

(In)capacity and (im)potency in *A Moratória*, by Jorge Andrade / (In)Capacidade e (Im)Potência em a *Moratória*, de Jorge Andrade


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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the social and identity questions raised in the play *A Moratória*, by Brazilian author Jorge Andrade (1922-1984). Based on the journey taken by the family of Joaquim and Helena, farmers made precarious by the coffee crisis of 1929, it reveals a picture that goes beyond the individual experiences of the characters, taking on collective contours marked by complex political and economic transformations. In this context, the play's innovative stage

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construction stands out, structured in two physical planes in which spatiality emerges as a temporal reference. In the space of the stage, distinct temporal moments are combined: 1929, when the couple is still in the farmhouse; and 1932, when the family lives in a nearby town, facing the financial difficulties and marginalization resulting from the loss of their land. An initial reading focuses on Lucília, the couple's daughter, because she is the character who becomes the family's breadwinner. However, the analysis here points to the physical, emotional and affective disruption experienced by all the other characters, each involved in (in)enabling processes, marked by (im)potency, in which the fragility of the reaction and the lack of possibilities go hand in hand with alienation and flight. For a theoretical basis, aesthetic and structural aspects of modern dramaturgy were researched.

KEYWORDS: *A moratória*; Jorge Andrade; modern theater; (in)capacity; (im)potency.

RESUMO

O presente artigo aborda questionamentos sociais e identitários observados na peça *A Moratória*, do autor brasileiro Jorge Andrade (1922-1984). A partir da trajetória percorrida pela família de Joaquim e Helena, fazendeiros precarizados pela crise cafeeira de 1929, desvela-se um quadro que ultrapassa a vivência individualizada das personagens, assumindo contornos coletivos marcados por transformações políticas e econômicas complexas. Nesse contexto, destaca-se a construção cênica inovadora da peça, estruturada em dois planos físicos nos quais a espacialidade surge como referência temporal. No espaço do palco, conjugam-se momentos temporais distintos: 1929, quando o casal ainda se encontra no casarão da fazenda; e 1932, quando a família reside em uma cidade próxima, enfrentando as dificuldades financeiras e a marginalização decorrentes da perda de suas terras. Uma leitura inicial direciona o olhar para Lucília, a filha do casal, por ser ela a personagem que se torna a provedora do grupo familiar. Contudo, as análises aqui efetuadas apontam a desestruturação física, emocional e afetiva vivenciada por todas as demais personagens, cada uma envolvida em processos (in)capacitantes, marcados pela (im)potência, nos quais a fragilidade da reação e a carência de possibilidades caminham lado a lado com o alienamento e a fuga. Para embasamento teórico, foram pesquisados aspectos estéticos e estruturais relativos à dramaturgia moderna.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *A moratória*; Jorge de Andrade; teatro moderno; (in)capacidade; (im)potência.

1 Introduction

Born in Barretos - SP, into a family of coffee barons¹ who experienced the decline of the coffee industry, Jorge Andrade (1922-1984) built a unique vision of Brazil and the Brazilian man. By portraying family conflicts immersed in a social context of crisis, his dramaturgy paints a broad picture of the economic and political changes experienced by the country. *A Moratória*, the play that is the subject of this study, premiered in 1954 and is part of this context.

The importance of studying the author and his work has been emphasized by researchers from different fields, not just in literature courses. It may even be necessary to accept it, as Maciel (2020, p. 2) does, even more frequently in other disciplines, without the attention that his work should receive as a motto in literary studies or in research into the history of theater:

It is a fact that Jorge Andrade's work has been much more frequented by historians [...] for those in the field of Literature, this playwright is not always a constant - always eclipsed by Nelson Rodrigues or Ariano Suassuna, however this state of affairs has changed recently, through systematic and critical reflection around the understanding

¹ The coffee barons in Brazil were a class of landowners and industrialists who dominated the country's economy and politics during the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially between 1850 and 1930.

of the processes linked to the production of modern dramas in Brazil (Maciel, 2020, p. 2)².

It's important to note here that *A moratória* is part of a group of ten texts, revised and organized in an order defined by the author himself in the book *Marta, a árvore e o relógio*³. Independent but complementary, when read together they build up a broad historical panel of Brazil in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. They form a cycle that paints a picture of the economic, social and political changes that took place in the period and how these changes reflected, in some aspects positively and in others negatively, on a significant portion of the population.

By adopting a broader perspective — one that involves spatiotemporal dialogues and encompasses different individualities that, in turn, interact within larger collective groups —, Jorge Andrade embraces an aesthetic construction shaped by political consciousness. Faria (2022), in analyzing the author's work, notes that “for Jorge Andrade, theater is an art form that expresses the individual and the society in which they live, as well as the time in which they are situated” (Faria, 2022, p. 113). In this context, the playwright's concern is highlighted

[...] with a theater that addresses not only social issues, but also psychological ones. How can we understand the anxieties, emotions, and aspirations that drive human beings? How can we understand the individual as a social being—shaped by an environment that undoubtedly contributes to their formation, and by a historical moment that determines the conditions of their existence?” (Faria, 2022, p. 113).

This point is emphasized by Jorge Andrade himself in an interview given to *Revista Isto É* in 1978: “I can only understand theater as a living representation of an event, and in this event the main character must always be the human being. [...] if art does not register the human being in time and space, to me it is not art” (Andrade, 1978, p. 45). There is no naivety in the construction of his characters; when alienation appears, it does so as a portrait.

As a guiding pillar, *A moratória* presents the trajectory of Joaquim and Helena's family, emphasizing relationships, affections and perspectives, in two specific moments and spaces: in 1929, in the farmhouse, and in 1932, in the urban environment. Accumulating wealth and political power, Joaquim, Helena and their two children, Lucília and Marcelo, grew up under the protective cloak of the immense coffee plantations that then dominated the countryside of São Paulo.

² The excerpts from Jorge Andrade's work and the quotations from the theoretical authors referenced herein are freely translated by the authors.

³ *Marta, a árvore e o relógio* was published by Editora Perspectiva in its first edition in 1970.

However, with the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929, the crisis of the coffee sector in Brazil was consolidated, the patriarch lost his land, and the family moved to a small town near the farm.

In this move from the rural to the urban environment, the foundations of a once apparently solid family structure crumble, with devastating repercussions for the characters. In a conversation with her fiancé, still on the farm, Lucília shows that she is aware of the consequences of her new situation: "I feel that we are all going to be involved and then we won't be able to be the same anymore. It's not just the farm that we're threatened with losing" (Andrade, 1986, p. 154).

As the family's provider after the loss of the land, Lucília takes on a leading and guiding role throughout the plot. However, the analysis carried out here addresses the physical, emotional and affective disintegration also experienced by the other characters. This points to personal (in)capacitating processes that are shaped by broader social and collective structures, in which the lack of possibilities comes close to paths of alienation and escape.

Representative of modern Brazilian theater, *A moratória* does not observe the classic unity of action, time and space, but a constant intertwining of these elements, highlighting the influences they exert on each other. The temporal modes combine mutually and interact as a scenic effect. They are scenographic and temporal planes, distinct but interspersed, with approximations and distancing, lines that are tensioned according to the author's intention and skill. A skill that is evident in the use of intergenerational conflicts, supposedly restricted to a family environment, to denounce issues of a social scale.

Right from its title, the play opens to different meanings. "Moratorium" is a term from commercial law, Joaquim dreams of a positive outcome to a process with which he hopes to extend the deadline for paying his debts and recovering his farm. However, in Jorge Andrade's plot, "moratorium" refers not only to financial deadlines, but also to personal deadlines, it is a commercial agreement, guilt, excuse and refuge. The word's interpretative possibilities include the characters' own daily lives, suspended during periods of transition marked by endless vicious circles of waiting, unpreparedness and powerlessness. And, in this way, it also includes the necessary warning of the sometimes devastating consequences of the process of economic and political transition Brazil was going through at the time.

2 The intersection of theater and historiography

In *A moratória*, theater and historiography work together to portray the financial decline faced by the family of Joaquim, a character representative of the Brazilian rural oligarchy of the early 20th century. The plot confronts political forms, economic structures, cultural experiences and family hierarchies.

Symbols and words, gestures, objects, images, historiographical facts and fiction come together on stage, multiple elements and languages capable of guiding the audience, spectator or reader, through the intricate paths of the first decades of the 20th century. As Magaldi (2004) points out, by choosing the years 1929 and 1932 to define the play's two planes of action, "Jorge Andrade wanted to make the irremediable fall of the rural aristocracy clear" (Magaldi, 2004, p. 229). This aspect is also pointed out by Prado (1986):

Anyone who doesn't sense, behind the individuals and the particular episodes it narrates, the agony of a society in the process of transition - that painful passage from the Brazil of the farmers to urban Brazil - will not understand anything of the play's scope (Prado, 1986, p. 626).

The picture drawn by Jorge Andrade is based on a situation experienced at the time by a large part of the coffee producers, caught up in a political and economic reorganization led by financial institutions and industrial groups. Faria (2013) makes this point:

[...] the playwright bequeathed us a vast "novel" with chapters made up of theatrical texts, recording the exploration of Brazil by the *bandeirantes*⁴, the political struggles of the 18th and 19th centuries and the fate of the descendants of the protagonists of those conflicts in the 20th century. It's a saga of energy transformed into weakness, of vigor that melted into vulnerability. The pioneering impetus metamorphoses into an inability to live, an inability to fight (Faria, 2013, p. 130).

In an interview given to Mariângela Alves de Lima and Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura in 1976, quoted by Silveira (2020), it is possible to find references that underpin his dramaturgy, childhood memories and his personal experience as the grandson of large landowners:

When I entered the hall, I saw my grandfather leaning against a wall, a shotgun lying on the floor, my grandmother on her knees hugging his legs and my mother trying to hold him down. And he was saying: "I'm going to kill him!" And they held him down. So, I found out immediately that he was going to kill someone who was in the entrance hall. This person, I later found out, was called Arlindo, and was the man who made him lose the farm and that later, that scene that I now call "*Pietá Fazendeira*", a statuary

⁴ Armed explorers and fortune seekers in colonial Brazil, the *bandeirantes* organized expeditions (*bandeiras*) into the interior of the country to capture indigenous people and search for precious metals. Their activities played an important role in the expansion of Portuguese colonial frontiers.

ensemble of my love and my emotion was fixed in the space and time of that room...
(Andrade, 1976, *apud* Silveira, 2020).

In this context, there is tenderness diluted in the almost brutal rawness of the dialogues in *A moratória*. Rosenfeld (1986) states that "one cannot deny the presence of an affective and affectionate vision of a bygone world to which the author, in spite of everything, feels attached" (Rosenfeld, 1986, p. 601). However, Rosenfeld points out that this view does not imply a defense of the past and its structures, "what prevails is painful inquiry and questioning [...] It is the critical, present mind that ravages history - a mind that is inflexible, severe, honest to the point of cruelty" (Rosenfeld, 1986, p. 601).

2.1 The essentiality of the stage structure in *A moratória*

Jorge Andrade's dramaturgy is not only built on dialogues, but also strongly anchored in its scenic structure. In *A moratória*, this scenic aspect was emphasized already in the first act of the play, in which the author demarcates, through detailed rubrics, a physical and content-based structural proposal based on the division of the stage into two planes:

FIRST ACT

SCENARIO: Two shots divide the stage more or less diagonally. Foreground or right: modestly furnished living room. On the right side wall, two doors: the one at the back, Marcelo's bedroom; the one in the foreground, the kitchen. At the end of the room, the corridor that connects to the other rooms in the house. On the left, a long dining and sewing table; next to it, in the foreground, a sewing machine. [...]

Second or left plane: Elevated about thirty or forty centimeters above the stage floor. Spacious room in an old traditional coffee plantation. On the lower left, the door to Joaquim's room. [...]

Observation: The rooms are usually lit as if they were a single room [...] (Andrade, 1986, p. 121).

Thus, there are two physical constructions that accompany the thematic content and the intended temporal perception: "In the second or left-hand shot, the action takes place on a coffee farm in 1929; in the first or right-hand shot, more or less three years later, in a small town near the same farm" (Andrade, 1986, p. 121-122).

In the background, the living room is spacious, and the family still owns an extensive coffee plantation. However, the coffee crisis and its harmful consequences are already in the background, even in 1929. In the scenes set in the past, we come into contact with the characters' expectations, dreams and possibilities. We also gradually see Marcelo's bohemian dissatisfaction, Joaquim's accumulated debts, political disputes and family pettiness. There is a domino effect of indebtedness

and precariousness that permeates different layers of the Brazilian rural social structure of the time.

Monte (2016) highlights this point:

Jorge Andrade provides us with a diffusion of behaviors of those who, in the foreground, are affected by the country's economic decline: the coffee plantation owners. [...] there is a diversity of formative-behavioral reactions, a multiple that corresponds to the spirit of the world in crisis, in which the disorientation of those who have always been able to count on property to solve problems in both the private and public order, through the culture of *colonelism* (Monte, 2016, p. 339-340).

In this context, *A Moratória* stands as a work of social critique. Its warning about the need to confront indifference and sensitization is the tool that makes the movement possible. A movement whose speech takes on a temporal language, as the play's scenic construction affirms:

It has to be said that there is a dividing arch between the planes, and topping it off is the genius of a single piece that serves both planes: weighing up the implacable and imperative element of the plot, the great clock symbolically subverts the inexorably rushing time and marks the differences between 1929 and 1932. By alternately staging the two planes, what we see is the present of the past and, as an effect of the characters' actions, its resultant present of the future (Monte, 2016, p. 340).

The mixture of space and time provided by the physical structure of the stage is also highlighted by Rahal (2015):

Jorge Andrade's first two plays already bring the expressive procedures that he will use throughout his work and that have the role of bringing the past alive on stage [...] Jorge puts his characters in action on different planes and, by bringing the past in *flashbacks*, he makes it present, that is, the past and present actions occur simultaneously (Rahal, 2015, p.33)

Not just historiographical time, but personal and collective temporalities are strongly interconnected. Researcher Iná Costa (1998) highlights this point: "The whole interest of the play lies in examining the relationships and reactions that are established" (Costa, 1998, p. 122). Actions and relationships that, because they are outlined in seemingly trivial scenes, require an attentive eye, capable of perceiving subtle details loaded with immense meaning:

JOAQUIM: Come and have coffee.
LUCILIA: I can't now.
JOAQUIM: The coffee gets cold.
LUCILIA: My work is late.
JOAQUIM: Well, my child, each thing in its own time.
LUCÍLIA: For those who have a lot of time (Andrade, 1986, p. 122).

The cup of coffee, which could symbolize contact, grows cold in Joaquim's hands. In a few words, contradictory perceptions of reality are exposed: that of the father, alienated in an illusion of pause, is linked to coffee, which refers to the farm, the rural environment, the past; that of the

daughter, stuck at the sewing machine, refers to haste, the urban environment, the present and the lack of prospects for the future.

This influence and juxtaposition of temporalities stand out more strongly in moments when dialogues take place between the two planes, contrasting experiences and strengthening feelings and perceptions. This is what we see in the following excerpt, which begins in the past, in the second plane, at the moment when Helena discovers the crisis in which the farm finds itself. Interspersed with Helena and Elvira's anguished dialog is another dialog, this one in the foreground, marked by Joaquim and Lucília's joy:

ELVIRA: (*In the background*) We're going through a major crisis.
JOAQUIM: (*foreground*) Lucilla!
HELENA: (*background*) Crisis?
[...]
JOAQUIM: (*foreground*) Moratorium! Moratorium, my child!
LUCILIA: (*foreground*) What is this?
ELVIRA: (*In the background*) You've got to cheer up, Helena!
[...]
LUCÍLIA: (*foreground*) (at the height of her joy) Papa, Papa! (hugs Joaquim)
HELENA: (*In the background*) (*In the throes of despair*) Quim! Quim! Quim! (*Elvira hugs Helena*) (Andrade, 1986, p. 144-145).

The scene continues by interspersing dialogues between the foreground and the background. The negative news of the crisis is combined with the hope of returning to the farm, as if one were the continuation of the other, but both later show the same outcome of loss.

In this connection between times, even when a scene prioritizes one shot or another, there is always some element of approximation: objects, characters or dialogues linking the spaces, such as the religious pictures in front of which Helena prayed on the farm, or a story referred to and the reality experienced, a character who appears in one shot and is commented on in another, a beginning and its conclusion. In her analysis of the weave of temporalities observed in *A moratória*, Silveira (2020) points out:

[...] the present-past binomial was structured vertically and horizontally. The vertical consists of reading a single time (present or past) from scene to scene, pointing out this step backwards or forwards, depending on whether the focus is on the present or the past. The horizontal consists of reading between present-past and vice versa within the same scene, pointing out how the gap between the times is narrowing (Silveira, 2020, p. 8).

In this sense, it is symbolic that, when Joaquim is evicted from his land, the watch is the object he hugs and Marcelo is the son who accompanies him out of the room:

(*Joaquim hugs his watch and looks around the room with great anxiety*) [...]
MARCELO: (*background*) Come on, Dad. Cheer up!

JOAQUIM: (*In the background*) Who's discouraged? [...]
MARCELO: (*In the background*) Nobody! Nobody! [...]
(*Joaquim and Marcelo look around the room and leave with resolution*) (Andrade, 1986, p. 184).

Time, used here as a shield by Joaquim, ends up showing itself as defeat. Father and son, at that moment, still hopeful about the future, are equally destroyed.

3 Portraits marked by strength, fragility and powerlessness

When we analyze the performance of the characters from a perspective of aptitude or failure, in *A moratória* a name appears that apparently has no leading role: Marta. Remembering that the play is included as one of the texts in the book *Marta, a árvore e o relógio*, two aspects stand out: the inclusion of Marta in the title of the collection and her presence in all ten plays grouped together. The emphasis placed on the character by Jorge Andrade alerts us to underlying symbolologies: like the clock and the tree, Marta is a referenced element, intertwining times, roots and the future, broadening our perception of the universe portrayed.

Lazarotti (2016) makes this point when researching the symbolologies present in Jorge Andrade's work:

Marta marks the social debt that Jorge Andrade pays to the marginalized class [...] she presents herself as a spherical character throughout the cycle. I say spherical because she has several other facets within her, like an internal mitosis that transforms a whole into parts, or the parts into a whole. His incarnations are diverse and, at the same time, just one: the excluded being (Lazarotti, 2016, p. 74 and 94).

As Lazarotti (2016) points out, Marta is a constant character and, even though she appears in different positions and from different perspectives, she is representative of the need for movement, she prevents us from forgetting the voice of the generally excluded and voiceless. In *As Confrarias*, the first play in the book *Marta, a árvore e o relógio*, is the protagonist, a mother figure and a portrait of the strength of despair. In the play, she carries her son's corpse through the streets of the village, an image of pain whose role is one of restlessness that makes the omission impossible. In this context, Jorge Andrade, through the mouth of Marta, says: "Salvation is for everyone or it will be for none" (Andrade, 1986, p. 67).

The phrase used by Marta in *As Confrarias* is echoed in the other plays in Jorge Andrade's book, in which the individual and the collective are shown as forces and influences that are always

interconnected, denoting the ineffectiveness of paths that do not encompass collective understanding and action.

3.1 Marta and Lucília: (over)living in the midst of disabling realities

In *A moratória*, Marta appears subtly, almost imperceptibly. She runs through the two time periods recorded, becoming the guiding axis, but her influence differs between the characters. As far as Helena and Marcelo are concerned, she doesn't have access to their universes of escape; however, she seems to be able to give Lucília answers and possibilities and, even though she is rejected, she is seen by Joaquim:

JOAQUIM: No more learning to sew [...]
Dona Marta! A seamstress. A few basics will suffice. Lucília isn't going to be a seamstress [...]
I don't approve of my daughter's contact with seamstresses. Who knows who attends these courses? People of all kinds (Andrade, 1986, p. 135-136).

Through different forms and masks, presenting herself as easily recognizable or being mentioned in the comments by the other characters, Marta points out oppressive realities, invokes and provokes action. In this context, she is a resource used by the playwright to present realities and points of view, intergenerational, historical and political issues:

JOAQUIM: Seeing you sewing for these people. People who didn't even deserve to clean our shoes.
LUCILIA: [...] There's no other way for now.
JOAQUIM: Little people! They only have money...
LUCÍLIA: (*Drought*) It's what we don't have anymore (Andrade, 1986, p. 124).

Here, much remains unsaid, interwoven between the words, a progressive accumulation of frustrations that are never fully verbalized. Engelmann (2025) discusses how Jorge Andrade's dialogues often function more as expressions of isolation than as acts of communication.:

The recollected past and dissatisfaction with the present gradually open fissures that isolate the characters, generate discursive tensions, and expose the incompleteness of both the subjects and, consequently, of language itself. The plays that comprise the decalogue are texts permeated by silences, which, in turn, function as dramaturgical devices (Engelmann, 2025, p. 16).

Marta navigates these fissures by assuming a role of continued permanence. Her voice moves through absences and pain, acting as a link capable of connecting emotions. Yet there is an intentional discomfort in the paths she traces, which becomes particularly pronounced in her relationship with Lucília in *A Moratória*. In the play, Marta's presence takes on somewhat

ambiguous contours, which deserve a closer look in their interpretation: while, as a sewing teacher, she provides Lucília with the means to survive, she also restricts the young woman's direct contact with the outside world.

After leaving the farm, Lucília, in her daily struggle as the family's new breadwinner, finds herself in an individual stage of social and emotional disruption that is too overwhelming for her to be able to make contact with the outside world. In this context, Marta, as an intermediary between the clients and Lucília, seems to represent a means of connection. However, as an intermediary, she is an element that reduces access to the collective. The dialogue with the other collective that should be carried out by Lucília is carried out by Marta, and the young seamstress limits herself even more to living within four walls: "LUCÍLIA: I don't notice them. I don't know who they are, nor do I care. I just work" (Andrade, 1986, p. 124). The crudeness of the daily life experienced by the young woman demonstrates the ineffectiveness of her action: no matter how hard she tries, as long as this effort is her own in an individualized way, she won't go beyond the incessant carrying Sisyphus' stone⁵, the next day will be the same as the last and the same as the next.

Jorge Andrade emphasizes this growing restriction in an exemplary way: the image of Lucília that remains at the end of the plot is that of the young woman as an object, a part of her sewing machine; there is a mechanization not only of the work, but of the human being who carries it out. In this way, it reminds us that some struggles cannot be won in a personal context, but have a historical and collective content that also demands a response that involves the collective.

It should be noted that the play presents two moments in Lucília's relationship with her work. The first, before the loss of the farm, when sewing is a source of pleasure, the possibility of creation, empowering confrontation and personal freedom: "Look at my dress! No one has ever had one like it! [...] Me! I made it!" (Andrade, 1986, p. 143). In the second moment, the activity that the young woman carries out takes on an oppressive connotation, the break it causes is that of dreams of happiness and not social ties. Sewing, after the loss of the farm, becomes uncreative work, an element of exploitation, reinforcing powerlessness.

⁵ In mythology, Sisyphus is presented as a mortal punished for deceiving and defying the gods. As punishment, Sisyphus is forced to carry a stone to the top of a mountain. When he gets there, the stone rolls down the mountain and the work begins again. Albert Camus (2004) uses the myth as the basis for his analysis of the inadequacy of human beings in a society marked by the demand for work that is often exhausting, repetitive and incapable of fulfilling personal or collective desires.

3.2 Joaquim and Marcelo: inabilities that move between the rural and the urban

Lucília, like her family members, is unable to cope with the reality she is experiencing, becoming a slave to a system that provides her with sustenance, but not access to more than daily survival. However, there are distinctions between how she, her parents and her brother cope with this reality. And this distinction is most visible when we look at the characters of Joaquim and Marcelo together.

It is significant, in Jorge Andrade's description of the plans, that in the rural setting, the room first mentioned is Joaquim's; in the urban setting, it is Marcelo's room. The men's bedroom is the first in the house, and male intimacy is the most preserved and reinforced in both environments, even though the living room, the workplace, is the space that belongs to Lucília, in this case, a social space, not an intimate one.

In the countryside, the values that are projected are those of Joaquim, his work, his coffee plantation, his masculine strength, even his later alienation in a moratorium of endless waiting seems to dominate over the others. However, it is Marcelo, the son, the "new" urban man who imposes himself, no longer in the first space of production, the field, but in the second, the abattoir where he starts working. There's a change that symbolizes the transitory: an abattoir is an intermediary element, not the final product, nor the initial one, it's not pasture, nor consumption, it's the place of slaughter.

Marcelo's option for city life was already visible at the time of the farm, which is highlighted in passages such as the following:

HELENA: (*Disguising herself*) Where's Marcelo?

LUCILIA: I didn't want to go back.

HELENA: I recommended that he not stay in town.

LUCÍLIA: Come on, Mom, let Marcelo have some fun (Andrade, 1986, p. 143).

At this point in the plot, the city, for both Marcelo and Lucília, is still seen as a source of discovery and fun. It represents the opening up of possibilities, of first and new loves and different perspectives on life. This changes later, when living in the city becomes an obligation, not a choice, and survival requires the two young people to enter the world of work.

Marcelo stands out for his preference for the city environment at both times, even in the context of financial precariousness seen in 1932. His speeches show his enthusiasm for the change, the speed, the new rhythm to which he tries, in his own way, to adjust:

HELENA: You come in late every day. What are you doing out until the early hours?

MARCELO: Nothing. Talking.

HELENA: But talking about what?

MARCELO: Nothing. Just talking, Mrs. Helena. At night the air is fresh, delicious, it makes me think! Do you want me to come and lock myself in this room? Don't you feel sorry for your son?

[...]

MARCELO: Working among those Englishmen, I'll soon be "spying". Then you'll see! I'll go up like a rocket!

[...]

MARCELO: [...] Working isn't so bad. We kill fifteen hundred oxen a day, Mrs. Helena! One thousand five hundred! (*he goes to his room*) (Andrade, 1986, p. 132-133).

A confident outlook on work and the future that doesn't convince the others, as can be seen below: "LUCÍLIA: I just want to see how long this enthusiasm will last. / HELENA: Now he's satisfied with his work. / LUCÍLIA: He used to say the same thing the other times" (Andrade, 1986, p. 133).

In 1929, Marcelo showed his unsuitability for his father's plans, his gaze and energy were only for the urban environment: "HELENA: Get up, my son. Your father has already called. [...] HELENA: It's time, my son" (Andrade, 1986, p.128). On this plane of the past, we can see Joaquim's concern about his son's behavior, signaling that the intergenerational passage of the land, if it were to happen, would not be without obstacles: "JOAQUIM: I've been fighting to send him, but it's no use! He doesn't want to react, he doesn't want to work, he doesn't want to do anything!" (Andrade, 1986, p. 161).

If there are difficulties in waking the boy up in the morning or getting him involved in the routine of the countryside, the expressions change if they concern the city: "MARCELO: I'm in a hurry [...] I'm going to the city" (Andrade, 1986, p. 134). The urban environment is clearly his favorite. However, in this first moment, going to the city has a festive aspect, Marcelo drinks, has fun, takes money from his family, especially his mother.

"I can't do it", "I don't know", are expressions directly linked to the young man's words. He doesn't feel motivated either to study or to work, he seems to be on hold in life even before the loss of the farm. Or perhaps he's not just on hold, but realizes the lack of prospects that rural life offers him. A scenario that is completely dismantled after the family's ruin:

JOAQUIM: You don't honor your name.

MARCELO: (*Pause*) And what is this name worth?

JOAQUIM: A lot. We're still what we were.

MARCELO: We're nothing, that's the truth (Andrade, 1986, p. 158-159).

Unsuited to an environment that doesn't complete him, Marcelo integrates the "new", the "speed", the "urban", not his father's traditions and rigid mentality, shaped since childhood by his

love of the land, as Helena says: "We are born, live and work on the land. We haven't learned to do anything else, or to live any other way" (Andrade, 1986, p. 152).

On the one hand, Marcelo presents himself in terms of breaking with tradition, he is free thinking, albeit flawed and without the space to mature: "I don't know how to stop my thinking [...] I don't know how to live in prison" (Andrade, 1986, p. 135). However, on the other hand, the young man is also characterized by inertia, by omission; the free thought that he can't stop reinforces dispersion and alienation. Marcelo ends up becoming an extra burden on the backs of the women in the family:

MARCELO: I admit it, I'm weak. I didn't take responsibility. And you? You who only think about your farm, your lawsuit, your rights, your name. As long as you think of yourself, of your honor, you can't feel the way I feel. You don't go out into the street to find out what other people think of us. You pretend not to realize that we are no longer part of anything, that our world is irretrievably destroyed. If we went back to the farm...

JOAQUIM: (*Shouting*) Let's go back!

MARCELO: ... we'd lose it again. The rules for living are different, rules that we don't understand or accept. The world, people, everything! Everything is different now! Everything has changed. Only we haven't. We're just slowly dying. A little longer and we'll be like that jabuticaba branch: dry! Dry! (Andrade, 1986, p. 160-161).

For Monte (2016), this conflicting relationship between father and son should be seen as one of the keys to understanding the play, and is representative of the period of transition experienced by the country at the time: "What should be the generation of continuity, following on from the strong grandparental and past values, clearly planted by Joaquim, actually assimilates the crisis from a defeatist ideology" (Monte, 2016, p. 342). The author points out that Marcelo, like a significant proportion of young people at the time, didn't find a structure in his social environment, not even in his family, that convinced him that he could make it in the midst of the breakdown of traditional values and the economic system that was being consolidated at the time, which was different from the ideology for which he had previously believed he was destined:

For this new man, unable to fight against a powerful economic wheel that brings the misery of our lives to light, there is no reason to sacrifice what he considers his little pleasures for the day and night, now represented by drink and sex (Monte, 2016, p. 342).

And Monte (2016) closes by highlighting the impossibility of both adapting to the new reality. Joaquim is lost in an inglorious alienation that does not, however, rob him of the dignity of his seventy years working the land; Marcelo, despite his urban outlook, is equally massacred, perhaps even more painful, in a vicious circle of defeats, unable to integrate himself into a struggle that is bigger than him.

The city doesn't give the young man a sense of home, he lacks the closeness to the land that Joaquim has in his urban experience; the maladaptation that Marcelo feels in 1932 is similar to what he felt in 1929, when he was in the midst of tradition, where his father moved around easily, even arrogantly.

The way Jorge Andrade places the patriarch's presence on two levels before and after the ruin emphasizes the disruption suffered by the character. The Joaquim of 1932 is lost, wandering around the house, even getting in the way of other people's activities; the Joaquim of 1929, just three years earlier, is completely different, his figure is charged with the strength of his power as owner of the farm and, in a way, owner of the family he raised. The juxtaposition of the shots highlights the human cost of this journey between the countryside and the city. For Joaquim, the loss of the farm represented the loss of the only concrete reference in his life: the land he had walked on for so many decades, the ground he had sown and which had fed his family.

The knowledge that Joaquim has acquired from managing his land does not enable him to meet the conditions demanded by the new production system that has come to dominate Brazil's economic and political landscape. His land dissolves into debts, promissory notes, laws, political agreements, a whole economic and cultural system that no longer needs his work or his knowledge, perhaps only his affection, which Lucília and Helena are desperate to keep. But what kind of affection can a man who no longer recognizes himself give?

At the end of the play, Joaquim sits with a rag in his hand. With few gestures and few words, the weight of life is reflected in the weight of the scene, exposing human fragility at the moment when the last thread of hope is broken:

(Long pause. Joaquim begins to unravel the cloth)

[...]

JOAQUIM: (Looks at Lucília) I... I don't suffer anymore, I don't suffer anymore, my child. There's no need to be afraid. I... I...

(Andrade, 1986, p. 186-187)

The pain underlying his attempts to maintain a modicum of dignity in the midst of chaos is perceptible; his frustrations, often transformed into moments of childish arrogance, sound like a desperate attachment to the patriarch he once was, to what he believed he was, that he would always be. It's a desperation that has such a personal impact that it becomes alienation, denoting his effective inability to absorb and overcome the loss.

Thanks to Jorge Andrade's masterful construction of scenes and dialogues, Joaquim and Marcelo become complex, real characters, capable of provoking identification and empathy. If

Marcelo embarks on his individualized universe by giving up hope, Joaquim follows the opposite path, taking refuge precisely in that hope to which he obsessively clings and which Marcelo denies himself. In the end, they are both shipwrecked.

3.3 Helena: a path of religiosity, accountability and powerlessness

Escape, alienation and confrontation are issues that can also be seen in the way the author deals with Helena, whose religious faith is a characteristic of continuity in both parts of the play. However, it is a religiosity that takes on different and, in a way, contradictory contours. In 1929, Helena prays at home; faith is an instrument of permanence within the farm. In 1932, Helena's religious practice shows a movement towards the outside world, in which she differs from Joaquim and Lucília, perhaps a little closer to the movement undertaken by Marcelo.

Nevertheless, although her strength — especially when compared to Joaquim's initial authority — grows in proportion to her husband's increasing alienation, it never achieves actual effectiveness in everyday life. The religious quest that Helena assumes in the city remains, as on the farm, a refuge very close to omission:

(As Lucilla removes the vase of flowers and the tablecloth, Helena falls to her knees in front of the paintings) O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who turn to you! Take away our land, but preserve it, preserve it, I beg you...

(She looks into Joaquim's room and suddenly hides her face in her hands. Lucília opens the sewing machine) (Andrade, 1986, p. 170).

There is, therefore, a kind of 'erasure' of the character, as Engelmann (2025, p. 158) affirms: "Helena subjectively annuls herself in order to help keep the family together. Her self-annulment is a form of silencing, of erasure". It is important to highlight here that, in a different way to her husband, for Helena, omitting herself is a conscious choice, not an unhealthy alienation: "HELENA: I never had any illusions. For me, everything ended that day... *(Looks slightly at the pictures)* ... That day your father and I left" (Andrade, 1986, p. 163). The pictures Helena looks at are the ones she used to pray in front of in the farm chapel.

Helena's strength, compared to Joaquim's initial dominance, grows as her husband's alienation grows. However, the conscience she possesses when she takes refuge in the religious universe, perhaps makes her more liable, since her knowledge of the facts doesn't lead her to stop

Lucília's exploitation. Her concern is clearly directed at Joaquim's feelings, not her daughter's, and with regard to Marcelo, her conduct takes on a role of connivance rather than omission.

JOAQUIM: He only knows how to drink and rot in that bed.
HELENA: Don't say that, Quim. He's young, that's how he is. [...]
HELENA: He's not used to working for others. [...]
HELENA: We should think only of your father, put everything aside
(Andrade, 1986, p. 131, 132 and 151).

The focus on Joaquim is one of the points of connection between Helena and Lucília. The two women's primary concern is not with their own situations, but with that of their husband and father, aware that he would not have the personal structure to go through the necessary transition without a physical and/or moral breakdown. And this is what happens, with the detachment from reality that the character embodies, an aloofness and inflexibility that end up placing on the shoulders of the two women a weight that, in truth, should be shared between all the members of the family.

In this context, it is symbolic that Jorge Andrade puts the phrase that ends the plot into Helena's speech, which may represent an opening for further reading about the role she plays in the work, whether as a woman, wife or mother: "HELENA: Those who planted... will begin to reap!" (Andrade, 1986, p.187). Helena's sentence shows a clear perception of the impossibility of returning; *the* plantation now belongs to others, it is no longer part of her family's life.

Final considerations

Jorge Andrade takes us back to 1929 and 1932. He spoke of human beings in the 20th century, involved in individual and collective problems that they are not always able to understand. However, in his record of the anguish of loss and impotence, his work becomes current and guarantees a universalizing content.

Social changes, financial and cultural restructuring and questioning identities are also hallmarks of the early decades of the 21st century. A universe of crises has been amplified in recent years amid a pandemic that has revealed our unpreparedness to deal with it. Pre-existing crises have redefined their limits to the point of coming dangerously close to negationism, the loss of social rights and the breakdown of individual or collective values. It is becoming increasingly urgent to reflect on who we are and what we really want as possibilities for being.

In this sense, the re-reading of Jorge Andrade is current and necessary in its denunciation of enclosure and powerlessness. Observing how movement and regression appear in his work expands our possibilities of understanding and prepares us for the structural changes that are foreseen as possibilities in the near future.

A final note is necessary: the research carried out on *The Moratorium* is based on the text, not on the staging of the play. These two perspectives, that of the book and that of the stage, highlight the possibilities of perception and interpretation. They are two different paths, that of the work and the reading public and that of the work and the spectator, both valuable and both pointing to other possible perspectives, future readings, stagings, new creative experiences.

The society that Jorge Andrade describes experiences confrontation, transformation and the desperate search for survival. Lives are merge with the machines that guarantee food, people are objectified, materialized in fixed positions whose common characteristic is the inability to dream. And not being able to dream is the most effective mark of giving up.

Being fit, in a framework without dreams, is an unreal aptitude. Effectiveness goes beyond awareness of a situation; the effectiveness of being fit represents, above all, the ability to act. We're not talking about victories or defeats, but dreams that guarantee movement, the attempt. Fitness, we must not forget, is reflected in hope.

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