. This was the case in the 1970's of *Bem-Amado* ("Well Beloved", Dias Gomes), *Irmãos coragem* (*Brothers Courage*, Janete Clair), the second adaptation of *Gabriela* (Dias Gomes, after the novel by Jorge Amado), and *Saramandaia* (Dias Gomes, 1976). (85)

The Brazilian telenovela opened the perfect stage for popular literature. With the rising sociopolitical tensions emerging because of the military dictatorship in power, traditional writers and performers had a new venue available to them while simultaneously others were closing due to government sanctioned censorship. Writers like Dias Gomes and his wife Janete Clair grasped upon and welcomed this new artistic challenge. Literature of the masses had arrived.

Repression of Expression

Much sociopolitical discussion and unrest emerged during the period between March 31, 1964 and December 13, 1968 in Brazil. A hardline military dictatorship had taken control of the civilian democratic government in order to protect the nation from what they described as "subversives" and "terrorists". The authoritarian regime worried about leftist and communist ideologies coming into vogue and "overthrowing" the decent and moral culture of the country. The military coup that occurred in the mid-1960s had its roots in the Cold War sentiment of the era. Countries had to take one of the two sides: United States imperial capitalism or Soviet Union's imperial communism. No country could remain neutral and determine its own sociopolitical destiny.

As part of this war, the Brazilian military dictatorship began a campaign of cultural and artistic censorship and repression. It began slowly during the first four and a half years. Authors, playwrights, filmmakers, and other intellectuals attempted to speak out against the repressive

regime through their works. However most of the leftist political ideologies of these artists and intellectuals permeated into society during this period. Not until the military government's decree in December of 1968 did complete societal censorship begin. Javier Godinho points out, "A censura organizada, definitiva e implacável não chegou com Castello Branco [...] A censura apareceu, despreparada, néscia, arrogante e implicante com o Ato Institucional número cinco e os três ministros militares no exercício da Presidência da República" (21).

The Ato Institucional Número Cinco – AI-5 created an absolute ban on free speech and expression in Brazil. Journalists, authors, radio announcers, and regular citizens alike could not express themselves freely anymore. Godinho paints a clear picture of the state of societal expression in Brazil after December 1968:

Não pôde publicar tal coisa e acabou. A rádio ou estação de televisão que desobedecesse ficava fora do ar, de castigo. O jornal tinha sua edição apreendida antes de chegar às bancas e aos assinantes ou depois disto. Se insistisse, a empresa jornalística perdia sua cota de papel importado. Há mil e uma formas de calar a imprensa para aqueles que detêm os poderes político e econômico. (22)

For intellectuals like Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the future President of Brazil from 1994-2002, repression of expression made it impossible to work or operate within their own country. All of their works now went under the microscope of the country's new censorship agency "Serviço da Censura" (Gaspari 44). They could not bear the persecution and repression and were forced into exile rather than risk the threat of incarceration, torture, and death. Brazil became the second leading exporter of scientists and professors in 1970 (Gaspari 45). From the beginning of the military coup in 1964 until the end of 1968, the university culture in Brazil began to change dramatically. Faculty began to leave for jobs abroad and student enrollment

dwindled. When law AI-5 came in 1968, it brought to an end any real meaningful cultural or intellectual activity at Brazilian universities (Gaspari 45). The filmmaker Glauber Rocha added, “O AI-5 paralisou tudo: Cinema Novo, teatro, música, tropicalismo. A reação da geração sem compromissos com 1964 era natural” (45). The playwright and author of telenovelas like *Beto Rockfeller*, Bráulio Pedroso, also commented:

Ainda se fazem filmes e peças com restos de um antigo hábito de liberdade. Este vazio na verdade é mais uma sensação premonitória, caso prevaleçam os critérios cerceadores da liberdade de expressão. A censura não só prejudica, como pode liquidar uma cultura, como aconteceu em Portugal, com seus quarenta anos de salazarismo. (46)

The writers and intellectuals during this time understood the effects of censorship on their work and on the society and cultural in general. Self-censorship began to emerge as a result of the new repressive law. Professors and students could no longer have free and open discussions about sensitive political topics in the classroom. However, because of this new and authoritarian attitude taken by the military regime, others in the arts and humanities began to explore new forms of expression that would permit them to express themselves freely without the fear of persecution or censorship.

The telenovela during this era was beginning to emerge as a popular art form and entertainment. The censors made a concerted effort to control the themes and messages in these TV melodramas. Mauro P. Porto explains, “Telenovelas of this phase were constrained by the military dictatorship’s repression of political criticism and its efforts to create and reinforce a Brazilian identity conducive to capitalist development” (126). Any form of overt political discussion in a telenovela received the full attention of the official military censors. The desire to

control the Brazilian sociopolitical script encouraged the censors to omit anything that criticized the military and its policies. Porto goes on by saying, “The authoritarian regime’s project of ‘national integration’ is one of the most important points of convergence between the policies of Military General and President Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974) and the expansion and unification of TV Globo’s programming” (126). President Médici’s reign began the most controlling era during the military dictatorship. Brazilian television and telenovelas constituted a key governmental base of cultural propaganda placement. Official government propaganda could be inserted into telenovelas as well as commercial spots. This period between 1964 and 1973 distinguishes itself for its ability to create a sort of national identity built on economic progress and consumerism called the “Milagre econômico”; an era when Brazilian military dictatorship used the international capital of the North American banks to modernize and develop an industrial economy.

During this period, television stations like TV Globo, had begun to bring in professional writers such as Dias Gomes and his wife Janete Clair to write telenovelas. These playwrights brought a sense of intellectual and cultural legitimacy to the telenovela. However, because some of these writers also had leftist ideological roots, they were closely monitored by the military censors. Nahuel Ribke reveals:

Despite the fact that telenovelas were often considered as an alienated entertainment product, instrumental to the military regime’s aim to distract public attention from the harsh political and economic situation, the recently released Censor Archives reveal that telenovelas actually suffered from heavy censorship and close scrutiny. Some of the most acclaimed telenovela writers were closely

watched by the Regime's intelligence agencies, and the telenovelas they wrote for Globo Network were regularly suspected of spreading subversive messages. (148)

The telenovela industry in Brazil became very popular and lucrative. The military regime could not totally shut it down because it would look like an anti-economically progressive thing to do. But it could keep it in line by creating official and non-official mechanisms of censorship. TV Globo dealt with these two types of censorship; official state censorship and self-imposed censorship during the dictatorship. It held negotiations with the official government censors as to what it could and could not include in its telenovelas. It also developed a form of self-censorship over the same period. Mauricio Tintori Piqueira explains this phenomenon:

Essa proposta de renovação foi bem sucedida, apesar das dificuldades impostas pela censura do governo autoritário e pela própria auto-censura imposta pela emissora, que muitas vezes tinha receio de ir muito mais além do que os generais de plantão permitiam ou do que o próprio público poderia aceitar, situações indesejáveis para os executivos da Globo, que tinham consciência de quanto podia ser desastrosa a opção de desagradar tanto o poder quanto a sua audiência. (3)

Censorship instituted a way of life for television programmers and telenovela writers. The constant threat of not being able to express the story the way the writer intended always persisted. Writers had to devise a new way of telling their story and getting their message across without being censored. Dias Gomes and TV Globo discovered that by using humor and satire to tell a story, the political and social message could be covertly passed on to the masses.

The Brazilian telenovela unleashed new material with the debut of *O Bem-Amado* in 1973. The telenovela had clear political leanings that received a lot of attention from the censors. James Cimino reports, "Na verdade, quem mais incomodava era o autor, um comunista que

usava seus textos como forma de combater os desmandos da ditadura. Tanto que quando a novela terminou, em outubro de 1973, teve 37 de seus 178 capítulos retalhados pelos censores” (1). Dias Gomes’ leftist political leaning made him a target for the military censors. They looked at the language that was used to describe the mayor Odorico Paraguassu as “coronel” and the outlaw Zeca Diabo as “Capitão” (2). They were also worried about his subliminal messages and references to other historical political leaders. Cimino states:

A linguagem (e possíveis mensagens subliminares) era o grande temor de censores. Pautados por este vetor, muitas vezes os relatórios da censura cortavam diálogos e palavras que possibilitassem dubiedade. No capítulo 145, por exemplo, um dos vetos se refere à cena em que Odorico se compara a Patrice Lumumba [líder congolês responsável pela independência do Congo em 1960]. (2)

However, Dias Gomes utilized the clever strategy of developing the humorously corrupt caricature of the mayor as both the center piece of criticism of corrupt government as well as criticism for the old and backward ways of the Brazilian interior. This led the military government to believe that Dias Gomes was in favor of progress and good moral standards that the generals proclaimed. However, the writer actually at the same time criticized the military’s lack of progress and good morals. Porto illustrates, “*O Bem-Amado* offered audiences a subtle critique of the military dictatorship, despite the limits imposed by government censorship. The result was a clear vision of Sucupira as a microcosm of the nation, as well as an association between Odorico and the military, which contributed to and weakened the Regime’s legitimacy” (129).

In the end, the repressive military dictatorship’s censorship created an environment that produced a unique artistic expression that succeeded in portraying a message of resistance and

political criticism. Although not an overt expression of criticism of the authoritarian regime, it hid itself behind the aesthetic of dark satire. Dias Gomes, in the middle of abusive repression of expression, caused a nation to laugh at itself and its social and political reality. His history as a playwright, intellectual, and political activist prepared him for this era of censorship.

The following chapters of this thesis will delve into the life experience and career of Dias Gomes pointing out his early political foundations, as well as his tendency to satirize individuals and institutions in his works. It will also finally give examples from *O Bem-Amado* of the dark satirical nature employed by the writer to criticize corrupt governments and politicians.

Chapter 1

Dias Gomes: Political Playwright

Dias Gomes ability to incorporate contemporary issues into aesthetic works of art on stage and on screen define his status as a writer. The sociopolitical issues of the day emerge in a realistic and cultural context to be examined and developed by the writer with satirical humor which enables the playwright to touch on sensitive socio-political themes as well as make political criticisms about the current state of the nation. Many of his political ideologies sprout from his upbringing and the sociopolitical context in which he lived. Living through the horrors of dictatorship in his own country under the Vargas regime from 1937-1945, as well as experiencing the ultimate threat of World War II and the threat of Nazism, had a lasting impact on the young artist. These life forming experiences explain how Dias Gomes' political views shape the satirical criticism employed by the writer in his artistic productions.

Early Life and Professional History

Alfredo de Freitas Dias Gomes was born October 19, 1922, in Salvador, Bahia. He was the younger of two sons born to Plínio Alves Dias Gomes and Alice Ribeiro de Freitas Gomes. His childhood was fraught with an early tragedy as his father died at the age of 44 when Dias Gomes was only three years old (Gomes 15). Throughout his life the writer admits to a fear of a premature death which he attributes to this experience of seeing his father in a casket at such a young age. He had a brother who was 10 years older than he whom he looked up to and idolized as a young child and youth (22-23). Tragically, his brother Guilherme, a medical doctor who clandestinely desired a career as a writer and novelist, died mysteriously at the age of 30. From

his example, Dias Gomes took an interest for writing and performing. The writer explains, “Talvez na ânsia de provar que merecia ter nascido, comecei a escrever muito cedo, aos 9 para 10 anos de idade. No início, era menos vocação do que imitação: meu irmão, Guilherme, embora estudando medicina por determinação paterna, era poeta, contista, romancista” (Gomes 22).

The young Dias Gomes studied his first years of school at the Ginásio Ipiranga in Salvador, Bahia, where the famous poet Castro Alves once attended, but he soon moved to Rio de Janeiro to accompany his brother who had just finished medical school and was entering the army as a medical officer. In Rio de Janeiro, Dias Gomes enrolled at the Ginásio Vera Cruz where he studied until the fourth grade and at this school the young student received his first lesson in politics. He comments:

O Vera Cruz era um educandário pretensamente moderno, que buscava ser eficiente, em que pesem as ideias pró-fascistas de um de seus donos, filiado à Ação Integralista Brasileira, liderada por Plínio Salgado, xérox nativa de Hitler. Na própria escola havia uma facção da juventude dessa mesma agremiação, que desfilava de camisas verdes nas paradas colegiais que antecederiam as comemorações do Sete de Setembro, lançando seus “anauês”, de braço estendido, na saudação fascista. Logo que ingressei no colégio recebi pressões para aderir aos “galinhas verdes”, uma maneira de ficar bem-visto pela direção da escola, segundo me explicaram. Consultei meu irmão, ele quase me agrediu: “Nunca! São fascistas!” (Gomes 36)

At the age of eight or nine, Dias Gomes discovered political ideologies and felt the pressure to join the youth fascist faction at his school. Although he did not fully comprehend the implications of this movement, he knew that his brother strongly disapproved of it, and that it

was probably something he should avoid. This encounter would begin to shape the political views of the author (Gomes 36).

At the age of fifteen, still an adolescent, Dias Gomes wrote his first theater piece that he debuts publicly at a Sunday family dinner. This play entitled, *A comédia dos moralistas*, eventually won him the first prize in a national playwright competition for the best new play of the year in 1937. This play also demonstrates the playwright's early inclination to use a humorous aesthetic to criticize the society elite who pretended to be good upstanding citizens but were in actuality immoral hypocrites (Gomes 39).

After a failed attempt to survive financially by joining the military academy, Dias Gomes returned to Rio de Janeiro to find out that the German Nazis had begun World War II in Europe. By this time the seventeen year-old writer became more politically aware, as he describes:

Os ventos totalitários já sopravam no Brasil desde 37, quando Getúlio, num golpe de Estado bem articulado, dissolveu o Congresso, fundou o Estado Novo e tornou-se ditador. Sua simpatia pela aliança que se formou entre Roma e Berlim, entre Hitler e Mussolini, à qual viria juntar-se mais tarde pelo Imperador Hiroito, do Japão, era indisfarçável. Copiando os métodos de Goebels, o DIP, Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda, controlava a imprensa e o rádio, censurava o teatro e o cinema, lançava por todo o país uma maciça campanha de cartazes anticomunistas e forjava uma imagen simpática do ditador que o povo, pouco esclarecido, engolia com facilidade. (Gomes 51)

The start of World War II was a shock to many people in the world. However, dictators and authoritarianism were not something Brazilian society was immune to. The dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas had begun just two years before the second Great War and the same fascist

tendencies of the Hitler and Mussolini regimes could be seen in the Estado Novo of Vargas. At the time Dias Gomes states that he was not well informed about what exactly was going on politically, but he would learn that repression, torture, and censorship were all integral parts of these types of authoritarian regimes.

As the Second World War unfolded far away in Europe, the young playwright became more disillusioned with the regime of Vargas and its false political promises to help those in need. Evermore, certain that his path in life was to write theater productions, he wrote as much as he could but he still had bills to pay. He turned to the radio in the early 1940s. His first job on the radio was writing short 15 minute radio theater programs. He began a series entitled, “As Grandes Batalhas da História”, of which only one episode aired on the radio because his producer ended up collecting the advertising earnings and quitting the station. Even though the young writer never received a dime for his efforts at Radio Theater, he had begun to develop his style of incorporating his intellectual and political ideas into his artistic productions (Gomes 53).

By 1942, Dias Gomes had joined a pro-Allied Forces student movement that had taken to the streets of Rio de Janeiro to express their support of the tight roping Vargas and Brazil to enter the war against Hitler and Nazi Germany. On one afternoon, he was with a large congregation of students at the Municipal Theater and was attacked by Vargas’ troops with tear gas that exploded right next to his head. The rebel without a cause, as he states, spent the rest of the day trying to wash out the chemicals from his eyes (Gomes 60). The young playwright continued to write plays and got his first real break when he met Henrique Pongetti, who at the time was a prominent writer of comedic theater productions. Through Pongetti, Dias Gomes was introduced to Jayme Costa, an actor and businessman who told the young playwright that he liked his comedic play *Ludovico* about an eighteen year old marrying a 70 year-old, but the actor thought

the leading lady needed more development. The play was never performed. The writer's next play called *Amanhã será outro dia* was explicitly anti-nazi, about a French politician that had moved his whole family to Brazil after the fall of Paris, refusing to collaborate with the Nazi occupiers. Dias Gomes also presented this piece to Costa to read. Being that Costa was a Getúlio Vargas fanatic, he had a negative reaction to the script. Because Brazil had not yet joined the war on either side, the actor was hesitant to go on stage with such a production. Jayme Costa knew, however, that the young playwright had talent and contracted Dias Gomes to write a new piece for the actor. The new piece, *Pé-de-cabra* was written in under a month and was a satire of Joracy Camargo's play called, *Deus lhe pague*. Costa's reaction was similar to his former, "Jayme ficou preocupado com o sentido da peça que lhe pareceu subversivo. Achou que talvez não fosse aprovada pelo DIP, o famigerado Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda getulista que censurava os espetáculos" (Gomes 63).

The rejection from Jayme Costa did not deter the young activist writer as it gave him more confidence in his ability to be creative and provocative. He decided to take his first production that had been rejected by Costa, *Amanhã será outro dia* to Procópio Ferreira, the most renowned stage actor of the era. Procópio Ferreira ended up thinking it was too risky to put on stage as well, but did think that *Pé-de-cabra* was worth guaranteeing a 30-day showing. The young playwright was ecstatic because in those days a fifteen-day run was considered a success production (Gomes 63-65). The play was a success, even though it only lasted a week in the theaters before being shut down by the Estado Novo's DIP for being too Marxist. Dias Gomes reflects on his first run-in with censorship:

Juro por Deus que até então não havia lido uma só linha de Marx ou de qualquer discípulo seu. (Veio daí o meu interesse posterior pelo marxismo). Não foi fácil

absorver essa primeira estocada vibrada contra mim pela censura. Muitas outras eu absorveria mais tarde. Senti-me, pela primeira vez, no papel do cidadão indefeso diante do poder castrador do Estado, descobrindo o quanto era importante uma expressão denominada liberdade de pensamento e todo o significado de lutar por ela. (Gomes 67)

Although Dias Gomes was not a card-carrying member of the Brazilian Communist Party and having never read any Marxist literature, at the young age of twenty he already demonstrated leftist revolutionary political ideas that he incorporated into his plays. His political voice began to emerge in his productions just as his thoughts came into his head. He used his satiric plays to criticize those policies of the Estado Novo in which he was in disagreement. Being young and a little naïve, the playwright was hurt and saddened at being censored. At the same time he became convinced and even more committed that what was most important was to fight for the freedom of thought and expression in his art. He would have to find more creative ways to express his political voice in the future.

After having some success with playwriting together with Prócopio Ferreira, and with a bit of hesitation but needing the financial support, Dias Gomes left Rio de Janeiro to accept an offer to work for the radio station Rádio Pan-Americana in São Paulo (Gomes 88). In 1944 the radio station was sold to a pro-Vargas group that had heard from the government that the station was a nest of communists. This group sent two Vargas operatives to sit in and monitor everything that went on at the studio (96). From these two political brutes, Dias Gomes received a physical beating after he denounced their brutal tactics live on air as they beat his friend in another room of the studio. The writer joined the Brazilian Communist Party later that year in 1944 and continued to work writing radio novelas e other productions at Emissoras Associadas.

While there, he met Janete Clair who would later become his first wife and conducted a radio program called *A vida das palavras*. Each week he would take a word from the dictionary and design a piece for that show around that word. Since there was a conference being held for Inter-American Peace and Security in the hotel Quitandinha, he chose the word *quitanda*. The playwright explains his motive:

Nessa semana escolhi, bem a propósito, a palavra “quintanda”, e concebi uma sátira política em que cada país era representado por uma fruta: os Estados Unidos a maçã, a *big apple*, o Brasil, o abacaxi, a Argentina, a uva (a alusão à uva Argentina, muito consumida aqui àquela época e também a Eva Perón, presente à conferência), etc., etc. E lançando mão dessas metáforas procurei levar ao ridículo e desmascarar a conferência. (Gomes 108)

Now well into his Marxist revolutionary political ideology at the beginning of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, Dias Gomes seized the opportunity to use his art as a writer to satirize the position of the United States as the protector of the Americas. He utilized the different fruits to represent metaphorically the major regional political players of the United States, Brazil, and Argentina. Because of this episode, his employment was terminated because the American Consul in São Paulo was listening to the program and complained to the radio stations' owner. He quickly found work at another radio station in São Paulo called Rádio América where his wife-to-be Janete Clair joined him. The two soon learned that she was pregnant and decided to marry and quickly move back to Rio de Janeiro to continue Dias Gomes work as a radio producer and writer, but more importantly where he returned to his true calling in life as a playwright.

Theater, Politics, Criticism

The early part of the 1950s saw the playwright continuing to involve himself more with the Brazilian Communist Party and even taking a pilgrimage to Moscow in the Soviet Union for a May Day celebration. This excursion ended up costing him both politically and financially as the photograph of him laying flowers at the tomb of Vladimir Lenin eventually appeared in the Brazilian newspapers a few days later. This led to his prompt firing due to the political pressure put on the owners of the radio station (Gomes 145).

Although blacklisted, he had some friends who found him work again writing magazine articles and he started to work using the names of his wife Janete Clair and friends Moisés Weltman and Paulo de Oliveira as pseudonyms. Eventually Dias Gomes started to write for TV Tupi in Rio de Janeiro doing television theater in the early days of TV during the mid-1950s. His productions were successful enough that he was able to get more work doing programs for Standard Propaganda which possessed the account for Kibon ice cream. This was work that he described as a means of survival until he could return to his love of writing plays. He knew that writing marketing pieces and slogans was not what he should be doing ultimately.

The young communist writer began to become disillusioned with the party after traveling to the Soviet Union and witnessing for himself that his idea of a Marxist utopia was far from what it was in reality. He noticed that there was no freedom of thought or expression in the socialist paradise he visited. When he learned that the “Father” Stalin was a brutal authoritarian murderer also gave the young principled intellectual cause to initiate a reexamining of his personal and political ideals. The playwright did not want to be a mere sheep in lockstep with the communist party and he often expressed these sentiments and doubts with other more orthodox

members. He was beginning to discover his own political ideology that did not always go along with other leftist thinkers of his time (Gomes 162).

During the next four to five years the writer set in motion the next phase of his career as a playwright. While working in the burgeoning Brazilian television industry, he started to write plays seriously once more. His first grand success came in 1959 with *O pagador de promessas*. This piece he had been writing for months during 1958-1959 and was critically acclaimed; it won many awards and was put on in various theater houses throughout Brazil, Europe, and the United States. Dias Gomes tried to write a piece that was authentically Brazilian with *Pagador*. It was a story based in the Brazilian Northeast where the author was born, and it revolved around the story of a man from the rural interior that makes a promise to carry a wooden cross to a church named Santa Barbara in Salvador, Bahia. To Dias Gomes, the main character represented a true faith-filled Brazilian who wanted to live his simple life and be a true to his principles and beliefs.

O pagador de promessas nasceu, principalmente, dessa consciência que tenho de ser explorado e impotente para fazer uso da liberdade que, em princípio, me é concedida. Da luta que travo com a sociedade quando desejo fazer valer o meu direito de escolha para seguir o meu próprio caminho e não aquele que ela me impõe. (Gomes 180)

This was the playwright's way incorporating authentic elements of Brazilian society but also of questioning societal norms and changes that were taking place at that time. Plábio Marcos Martins Desidério comments that, "Zé-do-Burro poderá ser também compreendido como o representante do povo, já que se percebe em Dias Gomes o entendimento que não é pela classe

proletária que virá a transformação, mas pelo próprio povo e que resistirá as forças dominantes” (15).

Desidério continues, “Nessas obras como *O pagador de promessas*, Dias Gomes incorporou elementos da realidade social brasileira em transformação no período conhecido como a “nova República”, que foi consolidada pós-governo militar (5). This reality that the writer elaborated in *Pagador* was the continual struggle between the old rural Brazil and the new urban developing one. Under this umbrella of conflicting ideas of antiquity and modernity, Dias Gomes found ways to talk about the problems within society and those in power and control within it. Desidério speaks to this:

A obra procurou apontar, como também em outras obras de sua autoria, a desigualdade em um Brasil que se modernizava e um que permanece tradicional, a distância entre os poderosos, representados nas autoridades religiosas e policiais, por um lado e do outro lado, o povo, sempre explorado, mas que em vários momentos procurava resistir, como retratado no enredo da obra. (2)

This exploitation by the powerful against the weaker masses is clear in *Pagador*. The priest represents the societal power that will not permit the simple man to fulfill his destiny and live the life he has chosen to live. The few powerful in the society make the rules and exempt themselves from having to comply with them, making the corruption of power and authority an obstacle for the principled common man to overcome. Desidério affirms that his social and political criticism was aimed at the social inequality as well as the political corruption he witnessed in Brazilian society (4). The political problems in the society are often represented in Dias Gomes plays in a metaphoric and humorous fashion.

A obra *O berço do herói* escrita também na década 60, bem como *O Bem-Amado*, possui elementos cômicos e de farseamento com muitas características do deboche. Esses elementos são percebidos em obras como *O Bem-Amado*, quando Dias Gomes utiliza metáforas e características cômicas para identificar questões da realidade brasileira. (9)

The playwright employed the satiric and humorous aesthetic to mask his socio-political critique of the societal problems. His use of metaphors to represent those in authority exemplified by corrupt abusers of that power exaggerated to an absurd level and the naïve or exploited exemplified the common citizen. In this fashion the audience could identify their societal leaders as culprits.

Between 1959 and 1960 Dias Gomes wrote *A invasão* which related a story about an abandoned building in Rio de Janeiro that was inhabited by emigrants from Brazil's northeast (Gomes 181). Again the play was a metaphor for Brazil's societal state in the early 1960's and how the lower classes that had nothing could take back their country and make reforms to help those less fortunate have the basic necessities of life. This was the hope of those on the intellectual left like Dias Gomes that the masses would become politically literate and continue to come together and fight the perceived imperialism of the United States.

The playwright's next piece came a year later in 1961 with *A revolução dos beatos*. This play was a transparently leftist piece that ended in a proposition of entering into an armed struggle (Gomes 185). Dias Gomes would follow this with *O Bem-Amado* in 1962. The plot had to do with a Northeastern mayor who promised to build and inaugurate a new cemetery for his small coastal city. It was based on a factual account of a mayor in the state of Espírito Santo and was a political satire that was never brought to production until 1969. Later on it was modified

for television and became an immense hit for the writer that will be discussed in more detail later on.

Dias Gomes next production was entitled *O berço do herói* and was written in 1963 just a year before the military coup that overthrew President João Goulart. The play had never been performed before the military coup and was hidden by the writer's editor so it would not be destroyed. It went through the censor process and had been approved to go live in 1965 when, at the last minute, it was banned from being performed for being "pornographic" and "subversive" (Gomes 216-20). Feeling the same way he had twenty years earlier during the Vargas dictatorship, Dias Gomes wrote next *O santo inquerito*. "Dias Gomes recorre à produção desta obra, que narra a história de uma jovem vítima da Inquisição no século XVIII, e que merece destaque dentre os heróis puros e libertários criados pelo autor" (Fabião 14). This play is once again a story of the powerful societal forces (the church) and the powerless (a common Jewish girl). The piece had definite metaphoric references to the current military regime in Brazil. Fabião elaborates on these references in the play.

O texto foi escrito numa época de violenta repressão social, sob a bandeira da ditadura militar. A economia, a política, a cultura e a religião do país estavam então envoltas em uma atmosfera de medo, de cerceamento da liberdade. A sociedade precisava ser silenciada, respeitar os ditames do Estado. Dias Gomes, como tantos outros artistas, tinha de configurar sua obra de modo que ela expressasse 'a verdade' da época, mas que pudesse, sobretudo, fazê-lo de modo imperceptível aos olhos atentos do regime ditatorial. (14-15)

Dias Gomes used the historical event of the Inquisition to parallel what he perceived to be similarly occurring over two hundred years later in his own country. The same corruption of

power that was embraced by the church in the eighteenth century was now being indulged by the military dictatorship and the societal elite in the twentieth century. By demonstrating the unjust and inequitable treatment of Branca Dias in his play he was mirroring and criticizing the established order of his era.

In 1968 the playwright also wrote *O túnel*, which was a metaphor for the state of the country from the time the military dictatorship began in 1964 until then in 1968. The piece was short and had only two scenes, but it was a potent observation and criticism of the different actors in Brazilian society during those four years. Four main characters that represented different classes or viewpoints of Brazilian society. They are brought together during a traffic stoppage in a tunnel. The plot turns on their different approaches to that stoppage (Silva 2). The tunnel is a metaphor for Brazil and the progress it had been making up until the point that the traffic (which had been moving swiftly) promptly came to a screeching halt. According to Dias Gomes, Brazil was heading towards progress and reform until the military-led coup of 1964. His leftist ideologies told him that society would continue to progress until it reached a social equity and form of utopia. That progress had been interrupted by international corporate forces that he attempted to highlight with his productions.

TV Globo and Telenovelas

In 1969, Dias Gomes was finding it more difficult to write the types of plays he wanted to write. In the face of new censorship laws introduced the year before, the playwright was not able to have any of his new productions performed. His financial situation was insecure because of this, and he needed to find some way to become literarily productive. Dias Gomes relates his feelings:

Tinha várias peças proibidas, e as que ainda não estavam sê-lo-iam certamente. Não me seria permitido prosseguir com minhas experiências teatrais, pois minha dramaturgia vivia na do questionamento da realidade brasileira, e essa realidade era banida dos palcos, considerada subversiva em si mesma pelo regime militar. O “modelo” dramaturgicó que viria a ser imposto pela ditadura nos anos 70 me excluiria completamente. (Gomes 255)

The effects of the censorship tightening up in Brazil at the end of the 1960s, essentially pushed out any writers who would not comply with the form of censorship being employed by the military regime. Dias Gomes felt he could not operate as a playwright under such oppressive tactics. He would have to find a new arena to express his ideas himself in the public and would find that new arena in the form of television soap operas.

An old friend named José Bonifácio de Oliveira Sobrinho, known affectionately as “Boni,” asked the struggling writer to come work for him at TV Globo (Gomes 250). His wife Janete Clair was already writing soap opera at the TV station for two years, and it was an intriguing proposal for the polemic writer. Although greatly criticized by the academic and literary elite of the day that considered television too commercial and colloquial, the playwright decided to take the proposal as a challenge. He desired to create a new type of “literature for the masses”. Denise Rollemberg explains, “Aí, seu trabalho tornou-se conhecido do grande público, num momento em que os meios de comunicação e, em particular a televisão, alcançavam a maior parte do território nacional e os patamares de audiência eram contabilizados em novas ordens de grandezas (2). With the power of the technology and the visual effects of television, Dias Gomes could reach a greater audience with his “subversive ideologies” (Gomes 255-56). Desidério adds, “No entanto, por ser dramaturgo, que escrevia peças somente para o teatro, Dias Gomes percebe

nesses veículos uma excelente oportunidade para ampliar o alcance de seus trabalhos e consegue utilizá-los para continuar sua produção dramaturgica e seu posicionamento crítico (10).

His first telenovela was not actually his but had been started by an outgoing Cuban writer named Glória Magadan. Boni had asked him to finish it with the option of using a pseudonym which the writer accepted as Stela Canderón. It was called *A ponte dos suspiros* and was more of a melodramatic production with romantic characters. However the author was able to insert a subtle criticism surrounding the overthrow of the ex-president João Goulart that began the military dictatorship in 1964 (Gomes 258).

As the playwright progressed as a writer of telenovelas, he began to use more metaphors and criticism in his stories. His 1974 telenovela entitled *O espigão* was a prime example of these metaphors used for socio-political criticism. The story was based around an elite businessman who built hotels. The only problem was that to build his monstrous edifices he would throw out residents, tearing down the old houses and buildings in the way of economic “progress”. The obvious metaphor is to the wealthy, mean capitalist portrayed as the villain while those in opposition to his money-making ambitions as the innocent common folk (Gomes 278).

Rolleberg states:

O empresário, capitalista inescrupuloso, é o vilão desastrado. As vítimas são as árvores no jardim da mansão, que representam a parte boa do ser humano, ou seja, a possibilidade de uma vida urbana humana, natural ou criativa, em oposição à ambição agressiva, capitalista ou destrutiva. (10)

The criticism in this telenovela is not only a Marxist critique of capitalism and its evils of disregard for human dignity, but also touches on for the first time in Brazilian TV history the question of the environment and ecological problems caused by the destruction of the natural

environment (Gomes 279). The hotel baron Lauro Fontana finally reaches his goal of acquiring the land to build his “Fontana Sky”. However, the innocent young worker that came from the Northeast to Rio to find work, became a defender of the trees in the city. He dies when he is shot attempting to calm the two opposing sides in the conflict. The portrayal of unscrupulous businessmen, together with the image of the innocent and struggling worker creates the desired political criticism.

Another Dias Gomes’ telenovela from the 1970’s that demonstrated his knack for socio-political criticism was *Saramandaia* in 1976. In this telenovela, again situated in the northeastern state of Bahia, the writer uses a more satirical approach in his criticism of society. He employs grotesque realism to stun the audience and at the same time use the grotesque realism of the characters to criticize the societal atmosphere. Igor Sacramento observes:

Entre as personagens fantásticas, vale destacar a emblemática cena em que Dona Redonda explode de tanto comer. Há aqui o uso explícito do realismo grotesco. A explosão representa a supremacia do corpo, mas um corpo pantagruélico que se expande, se abre e se projeta para fora, cujas margens e limites são subvertidos pelo excesso. (11)

Dona Redonda’s sudden demise by her body exploding demonstrates the negative effects of over consumption. The societal message that was prevalent during the early and mid-1970s under the Brazilian military dictatorship was that everything was great economically, and that Brazil was “O país do futuro”. This encourages economic activity as the masses felt positively about their own economic futures causing much consumption in the society. This critique of the consumption society by Dias Gomes is made humorous through the use of grotesque satire and the absurd notion that a person could explode from overeating.

Dias Gomes utilized authentic Brazilian social life in his works, giving the audience a familiar reference point, in order to criticize the sociopolitical establishments of his day.

Desidério notes:

Dias Gomes procurou adaptar suas peças à televisão e continuou com sua crítica social. Novelas como *O Bem Amado* (1973) e *Roque Santeiro* (adaptação de *O Berço do Herói*) (1985) procuravam criticar o poder dos “coronéis” e *O Espigão* (1974) a especulação imobiliária e tematizava a questão do meio ambiente. (11-12)

Dias Gomes’ literary criticism stems from his life experiences that molded his political views and ideology. He witnessed authoritarian regimes and tactics early on as a young boy and those experiences greatly influenced his writing style and the subject matter that he would touch on during his career. The act of writing for Dias Gomes was the same whether it be a radio show, theater piece, or soap opera script. The writer’s uncanny ability to incorporate the reality of Brazilian society, with satirical and political elements, made his works stand out as creative and original pieces of art. The one constant in all of his works was his desire to question and criticize the sociopolitical norms of his day and he successfully accomplished this with the popular telenovela, *O Bem-Amado*.

Chapter 2

Sucupira's Satirical Subversion

The telenovela *O Bem-Amado* bases itself in the fictional Northeast Brazilian town of Sucupira. Sucupira's mayoral election will soon take place and the protagonist, Odorico Paragussu, attempts to triumph over his political enemies by promising to build a new cemetery in the town. He ultimately triumphs in the mayoral election and continues on with his promise to build a new cemetery for the city. The plot sets itself around this mayor's attempts to inaugurate his newly built cemetery. However, it suddenly becomes difficult to find a deceased person in Sucupira, which leads to a series of wild and humorous attempts by the mayor to have someone die. Many literary critics have rightfully asserted that this telenovela has metaphorical roots, comparing the fictitious town of Sucupira with Brazil as a whole. However the dark satirical aesthetic of the production has been largely neglected. The dark satire of *O Bem-Amado* demonstrates a clever and subversive approach to political commentary. The events that transpire during this telenovela exemplify the use of dark humor employed by Dias Gomes to criticize politicians' self-serving and egotistical behaviors. Then simultaneously contrasting these politically corrupt attitudes with rational and innocent ones. Each character in the telenovela plays a distinct role in helping to depict politicians in a negative fashion.

Political Characters

The political characters in the telenovela display amoral and corrupt motives. The protagonist, Mayor Odorico Paraguassu, epitomizes the egotistical, narcissistic, and corrupt politician. The need to be adored and respected radiates in Paulo Gracindo's portrayal of this out-of-control mayor. His character sets the stage for the absurd and the grotesque to be highlighted

in such a way that he becomes a caricature. The mayor's character exaggerates the corruption and immorality of a self-serving politician. His use of linguistic modifications by creating new words by adding extraneous syllables on to already existing ones, in an attempt to appear educated and stately, exemplifies this exaggeration. Priscila Paschoalino analyzes his character:

Odorico Paraguaçu representa a classe dominante, inescrupulosa e corrupta, da política brasileira. Sua voz, plurissignificativa, representa o discurso vazio e retórico dos políticos que buscam manter o poder, a legitimação, a qualquer custo.

O prefeito de Sucupira, cidadezinha do litoral baiano, não se preocupa em criar uma consciência de si mesmo, e muito menos do mundo que o cerca.

Determinado a realizar suas ideias, constrói sua verdade e faz com que o mundo se apresente de maneira particular. A ideia domina o herói de Sucupira, e este, cego, não faz autocríticas, atuando sempre de acordo com seus preceitos morais.

(1)

The satirical aesthetic created by Dias Gomes through the unscrupulous character Odorico builds the foundation for political criticism and creates a craziness that demonstrates the dark and morbid nature of Paraguassu's thought process. By highlighting the amoral thoughts and actions of the mayor Odorico, the author develops a humorous, yet dark aesthetic that points out the nature of the vain, power-grabbing, charlatan of Sucupira.

Dias Gomes' development of the clownish mayor's follies runs throughout the production. Odorico's moral fiber (or lack thereof) becomes evident when confronted with the possibility of fathering an out-of-wedlock child with one of his political admirers. In order to survive politically he must devise a clever plan to relinquish any responsibility or face public humiliation. He insists on attempting to have romantic encounters with anyone who will accept

his advances. The protagonist's almost guilt-free attitude demonstrates a lack of conscience. Odorico's attitude toward human life gives an insight into the dark humor in Dias Gomes' criticism of corrupt politicians. The mayor's campaign slogan reads: "Vote no homem sério, e ganhe um cemitério!" The morbid absurdity of a mayoral candidate using the death of his constituents to get their vote underscores the extent of his moral failure! The citizens unwittingly choose death over life by voting for Paraguassu. Once more an exaggerated case using dark satire to criticize politically self-centered actions that only benefit the politician and not the citizenry.

Odorico desires political glory and will do anything in his power to obtain it. He attempts to buy off his political opposition with his wealth and prestige. When this does not work for him, he uses more draconian measures to silence the opposition. Destroying the town newspaper or shutting down the medical clinic highlight the actions of a possessed figure intent on winning at all costs, even if those costs are people's lives.

The mayor's immoral stance on every issue expands and grows throughout the story. He attempts to convince one of the characters, Zelão das Asas, to jump from the church steeple. While he is on top of the church, Odorico tells the crowd of on-lookers that Zelão can jump whenever he desires after the election because then he will have the privilege of being buried in his new hometown cemetery. The protagonist opposes Zelão's jumping at that moment and campaigns for him to jump after the election which he hopes to win, and he attempts to show the mayor as a person who has corrupted moral judgment. Another woman he persuades to go swimming in dangerous ocean waters, cajoling yet another man to try to commit suicide by shooting himself in the head. When the man fails to kill himself, the mayor becomes angry and yells at him saying he's a no good deceiver of the good faith of the people. The backward logic

and unreasonable exaggeration of the protagonist's immoral character highlights the dark satirical aesthetic employed here by Dias Gomes to mock the negative response by Odorico that the man is still alive.

The complete obsession with someone dying in order to inaugurate his beloved cemetery turns the unlikely hero to try to rekindle a long-running family feud in the city. He desires that the two sides have a shootout so someone will get shot and die.

The politically shrewd nature of Odorico Paraguassu created by Dias Gomes leads to the protagonist's fascination with and pleasure of death or the possibility thereof. When confronted with the possibility of multiple deaths due to the family's gun battle, he exclaims: "Você está tentando me animar?" In the play one tourist is badly wounded and sent away to the capital city for treatment and this infuriates the mayor:

Odorico – Levou pra morrer lá em Salvador?

Vigário – Eu não disse que fosse para morrer. Foi para ser operado.

Odorico – Esse serviço do Senhor Joarez Leão. Naturalmente ele viu que esse veranista ia botar o paletó e mais que de pressa botou ele para Salvador para morrer longe daqui! O senhor me desculpa usar esse palavrão mas esse homem é o demônio!

Vigário – O senhor está dizendo isso pensando na inauguração do cemitério, é?

Odorico – Eu posso pensar em outra coisa? O senhor não sente o meu problema?

Vigário – Sinto claro, mas é que...

Odorico – Não há mas. Não pode haver mas, nem entretanto, nem obstante. O cemitério é uma obra cristã. O senhor deveria estar interessado nela.

Vigário – Eu estou. Mas não vamos desejar uma morte só para Inauguar o cemitério. Isso seria anti-cristão!

(Chap. 87)

The mayor becomes so obsessed with death that he begins to rationalize causing the death of one of his citizens as a worthy Christian act and attempting to save a life of the tourist as an evil act of betrayal by his political enemies.

Days after Odorico Paraguassu wins the Mayoral election by a few votes over Lulú Gouveia, construction on the promised, new cemetery commences. This scene between Odorico and his secretary Dirceu Borboleta exhibits the morbidly absurd psychology of the mayor:

Odorico – Agora quero ver a cara de Neco Pedreira, Lulu Gouveia, Ana Medrado e companhia. Eles que dizem que sou um oportunista, um vigarista, um demagogista.

Dirceu - Quanto tempo que o senhor acha que vai levar para a inauguração, hein?

Odorico – Acho que dentro de um mês. Como primeiro enterro, será custiado pela municipalidade.

Dirceu - Vai ser um enterrão, não vai?

Odorico – Banda de música, marcha fúnebre.

Dirceu - Ah...então eu tenho que falar com o Mestre Sabiá, não é? Para saber se ele sabe tocar a marcha fúnebre.

Odorico – É, fala com ele hoje mesmo. Para ele começar a ensaiar a marcha fúnebre. (Chap. 9)

Odorico starts talking to Dirceu about how great the first burial will be and that they will be able to inaugurate the cemetery with great festivities and music. These preparations for burial are truly preparations for political glory for the mayor. The absurd exaggeration of Odorico's joy about burying someone once more helps to highlight the brazen dark nature of this politician.

Finally when the mayor does have a deceased person in his town, the body ends up escaping, and all of Odorico's vain attempts to keep it in Sucupira for burial fail. A soldier gets shot and dies while in a gun battle with the outlaw Zeca Diabo. This makes Odorico content and he now has an honorable dead man to inaugurate the cemetery. However, to his disgust the soldier's body is sent back to the capital Salvador due to Army protocol. He attempts to get the dead soldier returned on the next ship but does not receive the favor from his political ally.

Paranoia begins to set in on Odorico Paraguassu. He starts to see enemies all around him and intensifies his efforts to have someone die in his city. José Dias explains:

Odorico chegou à conclusão de que todos conspiravam contra ele. A cidade inteira. Era uma vasta conspirata maquiavelista, talvez com ramificações nacionais e internacionais, que estava em curso para apeá-lo da Prefeitura de Sucupira, com interesses escusos, quiçá antipatrióticos. E ele precisava dismantelar essa conspiração. (68)

The death-crazed mayor will stop at nothing to get what he desires. An epidemic of typhoid fever breaks out in the city and, to ensure that someone dies from it, Odorico steals the medications and vaccines needed to treat those who are sick.

In his continual quest to inaugurate the new cemetery, the mayor keeps busy by visiting the police station to ask about any possible crimes that may have occurred involving death. None seem to have occurred, but he does see the “wanted” poster for Zeca Diabo. Zeca is an outlaw who has been on the run from the authorities for more than twenty years. He is originally from Sucupira, explains the corporal at the station, but had to leave after killing four people. Odorico laments that those were times of great prosperity to have had four burials. The corporal then pulls out a small “ABC” book about the legendary Zeca Diabo that claims he is the “terror of the sertão”. This gives the mayor the idea of inviting Zeca back to Sucupira in hopes that he will provide a body for the mayor to bury.

Zeca Diabo becomes the new hope for death in Sucupira. The clever mayor has confidence that Zeca’s arrival will provide him with a deceased person sooner than later. To his surprise the outlaw has changed his ways and attempts to become “um homem de bem”. Odorico makes many proposals to try and turn Zeca back to his old ways, but nothing seems to

work. The death-obsessed mayor becomes frustrated with the lack of cooperation from the murderous outlaw and turns on him, leading to the mayor's demise. Odorico eventually decides to fake an assassination attempt on himself with Zeca Diabo playing the role of the assassin:

Obcecado pelo poder, pela inauguração do cemitério e reconquista do povo, ele acaba sendo a vítima fatal da própria rede de intrigas que ele mesmo produziu.

Assim como na tragédia, o *mal* se abate sobre Odorico de um modo que ele não pode manipular. Seu destino foge ao seu próprio controle. Ele acaba assassinado por aquele que contratara para matar e, finalmente, inaugura o cemitério.

(Sacramento 261)

Zeca Diabo does play an important part in the end for Odorico Paraguassu's motives. Odorico gets so wrapped up in his devious plans to manufacture a deceased person in Sucupira that he loses all control and becomes a victim to the consequences of his own deceitful behavior.

The protagonist orders the police chief to arrest Zeca Diabo and calls for more troops from the capital Salvador to assist. This ultimately does not result in a burial to inaugurate the cemetery and the mayor's plans become frustrated once more. This aesthetic, that turns things on their head, induces a response of horror and almost incredulous wonderment. Odorico's actions and responses to typical inquiries are met with outrageous responses. While conversing with his sister about his huge task of finding a deceased person in his city he goes on a serious tirade explaining that there must be a conspiracy against him and that God is somehow punishing him for some past sins. The mayor expounds that his intentions are most honorable and Christian for wanting to inaugurate the cemetery. His speech and thought process is absurd and contrary to that of societal norms. The audience is shocked by the ludicrous, immoral, and atypical behavior.

The Cajazeira sisters also play a key role in demonstrating a type of morally corrupt attitude. The three sisters, Doroteia, Dulcineia, and Judiceia (Juju), demonstrate strident political support for the corrupt mayor of Sucupira. They will do anything to support their candidate. Ana Maria de Medeiros confirms, “O Prefeito sempre teve o apoio das irmãs Cajazeiras: Doroteia, Dulcineia e Judiceia. Todas mantinham um caso secreto de amor com ele, mas uma não sabia do caso da outra. A todas, ele iludia com promessas de casamento” (73-4).

Dulcineia has an affair with Odorico that leads to her pregnancy. She asks him what she should do and the mayor devises a plan to which she consents to find another unsuspecting boyfriend to assume responsibility for the child. Doroteia Cajazeira sits on the city council and runs the mayor’s political campaign. She helps the mayor in his political machinations secretly desiring his love and adoration. Juju Cajazeira comes up with a plan to have their sick cousin Ernesto from Salvador come to die in Sucupira in order for Odorico to have political glory. Sick cousin Ernesto comes to Sucupira in an ambulance and remains at the sisters’ home waiting to die. Again the plan does not work and Ernesto fully recuperates to everyone’s disbelief and Juju begins to have a love affair with this same cousin she brought to Sucupira to bury. Dias Gomes underscores his own satirical strategy, and actually gives it a name, in this dialogue between Odorico and the town priest Vigário:

Odorico – Será que já se pode saudar, homenagear, ou por que não dizer mimosear os noivos?

Vigário – Parece um milagre. Há algumas semanas que fui chamado aqui para dar extrema-unção a um moribundo.

Juju – Não fale isso. Isola!

Odorico – Seu Vigário gosta muito do *humor preto*.

(Chap. 26)

This short dialogue exemplifies the dark satirical nature of the telenovela. Dias Gomes tells all when he has Odorico make a brief comment about “humor preto”, giving the audience a more direct admission of the aesthetic he attempts to employ.

The oldest Cajazeira sister Doroteia, also attempts to become romantically involved with Zeca Diabo. She sees him in the street and secretly wants to meet him. She eventually meets him and invites him over to her house. Zeca thinks she is a lady of the night and gets scared off when he realizes that she wants a true relationship, but then he continues to sneak over late at night to receive lessons from her on how to read and write. The Cajazeira sister’s mannerisms and words seem noble and proper, yet they have hidden ulterior motives that reveal a moral poverty that guides their lives. Their characters follow the same pattern as the protagonist Odorico. His words sound beautiful and politically correct; however, what he says and what he does are distinct, showing a deceitful and dishonest figure.

The enemies of Odorico, “O bem amado,” come in many different forms. However, just because these characters have been defined as enemies of the corrupt mayor does not make them saintly angels. They also play an important part in this political satire. Their lack of morals, coupled with their self-serving political desires, place them in a category similar to that of the protagonist. Odorico Paraguassu’s fiercest political enemies, the Medrados, cannot bear to witness any political glory bestowed upon the mayor, as he represents the Cajazeira family, with which they have been feuding for decades. Because the mayor had aligned himself with, when early on in the play he married the oldest of the three single sisters. A profound animosity and distrust of the Cajazeiras permeates the entire Medrado household. To make matters worse, the patriarch of the Medrado family sits as the city police chief. However, he cannot fulfill his duties

because he was permanently injured by a bullet to his back from one of Odorico's *jagunços*. Because of this, his wife Donana Medrado fills in for him at the police station.

At every moment in the telenovela, the Medrados counter the mayor's attempts to harvest political victory. In doing this they demonstrate an amoral political behavior paralleling that of their political enemy. Once the Medrados discover the political motives of Odorico, they spring into action. When the Cajazeira sisters bring their sick cousin to die in Sucupira, the Medrados decide to kidnap the sick cousin Ernesto and bring him to their house so he can get medical attention and recuperate. Their motives have an appearance of purity, but looking closer, their true motive was political and egotistical. The issue to them was their political victory and the morally correct decision never materializes.

Lulu Gouveia's character also opposes the mayor politically. Gouveia is the city's dentist and also Odorico's main adversary in the mayoral election. Gouveia ends up losing and teams up with the Medrados on all of their escapades to derail the newly elected mayor of Sucupira. On another occasion one of the city councilman dies from a gunshot wound caused by Odorico's "Day of Peace", where he succeeded in bringing together the two warring families to shake hands publicly. Lulu Gouveia devises a clever and daring plan to steal the corpse of the deceased city councilman on the night of the viewing while those attending are drunk or asleep. He and the Medrados pull off the kidnapping of the corpse and bury it in a neighboring municipality. Once again the enemies of Odorico Paraguassu show they, too, can play morbid politics. Lulu Gouveia's conspiring motives and actions establish a theme of the corrupt politician who will go to any lengths to achieve his political goals.

The dentist performs another important role in the telenovela; he offers political criticism and an opposing political view to that of the protagonist Odorico. Lulu Gouveia, promotes a

different future for those who decide to vote for him in the mayoral election. He promises nutritional and educational support for the families of Sucupira. Gouveia argues in a campaign speech: “De que adianta um cemitério de primeira, se morre de barriga vazia e analfabeto!?” Dias Gomes uses Gouveia not only as a politically immoral figure, but also as a mouthpiece to convey his own political leaning about what the role of government should be. The critique of the politicians’ motives demonstrated through this scene points out the fact that politicians’ motivations are self-serving and do not have the public’s welfare in mind but rather their own personal gratification.

Sucupira’s newspaper editor, Neco Pedreira, acts as one of the mayor’s relentless antagonists. He prints many negative articles about the mayor, constantly attacking him on political grounds. Pedreira has no scruples about trying to humiliate the richest man in the region, Odorico Paraguassu. He puts his politics aside however, when he meets the mayor’s young, lovely daughter. The two become involved romantically, and Odorico puts aside his political discord with the young journalist to satisfy another one of his personal goals: getting his daughter married off. Neco Pedreira’s role in the telenovela acts as a political critique of the mayor and all politicians in general. Pedreira takes on the critical voice of the author Dias Gomes. During the counting of the votes for the mayoral election, he makes his opinions known in the following dialogue:

Neco – Quantos votos tem o jegue do Nezinho? Por que não escreve no quadro o número de votos do jegue do Nezinho, hein?
Juju - Porque o jegue não é candidato seu Neco!
Neco – E daí? Mas é uma injustiça, isso é.
Juju - Você também votou nele, é?
Neco – O que é que tem? Mais um burro, menos um burro dá no mesmo.
(Chap. 8)

Neco shows disdain for politicians in this scene by comparing the other candidates to a jackass. Dias Gomes employs this humorous scene to show the absurdity of casting a vote for a donkey, but at the same time criticizing anyone who votes for an egotistical, morally corrupt politician like Coronel Odorico Paraguassu. The journalist gives the audience a contrasting image to the politicking protagonist. He does not represent an alternative political viewpoint but rather gives voice to the public's overall disgust with corruption and ineptness in the political class. In this role, he becomes useful to Dias Gomes as an instrument of political criticism.

Innocent Characters

Dias Gomes attempts to contrast these political and immoral figures in his production. To better highlight their non-social deeds he utilizes supporting characters who appear naïve and oblivious to the corruption and politics that surround them. The mayor's secretary, Dirceu "Borboleta" (acquiring this nickname due to his butterfly collecting habits), performs a key role in the success of constructing this politically dark satire. His innocence and child-like behavior opposes the astuteness of Odorico.

The "borboletista", as the mayor often calls him, stands as the Odorico's right-hand man. Faithfully loyal to whatever the mayor desires of him, his only worries are about catching and collecting butterflies. He has absolutely no political ambition other than pleasing the mayor at all times. He has a stuttering problem that accentuates his helpless, naïve nature. He gives honest responses and opinions that infuriate the conniving protagonist as he attempts to manipulate the public of Sucupira. As the mayor's closest political adviser, he cannot imagine that his boss could do wrong. This innocence and naiveté create an aesthetic of good versus evil in the telenovela. Odorico and Dirceu Borboleta's contrasting attitudes and mannerisms clash pointing

out the differences between the “bad guy” and the “good guy”. As Odorico becomes more entrenched in his political games and maneuvers to produce death in Sucupira, Dirceu Borboleta continues to act the fool, never noticing that his boss is a crazy man obsessed with his cemetery. This aesthetic construct becomes an overwhelming tension during the story. The audience becomes forced to grapple with these two opposing personalities and how Dirceu could be so ignorant and non-judgmental of Odorico. On one occasion Dirceu Borboleta, stammers out a political endorsement for his boss: “Quem votar em Odorico vai ter um caixão e um lugar no cemitério pago pela prefeitura!” This scene achieves two things for Dias Gomes. The absurd proclamation portrayed here shows the use of this dark aesthetic to highlight cheering for death. It creates an emotional and humorous feel to the scene that mocks the exaggerated politician. At the same time the innocence and loyalty of the mayor’s secretary displays itself. Dirceu is used as a pawn in the mayor’s malignant plans establishes the moral friction and generates a sense of judgment.

Dirceu’s innocence magnifies Odorico’s treacherousness as the loyal secretary is tricked by the mayor into marrying his mistress, Dulcineia. After they marry, Dulcineia convinces the naïve butterfly collector into thinking the child she carries is his. Additionally, Dirceu becomes involved in secretly recording all confessions of the parishioners for Odorico, and when the priest eventually discovers, Dirceu takes the fall for his boss. This overwhelms the innocent secretary, and he begins to resent the mayor for forcing him to accept all the blame for the unconscionable crime. Dirceu starts to realize that his boss has no concern or loyalty towards his friends. He grows to see Odorico as a self-centered liar who will do anything to save his political skin. The stuttering secretary eventually awakens from his naïve slumber and turns on Odorico, accusing the mayor of being a horrible monster proclaiming, “Eu descobri que ele é um monstro”

while confessing privately to the town priest Vigário. In another scene Dirceu divulges this dark secret to his wife and her sisters:

Juju – Eu acho que Dirceu está variando. O prefeito não ia querer uma coisa dessas.

Dulcineia – Você devia ter ouvido mau.

Doroteia – Quem sabe se você não sonhou?

Dirceu – Não, não eu não sonhei. Quando ouvi tudo eu fiquei assim tão surpreso quanto vocês. E aí fui pedir a confirmação do senhor prefeito.

Aí ele confirmou tudo. O que ele quer é que morra muita gente. Cajazeira, Medrado não importa! O que ele quer é muito cadáver, como numa guerra!

Juju – Ele disse isso!?

Dirceu – Disse, disse. Eu juro. Eu juro por mim, por Deus, por tudo quanto é mais sagrado, pela felicidade do meu filho!

Doroteia – Mas o prefeito devia estar brincando. Vocês sabem que ele gosta de fazer humor negro e naturalmente você levou a sério.

(Chap. 90)

He finally comes to the realization of the horrible character that the mayor displays. As the audience follows the telenovela, it has a clear unfiltered knowledge of the deplorable deeds of Odorico. The moment of Dirceu's awakening acts as an affirmation of the audience's moral judgment of the hilariously immoral mayor. The audience can almost be heard letting out a collective sigh of relief that the truth comes out. However, this does affect the butterfly collector in a negative light as he finds out that Dulcineia lied to him about her pregnancy. He confronts her, yet she shows no remorse, which causes him to go into a mad rage and strangle her to death. This role reversal changes the landscape of the telenovela. The once innocent character becomes corrupted by the actions of those taking advantage of him. The murder of Dulcineia brings a sense of shock as well as establishes the effect of the dark sentiment of death within the telenovela. The mayor's actions have caused this morbid act, in the eyes of the audience, and this contrast of the social norms with the ludicrous and amoral behavior of the protagonist shocks the audience. Igor Sacramento comments:

Além disso, nessa telenovela, assim como em *Bandeira 2*, Dias Gomes construiu um *herói negativo*: ao invés de privilegiar o herói que vence os obstáculos, confere o papel de protagonista ao herói negativo para permitir que o público, raciocinando sobre o erro, encontre o certo, mas também se divirta com a falta de escrúpulos de Odorico Paraguassu. (262)

Sacramento points out that the construction of Odorico Paraguassu has an aesthetic motive or purpose behind it. Dias Gomes creates the negative hero and promotes him as the main character to precisely highlight what is corrupt and immoral about politics in society, hoping that through the negative image of the anti-hero, together with the humor, the public can observe what is wrong with the Mayor of Sucupira and choose to reject his character and all others similar to him. Sacramento continues, “Afim, em geral, o uso desse tipo serviu na dramaturgia nacional-popular de inspiração brechtiana como uma negação do negativo” (264). The author’s objective in giving the audience the negative image of the character creates the emotional reaction that can become a rational one later on because of the profound effect of the satirical exaggeration that points out fallacy.

Zelão das Asas’s character also plays an important role in shaping innocence. He is a humble fisherman living in a hut on the seashore. On one occasion he was about to be lost at sea in stormy weather and made a promise to his patron saint, *Bom Jesus dos Navegantes*, that he would jump from the church steeple with wings if he were saved. During the telenovela he makes various attempts to keep his promise, but is thwarted at every turn. His attitude of simplicity and devotion contrasts that of the political quarreling during the production. When Odorico goes to visit him at his house, Zelão does not realize the motives of the clever mayor. After the mayor leaves, Zelão comments that it was nice of him to care about helping the

fisherman keep his promise. This naïveté provides a stark opposition to the treachery of the protagonist. The constant play between the evil mayor and the benevolent characters that surround him makes a clear distinction for the audience.

The character who most fulfills this role in the telenovela supposedly has the most to repent of. Zeca Diabo's role as the violent assassin creates the greatest disparity between good and evil. Zeca plays a repentant outlaw that has decided to turn a new leaf and become a "homem de bem". However, because of his reputation as a ruthless murderer, those in Sucupira do not want him around. So, the most law-abiding citizen in the city, Mayor Odorico Paraguassu interacts with this ruthless killer. It soon becomes evident though that Zeca Diabo has been misunderstood. The *cangaçeiro* goes directly to the church to ask the priest for forgiveness. The guilty figure suddenly becomes guiltless before Odorico can contact him. Odorico cannot believe that his prized assassin wants to receive forgiveness. This does not fit into the mayor's plans, but does fit in perfectly to Dias Gomes plans for portraying the mayor as the true outlaw of Sucupira. Zeca's character looks child-like and benign. His voice paints the picture of a timid little boy. He speaks softly pronouncing words incorrectly as does a small child. He possesses a simple mind due to his lack of education. What he says he will do, he does, and he expects the same from those he talks to. The play between the innocent outlaw and the conniving mayor becomes overwhelming. The innocence of the so-called outlaw and the hypocrisy and treachery of the "good" upstanding mayor reinforces the moral judgment of the viewer. The dark satirical criticism hangs over Sucupira like an ominous thunder cloud.

The mayor uses all types of devices to get Zeca to provide him with a corpse for his beloved cemetery. Dias Gomes utilizes Zeca Diabo's innocent mannerisms against Odorico's evil tendencies. Zeca has a patron saint just as does Zelão das Asas. Zeca even talks with his

patron saint *Padinho Cícero Romão Batista*. He seeks for guidance in order to do only good deeds. This characterization of Zeca paints a picture of someone with a conscience trying to make good, moral decisions. He evolves into the reluctant hero of the production that contrasts with the image of Odorico who essentially shows no moral bearings whatsoever.

Zeca desires to settle down and go back to school to become an apprentice with the town dentist Lulu Gouveia. He studies reading and writing with Doroteia Cajazeira and has intends to change his life positively. However, time and time again, his plans fail due to Mayor Odorico's evil designs. Zeca's naiveté has him believe that the mayor has his best interest in mind, and Odorico often visits Zeca's residence attempting to discover how he can get the ex-outlaw to revert to his murdering ways. This constant barrage of attacks on Zeca Diabo's new life as a good man builds an even more ghastly portrayal of the mayor of Sucupira as a villain. At this point Odorico even makes an allegorically absurd statement that compares himself to Pontius Pilate and Zeca Diabo to Jesus Christ. Eventually Zeca discovers the mayor's real character and finds out that Odorico was responsible for sending the troops from Salvador to arrest him. Zeca Diabo goes to assassinate the two-faced mayor in his office soon after. Before he shoots him with his revolver, they have an ironic dialogue that sums up the message of the telenovela:

Zeca – Eu mandei vosmecê pegar esse revólver não foi pra atirar para o alto não.

Odorioco – Óxente! Que brincadeira é essa?

Zeca – É brincadeira não seu doutô prefeito. É verdade. Porque um traidor não merece viver. Ainda mais um traidor que se faz de protetor e amigo.

Odorioco – Outra vez essa conversa! Eu já dei a minha palavra!

Zeca – A mim o senhô deu uma palavra, aos jornalistas o senhô deu outra. O senhô é um homem de muitas palavras, e muitas papas na língua. Mas agora chega de conversa!

Odorico – Mas, isso é tudo mentira. É tudo potoca! Esses jornais são os invencioneiros!

(Chap. 102)

In this scene at the end of the telenovela, the innocent outlaw finally sees the corrupt mayor as an enemy and realizes as his blind naiveté washes away that he has been lied to. This scene creates a metaphor for the audience to contemplate as the audience is able to ponder about how politicians deal with the public and demonstrates the unmasking of Dias Gomes' criticism of politicians, creating a lucid picture of what the telenovela attempts to unveil by utilizing dark satire.

Rational Characters

Sucupira seems to be unaware or alarmed about their out of control mayor until one important character comes to fill in as the medical clinic's physician. Dr. Joarez Leão brings with him not only medical expertise, but a keen sense of reason and common sense that appears to be lacking in the city. Dr. Leão's role directly opposes the attitudes of Odorico Paraguassu. The doctor sees through all of his politics and flattering words. From the very moment that he arrives, Dr. Leão makes it perfectly clear that he does not want anything to do with politicians and their political games.

Odorico wants to use the doctor's arrival as a political photo opportunity and decides to inaugurate the city's health clinic a few days after the doctor arrives. Joarez Leão rejects the Cajazeira sisters who have come with flowers and sticks out his tongue at them. He goes on a rant when he sees the people congregating outside the clinic and tears down the stage set up for the mayor to give his speech. Dr. Leão tells the crowd to go home because his medical clinic will not be used for politics.

The role and importance of Dr. Joarez Leão as a voice of rational thought and political criticism develops as the telenovela progresses. In the midst of the dark humor of Sucupira and

its mortician, Odorico Paraguassu, the doctor's character acts as the most levelheaded voice in the city. When the doctor meets the mayor at the medical clinic, he senses that the mayor has foul motives. Dr. Leão gives political advice to the mayor when the mayor comes to his clinic to check for any deathly ill patients. The protagonist asks if it would be possible to purchase a corpse from a university in Salvador to bring to Sucupira to bury. The wise doctor counsels him that it would be a bad idea since his political enemies would eventually discover that ruse. Joarez Leão uses the mayor's own preoccupation with politics to convince him of his faulty reasoning. This comes to bear once again as the doctor complains to the mayor's daughter Thelma that her father has prohibited the citizens from drinking the radioactive mineral water flowing from city property. The mayor overhears this complaint and becomes infuriated with Dr. Leão. However, when the doctor leaves, he admits to Thelma that it would be a good political maneuver to get the people of the city to take their minds off his recent scandal. The contrast here comes from the motive behind letting the people drink the mineral water. Odorico wants some type of personal political benefit, while the doctor only wants to help the people become healthier. Madeiros comments on the role of Dr. Leão, "Na trama, o personagem desempenhará um papel importante, resistindo de forma mais consciente às atuações políticas de Odorico. De postura mais anárquica, Juarez não se interessará pelo poder político, mas preocupa-se em tentar levar algum tipo de consciência ao povo humilde de Sucupira" (94).

Wherever the mayor tries to meddle in the affairs of his citizens, Dr. Leão seems to expose him. Coronel Odorico calls Dr. Leão "uma praga," and then states he is "cercado de Judas por todos os lados."

As the mayor leaves Zelão das Asas' house, the doctor arrives at the same instant. When the mayor leaves, Zelão shows his gratitude for the mayor caring about helping him to fix his

wings so he can jump from the church steeple. Dr. Leão turns and yells at the fisherman, “Ele quer te matar seu burro!” He tends to see things from a different perspective than the others in Sucupira. He perceives the mayor’s plan to come up with a corpse to inaugurate the new cemetery. Dr. Leão sees through the lies and flattering words of the deranged mayor. It becomes clearer that he is the main tool of political criticism for Dias Gomes in this production.

The character Dr. Joarez Leão has a special place in the political commentary made by Dias Gomes. Dr. Leão acts as a mouthpiece for the writer on many occasions throughout the piece. His rational thinking contrasts that of the rest of the characters. Odorico has his *jagunços* take all of the furnishings and medical supplies out of the medical clinic so that it will be closed down. The next morning, Dr. Leão steps outside and tells the patients waiting for treatment that there will be no medical services. He continues to explain that the mayor has closed down the clinic in hopes that one of his citizens will die from lack of medical care so that he can inaugurate his new cemetery. The doctor’s common sense and logic do not seem to penetrate the citizens of Sucupira. They start to think that he must be mistaken about their beloved mayor. The people cannot believe what the doctor says and begin to think that he is going crazy. All that is normal and good as portrayed by the character of Dr. Joarez Leão appears abnormal and bad. The backwards thinking of the politician that is demonstrated by Odorico is not perceived by the rest of the people. The political commentary here attacks the deceptive nature of the politician as he proclaims altruistic motives, yet in reality has many insidious ulterior ones.

This produces an even greater tension between the audience and the innocent and naïve characters in the telenovela. Dr. Leão’s voice appeals to the moral mindsets of those watching. The moral contrast becomes more and more distinct to the viewers.

Dr. Leão explains to the mayor's daughter, Thelma, that her father's political drive has transformed the mayor into a psychopathic monster willing to do whatever it takes to get what he wants. Dr. Leão gives thanks that Odorico is only the mayor of Sucupira and not the leader of a world superpower. This political critique of powerful politicians comes as a dark image of a horrible, death-crazed mayor; it is a direct rational commentary that criticizes politicians and their abuses of power.

The church priest, Vigário, demonstrates a certain rationality during the telenovela. Although the good friend of the mayor, he exhibits the attitudes and conscious of someone opposed to the desires of Odorico. His sense of innocence comes from his desire to see the good in everything as a man of the cloth. However, the priest shows no naiveté as do the other innocent characters portrayed.

One episode that substantiates this opposition to the mayor's attitude comes when Odorico wants the priest, Vigário, to get Dirceu to confess that something happened between Dirceu and Dulcineia to free himself from the potentially humiliating affair. Mayor Odorico continues to imply to others that something happened, and he fights with Vigário over the issue. The mayor wants the priest to lie and become immoral in order to hide his own immorality. Vigário refuses on the basis of his high moral integrity as a priest. This scene demonstrates the political criticism about how far a politician will go to save his political reputation. To the audience the protagonist attempts to save himself politically but does it in such a manner that makes him look like a comical cartoon caricature.

Vigário continues to oppose the mayor in his attempts to find a corpse. When a character named Libório again tries to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff into the ocean, the priest rushes to talk him down from the edge of the cliff. When Zeca Diabo is held up in his brother's

home surrounded by soldiers, Vigário attempts to dissolve the situation by calling on Dr. Joarez Leão to come convince the outlaw to surrender to the police. The priest becomes another one of those “Judases” who seems to frustrate the mayor. Odorico cannot find anyone to assist him in finding a deceased person.

In another part of the telenovela the mayor wants to discover who stole the corpse of the deceased city councilman and desires to have an investigation into where the cadaver has gone. Odorico files a police report with the police chief and has everyone who was at the viewing be interrogated in his presence. When this strategy does not bear any fruit for the paranoid mayor, he turns to Vigário for assistance in finding the culprit. Odorico proposes to Vigário that the priest give an account of the sacred confessions of the church goes to the mayor in order to find out who stole the dead body. The following dialogue comes from this scene:

Vigário – Seu Prefeito com todo respeito que o senhor bem merece, eu devo dizer que o seu propósito é uma ofensa a minha dignidade!

Odorico – Calma seu Vigário, calma. Não vamos fazer uma tempestade num copo da água. Eu só pedia sua atitude colaborinista que estava numa, e estou numa conjuntura desesperante.

Vigário – Mas não posso revelar o segredo da confissão. Não posso! O senhor sabe muito bem que o sigilo da confissão é uma obrigação sagrada por parte do confessor. Ou o senhor não sabe disso?

Odorico – Eu sei. Pensei apenasmente que o senhor pudesse abrir uma excessão levando em conta os propósitos que são os mais nobletantes, os mais elevados e por que não dizer os mais cristãos!

Vigário – Mas não posso! Nem pense nisso!

Odorico – O senhor tá vendo né, roubaram o defunto na baba de todo o mundo. Ninguém sabe, ninguém viu, ninguém fala nada. Tem impressão que tá todo o mundo num coma na cidade inteira. Nem adianta abrir um inquérito porque eles não vão falar nada. E eu pensei, tenho certeza que um lugar onde vão dizer a verdade é no confessionário.

Vigário – Está louco!

Odorico – É o único jeito de saber quem foi que roubo o defunto.

Vigário – Então o senhor nunca vai saber!

Odorico – Lamento muito seu Vigário. Moralmente porque a história tá aí pra dizer, que sempre, o poder temporal e o poder espiritual andaram de braços dados. E a sua atitude é anti-histórica!

(Chap. 74)

This infuriates the priest and he tells the mayor that he must be crazy for asking. Odorico responds that he thought it was a perfectly viable proposition considering the circumstances. He gets angry with the priest and tells him that historically the church and the state have always been allied. The mayor accuses the priest of being on the wrong side of history. Vigário continues to play an important sane voice in the midst of Sucupira's satiric political backdrop. His attitudes and actions separate him from the mayor and the other political voices in the story and his confrontations with Odorico manifest the contrasting view of a moral conscience. Without his role as someone who opposes the mayor unwittingly, the full aesthetic that Dias Gomes tries to construct might have been less effective.

The politically dark satirical atmosphere created by Dias Gomes highlights and denounces egotistical politicians. Célia Regina Benquerer states, "What is important is that the story of Odorico Paraguassu has given him a unique opportunity to dramatize and criticize national and international events. And he takes full advantage of it, tackling social, political and economic issues" (42). The opportunity for Dias Gomes to criticize politicians and their dealing with the people through a grotesque satire made it palatable to both the Brazilian viewing audience as well as the current authoritarian regime. José Dias elaborates:

Mas a popularidade dos tipos criados por Dias Gomes para *O Bem Amado*, e que atingiu outras fronteiras, para além dos limites nacionais, deveu-se em grande parte ao humor com que lidava com os mais graves problemas do comportamento venal e corrupto dos políticos, atitude lamentavelmente bastante conhecida em todas as vizinhanças latino-americanas. (78)

Normally the Brazilian electorate complained and lamented their awful political situation. Dias Gomes' ability to employ dark humor with the political realities of the day, gave the audience in Brazil the opportunity to laugh at themselves as a society and at the corruption they were accustomed to witness on a daily basis.

The author's placement of political, innocent, and rational characters in this telenovela gives a contrasting view to the audience. The innocent and rational actors in the production are distinct from the absurd and immoral political ones depicted. These opposing forces, represented by the characters, paint a clear portrait of the dark and corrupt nature of the mayor of Sucupira and his political counterparts.

Conclusions

Dias Gomes began his career writing theater pieces when he was a teenager. His love of writing theatrical pieces kept him on track when his professional life turned toward writing and broadcasting for radio stations in the 1940s-1950s. The author's development as a playwright led him to success in the late 1950s with his first critically acclaimed piece, *O pagador de promessas*.

The 1960s saw more theatrical pieces by Dias Gomes that established him as one of the top playwrights of his day. These plays dealt more and more with the Brazilian countryside, the everyday Brazilian, and the cultural aspects that controlled and had influence on the society as a whole. Many of these plays included messages of social and political corruption that created a call for social change that mainly had to do with anti-tyrannical and socialist ideologies with resolutions to solve the nation's problems. As the political repression and censorship grew during the authoritarian military dictatorship at the close of the 1960s, so did the banning of many plays deemed controversial or "subversive" by the government censors. Playwrights as well as actors needed to find work, and, increasingly, the Brazilian telenovela industry became a safe haven for many would-be enemies of the military generals. Dias Gomes became one of these playwrights that would join his wife Janete Clair to write telenovela scripts for the fledgling TV Globo. The telenovela was similar enough to a theatrical piece that Dias Gomes managed to quickly translate many of his theater pieces into telenovela successes. Beginning in the early 1970's the playwright began to challenge the social environment with the use of political satire.

The use of satire to criticize governments and politicians comes naturally as it takes the sharp edge off of serious sociopolitical matters, enabling the satirist to express his critical

message. This critical commentary intends to damage the individual or institution being targeted by the satirist:

Satire, ‘the use of ridicule, sarcasm, irony, etc. to expose, attack, or deride vices, follies etc.’ (as the dictionaries define it), has its origin in a state of mind which is critical and aggressive, usually one of irritation at the latest examples of human absurdity, inefficiency or wickedness. (Hodgart 10)

O Bem-Amado debuted in January 1973 and aired 178 chapters that ran for over a nine-month period. The nation quickly embraced the humorous yet authentic portrayals of a backwards and corrupt small-town mayor in the Brazilian interior. The characters consisted of a hodge-podge of morally corrupt politicians and officials, warring families, gossiping old-maids, a town drunk, a humble, innocent priest, and a harmless butterfly collector, among others. The authentic nature of the cast of characters instantly gave the Brazilian viewing audience a story they could relate to.

Sucupira is typical of other Brazilian interior towns. What Dias Gomes put to paper became alive and wild on the small screen. The satiric nature and dark humor of the telenovela caused the audience to not only laugh at the character’s follies, but laugh at themselves as well. The Brazilian reality portrayed every night at 10:00 pm ultimately helped the Brazilian people cope with the reality of social and political repression. Characters demonstrated their virtues and vices creating a stage on which the audience could see their own real-life experience. Dias Gomes’ use of dark humor and satire contributed to the viewer’s awareness of the serious sociopolitical criticisms being made:

The student of comedy theory would do well to link shock to the humor hypothesis that credits surprise as the most pervasive explanation for laughter.

Only here the laughter is of a nervous, ‘should I be responding in this manner?’ nature. Fittingly, black humor has also been called “comedy of terrors.” (Gehring 2)

The shock of this insane behavior of the mayor, along with the morbid focus and plot of the telenovela, suddenly transforms into humor for the masses as an escape from the realities of their own experience with corruption. This hugely exaggerated bogeyman caused a large enough humorous response so that it masked the political criticism of the military dictatorship. Dias Gomes attempted to covertly criticize the new authoritarian regime by overtly criticizing the old guard of corrupt *coronéis* in the Brazilian interior. It proved safe to criticize non-military officials and only exaggerate the hypocritical actions of old-timer corrupt politicians, as military censors did not see that the telenovela at its heart criticized all corrupt government officials, be they dictatorial military generals or democratically elected representatives.

The dark humor and satire in *O Bem-Amado* by Dias Gomes proved to be successful political criticism of governments and politicians. As an intellectual playwright and political activist, Dias Gomes employed his literary talents to publish his subversive, sociopolitical critical agenda without being censored.

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