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A LUSO-BRAZILIAN CLASSIC:
THE FORMAL SATIRE "AS CARTAS CHILENAS"

It seems more than a little unjust that a work as vibrant and as colorful as the *Cartas Chilenas* has been examined since its publication in the nineteenth century mostly with a view to proving who actually wrote it rather than as the fine example of formal verse satire that it is. It is a work which Rodrigues Lapa calls "um admirável poema, que tanto mais avulta quanto mais se lê."¹ With each successive reading the poem takes on new dimensions; it is both a social document of Minas Gerais as it was when the gold boom was already on the wane and an elegant poem written in *decassílabos brancos*.

At one time or another the following writers, critics, and historians have all taken part in the discussions of the authorship of the *Cartas Chilenas*: Manuel Bandeira, Afonso Arinos Melo Franco, Sud Menucci, Cecília Meireles, Afonso Pena Junior, Sílvio Romero, Varnhagen, Rodrigues Lapa, Arlindo Chaves, Sílvio de Almeida, Lindolfo Gomes, Pereira da Silva, Tito Lívio de Castro, etc. That is by no means a complete list, but it certainly goes to show that literary mysteries attract many people. Many have attempted to claim authorship of the *Cartas Chilenas* for their particular candidates. After the publication in 1958 of Rodrigues Lapa's *As Cartas Chilenas*, subtitled "Um problema histórico e filológico," in which he furnishes us with a detailed stylistic analysis of the work, which led him to the conclusion that the *Cartas Chilenas* can only be the work of Tomás Antônio Gonzaga, interest in the work seems to have lessened considerably. This is a pity, for the poem retains its freshness as satire nearly two hundred years after it was written.

It is easy to read, fairly simple to decipher (even for those knowing only the rudiments of Brazilian colonial history), the language is fresh and vividly colloquial, and it is almost immediately recognizable as a tirade against a man in power who does not administer his government

¹ M. R. Lapa, *Verdades e Ficção nas "Cartas Chilenas"*, "Minas Gerais Suplemento Literário," 1969, IV, No. 158, p. 2.

properly, either through stupidity or venality, or a combination of both. The theme remains a timely one in view of the persistence of wrongdoing in high places and the various forms of colonialism and neo-colonialism wherever and whenever practiced, as in Africa, Northern Ireland, or Latin America.

As *Cartas Chilenas* followed in a line of satirical poems, which included Cruz e Silva's *O Hissope* (1772), Silva Alvarenga's *O Desertor* (1774), and Melo Franco's *O Reino da Estupidez* (1785). Most Portuguese literary critics consider *O Hissope* the greatest satirical work in Portuguese in the eighteenth century,² but when read today it seems extremely subtle and filled with preciousness. It is not formal verse satire but rather a satirical poem in mock-heroic style (labelled by its author as: *Poema Herói-Cômico em 8 Cantos*). Antonio Candido gives the background of this type of poem in his *Formação da Literatura Brasileira*, and I believe that it is of great value in understanding the *Cartas Chilenas*.

In the 17th century, literary virtuosity favored the elaboration of a new form, in which traditional satire was joined to the burlesque and the epic, creating the so-called mock-heroic poem, with its roots probably fastened to the 15th century Italians. Silva Alvaranga returns to the origins of the *Batracomionaquia* and to *Culex*, attributed to Homer and Virgil. After that he cites Tassoni, Boileau, Butler, Pope, Cresset, leaving aside Scarron and his parody of the epic. Boileau, who systematized everything, made a synthesis of the ideas of the Italian poet, defining as the object of the mock-heroic poem the celebration, in epic tone, of a happening without the slightest importance, its mastery consisting in elaboration practically in a vacuum. This is what he did in *Le Lutrin*, celebrating the quarrel of the Prelate of Sainte-Chapelle with his Cantor because of a minor matter of prestige, manifested by the localization of that piece of furniture. In this way the satire passed to a secondary level and the poetic buffoonery to the primary level; but what could mean the abdication of the critical spirit sometimes amounted to a convenient disguise in order to state certain truths during oppressive regimes.³

² Rodrigues Lapa does not hold this opinion, and Antonio Candido, calls *O Hissope* "geralmente louvado além do merecimento."

³ "No século XVII, o virtuosismo literário favoreceu a elaboração duma forma nova, em que a sátira tradicional se mesclava ao burlesco e a epopéia, gerando o chamado poema herói-cômico, de raízes firmadas porventura nos italianos de século XV. Silva Alvarenga remonte as origens a *Batracomionaquia* e ao *Culex*, atribuídos a Homero e Vergílio. Cita em seguida Tassoni, Boileau, Butler, Pope, Gresset, pondo a parte Scarron e sua parodia de epopéia. Boileau, que sistematizava tudo, sintetizou as idéias do poeta italiano, definindo como objeto do poema herói-cômico a celebração, em tom épico, de um acontecimento sem a menor importância, consistindo a maestria em elaboração praticamente no vácuo. Foi o que fez em *Le Lutrin*, celebrando a querela do Prelado da Sainte-Chapelle e do seu Chantre por causa de uma questão de prestígio, manifestada na localização desse móvel. Deste modo a sátira passava a segundo plano e a jogralice poética ao primeiro; mas o que poderia significar abdicação

In light of Candido's analysis, it seems likely that mock-heroic poem is not a genre which, except in a few notable exceptions such as Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, is going to stand the test of time. It is one form of satire which requires that the reader be familiar with the original happening to enjoy and understand the poem. And in the case of *O Hissopo*, without even discussing the happening on which it was based, how many people today even know what a hyssop is?

O Hissopo is directly based on Boileau's *Le Lutrin*, since the disagreement which serves as a pretext for Cruz e Silva's poem echoes a polemic between two members of the clergy over a ridiculously trivial matter involving rank and privilege. In reality *O Hissopo* is, in the words of one Portuguese literary historian, "a sharp social satire against the agonizing feudal world."⁴ It was intended to be a much more subversive work than the *Cartas Chilenas*, but time has so obscured its meaning that today it can be read only as a literary exercise by most people, and the satire seems dry and lifeless. In contrast, the *Cartas Chilenas*, with its simplicity and clarity of language, is very readable and quite accessible to interpretation by contemporary students, possibly because it contains something for everyone—delightful vignettes of everyday life in Vila Rica, besides the picture of the political problems of a colony far-removed from and exploited by the mother country.⁵

A thorough reading of the *Cartas Chilenas* shows us a formal verse satire which is really personal satire, of the kind which abounds in Portuguese literature since the *Cantigas de Escárnio e Mal-Dizer*. At no point does Gonzaga take the Portuguese government as such to task, but rather aims his barbs at Luis de Cunha Menezes, the governor. Accordingly, Gonzaga presents us with a personal indictment of "Fanfarrão Minésio," and only indirectly of colonialism. As Antonio Candido says:

The only general idea, we might say almost the only philosophical position evident in the poem, is the notion of the contrast between the specific value of the individual and the manner in which society generally defines social positions. Fanfarrão is a noble: therefore he enjoys prerogatives which he does not deserve, does not even know how to use, and the individuals of worth are at his mercy.⁶

do espírito crítico importava algumas vezes em disfarce comodo para dizer certas verdades em regimes de opressão" (A. Candido, *Formação da Literatura Brasileira*, São Paulo 1959, vol. I, p. 149–150).

⁴ "Uma acerada sátira social contra o mundo feudal agonizante" (L. de Sousa Rebelo, [in:] *Dicionário das Literaturas Portuguesa, Galega, e Brasileira*, ed. J. do Prado Coelho, Porto 1960, p. 745).

⁵ Gonzaga never arrives at this conclusion, but it is an inevitable one for his readers.

⁶ "A única idéia geral, diríamos quase a única posição filosófica evidente no poema, é a noção do contraste entre o valor específico das pessoas e a maneira por que a sociedade costuma definir as posições sociais. O Fanfarrão é fidalgo; por isso desfruta prerrogativas que não merece, nem sabe usar, e as pessoas de valor ficam a sua mercê" (Candido, *op. cit.*, p. 163).

The literary significance of the *Cartas Chilenas* might be more appreciated if one examines its worth in light of classical satire as cultivated during the Enlightenment by such outstanding writers as Alexander Pope. The English writer considered himself to be a satirist in the style of Horace, and he much admired the gentle Roman satirist. Much of what Pope understood of Horace was derived from Boileau, who exercised a significant influence both on eighteenth century English poetry,⁷ as well as on the state of letters in eighteenth century Portugal.⁸ In an enlightening book entitled *Horace in the English Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, Caroline Goad makes the point that although Pope considered himself a moral satirist,

it is an accepted fact that Pope is at his best in his writings when he is expressing himself most personally, and it is also unfortunately true that these personal expressions of himself arise most often out of intense and bitter anger. His satire is directed almost entirely against persons: that of the great Roman satirists is directed against typical vices and follies.⁹

Much of the same thing could be said of Gonzaga and his *Cartas Chilenas*, except that Gonzaga also has his preoccupation with justice. He never betrays his training in the law. Tito Lívio de Castro, who did not believe that the *Cartas Chilenas* were the work of Tomás Antônio Gonzaga, comments quite acutely on Critílo, the unknown author:¹⁰

Critílo was, besides being educated, a good poet, an intransigent respecter of laws and customs, a man in whom all the arbitrary acts practiced by the representatives of the king provoke violent protests, however, without the slightest discredit to the monarchy. [...] The poets of his preference were Ovid and Horace; only once does he refer to Virgil in the *Cartas Chilenas* and, what is more surprising, there is not one word about Juvenal, whose name, however, would be more relevant transcribed in the Prolog of the *Cartas Chilenas* than that of Horace.¹¹

⁷ A. F. B. Clark, *Boileau and the French Classical Critics in England*, Paris 1925, p. 131.

⁸ Boileau was promptly translated into Portuguese by the Conde de Ericeira in 1699, a point made by H. Cidade in *Lições de Cultura e Literatura Portuguesa*, Coimbra 1959.

⁹ C. Goad, *Horace in the English Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, New Haven 1918, p. 134.

¹⁰ J. de Castro Osório, *O Crítico de Gracian e as Cartas Chilenas de Gonzaga*, "Atlantico," 1942, No. 1, p. 32-43.

¹¹ "Critílo era, além de instruído, bom poeta, intransigente respeitador de leis e costumes, homem em quem todas as arbitrariedades praticadas pelos representantes do rei provocam violentos protestos, porém, sem o mais leve descrédito da monarquia... Os poetas de sua predileção eram Ovídio e Horácio; apenas uma vez se refere ao Virgílio nas *Cartas Chilenas* e, o que é mais de admirar, não há uma palavra a respeito de Juvenal, que no entanto, tinha mais cabimento transcripto no Prologo das *Cartas Chilenas* do que Horácio" (T. L. de Castro, *Questões e Problemas*, São Paulo 1913, p. 37.

Alexander Pope aspired to lead a life of "luxurious simplicity," after the model of Horace. Even a superficial reading of Pope's verse will yield up this idea. Gonzaga seems to have shared this aspiration of Pope, although he did not have the Englishman's independent financial means at his disposal to do so. Indeed, a life of simple plenty was a common ideal during the eighteenth century. Gonzaga's contemplated marriage seems to have been part of this picture, and the scenes of quiet domesticity which he paints for us both in the *Cartas Chilenas* as well as in his poems, *Marília de Dirceu*.¹²

Several parallels could be drawn between Pope and Gonzaga, since they were both imbued with the way of life which the Enlightenment fostered. But it is clear when reading both of them that Gonzaga is more profound and less brittle than the English master. Pope held that good taste is the most important thing in life and that this takes precedence over philosophical concerns. One literary historian comments:

The centre of Pope's moral teaching is the notion of good taste, which implies not merely the ability to enjoy the arts but a whole way of living. Pope believed it immoral to have bad taste in architecture or gardening, and conversely that vice and folly are hopelessly vulgar.¹³

Gonzaga, in his verses, seems to have exhibited more compassion than Pope, but basically he shared his elitist attitudes. He refused to attend the theater in Vila Rica, for example, because he thought it of such poor quality, and his disdainful attitude towards blacks and Brazilians of mixed blood appears in many instances of his poem. And what escapes from every page of the *Cartas Chilenas* is Tomás Antônio Gonzaga's indignation that such vulgarity and stupidity as Cunha Menezes exhibits should be present in a Portuguese of noble birth. The Brazilian writer's attitude is aptly described in the following commentary of a British historian on Gonzaga's English counterpart:

Pope, who is capable of the most delicate effects of *rococo* decoration usually clinches a passage of Horatian satire with forceful and monosyllabic words of the simplest Anglo-Saxon origin, where he says that he will not hesitate to attack vice even in those who wear orders of nobility, to "bare the mean heart which lurks beneath a star." This combination of elegance and directness needs such technical mastery and social self-confidence as is hardly ever found in literature: many tried to follow him but there is no "school of Pope."¹⁴

Gonzaga shares with Pope this combination of elegance and directness, although not his "delicate effects of *rococo* decoration." Gonzaga's elegance is in reality the elegance of simplicity of expression. He is much more down-

¹² T. A. Gonzaga, *Marília de Dirceu*, São Paulo 1966, is one of the most recent editions of this popular work.

¹³ M. Hodgart, *Satire*, New York 1969, p. 146.

¹⁴ L. c.

-to-earth than Pope (probably because he realized the limitations of his public), but even though he uses many popular expressions of somewhat dubious taste, the effect they produce is not one of vulgarity. One never doubts that these verses are the work of an educated, sophisticated, highly complex individual. In the opinion of Segismundo Spina:

They [the *Cartas Chilenas*] are a serious satire, at times bitter, recalling the English "humour" more than the Latin spirit: they lack, nearly always, the "playful tone" which we are accustomed to expect of this genre.¹⁵

Despite the similarities between the two writers, there is no concrete evidence that Tomás Antônio Gonzaga was directly familiar with the work of Alexander Pope. However, one cannot discount the possibility of influence, and Pope was considered to be the finest writer of eighteenth century England. Pope was born in 1688 and died in 1744, so that all of his poetry and prose dates from the first half of the eighteenth century, a generation before Gonzaga. Hernani Cidade mentions a translation in Portuguese of *Essay on Criticism* as early as 1810 and, in the following year, one of *Moral Essays*. He also cites an even earlier translation of *Essay on Man*, but he does not give a specific date.¹⁶ Both Pope's *Moral Essays* and the *Cartas Chilenas* begin with apostrophes to a sleeping friend, despite the disparity of tone:

(Pope) Awake, my St. John! leave all meaner things
 To low ambition, and the pride of kings.¹⁷

 Doroteu, my Friend, my dear Friend,
 Open your eyes, yawn, stretch out your arms,
 And clean from your sleepy eyelids
 The clammy moisture, that sleep accumulates.

In a passage from *Formação da Literatura Brasileira*, which I have already quoted earlier, Antonio Candido mentions that a friend and colleague of Gonzaga, Silva Alvarenga, was given to citing Pope as one of the influences on his own poetry. One such reference is found in his *Discurso sobre o Poema Herói-Cômico* published as a preface to *O Desertor* in 1774.¹⁸ Clearly, the work of Alexander Pope does seem to have been known in Portugal and in Brasil during the second half of the eighteenth century, but whether it was in translation or in the original English is not clear.

In addition to a general cultural context, other factors pertaining to

¹⁵ "São [as *Cartas Chilenas*] uma sátira séria, não poucas vezes amarga, lembrando mais o 'humour' inglês do que o espírito latino: falta-lhes, quase sempre, o 'tom jocoso' que nós acostumamos a esperar desse gênero" (S. Spina, *Literatura no Brasil*, dir. A. Coutinho, Rio de Janeiro 1968, vol. I, p. 360.

¹⁶ Cidade, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 365-366.

¹⁷ A. Pope, *Poetical Works*, ed. W. M. Rossetti, London 1901, vol II, p. 66.

¹⁸ Candido, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

Gonzaga's background provide further reason to believe that Pope was probably an influence on his literary formation. It has been well documented that Tomás Antônio Gonzaga's maternal forbears were Anglo-Irish.¹⁹ His Mother's family was involved in the Port wine export trade in Porto, and her father had even been a ship's captain at one time. Such a family would have had easy access to English books and periodicals. After Tomás Antônio's mother died when he was only nine months old, Rodrigues Lapa tells us that his upbringing was entrusted to an aunt, his mother's sister, Ana Maria Clark "and his uncles, Fathers Raymond Clark and Thomas Clark, directed his education afterwards."²⁰ So that his earliest training was supervised by the British part of his family. It seems reasonable to assume that they would have made sure that Tomás Antônio would have had instruction in the English language. However, in the absence of any clear-cut proof, we can only speculate about this.

Another indication of British influence stems from the prominent place of formal verse satire in the works of Alexander Pope, as opposed to its relative unpopularity in Portugal where writers preferred the mock-heroic, as we have already noted with regard to *O Hissope*. Pope used the rather rigid, stylized form of verse satire to great advantage; and Gonzaga used it no less masterfully in the *Cartas Chilenas*, as I hope to demonstrate later.

The title of *As Cartas Chilenas* was almost certainly suggested by Montesquieu's *Les Lettres Persanes*. They were first published in 1721 (anonymously, like the *Cartas Chilenas*), and they took Paris by storm. One translator has said:

So great was the sale of the *Persian Letters* when they came out that publishers did their utmost to obtain sequels. They buttonholed every author they met, and entreated him to write *Persian Letters*.²¹

There were many imitations of this type of work (letters between travelers or from one traveler in a foreign land to a friend at home), and it certainly appears that Gonzaga wished to use Montesquieu's general idea and also that he felt that Montesquieu was a kindred spirit.

Montesquieu was acknowledged by all to be a charming man, and his translator adds: "Simplicity was the great charm of the man, as it is of the writer."²² Of course, Montesquieu lived a life of ease and pleasure and never wanted for any material comfort. Even so, a thumbnail social profile of Montesquieu, the quintessential *honnête homme*, almost fits

¹⁹ T. A. Gonzaga, *Obras Completas*, pref. M. R. Lapa, Rio de Janeiro 1957, vol. I, p. IX.

²⁰ "E seus tios, os padres Raimundo Clark e Tomás Clark, dirigiriam depois a sua educação" (*ibid.*, p. X).

²¹ Ch. L. de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, transl. and introd. J. Davidson, London 1909, p. 26.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Gonzaga as well: "A man of high education, versed in the theory and practice of law, an aristocrat of wealth and title, occupying a position of great influence."²³ Except for the passage about wealth and title, that could be Gonzaga. But although Gonzaga attempted to emulate Montesquieu's evenhandedness and gentle raillery in his writings, what really comes through in the *Cartas Chilenas* is the portrait of a writer who had a very different personality from that of the French master. As Antonio Candida has noted very well in discussing Gonzaga, the satirist:

We feel the pamphleteer imposes himself upon the poet and personal resentment guides the pamphlet. Critilo then was a good artist, but a man of strong temperament. The poem also allows us to perceive that he was very sensitive and aware of his worth; we feel throughout a certain irascibility of hurt pride and a pronounced confidence in his own capacity to weigh and measure other people's defects. Besides this, adherence to judicial and administrative forms and norms is indicated, the transgression of which is considered, in itself a greater crime than the sum of the arbitrary acts of Fanfarrão.²⁴

This attitude of pride and disguised passion Gonzaga shares with Alexander Pope, and I believe that it is this, more than anything else (together with a certain similar turn of phrase) that is imparted on reading both authors' satires: in both one detects a certain attitude of trying to rise above it all but not quite succeeding as they succumb to feelings of resentment and anger. In other words, they both lack the objectivity of their beloved Horace.

Thus far we have seen how the *Cartas Chilenas* can be viewed as an example of a genre amply cultivated by eighteenth century writers reflecting the views of enlightened, "polite" society. Let us now analyze the poem. I have come across two excellent definitions of formal satire. One is by Dawid Worcester, who writes:

[...] one might say that formal satire is a poem of short or middling length, designed to express the author's disapprobation of political, social, or personal actions, conditions, or qualities, written in the heroic couplet, in real or fancied imitation of one or more of the Roman satirists; its prevailing tone may be one of gross invective, satiric invective, or burlesque; it may or may not be constructed on a narrative framework; it also contains an indefinite number of the following features: Roman typenames, Roman manners, intentional roughness of style, assumption of a mission comparable to that of a Hebrew prophet, rage and bluster,

²³ O. H. G. Leigh, spec. introd. in *Persian Letters*, p. IX.

²⁴ "Sentimos o panfletário se impor ao poeta e o ressentimento pessoal nortear o panfleto. Era pois Critilo bom artista, mas homem de gênio forte. O poema deixa ainda prassentir que era bastante suscetível o côncio do seu valor; sentimos por todo ele não sei que irascibilidade de orgulho ferido e acentuada confiança na própria capacidade de pesar e medir defeitos alheios. Ao lado disso, denota apego as formas e normas jurídicas e administrativas, cuja transgressão reputa, por si só, crime maior que o próprio conteúdo das arbitrariedades do Fanfarrão" (Candido, *op. cit.*, p. 163).

Olympian disdain, dark and ominous innuendo, dialogue—often taking up the greater part of the poem, portraits of men and women, speeches that betray the speaker, passages of philosophic reflection.²⁵

From this definition we can see that almost any satirical attitude is allowed in formal satire, and that what most critics have considered "faults" in the *Cartas Chilenas* are not necessarily faults by the standards of formal verse satire. Gonzaga's satiric tone swings between burlesque and satiric invective, with many elements of caricature also present; the narrative thread, although quite episodic, is definitely there. It is well to remember that formal satire is a semi-dramatic form, so that the idea of a "story" must be maintained, no matter how greatly the author wanders and meanders. In Roman times, formal satire was very often declaimed in the public squares, so that this was both a written and an oral form of literature.

There are thirteen letters in all, although the last is only a fragment. The author begins each letter with a short introduction, in which he recalls incidents in Roman history or episodes in Vila Rica with his friends, and his reminiscences sometimes evoke Horace's Sabine farm as he quietly swings in his hammock. In these introductions he always addresses Doroteo, his friend and correspondent, who is a straw figure in that he never responds personally to Critilo. If a response is deemed necessary, then Critilo says: "As you would answer," or "You will say." Nevertheless, Doroteo is very much present in the narrative; Critilo invokes him constantly, and the poem is studded with rhetorical questions addressed to Doroteo.

After this evocative introduction, Critilo outlines the subject of each particular letter in a few lines before he actually embarks on a full-scale embellishment of his theme. The author also gives notice at the end of each letter that he will either continue the same subject in the next letter or take up a new one. He usually alleges that he is too fatigued to continue now or that his hand is tired from writing.

In the initial letter Critilo introduces the principal characters—Fanfarrão (Cunha Menezes) and his colleagues. All are pictured in humorous caricatures, filled with ironic comments on the pretensions of the various officials and hangers-on as contrasting greatly with the unprepossessing reality of their appearances. Gonzaga goes into detailed physical description of Fanfarrão and his cohorts, describing them one by one. For example, in speaking of "a certain Robério," who is, in reality, Roberto Antônio de Lima, confidant of Cunha Menezes and a self-styled poet, Gonzaga pictures the following creature:

Small stature, wide face,
Lean legs, and paunchy belly,

²⁵ D. Worcester, *The Art of Satire*, p. 36.

Immense shoulders, lacking a neck;
 A blotchy complexion, and he keeps
 His puffy cheeks always bulging:
 Even though he is already old, he supposes
 Himself to be delightful in the eyes of women,
 And the devil put it into his head, that he had legs
 Capable of mounting a good jennet,
 Which neighs from Parnassus. Poor fool,
 Who put you in such a spot!

You can only sing in halting verses,
 And to the sound of a bad fiddle
 Of the deeds of your Master, and of his Rulings.²⁶

One can hardly imagine a more devastatingly comic description, which nonetheless, portrays a specific recognizable individual and not a grotesque figure.

Luiz de Cunha Menezes is pictured as a dandy without the requisite physical equipment ("the King of the Fops"); his chaplain as a man with "bushy eyebrows, dusky face, eyeglasses on his nose"; and his private secretary Matúcio (José Antônio de Matos) as an underling with "an air of Milord." All are portrayed in distorted descriptive terms in the initial letter, which is entitled: "In Which Is Described the Entrance Which Fanfarrão Made into Chile," so that we are apprised immediately of what we are to think of our main cast of characters. The fact the the *Cartas Chilenas* begin with Cunha Menezes' entrance into Chile (Vila Rica) points up the dramatic form of the verse satire—it is exactly as though he is making his entrance upon the stage in a play.

Our author makes the acts of Cunha Menezes while governor the basis for his narrative. Gonzaga's method seems to have been to choose different negative facets of Fanfarrão's character for the different letters. After the presentation of the characters in Letter I, we have letters about his bad manners, his cruelties, his sexual habits, his excessive reliance

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Estatura pequena, largo o rosto,
 Delgadas pernas, e pençudo ventre,
 Sobejo de hombros, de pescoço falto;
 Tem de pisorga as cores, e conserva
 As bufantes bochechas sempre inchadas:
 Bem que seja já velho, inda presume
 De ser aos olhos das madames grato,
 E o demo lhe encaixou, que tinha pernas
 Capazes de montar no bom ginete,
 Que rinche do Parnaso. Pobre tonto,
 Quem te metterem camizas de onze varas!
 Tu só podes cantar em coxos versos,
 E ao som da má rabeca, com que atroas
 Os feitos de teu Amo, e os seus Despachos."

on the badly trained troops he himself creates, the way he allows his cohorts to enrich themselves at the expense of the people, and running through all the letters, the *leit-motiv* of his complete disregard for the law. Each letter is a separate story, but all depict the governor's stupidity, vulgarity, or wrongdoing, and all constitute an indictment of his behavior.

Gonzaga oscillates between caricature and burlesque when he wishes to be humorous and satiric invective when he wishes to make a moral point or when he is furious at some transgression. That is, in the physical descriptions of his victims, he is nearly always humorous, as he is also in Letters V and VI in describing the festivities marking the marriage in Portugal of the princes of the realm. Letter V has the splendid title: "In Which Are Told the Disturbances Caused at the Festivals Celebrating the Wedding of Our Serene Highness with the Serene Highness of Portugal." This ironically elegant title is a fitting one for a letter in which the author relates all manner of ridiculous happenings instigated by Fanfarrão on the excuse of celebrating a royal wedding.

However, when Gonzaga is cataloging the governor's abuses his tone is one of acerbic irony which often descends to scathing sarcasm. These letters have titles like that of Letter III: "In Which Are Told the Injustices, the Villainies, Which Fanfarrão Executed Because of a Jail, Which He Began to Build,"²⁷ or like Letter IX: "In Which Are Told the Disorders, Which Fanfarrão Produced in Governing the Troops." These two letters have little snatches of humor, but basically they are a denunciation of Cunha Menezes policies. It is important to note that after Letter VI (and we have said that there are thirteen in all), there are only very brief humorous interludes, and the author devotes himself almost entirely to a recitation of Fanfarrão's shortcomings as a representative of the Portuguese government. His satire then becomes a real diatribe, and were it not for the fact that he is always a careful and interesting poet as well as a marvelous reporter, his satire would lose the interest of the reader. To avoid a tedious cataloging of wrongdoing which could only lead to boredom, Gonzaga enlivens his narrative with all the features that David Worcester states are found in formal verse satire, and the work holds the reader's attention despite its shortcomings.

Rodrigues Lapa, in his study on the authorship of the *Cartas Chilenas*, gives the following opinion of the work as poetry, rather than as a social document:

²⁷ In Letter III Gonzaga opens with a lyrical description of a rainy afternoon in Vila Rica, and as A. Bosi says in his *História Concisa da Literatura Brasileira*, São Paulo 1970, p. 192: "Le-se uma descrição da vida pachorrenta dos arcades, vindo a tona o 'velho Alcimadonte' entre os seus alfarrábios (Claudio) e o 'terno Floridoro' (Alvarenga Peixoto) fruindo dos lazeres da vida familiar."

As Cartas Chilenas, de estilo bem martelado, nítido como cristal, jovializado por termos e locuções populares, que constituem o sal desse poema admirável, incomparavelmente superior a esse respeito, e a todos os outros, quanto a nos, as bagatelas literárias que são *O Hissopo* de Cruz e Silva, *O Deserto* de Silva Alvarenga e *O Reino de Estupidez* de Melo Franco. Esse estilo traz para a literatura a audácia libertina dos termos da rua a fraseado chulo, rejeitados pelos puristas do vernáculo e muito a custo, e só alguns, registados nos dicionários.²⁸

This is high praise indeed coming from one of Portugal's foremost literary critics and historians. His praise stands in marked contrast to those critics who would dismiss the poetic value of the *Cartas Chilenas* as practically nil, finding in them only an important social document of colonial Brazil. Such a writer is Haroldo Paranhos: "They do not have great literary merit, but they are a precious historical document..."²⁹ Sílvia Romero was another critic who, as quoted by Raimundo Magalhaes Junior in his *Antologia de Humorismo e Sátira*, thought the letters "destitute of greater literary and poetic interest" but of extreme documentary importance.³⁰ It seems as though these critics have rejected out of hand that the *Cartas Chilenas* as satire could be good poetry as well as a social document. Perhaps this was because of a certain unfamiliarity on the part of these writers with the form and methods of formal verse satire. As I stated earlier, mock-heroic poem was much practiced in Portugal, but Gonzaga's work was not mock-heroic; however, it could have been seen by some critics as a defective mock-heroic.³¹ It is probably much more likely that these particular men had little use for satire. One suspects that as a genre it is disliked by many literary critics, who would regard any example as decidedly inferior to other literary genres.

Even Tito Lívio de Castro, an admirer of the *Cartas Chilenas*, confesses certain reservations:

The *Cartas Chilenas* would be of greater interest if Critilo would have as his objective the ridiculing of abuses and despotisms to which he was almost indifferent. Placing himself truly in the position of observer, he would enrich the *Cartas* with comic and interesting situations. This, however, did not take place, and the powerful note, the virulence of the attack, shows that the author was too interested in the subject to take it only as ridiculous.³²

²⁸ Lapa, *Verdades...*, p. 63.

²⁹ "Não tem elas grande mérito literário, mas são um precioso documento histórico..." (H. Paranhos, *História do Romantismo no Brasil*, São Paulo s. d., vol. I, p. 204).

³⁰ "Destituídas de maior interesse literário e poético" (R. Magalhaes Jr, *Antologia de Humorismo e Sátira*, Rio de Janeiro 1969, p. 26).

³¹ Sílvia Romero treats the *Cartas Chilenas* as mock-heroic. In a rather pointed statement he says: "Ainda uma vez afirma-senelas a incapacidade brasileira para o poema. O talento lírico dos nossos poetas da-se mal nas composições de outra índole, como e epopéia ou o poema comico e satírico". In this statement we can see the beginnings of the idea that Brazilians cannot and do not write satire.

³² "As *Cartas Chilenas* seriam mais ricas de interesse si Critilo só tivesse por fim ridicularisar abusos e despotismos que lhe fossem quasi indiferentes. Colocado verda-

Antonio Candido makes a similar point in another way:

Critilo applies himself in such a manner to the satire that—we feel reading it—its beauty is little thought of; and the few moments in which the diatribe abates are mere recourses to rest and sharpen our attention. The verses concentrate on the attack, revealing the tension, the mental energy which elaborated them.³³

And the end result is that this dramatic “tension” is exactly what Gonzaga communicates to us, and it is what makes the *Cartas Chilenas* infinitely more interesting than *O Hissopo*, *O Desertor*, etc.

In the *Cartas Chilenas*, Gonzaga’s objective is to destroy the character of Cunha Menezes, and he does so, much more with the spirit of a Juvenal than with that of a Horace. His satire is not at all objective, and as Antonio Candido states: “This presence of the *I* makes the diatribe lively and delicious.”³⁴ Gonzaga uses all the rhetorical devices at his command to cut his enemies down, and it is this intelligent use of rhetoric that contributes greatly toward making this satire work. Irony pervades the poem; for example, the following passage is from Letter IX:

The wise Homer was born among the ancients.
To sing of the name of the Greek Achilles,
To sing also of the Pious Aeneas,
The Roman people had their Virgil.
Thus to write of the great deeds,
That our Fanfarrão realized in Chile,
I believe, Doroteu, that Providence
Hurled into cultured Spain your Critilo.
Now then, Doroteu, I accept, I accept
The respectful execution of my duties.³⁵

deiramente na posição de observador, enriqueceria as *Cartas* de situações cômicas e interessantes. Assim, porém, não se deu, e a nota forte, a virulência do ataque, mostra que o autor era por demais interessado no assumpto para tomá-lo apenas a ridículo” (de Castro *op. cit.* p. 37).

³³ “Critilo se aplica de tal modo na sátira que — sentimos lendo-a — a beleza mal o preocupa; os poucos momentos em que a diatribe se amaina são meros recursos para repousar e aguçar a atenção. Os versos se concentram no ataque, revelando a tensão, a energia mental com que os elaborou” (Candido, *op. cit.*, p. 162).

³⁴ “Esta presença do eu torna a diatribe viva e saborosa” (*ibid.*, p. 164).

³⁵ “Nasceo o sábio Homero entre os antigos,
Para o nome cantar do Grego Achilles
Para cantar também ao Pio Eneas,
Teve o povo Romano o seu Virgílio.
Assim para escrever os grandes feitos,
Que o nosso Fanfarrão obrou em Chile,
Entendo, Doroteo, que a Providencia
Lançou na culta Espanha o teu Critilo.
Hora pois, Doroteo, eu passo, eu passo
A cumprir respeitoso os meos deveres”

This is only one instance of Critílo's irony, but a more detailed examination of the poem's structure will show that irony is the attitude most frequently employed in the work.

Besides the definition of formal satire proposed by David Worcester, Mary Claire Randolph, in an excellent article has outlined what she considers the minimal essentials for formal verse satire: two actors (since she sees formal satire as a "quasi-dramatic" genre), a Satirist and his Adversary; a setting of sorts; and a thesis to be argued.³⁶ These elements are all present in some form in the *Cartas Chilenas*: Critílo is our Satirist and Fanfarrão the Adversary; Critílo's home in Vila Rica, the place from which he writes to his friend Doroteo; Vila Rica under Fanfarrão is the setting; and his thesis, which is more a position than a thesis, is that Cunha Menezes has abused his powers as governor.

Within this outer framework lies the satire itself wherein, in what has been called Part A, some irrational behavior of Man, either foolish or vicious, is turned about on a pivot and its various sides mercilessly exposed and illumined by a wide variety of lively exegetical devices,

continues Randolph. Indeed, this is exactly Gonzaga's technique when examining the behavior of Fanfarrão and his colleagues.

Randolph believes that the form of formal satire can sometimes become confusing to the reader when there is much conversational exchange between the two principal actors. In the case of the *Cartas Chilenas*, the narrator Critílo is the only one to speak except when he is relating separate incidents in which he himself does not take part. He is always the "objective" onlooker, and he directs our following of the action. Critílo never directly addresses his adversary, Fanfarrão.

Mary Claire Randolph continues:

To illustrate his thesis, win his case, and move his audience to thought and perhaps to actions, the Satirist uses the following: swiftly sketched but painstakingly built up satiric "characters" or portraits; miniature dramas; quotable maxims and sententious proverbs; apostrophes; visions; beast tales (often reduced to animal metaphors); brief sermons; figure processions; invocations to abstractions, etc.

All these ingredients are readily found in the *Cartas Chilenas*.

Thus far we have seen that this poem provides a graphic example of poetic satire as defined by Randolph. Her comments, indeed, could be considered a commentary of the Brazilian's work, as we read:

He uses anything and everything to push his argument forward to its philosophical and psychological conclusion in much the same manner as events might push action forward to a denouement in drama or fiction. In addition

³⁶ M. C. Randolph, *Structural Design of Formal Verse Satire*, "Philological Quarterly," 1942, XXI, IV, says on p. 372: "Sometimes this second figure is only a straw decoy who utters no word but simply listens throughout the Satirist's monologue." Further quotations from p. 373-374.

to these structural devices, an innumerable variety of purely rhetorical devices is employed to give point, compactness, speed, climax, contrast, surprise, and a score more of the special effects so necessary to good satire. Holding these varied materials together internally is the unifying thesis-thread or core of argument, while the outer frame serves as external enclosure for the entire piece. Thus, whatever simplicity and nonchalance formal satire seems to have is only an assumed simplicity of verbal surface beneath which there exists a skillfully evolved and delicately convoluted development of dialectical argument.

Mary Claire Randolph has stated that there is always much more negative portion (Part A) than there is positive portion (Part B) in formal verse satire—the positive portion being that which exhorts one to virtue. Sometimes this part is only implied, but it must be present. This positive part is very difficult to locate in the *Cartas Chilenas*; for example, there is no one letter which could serve as the positive portion of the *Cartas Chilenas*. Gonzaga finishes each letter with a brief sermon, but he sees the abuses of Fanfarrão as being the responsibility of Fanfarrão and not the result of the colonialist policy of the Portuguese. There are those, Tarquínio J. B. de Oliveira among them, who see a reference to the *Inconfidência Mineira* in the following lines from Letter VI:

But you, dear Friend, do not grieve,
That all are of this class, and if you live,
You will still see them realize miracles. ³⁷

However, they could simply represent a prophecy that things will have to get better in the next generation while in no way altering the political reality. The author's non-revolutionary ideology will not draw a political inference but remains "within the system" and is reduced to personal invective—against the governor—rather than taking on the colonial regime.

Perhaps the most expressly didactic verses, approaching a real moral, come at the end of this same Letter VI:

Arrogant and crazy leader, what does it
Benefit you to spend in chilly celebrations
An immense fortune, which the good Senate
Should consume in holy things?
Poor housewives lament, and
Innocent children suffer, and can you look upon
Such evils with a dry face?
Even though you sacrifice to your own taste
The fortunes of the people that you govern;
The day will come, when a robust and holy hand,
After castigating us, will sympathize with us,
And hurl into the bonfire the torpid ensign.
Then those who wept will laugh;

Maybe then, you will weep, but in vain;
 For laments and cries will gain nothing
 For those who keep them until too late.³⁸

But here too lesson is a general one couched in the terms of well-meaning but ineffectual principles. Even Gonzaga's general principles indicate an enlightened attitude. Alfredo Bosi goes a bit too far when he asserts:

It goes without saying that the accusation of Critilo goes no further than individuals, and if he allows a word of pity for the blacks, he does not touch the regime on any point nor incriminate the holy laws of the realm. To situate the ideology of Gonzaga: enlightened despotism and colonial mentality.³⁹

While correct in the main, his appraisal fails to do justice to a work comprising a fairly complex ideology. Surely Gonzaga oscillated between a disdainful attitude and a paternalistic attitude toward the Negro and the mixed-bloods of Vila Rica, but his horror at Fanfarrão's injustices seems quite genuine. Antonio Candido is much more on the mark when he says:

Perhaps the problem is more extensive. For Critilo, the arbitrary Governor constituted in a way an assault on the natural equilibrium of the society, and as such, attacked more than just him; so that in reacting, he is first an offended judge, then a theoretician of the natural order; never a nativist. As a result, the horror manifested at the violation of usage and custom; in such a way that Critilo does not feel secure any more, not even situated, in a society in which able men are disregarded, the authorities treated without courtesy, the social rules quickly subverted. Reign of the rabble, that is the subtitle which could be given to the work, such is the obsession with which he refers to the ascension of mulattoes, shopkeepers, the little people in general. Fanfarrão altered the natural relations in a

³⁸

"Soberbo e louco chefe, que proveito
 Tiraste de gastar em frias festas
 Imenso cabedal, que o bom Senado,
 Devia consumir em causas santas?
 Suspirão pobres amas, e padecem
 Crianças innocentes, e tu podes
 Com rosto enxuto ver tamanhos males?
 Embora sacrifica ao próprio gosto
 As fortunas dos povos, que governas;
 Virá dia, em que mão robusta, a santa,
 Depois de castigar-nos, se condoa,
 E lance na fogueira as varas torpes.
 Então rirão aquelles, que chorarão;
 Então talvez, que chores; mas debalde;
 Que suspiros, e prantos nada lucrão
 A quem os guarde para muito tarde" (p. 152).

³⁹ "É escusado dizer que a denúncia de Critilo não vai além das pessoas e, se deixa passar algum verso de piedade pelos negros, não toca em ponto algum do regime nem incrimina as santas leis do reino. Situar a ideologia de Gonzaga: despotismo esclarecido e mentalidade colonial" (Bosi, *op. cit.*, p. 84).

society of hierarchies, and this is a crime similar to public graft and to despotism.

The fact, however, is that the satire of the right-thinking and honorable Critfilo, lay bare, through the performance of a petty tyrant, the potential inequities of the system; thus its political significance and its value as the register of an era.⁴⁰

LUZYTĄŃSKO-BRAZYLIJSKI UTWÓR KLASYCZNY:
„AS CARTAS CHILENAS” JAKO FORMALNA SATYRA

STRESZCZENIE

Obecna rozprawa przechodzi ponad faktem bardzo często dyskutowanym w literaturze fachowej, a dotyczącym nader wątpliwej sprawy autorstwa utworu *As cartas Chilenas*, ogranicza się natomiast do zagadnień literackich jego wartości. Od dawna ten bardzo nietypowy utwór literatury luzytańskiego-brazylijskiej był przedmiotem wielu nieporozumień u niejednego historyka literatury, widzącego w nim przejaw wadliwie ukształtowanego poematu heroikomicznego bardziej niż przykład formalnej satyry wierszowanej.

Autorka odtwarza atmosferę, w której powstał ów utwór, oraz omawia znamieny fakt, iż jest on równie żywy i dynamiczny jak przed dwustu laty, kiedy został napisany. Wyróżnia ona różne kategorie satyry literackiej oraz omawia ostrość i skuteczność wykorzystania jej środków przez autora *As cartas Chilenas*.

W rozprawie omówiony jest wyraźny wpływ Pope'a i Montesquieu, ponadto przeprowadzona jest szczegółowa analiza stylu poematu z licznymi przykładami zaczerpniętymi z utworu.

Przełożył Jan Trzynadłowski

⁴⁰ “Talvez o problema seja mais amplo. Para Critfilo, o arbitrário Governador constitui de certo modo um atentado ao equilíbrio natural da sociedade, e assim feria mais que ele; de maneira que ao reagir fazia-o primeiro juiz ofendido, em seguida como teórico da ordem natural; jamais como nativista. Com efeito, o horror manifestado a violação do uso e do costume; de tal forma que Critfilo não se sente mais seguro, nem mesmo situado, numa sociedade em que os homens de prol são menosprezados, as autoridades tratadas sem cortesias, as conveniências levemente puladas. Reinado da canalha, é o subtítulo que se poderia dar a obra, tal a obsessão com que se refere a ascensão de mulatos, tendeiros, gente miúda em geral. O Fanfarrão alterou as relações naturais duma sociedade hierarquizada, e isto é crime solidário da concussão e da prepotência.

O fato, porém, é que a sátira do bem-pensante e honrado Critfilo desnudava, através da atuação de um regulo, as iniquidades potenciais do sistema; daí o seu significado político e o valor de índice duma época” (Candido, *op. cit.*, p. 165).