



Cultural Space and Theatrical Conventions in the Works of Oduvaldo Vianna Filho (Latin American Literature Series)

Leslie Damasceno

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Oduvaldo Vianna Bilho was a key activist in the Brazilian national theater movement from 1954 until his death, at the age of 38, in 1974. An author and actor in theater, cinema, and television, Vianinha-as he was popularly

called-was an astute theoretician whose assessments of Brazilian theater still speak directly to controversial issues of the 1990s.

In his theoretical writings, Vianinha discussed politics and aesthetics, the real and potential audiences for Brazilian theater, and how these issues, as well as problems of resources and training, affected the traditions and evolution of Brazilian theater and drama. He wrote during one of the most repressive periods in Brazilian history, a time in which

the military regime crippled theater and the arts. In his work he constantly appraised his own dramatic development and the potential of his theatrical activity, in light of cultural and political possibilities, to affect social change.

In the first full-length study in English of Vi anna Bilho's work, Leslie Damasceno examines theatrical and dramatic conventions in relation to the cultural space within which Vianinha lived and worked, interweaving discussions of acting, direction, and use of scenic space with textual analyses of his plays. To place him in cultural and historic context, Damasceno surveys the social, political, and economic factors that delineated the parameters of, and opportunity for, theatrical performance.

Damasceno's first two chapters are theoretical in nature; they establish essential critical space and distance within the intertextuality inherent in the study of a playwright who was himself a theoretician. The first chapter defines cultural space and theatrical conventions, arguing their primacy as structuring elements in the development of theatrical traditions. The second chapter presents an overview of Vi anna Filho's theory and his evolving opinion on the role and function of theater as a political, dramatic, and aesthetic device. Subsequent chapters evaluate specific plays, focusing attention on the playwright and his interaction with audiences of the time. A thorough examination of his best play, *Rasga corafio*(Rend Your Heart) highlights its value as the culmination of the theatrical and dramatic conventions that he had most come to appreciate.

The interdisciplinary approach to dramatic text and theatrical practice presented by Leslie Damasceno in *Cultural Space and Theatrical Conventions in the Works of Oduvaldo Vianna Filho* offers a historical, cultural, and aesthetic analysis of theater committed to social change in Brazil from the 1950s until the mid-1970s.

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