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THE CANUDOS PERPLEX: THREE EARLY “FACTIONS”

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RESUMO: A vida de Antônio Vicente Maciel, o “Conselheiro,” como a história da construção e destruição de sua comunidade messiânica, Canudos (1893-1897), tem sido uma fonte inesgotável para a literatura e o imaginário brasileiros. Na literatura sobre Canudos nota-se uma tendência para utilizar o gênero de “faction” — da história romantizada ou ficcionalizada. Este ensaio compara *Os Jagunços* (1898) de Afonso Arinos, *O Rei dos Jagunços* (1899) de Manoel Benício, e *Accidentes da Guerra* (1905) de Egmydio Dantas Barreto, que são os três primeiros “factions” a tratar o assunto de Canudos. Analisa, portanto, as razões pelas quais estes autores evitaram os gêneros (relativamente) “puros” da Reportagem e da História, recorrendo em compensação a um gênero misto que acrescenta à suposta veracidade a imaginação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Afonso Arinos, Manoel Benício, Emygdio Dantas Barreto, Antônio Vicente Maciel, Guerra de Canudos, Faction

Even as the embers of Canudos, the “mud-walled Troy” of the interior of Bahia, were still aglow after the city’s destruction by government forces in 1897, Brazilian authors were already setting pen to paper in an effort to recount and explain the most significant millenarian event of Brazil, and possibly of the Americas, whose fame has since spread worldwide by, among other events, the success of Mario Vargas Llosa’s 1981 novel, *La guerra del fin del mundo*, and on the millenarian nature of the Canudos conflict one must read Levine (1992). The significance of the Canudos war is based neither on its size, on the number of deaths, on the duration of the military campaign, nor even on the portion of the army which it engaged, all of which were surpassed by the Constestado rebellion in southern Brazil, which has not received a tenth of the publicity that Canudos has, and few if any literary treatments (Diacon 1991). The significance of Canudos, I would argue, was a product of its reception and rescripting in the Brazilian imaginary, which, over the course of time, has produced radically different and even opposing views of the conflict—the “perplex” of my title. In the period of the war itself, Canudos was interpreted contradictorily as a redoubt of primitive religious fanatics and bandits, and as a counter-revolutionary state-

within-a-state, financed by the substantial number of monarchists remaining in Brazil and their sympathizers abroad; Canudos was founded in 1893, when the Republic was only four years old. Almost immediately after the war, counter-memories of Canudos appeared from the pens of authors such as Afonso Arinos, Manoel Benício, Emygdio Dantas Barreto, and Euclides da Cunha. Revisionary views of Canudos culminated in the work of João Arruda, Rui Facó, Edmondo Moniz, Abelardo Montenegro, Marco Antonio Villa, and others, who shifted the image of Canudos from one of religious messianism and collective delusion to that of a consciously constructed, grassroots socialist community, the Brazilian Commune, destroyed by the economic and political elites of the country (Montenegro 1954; Facó 1963; Moniz 1987; Arruda 1996; Villa 1995).

The historiography of Canudos itself has a history: Canudos is not just something that happened, but a literary *topos* that has been treated from a variety of ideological and aesthetic perspectives. The war of bullets produced a war of words, in which basic concepts of *brasileiridade*, modernity, and social justice have been debated under the pretext of getting the Canudos story “right.” The messianism of Conselheiro has found an echo in the single-minded mission of finding the ultimate truth of Canudos. Lori Madden accurately expresses the trajectory and interest of Canudos historiography when she writes that the Canudos conflict “has stimulated the imagination of diverse writers of alternative points of view since it affords evidence to be viewed as a political rebellion, a civil war, a problem of ethnicity, a messianic movement, a social movement, and other phenomena. It has become a mirror to the manipulations of its interpreters to such a degree that Canudos historiography, studied over time, tells a story of the evolution of ideas (Madden 1993).

Madden traces some of this history of the history of Canudos. However, though she invokes “imagination” in the passage quoted above, she does not consider a group of early monographs on the war that take the form of “faction.” By “faction” I mean a writing in which fact alternates with fiction, and which undertakes the presentation of history, contemporary events, or biography within a fictional framework, frequently inserting genuine documents of eyewitness accounts. “Faction” may be considered a sub-genre of historical fiction, where the urge to document history outweighs the mimetic function of literature. In Richard Johnstone’s definition, “faction” combines fiction with non-fiction, presenting itself “now as one thing, now as the other. It derives part of its strength from being seen as fictional—literary, invented— and part from being seen, paradoxically, as fact” (1985: 76). Perhaps the most noted use of the term was by Alex Haley to describe his book, *Roots*: “Although it is advertised as nonfiction, perhaps we should call it ‘faction’” (WATKINS 1976: 2). Gore Vidal’s novel *Lincoln* (1984) is another notorious example of the genre, which came under attack by historians for some of its imagined scenes. Neither the English term “faction” nor its equivalents seems to have any currency in Brazil, despite some outstanding examples of the genre, such as Silviano Santiago’s *Em liberdade* (1981), a fictionalized diary of Graciliano Ramos following his release from prison. Santiago chose the following quote by Otto Maria Carpeaux as the epigraph for his faction: “Vou construir o meu Graciliano Ramos” (SANTIAGO 1981: 7). So too, each author I will consider here used faction to construct “his” Canudos. While it might seem that any literary work based on a historical event would qualify as faction, this is not the case. For example, the ornate language, verse forms, and larger-than-life characters of Paschoal Villaboim Filho’s *Canudos* allow it to better fit the category of

epic, and this work’s deliberate adherence to the epic tradition, in contradistinction to fiction’s novelty and improvisation, itself implies an ideological stance towards events (VILLABOIM FILHO 1984).

Two of the early fictions analyzed in this article predate Da Cunha’s *Os Sertões* of 1902: Afonso Arinos’s *Os Jagunços* (1898); and Manoel Benício’s *Rei dos Jagunços* (1899). The third, *Accidentes [sic] da guerra* (1905), by Egmydio Dantas Barreto, post-dates Da Cunha’s masterpiece, but is based on the same author’s *Última expedição a Canudo*, a personal memoir published in 1898. Indeed, one could almost say that these fictions are the earliest monographs to attempt a holistic explanation for the Canudos phenomenon, since both Dantas Barreto’s *Última expedição a Canudos* and Henrique de Macedo Soares’s *Guerra de Canudos* (1902) are primarily eye-witness accounts of the war, with few words devoted to pre-war events, and largely superficial interpretations of the war’s causes and issues. While Da Cunha’s masterpiece is known to every student of Brazilian literature — and has also been considered by some as a “faction”— those of Arinos, Benício, and Dantas Barreto are known almost exclusively to Canudos specialists, and when known are more mentioned than read (although Benício’s narrative provided much of the basis for the 1997 film, Rezende’s *Guerra de Canudos*). The works of Benício and Arinos have only recently been reprinted, while Dantas Barreto remains a rare book. After comparing the plot, style, and ideological orientation of these three works, I will consider a question related to their formal aspect: why did all three authors mix genres to produce “factions,” rather than write “objective” histories of the Canudos conflict? In order to compare these works, however, it will be necessary to begin with a recounting of the bare facts of the Canudos conflict.

The Elements of Plot

Antônio Vicente Mendes Maciel, who founded Canudos, was born in 1830 and became famous in the backlands of Bahia, Sergipe, and Ceará as a *beato*, or itinerant lay priest. From 1874 onwards he incentivated and supervised the (re)construction of churches and other public works projects throughout the region. As a sign of the importance given to Maciel’s words and deeds, he received from his followers, the common people of the region, the appellation of Conselheiro (Counselor), and is thus generally referred to as Antônio Conselheiro. His large following and efforts to help local landowners and priests made him a man to be reckoned with in the region, and an object of official concern. He was arrested in 1876 on an unfounded charge of murdering his spouse, and eventually released. The declaration of the Republic in 1889 gave the authorities grounds for moving against Antônio Conselheiro, for he could now be labeled a Monarchist and an enemy of the Republic. Police forces were sent against the Conselheiristas on at least four occasions, the last and most violent in Masseté, where deaths occurred.

Conselheiro and his followers realized that they would have greater security from the incessant attacks and harassment if they could found a permanent community in a defensible position. In *Os jagunços*, Arinos interprets this decision as messianic. In his account, the Counselor has a vision several years before founding his City of God, called Belo Monte:

Aquela terra não era senão a nova Canaã. Aquele povo era chamado a realizar a obra divina. E ele ia convocá-lo, ia revelar-lhe os altos destinos que Deus lhe

reservava;ia levá-lo à construção da cidade santa. [. . .] O rosto do missionário se tranfigurara. No cérebro iluminado pelo raio divino borbulhavam idéias grandiosas e sublimes. Diante de seus olhos cheios de fogo, passava a visão dos dias futuros. (ARINOS 1898: 50)

Arinos’s representation contains an ambiguity typical of his novel. Is there really a divine ray, and is the Counselor’s face really transfigured? Or is Arinos using free indirect discourse to filter the Counselor’s own thoughts through the narrator’s language? In any case, the passage shows the Counselor not planning Belo Monte, but passively receiving and carrying out God’s plan for the New Canaan, the first Canaan being of course the land fought for by the Jews after leaving Egypt and wandering in the desert. Throughout Arinos’s text, the Hebrews will furnish a perfect analogy for the sufferings and neglect of the *sertanejos*; the history of the former tells the Counselor that the latter, too, are a “chosen race” destined to fulfill a divine plan: “Deus lhe dissera que ele, o humilde, o desconhecido, o miserável, ele, o sertanejo sem conhecimentos seria incumbido da grande missão de revindicar o direito de todos os homens do sertão; seria ele o braço vingador da afronta sofrida pelo Imperador” (1898: 171). There is no evidence in any of the writing left behind by Maciel that he thought in this way. His opposition to the Republic was based upon the simple objection to God’s law being replaced by human law. Arinos’s fiction begins a long line of interpretations of the *Conselheiro* as a religious fanatic, obsessed by a monomaniacal vision. Modern historical interpretations have corrected this view. Edmondo Moniz, perhaps erring in the opposite direction, goes so far as to claim that Conselheiro took his idea for the city from Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1987: 100). Marco Antônio Villa, Robert Levine, and others have argued that the decision to found Belo Monte on the site called Canudos was part of a non-divine, far less grandiose, and somewhat more pragmatic plan, based on the Counselor’s advancing age and the need for a permanent defensive position against attack. Arinos chooses to jump from the middle of the Counselor’s career (1877) to the eve of the government attacks on Belo Monte in 1897, alleviating himself of the need and the chance to portray the move to Canudos as a response to escalating violence.

The erection of a permanent settlement intensified rather than diminished conflicts with the authorities, since Belo Monte as a town acquired its own police force, paid no taxes, accepted no Republican money, and conducted no civil marriages. Prostitution and alcohol, endemic to the ordinary life of the *sertanejo*, were forbidden in Canudos. Most irritating of all, Belo Monte was a free city, whereas every other town of the interior was ruled directly or indirectly by the large landowners, called *coronéis* (colonels). The necessary detonation device did not take long to appear. The *Conselheiristas* had bought wood in Juazeiro, and when delivery was delayed, the Counselor sent word that he would send his men to get it. The deputy, interpreting this formulation as a threat, then sent telegrams to the governor of Bahia predicting that the city would soon be invaded and asking for troops. The governor, in order not to acquire the reputation of being a crypto-monarchist, acceded to the demand, sending a command of 116 men of the Bahian police to protect Juazeiro in November, 1896. When the predicted attack did not materialize, the force proceeded to the town of Uauá, where a force of *Conselheiristas* attacked them in the early morning. Oddly, Arinos places the battle outside the town of Uauá. The soldiers have left the town and are heading for Canudos when they see the *jagunços* and fire on them. In relocating the battle and the movements

of the combatants, Arinos has removed any doubt that the army initiated the conflict, by having them move towards the *jagunços*, rather than vice versa, as in most accounts. The battle left 8 soldiers dead, along with about 150 *jagunços*, who fought with scythes, clubs and blunderbusses. Despite their superior results, the soldiers retreated to Juazeiro. The battle hardened positions on both sides of the conflict. The backlanders had won their first real victory ever against constituted power. Converts streamed into Canudos.

A second expedition of 600 soldiers, and a third of 1200 were defeated in January and March of 1897, respectively. The death of the commander of the third expedition, Colonel Moreira César, made Canudos a national concern, a threat to the entire Republic. The city's extraordinary armament, the only apparent explanation for its amazing resistance, were rumored to come from foreign powers. Monarchist newspapers were destroyed, monarchist sympathizers lynched by angry mobs as far away as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Dantas Barreto, a soldier and solid Republican, laid this interpretation to rest in *Última expedição*: “A co-participação dos monarchistas, portanto, nos acontecimentos de Canudos, foi toda platônica” (14). The fourth expedition, which eventually involved half of the Brazilian army, could not fail. Five times as large as any of the previous expeditions, it besieged Canudos from late June to October 5, 1897, when the last defender was killed and the city razed.

Afonso Arinos, *Os jagunços*

Afonso Arinos (1868-1916) was the only one of the three authors considered here who did not travel to Canudos during the war. Arinos had pronounced monarchist sentiments and a profound interest in the culture and geography of the *sertão*. He published his faction, *Os Jagunços*, in 1898 under the pseudonym of Olivio de Barros in order to avoid the possible repercussions which had led to lynching and exile for some monarchists during the Canudos conflict. This disinheritance of his own work by a future member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters began the process of its forgetting. Thus, Tristão de Athaide, an important early interpreter of Arinos's contributions to regionalist fiction, could dismiss the novel on formal grounds as “longe demais, sem unidade de fatura ou de narrativa e freqüentemente dessaborido, relevando quase sempre a composição apressada para folhetim” (1922: 8). One sees in this assessment a misapplication of the standards of the European “art novel” (of which there were few examples in Brazilian literature at the time) to a “faction” that attempts to intervene in a political debate. Arinos's collection of short stories, *Pelo sertão*, published in the same year as *Os jagunços*, fit better into Athaide's definition of art, and has since become a minor classic of Brazilian regionalist literature.

Although Arinos's knowledge of the *sertão* of Minas Gerais was extensive, he had never seen the area surrounding Canudos in Bahia, and hence had to rely on newspaper and other accounts of the war for his descriptions. Arinos follows a readily comprehensible mimetic strategy by inventing a fictitious *jagunço*, Luís Pachola, whom the narrative follows as he becomes a convert to the Counselor's campaign, settles in Canudos, and fights the war to its end. This strategy allows Arinos to make full use of his knowledge of *sertanejo* culture and psychology despite his lack of direct knowledge of the area. It also allows him to recount his story “de dentro para fora, ao contrário de Euclides,” as Herman Lima puts it (1968: 91). Lima's statement contradicts his own later assertions that Arinos never recast his hastily written novel because it owed so many of its descriptions to Euclides Da Cunha's

dispatches to *O Estado de São Paulo*. Lima cites three instances of such resemblance; yet the very opposition he draws between the points of view from which *Os jagunços* and *Os Sertões* are narrated outweigh the importance of any such borrowings. Walnice Galvão reversed Lima’s judgment, claiming that Arinos gave Euclides a number of episodes which he could present as though the latter had been an eyewitness to them (1976: 56). Finally, Leopoldo Bernucci has thoroughly documented mutual borrowings between Arinos and Euclides, along with conceivable resemblance owing to shared reliance on other sources, without however assessing the very different overall results achieved by the two authors (1995: 65-84).^o Lima’s pithy statement captures that difference: Arinos’s story of the war is told almost entirely from the perspective of the *jagunços*, while for Da Cunha the *jagunço* is an object of study to be viewed from the outside.

Less intuitive than the creation of a fictional character to support the narrative is Arinos’s setting for the opening of the novel in 1877, 16 years before the founding of Canudos, and in Periperi, located in a region Arinos was familiar with, but which was not one of the Counselor’s more usual haunts. At one of the large ranches in the region, Pachola attends a festival (Festa do Divino) where the Counselor is also present. Another cowboy, jealous of the young girl Conceição’s attentions to Pachola, attempts to kill his rival, but shoots the girl instead. Her death marks Pachola for the rest of his life with sadness and a sense of mission: “A figura ensangüentada de Conceição perseguia-o sempre, não como espectro de vingança, nem de remorso, mas como a doce e meiga vítima, que por ele deliberadamente se sacrificara” (113). When he encounters the body of his rival hanging from a tree, an apparent suicide, Pachola decides that “A sua vida, pois devia tomar direção diferente, ou, por outra, ele deveria começar nova vida a partir da morte de Conceição” (114). Resting after the battle of Uauá that initiated the Canudos war, Pachola receives the vision of Conceição again: “os olhos da rapariga, que pareciam ter o brilho azul-escuro e bronzeado das plumas dos pombos selvagens, pairavam um instante sobre Luís, cheios de não compreendidas interrogações” (158). These two sacrificial deaths, one recalling Christ, the other Judas, symbolize the sacrificial victims that Canudos represented for Arinos. In an “Epílogo da Guerra” published in his newspaper, *O Comércio de São Paulo*, Arinos had made this comparison explicit: “[Os Canudenses] receberam o esplêndido e misterioso batismo de sangue e, cintos dessa púrpura, abriram as portas da nacionalidade brasileira para seus irmãos sertanejos” (1969: 646). Arinos’s phrasing synthesizes the Christian motif of baptism with Classical ones of mourning purple and of dying for one’s country. In Arinos’s cadences, as in the seemingly digressive events of *Os jagunços*, Canudos ceases to be a historical accident or a politically motivated revolt, and instead assumes the dimensions of a “rito sacrificial,” which, in the words of Leopoldo Bernucci, contains “a dimensão redentora cristã que faz da morte de alguns a salvação de muitos” (1995: 70). In effect, with Pachola’s story Arinos has substituted a matrix of Christian love and sacrifice for the violent archetype of Apocalypse with which Canudos had been marked by the press. Arinos presents Pachola’s transformation through tragic experience not as a form of fanaticism, but as an expression of a religious faith with pragmatic aspects. Pachola is meant to represent the typical man of the *sertão*, particularly in his religious faith, which lacks a sophisticated theology, but has an extensive inventory of prayers, images, and fetishes: “o canto dos passarinhos, o bramido das tempestades, as secas e as chuvas, as pestes, os estragos dos raios — tudo era feito pela vontade de Deus. [...] As orações que

ele sabia eram para ele meios tão certos de livrar-se dos males, ou do perigo, como era seu poncho para abrigá-lo das chuvas” (98).

Arinos interweaves the Counselor’s story with Pachola’s. The Counselor is present at the festival, but leaves before the killing. He predicts that a cattle-owner’s herd will drown, and the event takes place. This incident seems to be Arinos’s explanation for the hatred of the Counselor conceived by the large landowners of the region. Above all, the Counselor’s vision of his mission develops in parallel with Pachola’s. His visions of a new city echo Luís’s of the dead girl. From the porch of the rancher’s house, his eyes take in the vastness of the *sertão*, which transforms itself in his vision into the new Canaan, as we have seen in the passage cited above.

Pachola follows Conselheiro to Canudos and becomes one of its leaders and most skilled fighters. The battle scenes are frequently narrated from his perspective. Arinos portrays Canudos neither as an agglomeration of fanatics nor as a solidarian, utopian community, but more as a Spartan dictatorship, combining unity of purpose with repressive mechanisms. For example, Arinos depicts the flogging of women who were thought not to mourn sufficiently for their husbands killed in battle. João Abade, the second most important figure in Canudos after the Counselor, emerges as a villain in this text (as also in Benício’s), an intriguer who becomes Pachola’s enemy. He plants in the Counselor’s ear a rumor that Pachola had pocketed some money from the community when doing business with the outside world. Pachola also loses his second girlfriend, who is hounded out of Canudos due to the machinations of personal rivalry with another woman who also has the Counselor’s ear. Arinos’s Canudos is schizophrenic, dominated in equal parts by: 1) profound religious idealism; 2) pragmatic defense of a viable way of life; and 3) the mechanisms of petty personal rivalry seen in the above examples. As an example of the first instance, Carlota, the wife of one of the secondary characters, Pedro Espia, at one point expresses her horror at the bloodshed and her presentiment that “nem nós, nem nossos filhos escapamos desta guerra,” to which her husband responds “E que tem isso? Antes assim. Ao menos nós já levamos os nossos pecados purgados e não teremos de sofrer muito o fogo do purgatório” (267). This passage shows the essentially eschatological vision of the inhabitants, and the reason for their tenacious defense. On the other hand, a hundred pages earlier the narrator had expressed a far more pragmatic response on the part of the inhabitants, representing the second thought pattern:

quanto ao Governo, este estava muito longe para se lembrar deles. Dele, pois, nunca tiveram motivo de gratidão. Mas agora, esse poder se aproximava para destruir os templos que eles ergueram no meio do deserto. [...] Os jagunços não podiam compreender os motivos por que era guerreado o Conselheiro. Vivendo no meio deles dezenas de anos, o enviado de Deus nunca praticara o mal. [...] Assim, pois, no espírito daqueles homens rudes, a guerra contra o Conselheiro só podia provir da impiedade e da heresia contra a religião e a fé. (176)

In passages such as these, Arinos acquaints his readers with the Canudos war from the point of view of its victims. The narration never shifts to the halls of power, for example to the governor’s palace in Salvador, or to the urban centers of Brazil. It remains always with the *jagunços*, giving their perspective on the conflict and their reasons for fighting.

As the war ends, Arinos allows Pachola and a few others to escape through underground tunnels to the river, and the novel's last sentence, in a continuation of the governing Old Testament intertext, equates this escape to the flight from Egypt and subsequent wandering of the Israelites: “E a tribo marchou para o deserto” (319). This sentence implies that the culture of the long-suffering *jagunços* will be sublimated in the future of Brazil, just as the culture of the Hebrews was taken up into Christianity.

Manoel Benício, *O rei dos jagunços*

Manoel Benício, an army colonel, accompanied the fourth expedition as a reporter for the *Jornal do Comércio* and was nearly executed for his severe criticisms of the army's actions. In one of the few studies devoted to the literary structure and technique of *O rei dos jagunços*, Silvia Azevedo considers Benício's faction as a response to Arinos: “essa ‘resposta,’ quase certamente, seria motivada pelo fato de Manoel Benício, mais do que Afonso Arinos, sentir-se autorizado a dar a conhecer a sua versão da guerra, já que fizera a sua cobertura como correspondente do *Jornal do Comércio*” (1993: 37). Part of Benício's response lies in his approach to the literary structure of his narrative. Whereas Arinos's recounting adhered to novelistic structure, Benício's faction will move between several genres: “ao contrário de Arinos, Benício não tem por propósito escrever uma ‘novela sertaneja,’ e sim uma crônica de costumes, ou seja, um relato em que os fatos históricos têm precedência sobre a construção literária” (AZEVEDO 1993: 32). Benício's strategy resembles Arinos's in their mutual desire for grounding the Counselor's story in the culture and belief systems of the *sertão*. Like Arinos, Benício also explains the psychology of Canudos by means of a preparatory story of vengeance and bloodshed. However, rather than focus on the individual psychology of an idealized *jagunço*, Benício inserts the story of Canudos into the history of social relationships in the *sertão*. Nor does he, despite the title *O Rei dos jagunços*, attempt to draw a portrait of the Counselor. Unlike Arinos, who pays little attention to the Legalists except as targets for the *jagunços* to shoot at, Benício makes a statement that can be considered the beginning of the “two Brazils” theory that Da Cunha will develop in *Os Sertões*. Canudos resulted from the people at the centers of power — Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo — holding ideas completely separated from those of the people in the interior: “A comomoção de Canudos [...] foi um symptoma desta molestia social que grassa no centro do Brasil, porque a testada já está conquistada por outras gentes e outras ideias” (200). In constructing his faction, Benício takes the path of polyphony and dialogism, mixing genres and using digression and amplification as rhetorical tools. Historical records are interlaced with the fictions recounted below. For example, Febrônio de Brito's published account of the second expedition he commanded against Canudos is simply inserted whole into the narrative, as is an exchange between ecclesiastical and civil authorities concerning the danger represented by Conselheiro, and other documents.

O Rei dos jagunços commences with a detailed recounting of the family feud between the Araújo and the Maciel families, which began generations before Antônio Maciel's birth. Benício obtained most of this material from the lawyer, João Brigido, a resident of Ceará and friend of the Maciel family. Antônio's grandfather had participated in this vendetta, in which all male family members eventually became soldiers, while his father had relocated his family in order to escape from it. Benício reports an interview between Antônio and João

Brigido, on the eve of the former’s departure into the wilderness and sainthood. Antônio speaks of his intention to live “nos sertões de Canindé. Depois seguirei para onde me chamam os malaventurados.’ Despidia-se e nunca mais voltou à terra de seus pais e de seus filhos onde toda a sua família soffrera tantos desgostos e tanta sorte de injustiça humana e desgraças fataes” (1997: 31). This digression, comprising the volume’s first sixty pages, explains Antônio’s psychology less in terms of psychosis and more in terms of sublimation, in which Christian passivity substitutes violent revenge, but in which such passivity, when practiced on the grand scale of a Canudos, returns to its violent origins and vendetta mentality. The extreme and apparently digressive detail with which the vendetta is narrated is analogous to the story of Pachola, but explains the Counselor’s passivity and quietude during the Canudos war. Benício’s method for telling his story implies a theory often used to explain the psyche of Antônio Conselheiro: “na sua luta em Canudos, buscava inconscientemente resgatar a honra da família ultrajada no passado” (PINTO 1995: 33). Such feuding presents an unflattering portrait of the *sertanejo* in general, as confirmed by Benício: “O sertanejo só admira e quer bem ao que é forte, porque o assusta” (5). Arinos, in contrast, while opening his narrative with a similar incident, counteracts it with Pachola’s subsequent piousness.

Benício has indicated the right parallels for the Canudos conflict, but has perhaps misplaced them in emphasizing their psychological rather than social effect. The *coronelismo* and clan politics that gave rise to bloody vendettas such as that which decimated the Maciéis were logical results of the isolation of the *sertão* from the stabilizing structures of church and state, which remained confined to the litoral region (the capital of every Brazilian Northeastern state is located on the coast). However, vendettas clearly undermine *coronelismo*’s attempts at regulating society, and introduce a further destabilizing factor into the backlands. The messianism of a Conselheiro or a Padre Cícero, as Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz points out, is the entirely normal solution of a traditional society for resolving such crises of organization, be they caused by the vendetta or, as in the case of Canudos, by economic blight and the change in larger political structures exemplified fall of the Monarchy. The messianic leader either substitutes the figure of the landowner, as in the case of Antônio Conselheiro, or allies himself with one of them to eliminate rivals and re-establish order (QUEIROZ 1972: 5/12).

Benício’s next digression concerns one such *coronel*, the owner of a ranch where the Counselor stops to preach in 1888. The rancher, João Tomé, hopes that the preacher will exhort his followers to construct a reservoir, which will benefit his ranching activities. With this Benício provides an example of the complex relations that emerged between the Counselor and the backlands power structures, which historian Ralph Della Cava has summarized thus:

the capacity of Conselheiro [...] to attract “pilgrims” to the labor-shy regions of Bahia and Ceará (where they remained as workers) was tantamount to political power. [...] Conselheiro was an asset to both curates and *coronéis* of the Bahian backlands. There is strong evidence that in addition to rendering services to the church he often assisted the local colonels. They appreciated the dams and roads that the *beato* constructed for them, and above all, the free labor provided by workers whom the Counselor kept well disciplined. (1968: 411)

The contrast between Benício’s introduction of the Counselor at what amounts to a public works project, vs. Arinos’s at a religious festival, is indicative of the difference in their treatment of the Canudos material. As we might expect on this account, Old Testament parallels never appear in *O rei dos jagunços*.

The Counselor’s economic benefit to the region supplements his amelioration of social ills. During the sermon he preaches to the local residents, a mysterious fire appears on the nearby mountain, which is interpreted as a miracle of the Counselor and as the troubled spirit (*alma penosa*) of a woman who lived in sin. The Counselor then castigates a married man who is living with an ex-slave as his concubine, and asks a man who is living in incest with his daughter, “Pai maldito, serás tu da raça das jararacas?” (A “jararaca” is a pit viper.) Directly addressed by the seemingly omniscient Counselor, the incestuous father goes insane on the spot, and eventually reappears in the train of the Counselor with the moniker of “Jararaca;” it is necessary to note that Honório and Antônio Vilanova are important historical personages in the founding of Canudos, but there is no independent record of an Horácio, and Benício seems to have erred in his recording of the name. The concubine is later assassinated by being hit over the head with a block of wood. Along with the Counselor’s ability to know the hidden sins of community members, these “miracles” increase the audience’s belief in his divine powers. In reality, Horácio [sic] Vilanova had supplied the Counselor with this information that he obtained by exchanging gossip with the local inhabitants. The Counselor’s right-hand man, Vilanova, is depicted in terms that expose the supposedly miraculous powers of the Counselor as cheap circus tricks: “Elle era para o Conselheiro o que um medium é para o magnetizador ou o que os compadres são para os mágicos ambulantes” (47). Just as the initial section was summarized by an *aperçu* that the *sertanejo* only respects strength, this section leads to the conclusion that ignorance causes people to hold wrong ideas more defensively than educated people hold right ones: “ninguem é tão sensível em suas crenças como o ignorante. Querer destruí-las antes de explicar porque, ou doutrinal-o em crenças novas, é violência” (84). This phrase anticipates the tragedy of the Canudos war, in which thousands of people were killed in order to correct the rebels’ mistaken allegiance to the monarchy. It does so without any of the sympathy for the *sertanejo* mentality seen in Arinos. Benício details the Counselor’s opposition to taxes as a conceptual misunderstanding of the Republic. He continues to emphasize the backwardness, ignorance, and barbarity of his subjects, while at the same time preparing a critique of the government actions against them.

The novelistic focus of the next long section is on the amorous involvements of Thomé’s three daughters, and especially on those of the youngest, Benta, who ends up among the Counselor’s followers. Benício depicts the three daughters as noble savages, raised by a careless father far from civilizing influences and without a thought of marriage. The arrival of the Counselor’s following at the farm wreaks rapid changes in the girls’ dispositions: by the end of the chapter all three have eloped with their lovers. Benta is depicted not as a religious fanatic, but as someone who joins the pilgrims because she has no future and no fixed place in the social order. She is besieged by the unwanted attentions of Candinho, a former slave and her “irmão de leite.” Benta detests Candinho, but when she takes the step of running away, following the trail of her sisters who have both eloped, the ex-slave abducts her. They take to wandering the countryside and sleeping in abandoned houses, following the Counselor’s trail. One night they are surprised by a *capitão de mato*, or bounty hunter. When Candinho protests, the man responds, “O que é isto, seu negro. [...] Então o treize de Maio

já o tornou tão soberbo assim! [...] fica sabendo que tenho feito mais uso disso e disto (e apontou as pistolas e o relho) depois da abolição do que antes” (80). The bounty hunter, who is described as a “caboclo,” or mixture of Indian and African, later kills Candinho, marries Benta for her inheritance, and returns her to her father’s farm.

The incident seems only marginally related to the Counselor and to the question of Canudos. However, the numerous freedmen among the Counselor’s following became a subject of discussion in the period, and the emancipation of 1888 created a whole new class of individuals without employment or place in society, which increased the need for a free city like Canudos. Benício’s faction shows this quite clearly: ex-slave and unmarried woman, together, have no place in society. Benta’s journey eventually returns her to the ranch from which she had started. Her aversion to Candinho’s advances, as well as the racist statements of the bounty hunter, reflect the landed classes’ distrust of freedman as wage laborers, which led to efforts at importing workers from the Mediterranean to take their place. Benício faults the leading classes for this: “Desventurada Bahia que teve de quedar-se, perante esta brutal carnificina de seus filhos, e terá mais tarde de supprir tantas vidas de sangue nacional por outras de sangue da Calabria, que hão de custar rios de dinheiro, pelo menos . . . !” (216). “Desventurada” Bahia is thus as much to blame for the war as the Counselor’s “malaventurados.”

More or less reproducing the journalistic dispatches which he had sent to the *Jornal do Comércio* during the war, Benício then relates the first through third expeditions from the viewpoint of an outsider, intercalating official materials such as the deposition of Febrônio de Brito (commander of the second expedition) and newspaper reports, before returning to the “king” of the *jagunços* by reporting imagined dialogs and gossip among the residents of Canudos. Like Arinos, Benício reveals hypocrisy, lust, and a will-to-power underlying the supposed utopia of Canudos. His focus is on João Abade, whose official title in Canudos was “Chefe do povo,” the equivalent of a chief of militia in charge of the town’s armed forces and defensive preparations. Benício portrays Abade as a sexual predator who abuses his absolute power to order as many women into his bed as possible; whether true or false, this characteristic of Abade seems to have been common knowledge (or rumor) at the time: Macedo Soares reports that Abade was an individual “de má nota e piores costumes, libidinoso e perverso” (39). The novel, *João Abade*, by João Felício dos Santos (1958), not only preserves this characteristic of salaciousness for its main character, but extends it to all leaders of Canudos other than the Counselor. In Benício’s polyphonic imaginings of the gossip of Canudos, one of the interlocutors remarks, “Que seu Abade esta noite foi tão feliz como as noites passadas” (141). When residents begin leaving Canudos to avoid death in the final conflagration, Abade’s concupiscence is further enflamed: “A causa estaria perdida, isto é, o formidável harem que elle idealisava fazer em Canudos, depois da morte do Conselheiro, seria um deserto, um ermo, uma solidão sem mulheres, a celeste porta sem eunochos e cortezães e odaliscas!” (155). Abade attempts to make Pimpona, the last child of Antônio Felix and wife of Vilanova, his concubine, but the *curandeiro* of Canudos warns the old man to escape with his child.

Other negative depictions include Pajeú’s killing of two prisoners whose lives had been spared by the Counselor. Benício also adds the absurdly comic incident of a number of Canudos girls going to bathe in the Vaza-Barris, and having their clothes stolen by the insane Jararaca. The end of Canudos is represented in the surrender of Beatinho and the

immediate decapitation of his prisoners. The schoolteacher of Canudos, Macotas, crosses the firing line and delivers a scathing speech before herself being decapitated: “O que mais desejam? A nós, as mulheres? . . . Degolem a todos; degolem os filhos também, para que não reste um só que como eu agora, amaldiçõe mais tarde, a todos, a todos, raça damnada!” (213). After the slaughter, Vilanova digs up the treasure and disappears with it. The last scene is of Jararaca, the incestuous father, riding his burro through the desert: “apareceu como um ser quichotesco ou phantastico!” (220). This image of picaresque wandering seems to echo ironically Arinos’s solemn biblical allusions. Unlike Arinos, Benício has no destination in mind for the survivors of Canudos except the chimerical ones of a Don Quixote. Paulo Martins suggests that the ending of the faction constitutes a sign of its magic realism: “Ou não seria o personagem Jararaca, com o qual o autor termina sua narrativa, um ancestral dos Buendía da solidão centenária do universo mágico de García Márquez?” (BENÍCIO 1997: xvii).

But Benício’s narrative collage reveals its seams and sources far more than does that of García Márquez. His book mixes fiction, reportage, history, and editorial opinion. His use of fiction probes the background of the conflict, but also emphasizes the backlanders’ ignorance, the vices of some members of the Canudos community, such as Vilanova and Abade, and the insanity of the Counselor. Benício spends pages describing an incident where the Counselor is wounded by a grenade, and Macotas goes to heal him. He simply stares at her without speaking, which in turn makes her hysterical (207-9), reinforcing the notion of insanity that governs Benício’s picture of Canudos. Despite the negative quality of his invented incident, Benício concludes that the Counselor, as a bad Catholic, was also a true martyr who died, like Jesus, for his faith. His followers, moreover, were defending their faith, their possessions, and their honor. As we have seen the government of Bahia comes off no better in his account. Whereas Arinos attempted to understand the *jagunço* from the inside, as it were, Benício seems to satirize him, while also exposing the massacres and other vices of the army and government to a much greater extent than had Arinos, who perhaps feared repercussions from such a stance.

Dantas Barreto’s *Accidentes da guerra*

Like Benício, Emygdio Dantas Barreto took part in the fourth expedition against Canudos, as a lieutenant-colonel of the Third Brigade. His memoir, *Última expedição a Canudos*, is unrelenting in its vituperation of the “fanáticos” and “elementos subversivos” of Canudos, who needed to disappear “em nome da ordem, da civilização e da moralidade do Brazil” (1898: 233). It shows unwavering support of army strategy and fulsome praise of the bravery and patriotism of the common soldier. At one point, Dantas Barreto contradicts Benício’s reports of army retreats as false, “como se a última expedição pudesse cometer uma fraquesa sem comprometer a reputação do exército nacional, de cujo valor já duvidavam os seus eternos adversários” (107). The author does at times show admiration for the *jagunços*’ courage, as well as sympathy for their plight. Canudos was literally infernal: “Todas as torturas do Inferno de Dante estavam ali resumidas!” (225).

Dantas Barreto carries this essential antipathy towards the *jagunços* over into his faction, *Accidentes da guerra*, which the author himself terms “um episódio romantizado” (1905: 7). He means by this that he uses a love story between a soldier and a *jagunça* as a

thread holding together his descriptions of Canudos and of the war. The clearest example of his antipathy is provided by the novel’s final event, when the novel’s two protagonist lovers are killed by *jagunços*: Alberto is killed by sniper fire, and then “cinco homens repellentes, typos de salteadores, physionomias de assassinos” (275) emerge from the *caatinga* and carry off Germana. They stab her to death as she resists their assault. Alberto was a soldier whom the reader first met as he was preparing to leave Salvador for Canudos as part of the Moreira César expedition. A native of Monte Santo, Alberto fondly remembers his childhood sweetheart, Germana. Their romance had been destroyed by the different social standing of their families, providing the first “accident” of the novel’s title: “É que tenha na minha terra uma historia bem cheia de accidentes [sic]” (16), he explains to his curious comrades-in-arms. Germana’s father had been a debt peon on the land of Alberto’s father, Coronel Nogueira, rendering marriage between the two unthinkable. Upon the troops’ arrival in Monte Santo, Alberto learns that Germana’s family has moved to Canudos.

Much later, after being captured by the fourth expedition, Germana narrates the family’s peregrinations: they had first moved to Lago Grande, where her father farmed on the land of Manoel Gato. There was a drought, and the family began to starve. Antônio Vilanova passed through and “contara prodígios da cidade santa” (257), and the family followed him to Canudos. After the defeat of the Moreira César expedition, they wanted to leave Canudos, but “o Villa-Nova disse que não voltariam mais as forças do governo; afiançou mesmo que a tal respeito se entendera com um chefe político, amigo do governador do Estado, o Coronel Leitão da Serrinha” (258). Naturally, the promise does not materialize. Like Benício, Dantas Barreto portrays the chief businessman of Canudos as a manipulator.

Until Alberto discovers Germana near the end, narrative suspense revolves around the possibility that he will either unknowingly kill her and her family, or else be able to liberate her. Alberto is obsessed by the thought that “estivera na cidadella a poucos passos talvez de Germana” (165-6). With this simple plot device, Dantas Barreto dramatizes the very real social differences and economic devastation which gave rise to the Canudos movement. The mimetic device of frustrated romance indirectly demonstrates more comprehension for the motivations behind the rise of Canudos than does the author’s straightforward labeling of the *jagunços* as monarchists and fanatics. He softens his portrait of *jagunço* brutality with the presence of a beautiful *jaguncinha*. Near the end of the fourth campaign, Alberto’s companion, Elias, sees women being shot down in the battle. He then notes the large number of women and children taken prisoner, who were taken behind the lines: “nesse acumulo de creaturas embrutecidas [...] viam-se raparigas que indicavam um tratamento mais cuidadoso, singularmente formosas” (241). The most attractive of these, of course, is Alberto’s Germana. Alberto, who has been wounded, finds her and draws her out of the crowd. They are cared for by a sergeant’s wife and put into a train of 1200 people walking to Monte Santo from Canudos, along with Germana’s brother, Vicente, preparing the novel’s final catastrophe.

Dantas Barreto is the only one of our three authors to describe the “comboio” of wounded that streamed from Canudos back to Monte Santo. The scene is chaotic. Wounded officers

pediam humildemente que os levassem para qualquer parte onde pudessem respirar um ar que não estivesse impregnado das podridões emanadas de tantos cadáveres insepultos, decompostos, sobre esse terreno apertado, em

que nem uma valla commum os recolhera, mas os soldados voltavam-lhes as costas e saiam resmungando umas phrases insolentes, desavergonhadas (266).

The attitude of “every man for himself” implied in this passage foreshadows the tragedy of Alberto and Germana. As the train starts off, the wounded naturally go more slowly than the protecting batallion, so that fifty minutes later there’s a difference of 4 kilometers from front to back (270). The unprotected part of the train is attacked, with Alberto among the casualties. The fate of Germana has been described above.

The collapse of morale and even of humanity continues with the discovery of Alberto’s body by his comrades in arms: “A piedade e o egoismo chocaram-se nesse momento angustioso, mas o último sentimento venceu o primeiro” (277). The soldiers run off, leaving Alberto’s body to the vultures. Even Germana’s brother, Vicente, passes by without stopping, indeed without shedding a tear. The corpse is finally removed from the road several days later, “para não espantar o gado que se destinava às forças de Canudos” (278). Only after the war is over does Elias, Alberto’s friend, bury his comrade’s body by the side of Germana. Paradoxically, the last sentences of the novel call for a national memorial to the brave soldiers who took part in the Canudos campaign.

The Role of Faction in Telling the Story of Canudos

The political positions of the three authors being considered here clearly influenced the structure of their narratives. Arinos, the Canudos sympathizer, created as his central character a “rebel,” Pachola, who, though loyal to the Counselor, hardly fits the propagandistic definition of “fanatic.” At the other extreme, the legitimist Dantas Barreto made certain that his readers’ sympathies focus on Alberto, a soldier, albeit one from a town of the region with distinct pro-Canudos sentiments. Between these extremes, the journalist Manoel Benício achieved a more objective, panoramic perspective by telling a number of stories digressive to the main conflict, and allowing his most interesting, developed characters, such as Benta, to remain marginal to the conflict itself. The prominent figures of the war, such as the Counselor, João Abade, and Vilanova—like Jararaca—are treated as leitmotifs rather than as complex humans. At the same time, as works of literature these factions are dialogic rather than ideological, presenting episodes and characters which at times contradict the stated points of view of their authors. In the *Jagunços*, Pachola suffers repeatedly under the hypocritical theocracy of Canudos, while in the figure of Germana, Dantas Barreto hints that there could have been love instead of hatred between the war’s two sides. Benício’s text is dialogic in the generic sense, alternating fictional narratives with ethnographic presentations and testimony from the war reproduced *verbatim*. The result is a scathing critique of both sides of a war that should never have been fought.

I have argued elsewhere that genres delimit the different possible use-values of discourse in a particular culture (1994). What is the particular use-value of an indeterminate genre such as “faction”? In his account of the “rise of faction” in U. S. literature in the second half of the twentieth century, Richard Johnstone laments the “feeling of paralysis” that supposedly contributed to the genre’s popularity. The genre as a whole, according to Johnstone, gives the message that “nothing is real” (1985: 78). Johnstone may judge with

accuracy contemporary American uses of the form, but the instances of faction examined here were not produced in order to prove that Canudos was not real—quite the opposite. No doubt numerous reasons could be adduced for the prevalence of this form, beginning with its amorphous status and lack of definition, which made it more available to untrained authors. In conclusion, I will explore two reasons why faction, rather than history *per se*, was so prevalent in early accounts of the Canudos conflict.

One reason for the prevalence of faction in the early history of Canudos is the authors’ urge to present both sides of the story as a counter-balance to propagandistic government and journalistic accounts. The written records of the conflict showed the viewpoint of the Republican side almost exclusively. The one-sidedness went beyond the old adage that “history is written by the victors”; in this case, writing and recording were already associated with the forces of civilization. Survivors of the conflict were persecuted, went into hiding, and were reluctant to give interviews until many years later. For decades after the war, the only possibility for telling the *jagunços*’ story was to resort to fiction.

Da Cunha provides a second explanation for the use of faction, in the context of describing the morally repugnant behavior of the Federalists in executing their prisoners. Did they not fear the judgment of posterity? No, responds da Cunha: “Ademais, não havia temer-se o juízo tremendo do futuro. A História não iria até ali. Afeiçoara-se a ver a fisionomia temerosa na ruínia majestosa das cidades vastas, na imponência soberana dos coliseus ciclópicos, nas gloriosas chacinas das batalhas clássicas e na selvaticidade épica das grandes invasões. Nada tinha que ver naquele matadouro” (382). What begins as a statement about moral behavior concludes as a definition of the genre of History (notice Da Cunha’s spelling of the word with a capital “H”). Da Cunha feels that History is not the proper genre for reporting the events in Canudos. History takes as its objects grand battles affecting the course of civilizations. Its recorded wars are fought in the classical mode, with two armies confronting each other in vast arrays which decide the fate of nations in a single day. Failing these aspects, Canudos could not become the subject of History. Another genre had to be found in order to recount the Canudos story.

Da Cunha could have had in mind a specifically Brazilian history, such as Francisco Adolfo Varnhagen’s *História das Lutas com os Holandeses no Brasil* (1871). This was, in Varnhagen’s own opinion, “monumental history,” written to encourage Brazilians for whom the Paraguayan war was becoming a test of national faith, by giving them “o exemplo mais antigo, em que o próprio Brasil, ainda então insignificante colônia, havia lutado, durante vinte e quatro anos, sem descanso, e por fim vencido, contra uma das nações naquele tempo mais guerreiras da Europa” (1955: 12). Varnhagen here lists the characteristics necessary to such History, including the fact that Brasil defeated a European power. Indeed, *Os Sertões* is not a history like Varnhagen’s, and so I believe that we are justified in taking Da Cunha’s comment as reflecting his own doubts about using History as a genre for capturing the truth of Canudos.

In comparing *Os Sertões* with Domingo Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, Leopoldo Bernucci concludes that History as a genre also will not achieve the pragmatic effect on the national readership that these two authors desired:

para ambos os escritores latino-americanos parecia ter muito mais importância a narração de “como deveriam ser” os acontecimentos históricos do que a de “como realmente foram.” [...] Invadindo as linhas demarcatórias e movendo-se de um domínio a outro, do real ao ficcional, o texto euclidiano possibilita esta mobilidade entre fronteiras. Por certo, é ainda a assimetria desses territórios que, muitas vezes, preserva e mantém o status ontológico de seus discursos criando ao mesmo tempo uma zona neutra, do entre-lugar, situada além do real e aquém do imaginário, da qual o texto pode ou não ser lido ficcionalmente. (1990: 50-60)

Heitor Martins uses much the same concept to defend Arinos’s attempt at uniting “história e política, ou seja, [Arinos] pretende ser fiel a uma realidade que se encontra fora do mundo da ficção e, ao mesmo tempo, tenta dar uma direção ao futuro” (1968: 1). History can carry out the former, but not the latter.

Undoubtedly inspired by the 1993-97 centennial of Canudos, José J. Veiga, José de Oliveira Falcón, Ayrton Marcondes, Eldon Canário, and Oleone Coelho Fontes are among the Brazilian authors who have produced fictions, historical or Magic Realist, romances, or factions concerning Canudos. These literary works, no less than those written in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, call for analysis that fully considers their respective vectors of intervention in the debate over the present and future of Brazilian society that Canudos represents. Canudos is not simply a pre-text for literary production; rather, imaginative literature has become a primary vehicle for plumbing the depths of the Canudos perplex. This essay has argued that weighing the volatile combination of imagination and fact in literary texts—a combination expressed in the term “faction”—can and should be a primary tool for such analysis.

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ABSTRACT: The life of Antônio Vicente Maciel, the Counselor, along with the story of the construction and destruction of his messianic community, Canudos (1893-1897) have

been an inexhaustible source for the Brazilian imaginary and in particular for Brazilian literature. Literary texts treating Canudos tend to use the genre of “faction,” i.e. of novelized or fictionalized history. This essay compares *Os Jagunços* (1898) by Afonso Arinos, *O Rei dos Jagunços* (1899) by Manoel Benício, e *Accidentes da Guerra* (1905) by Emygdio Dantas Barreto, which were the first three such Canudos “factions.” The essay analyzes the reasons for these early authors to reject relatively “pure” genres such as reporting or history in favor of a mixed genre that supplements (supposed) veracity with imagination.

KEYWORDS: Afonso Arinos, Manoel Benício, Emygdio Dantas Barreto, Antônio Vicente Maciel, Canudos Conflict, Faction