

MARÍLIA

A play by Rogério M. Pinto

Marília, a stage play, falls under the umbrella of “personal performance.” This form appears prominently in the theater as solo autobiographical and autoethnographic performances, often referred to as self-referential theater or self-referential drama.

Self-referential theater/drama is often pursued for therapeutic purposes – personal growth, healing, problem-solving, and/or for non-therapeutic purposes – artistic, educational or advocacy goals. *Marília* is a form of self-referential theater. It includes both autobiographical – personal life – and autoethnographic – positionalities, including issues concerning ethnicity, race, gender, class, etc. – contents.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Protagonist: Rogério (“R”), gay male, grew up poor in Brazil, currently a university professor.

Marília: Protagonist’s 3-year old, youngest sister = Life size doll.

Additional characters played by the protagonist:

Cida: R’s mother

Suzana: R’s oldest sister

Patricia: R’s second oldest sister

Millie: R’s third oldest sister

Context: *Ash Wednesday, the day after carnival. R greets the audience as they enter the theater. R has travelled for the past 24 hours from Brazil to NYC and just arrived home. The stage is R’s community art installation, *The Realm of the Dead**, an imaginary cemetery where his sister was buried. He occupies a blurry space of suitcases, graves and coffins.*

Setting: *Each program has a Ribbon (Meaning: accident and childhood injury prevention) that says, “Marília.” The ribbon should be narrow and long enough to go around the wrist.*

***Stage:** *The Realm of the Dead* is linked thematically to *Marília*. It comprises 35 suitcases, often the immigrant’s only repository of possessions and memories. Twenty suitcases represent graves of friends and family mentioned in the play, some deceased, others still alive. Fifteen suitcases depict the life and death of Marília, her family, her environment, and what she left behind. The suitcases will be displayed like graves in a cemetery, sometimes in perfect rows, sometimes in disordered arrangements. Some will be closed, making the viewer to wonder about their contents. Myriad decorative items help create the feel of a Catholic cemetery. *One suitcase or trunk represents Marília’s grave, and it contains a life size doll of Marília. The theater needs to have a blank surface for projections.*

Arrival

This is fabulous! [*Surveys audience*] I'm so excited to see you! So glad you came to hear the story of Marília. Thank you so much for coming, it means a lot to me.

Wow! So many trips... I just came back from Brazil, where I was born, where I grew up and lived before I came here, in 1987. [*Heavy pause*]

I'm exhausted from traveling, from carrying heavy suitcases... so many lives, life stories, baggage. I've been travelling for the past 24 hours. It's a long way from Brazil. [*Projection #1: Brazil-USA directions*]

Yesterday, I left my mother's place at noon to catch the 3PM shuttle from Belo Horizonte my hometown to Rio de Janeiro. It took less than one hour, but in Rio I waited for seven hours before departing to New York. We took off on time at 11 PM and flew for nine hours. It is a long trip!

[*Projection #1 fades*]

I love each visit to Brazil. Belo Horizonte has grown so much with a population of three million, and Rio de Janeiro more than six million. Belo and Rio are among the nicest cities in Latin America; and yet I came to live here in the United States of America...I love the city even after 28 years! But to this day, I still adore the richness of Brazil's history, culture and folklore.

[*Carnaval Music: "Cidade Maravilhosa" by A. Filho in "O Maior Carnaval do Mundo" cut #1*]

This trip included four days of carnaval! It was sunny! It was summer! It was *incredible*! Since I was a child, Carnaval is my favorite holiday. People, all over, playing wonderful music, dancing, wearing stunning costumes like the beautiful woman I saw yesterday on my way to the airport. [*Projection #2: Woman with headdress*] Every year, life in Brazil takes a four-day halt and people, people of all ages, races, genders, big and small, all embrace beauty, desire, fantasy, and hope for better days to come. Carnaval is a "welcome" to *all*, it stretches social boundaries that outside carnaval would be a real drag!

[*Projection #3: Protagonist in drag*]

[*Dances and poses*]

[*Projection #3 fades*]

Yesterday was the last day of carnaval.

[*Carnaval Music Fades*]

In Rio, I contemplated the Christ on the Hill, [*Projection #4: Christ the Redeemer*] His welcoming arms inviting us to stop, pray, listen ... Today, Ash Wednesday; we look upon the Christ and from the ashes we bear his cross, a reminder of our mortality. [*Crosses forehead*]

[*Projection #4 fades*]

Lent starts today: forty days of fasting and abstinence. But fasting in Brazil is really hard to do! Brazilian food is absolutely delicious; a mix of indigenous, African and Portuguese cuisines Just to name a few! When I'm there, I eat way too much – pounds of candies, delicious candies! I gain ten pounds in my belly and come back looking pregnant. [*Caresses belly*].

Do I look pregnant to you?

I love to bring souvenirs from Brazil; little things that have meaning to me. Like the black ribbon I got for you. [*Takes ribbon out of pocket*] In Brazil, they say that if you have a special wish, you should tie a ribbon, like this, around your wrist, and ask God to grant you that wish. If you have faith, your wish will be granted when the ribbon gets old and breaks loose. Please try it! But make sure to make a special wish. Like the one I've had for the longest time. For so long, I've wanted to tell the story of Marília. I'm glad you came to hear it.

*

Marília was the youngest of my five sisters... I also have two brothers. I'm the youngest of eight siblings, I'm the baby! I love all my brothers and sisters, and someday I might tell each of their life stories.

But today I will tell you about Marília. I was 10 months old when she died. Marília was three years old. It's strange, as an adult, to think of my elder baby sister who died on the last day of carnival (the day we call Fat Tuesday here in the United States). It was summer, February, 1966. Yesterday, the last day of carnival was the anniversary of her death.

My mother tells me that the day Marília died, Marília took my mother's lipstick and smeared it all over her lips; she did the same to me and to our little pet rabbit! With Marília's encouragement, I kept pulling the rabbit by the tail over and over until it made funny faces. Marília, very worried, rushes to tell my mother, Mommy, mommy, *o Rogerinho 'ta matando seu gatinho* – Little Rogério is killing your little cat! [*Pause*]

I don't remember any of it; I wasn't even one year old.

My mother tells me that, later that day, Marília died; she was in a fatal accident involving the local bus

that stopped in front of our building. I often asked my mother to tell me more about it, but she would say that that was all I needed to know; that and that Marília looked like an angel in her casket.

I grew up conjuring up all sorts of images about a little angel in a white box inside the earth. I was curious about how the long wings could fit inside the little box.

But I knew not to ask. [*Pause*]

[*Unpacks medium-size box*]

Discoveries

Every time I unpack, I can't help but think about when I left Brazil to come to the United States, March 24th, 1987, right after college.

Projection: "Discoveries"

I took four years of biological sciences. College for me was in Belo Horizonte; I lived at my family's home. I attended classes all day and worked as a teacher's assistant. I loved anything to do with biology! But growing up I also had a dream to become a hairdresser! I was good at hairdressing!

Over the years, I had cut and styled my mother's hair and all my sisters', except Marília's...but I wondered ... what type of hair might she have? [*Pause*] How did she look? You see, my only reference was a faded photography on her grave. Like I said, I was good at hairdressing! I went to college *and* beauty school in Brazil. Everyone was surprised! Eventually everyone celebrated my decision! Hairdressing even helped me to stay in the United States. I worked for many years doing hair before I became a social worker and later on a university professor. But I'm getting ahead of myself here. Back to hairdressing! I went to beauty school in the evening. The school in Belo Horizonte was called Broadway! Imagine that!? I think that my dream of becoming a hairdresser had something to do with my gender identity and how I expressed myself since I was a child.

As a little child I felt that my boy's body was quickly inhabited by my sister Marília...like Marília and I were one... please don't worry, I am not crazy nor did I ever have multiple personalities... Though she was dead, Marília and I developed very close together; she made me stronger, capable to do a lot, but not without conflict!

I remember my mother asking the doctor "why is my son so much like his sister, why all his friends are

girls, why is he feisty and yet so sensitive, is he a normal boy, my son?" My mother's preoccupations haunted me all my life and made me fearful about my future.

In college, I was under the impression that I could never be a successful biologist because I wasn't "man" enough. I had better grades than most students, but Brazil had been under a dictatorship since the 1960's; in the 1980's, when I was in college, there was no LGBT liberation yet. No gender non-conforming identity or gender fluidity...No transgender liberation in sight! Being feminine and having a boy's body, I feared I'd be beat up and killed by bigots or the military police. The discrimination I'd have to overcome as a biologist seemed (it was) insurmountable. There were voices from my childhood echoing inside my head over and over and over.

[Emotionally distressed]

Bichinha! Mulherzinha! Veadão!

Sissy! Little girl! Faggot! These voices were meant to drown me.

The same boys who mocked me also chased me around as though I was a girl. In public, they taunted me; in private, in a twisted way, they seduced me into doing things for them, sexual things. I was confused by all this. Even more confused when adults asked me, "Are you a boy or a girl?" I was asked often, "Are you a boy or a girl," even after I became a teenager.

As a child, I thought what made a girl a girl was having a pussy. All my sisters had pussies. If I had one, I'd be just like Marília, right? A Marília who never died. In my mind, everyone thought I might be a girl. I knew I was a girl, even though I didn't have a pussy. I began to wonder if my father also knew I was a girl... the way he looked at me... showed special interest in me... I was confused... you see, my father touched me intimately. His touch was firm, manly; he was a man. Therefore, I concluded, I must be a "girl." *[Pause]* Perhaps Marília? My father was so sad after she died... May be if I was Marília, could I make him happy again!?

I guess I'll never know. Marília was gone for seven years when my father died. By then, I was eight years old. It must've been hard for him to make sense of his behaviors. I think he felt overwhelmed with guilt and he died at the age of 43. The last time I saw him was in the hospital; he was in a lot of pain. His cancer had taken over both his lungs.

[Projection # 5: Father's photo]

Oh! My father...

He must've been lonely, my father
A life of losses and secrets
A wife and kids

What did he hope for, my father?
To have another daughter
Someone to love him
To touch the girl who died so young

I'm here, daddy... please don't make me wait

He must've been horny, my father
A life of losses and secrets
A wife and kids

What could he hope for, my father?
His son willing to obey
Someone to adore him
To lock the bedroom door and acquiesce

I'm here, daddy... please don't make me wait

He liked when the boy touched his feet
The warmth he felt in his gut
The tender touch of little fingers
The rise and fall of his penis
A sense of defeat

Was it all that my father desired?

If he wanted love,
Had I known he was about to die and decay,
I'd give him love...
All I wanted was for my daddy to stay

[Projection # 5 fades]

[More unpacking to Carnival Music]

[Carnaval Music: "As Pastorinhas" by João de Barro– Noel Rosa in "O Maior Carnaval do Mundo" cut #8]

Brain

Projection: "Brain"

Yesterday, I spent a few hours with Clara, my old college professor. Over the years, we have become really good friends. Clara came to the airport in Rio to keep me company until my departure. The airport was quiet, except for those of us trying to leave carnival behind.

[*Carnaval Music Fades*]

Clara was a fabulous teacher and mentor. I was her assistant for three years. She was tough and detailed, super intelligent, and I adored her! Together we taught *Human Histology* – the intricacies and beauty of human tissues that make up all our organs.

I was fascinated by the human brain, [*Projection #6: brain*] how it works, how we feel and do things. The brain is soft, it must be protected against everything, [*Pause*] including awful accidents. Thick layers of bone [*Projection #7: brain inside the skull*] and connective tissues protect the brain against intrusion and destruction. Without the brain there is no life, nothing! The brain controls everything we do and everything we feel. Brain cells [*Projection #8: slide of brain cells*] allow us to *feel* love, pleasure, pain... These miraculous cells are no less than the caretakers and the wardens of all our feelings and all our memories.

[*Projection #8 fades*]

Clara and I reminisced about my college years, how we became friends, how in spite of so many losses and lack of resources, I was the first in my family to graduate from a university. Clara was so proud that I had been class valedictorian... [*Projection #9: Behind podium*].

In my graduation speech, I said, [*Projection #10: On the mic*]

“I would like to thank my classmates and friends, all my teachers, and particularly my mother, sitting in the audience. Thank you all for these wonderful four year, for providing this graduating class the support we needed to learn and to build a life filled with wonder and realization.”

[*Projection #10 fades*]

Transitions

But deep down, I needed more. I was ever so uncomfortable inside my own skin. I had many questions about who I was and how my dead sister figured in my life... I needed some distance from my family and all I had known.

I finished college, borrowed money, and took off to New York City! I had a dream to fulfill: to become a hairdresser!

Projection: “Transitions”

My arrival in New York was not smooth, oh no! My first home, the basement of a house got flooded as soon as I moved in; *flooded*, the entire basement became a pool of water! Thank God for a friend of a friend who helped me find a place in Woodside, Queens, in a small building where I lived with roommates for the next several months.

Guess what? That building's elevator caught fire; the entire apartment, the entire building was engulfed in smoke.

But there is more... I couldn't get a hairdressing job, I didn't speak English. I didn't have a cosmetology license or a green card. I had no money and no job in sight... Eventually I got a job as a dishwasher in a restaurant. I worked seven days a week for about \$200... After that, I did housekeeping work, and I delivered pizza too: believe it or not, I fell from the bike in the middle of Manhattan... My next job was in construction; imagine that! Surprisingly, I did well putting up drywall, painting ... you know, butch stuff.

But it didn't last long... one of the guys on that site attacked me. I was having lunch. He appeared out of nowhere. Like the bullies from my childhood, he called me names and then spread patching compound all over my face. I couldn't see a thing! The construction workers on the site helped me get out and wash my face, but I never went back there. I was scared!

Scared, but not alone... Marília was there with me as she is with me always ... reminding me that when I came to New York, I was happy to have any job, even those so hard to do. Immigrants from poor countries like me come here under difficult conditions: terrible debts; some swim across dangerous waters and others may die of heatstroke or suffocation in shipping containers. *[Pause]* Nowadays, if we get to the United States alive, we may get shot by ICE, we may be detained, and even die in concentration camps on the Southern border. After all this, we'll happily do any job we can get, no matter where we come from.

I came from a housing project in Belo Horizonte. *[Projection #11: Housing Project]* There we played bare foot on the dirt, grass, and unpaved streets *[Projection #12: Project grounds]*. A long avenue connected the nine buildings to the center of the city – 20 minutes by bus! We lived on the first floor of building number Four. Marília's accident took place at the bus stop in front of that building. *[Projection grounds# 12 fades]* From the building's open courtyard, we could see inside each apartment. We knew one another's intimate business. The police often raided the buildings without any apparent reason. Growing up under the dictatorship, lack of privacy was common place.

Ten of us lived in a tiny two-bedroom apartment, me, my mother and father, my brothers and sisters, and the little pet rabbit. I slept in the same bed with my two younger sisters, Gladys and Millie.

I asked them about Marília all the time. They told me that Marília was in a terrible accident. If I wanted to know more, I should ask my mother and my older sisters. The less I knew the more I fantasized about the little angel and her wings inside the white box... [Pause] I was scared of the unknown...

When my father died, I slept in my mother's bed, the only place I felt safe... her voice was so soothing when she sang lullabies. [Sings]

"Dorme nenê ... mamãe tem o que fazer ...

Projection: "Transitions"

..tem roupa pra lavar e costura pra cozer..."

"Dorme nenê ... mamãe tem o que fazer ...

..tem roupa pra lavar e costura pra cozer..."

Mother

My mother worked hard just to feed us and yet she found the time to sing all the time... Every day, she took two buses and walked up a hill for 30 minutes to get to the grammar school where she worked as janitor and cook. Many a time I walked up that hill with her... She cooked and scrubbed all day caring for children, then she came back home to cook dinner, do the laundry (by hand), and care for us, her own kids. My mother is truly fabulous! [Projection # 13: Bull's painting]

She is not a bull, but she has been like one: big; beautiful; grounded; loyal; and tender. She painted this bull for me. I think of it as her self-portrait. I cannot tell you how much I adore it! She signed this painting as "Cida," C-I-D-A, "Cida," but her full name is *A-pa-re-cida de Jesús*, "Apparition of Jesus." [Projection # 14: Christ Redeemer. Words "Apparition of Jesus" across] Our last name, *Pinto*, in Brazilian Portuguese, means "little chicken." Therefore, my mother's full name is "Apparition of Jesus Little Chicken!" [Projection 14 fades]

Do you know what I call my mother? I call her Blondie, "Loura," [Projection 15: Mother's face with the word "Loura" across] because she has beautiful light hair, she is fierce, and looks awesome!

Though mostly nice and good, my mother can be terribly obtuse and even cruel sometimes.

[*Projection#15 fades*] For instance, when my sister Gladys was getting married; I must've been about 15 at that time... I let my hair grow a bit longer so that I could get a new style for the wedding. Oh God! My long hair looked beautiful! As the hairdresser blew my hair with the big round brush, a miracle was taking place before my very eyes. My hair was straight! Was I happy that day? Feeling so good about how I looked... Growing up, I had learned that straight hair was good and curly hair (like mine) was bad. You had either good or bad hair, and mine was bad! Having bad hair meant that I was unattractive, ugly, doomed! That day I felt that my *straight* hair could save my life! I couldn't wait to show my mother. But that day, she came home particularly exhausted and irritable... when she saw "the hair that could save my life," she was not happy at all; she was furious, "Ficou parecendo uma puta!" My new hair made me look like a whore, she said! Some part of me enjoyed what she said... (Talking about confusion...) she imagined me as a woman, and a sexy one for that matter! But my mother's anger was so unexpected; she threatened to cut my hair real short when I slept. My mother is not a threatening person, but that day I was afraid of her. She called *me* a whore! So often I felt like one, from the moment my father touched me. I ended up getting a haircut I knew would appease my mother.

However, a few days later, I told her, "*Nunca mais a senhora ou qualquer pessoa vai decidir qualquer coisa a respeito do my cabelo, meu gênero ou como eu deva viver a minha vida!*" Never again will you or anyone else decide anything about my looks, my gender or how I should live my life! But that was not me alone...Marília and I would have a life free of gender constraints.

As you already know, a few years later I came to New York and became a hairdresser.

"America"

After my initial job adventures, I looked for work in the local paper, the *Daily News*.

Projection: "America"

I found an ad that said: "*Looking for easy going hairdresser, comfortable cutting hair of both men and women.*" I could easily manage that, but the ad also said: "*Hairdresser should have a cosmetology license and be fluent in English.*" After only five months in New York, this, I definitely could not manage! But I called the place anyway and I made an appointment for an interview. This was a "Marília" moment, when she enables me to do things I could never do on my own. I was nervous; my English was good enough to survive but not to understand details and clients' preferences about their hair. You know how people can be so picky about their hair! [*Pause*] In my interview, I was polite and I answered truthfully each question ... but I did not disclose that my visa to stay in the United States was about to expire. When I went for my job interview, I was about to become an "illegal alien" ... [*Projection #16: R's face, a*

caricature of an alien] a threat to the United States of America! I was fearful that I could be deported.
 [Projection #16 fades]

Much to my relief and surprise, Sonia, the beauty salon's owner, gave me a job on the spot and soon after, she began to work on my immigration papers. But I was undocumented for years to come. The Department of Labor took five years to process my application. After that, it took two years for me to receive my green card, and another five to become an American citizen. By the time I received my green card, my dream of becoming a hairdresser was realized and my work at Sonia's beauty salon was complete. By then I had another dream to fulfill, to become a social worker.

In the 1990's, I did volunteer work helping patients with HIV and AIDS. This work quickly compelled me to become a professional social worker. My undergraduate degree in biology was easily validated in the United States. In two years' time, I earned a Master's degree in social work from Yeshiva University. They had a fabulous program for people with full-time jobs. We took classes in the evening and on Sundays. I was 32 when I finished the Master's program, about 10 years after I left Brazil. I practiced social work for several years while I went to Columbia University for my PhD. Many years have passed... Now I am a professor of social work in the University of Michigan... I still do hair, here and there... only David's really, my husband of 22 years. I enjoy doing his hair! So much has changed in my life and I sincerely hope there is still a lot more to come!

Baggage

Yesterday at the airport, the airline weighed my suitcases. I weighed my emotional baggage. It's hard coming back, no matter how many years have passed... [Projection: "Baggage"] The check-in agent asked me to redistribute the contents of my suitcases to even out the weight. I did. [Picks up a jar] I picked up this jar of *tempeiro*, the food seasoning my mother made for me. Everyone could smell garlic even though the jar was tightly sealed... My mother made it for me. Of course, I could make it for myself. [Jar down] This has been true all my life; my mother and sisters have done things for me, given me so much I could never list it all...
 [Open & holds lipstick]

Pink lipstick, light and delicate like Marília ... [Picks up mirror. Holds mirrors until the end of scene] ... a little mirror reflecting both our faces... little things that make us both happy. Without my mother and all my sisters, I would not be here today. I am at once each and all of them.

T4: I am at once each and all of them.

[*Looking in the mirror as mother and sisters*] We protected *you*; we fed *you*; we took good care of *you*. I feel so heavy... heavy and old... old and fat! Do I look fat? [*Puts mirror and lipstick down*] Growing up I was so skinny, a scrawny kid! There was never enough food. My mother and siblings worked hard all day to feed all of us ... Alone all day, I would open the refrigerator hoping to find food I knew wasn't there, adjusting to the fact that the refrigerator was empty, the house was empty. I would close the refrigerator and feel utterly disappointed even though I already knew there was nothing there. I always hoped I'd find candies...lots of candies! Alone all day, I dreamed of dressing up as an angel and going to church for the coronation of the Virgin Mary. [*Projection 17: Mary's Coronation*]. Every year, every evening in May, the girls from the housing project came to church wearing flowing tunics and beautiful feather wings ready for the coronation pageant. From the church floor, I watched them go up on the altar; little angels flowing around singing at church. [*Projection 18: Coronation*] I knew all the songs; I sang along:

*"Mês de maio, mês de alegria...
Cantemos louvores a Virgem Maria..."*

[*Projection #18 fades*]

After the pageant, the angels received little bags filled with candies. But only girls were allowed; and, according to the authorities, I was not a real girl. [*Picking up each type of sweets*] Alone all day, I dreamed of lollipops, chocolate candies, jelly beans, cookies, cookies, cookies, [*Scoops up candies from box or suitcase*] all the sweet things the little angels got ... [*Throws candies in the air and onto the floor*] There they are, all the candies we could never have! I wasn't a real girl; and Marília was dead! I've tried really hard to let go of my memories of loneliness and the hunger I felt in my belly, but those pesky brain cells I learned about in college won't let me forget a thing. My memories make me feel cold...

So very cold... [*Projection #19: NYC buried in snow*] As I felt the winter I came to New York... [*Projection #20: NYC and falling snow*] One evening, coming home from the beauty salon, I felt profoundly alone, more than I had ever been, the only soul in a frozen city. The streets were empty; the freezing weather scared me to death. I missed my mother desperately; I was desperate for some warmth.

[*Projection #20 fades*]

The pace of the city and the cold weather pushed me to eat more, dare more, try new things. I even considered becoming a whore; some immigrants do. We look for warmth in strangers who may help us with money, sometimes food. I didn't have it in me to become a whore, but I wonder... if I had a pussy and long straight hair ... if I looked like the beautiful woman I saw yesterday on my way to the airport, would I have? [*Pause*]

A few days ago, back in Brazil, I was talking with my mother about how I felt when I first came to New York and how I still hate that memory of the cold and the fierce loneliness I felt... I don't know how, but I ended up revealing to her how I have imagined Marília in her coffin all these years – an angel, cold and lonely, deep in the earth. *[Pause]* What I said prompted my mother to show me a letter she had received from the cemetery where Marília had been buried.

Fragments

The letter explained that heavy rains had shifted the ground and washed away all the children's graves; the city had plans to eliminate the children's section of the cemetery. *[Projection: "Fragments"]* Being that Marília was buried in a public cemetery, we were legally compelled to unbury Marília and move her remains to another grave. My mother told no one else about this and waited for me to get to Brazil to help her resolve this matter. Of course I agreed to do it. Without fully realizing all that would be involved, I called the number listed in the letter and made an appointment for the procedures. Two days later, my mother and I were sitting in cab on our way to the cemetery. We talked about everything, except what we were about to do. We talked about her painting classes, my niece's wedding, and marriage equality. My mother explained that she didn't understand all the ramifications of this historic opportunity for LGBT people to get married, but she was happy that now I could do it. She surprised me when she said that, when I was growing up, her biggest fear was that I'd be alone without a companion... she said she was happy that I had found David and how much she loves him. *[Pause]* The things my mother says, who would've thought... I planted a kiss on her cheek right before we got out of the cab. The gravedigger and the police officer were waiting for us. They finished the paperwork and silently guided us through the grave-packed cemetery to what remained of Marília's grave. *[Projection #21: Grave]*

There, the gravedigger swung his pick; the pick hit the ground; the ground opened. There we were inside the Brazilian earth.

[Projection #21 fades]

[Picking remains and objects from a box or suitcase]

The pick pierced the ground over and over; the first few moments felt like an eternity waiting to see Marília, the angel in the box. *[Opens box or suitcase and picks Marília's fragments inside]* Suddenly, from down below, I heard the muffled sound of metal against metal. The pick hit the handle of her coffin. *[Holding up the rusty handle]* I looked at my mother; she looked back "Is this the handle of her coffin?" I heard not a sound from her. Dirt piled around us. I began to dig with my bare hands, searching for

anything I could find. Deep in the pile, I found pieces of fabric. [*Holding pieces of fabric*] Could this be from the dress she was wearing? I ask my mother; she nodded “yes.” I kept searching ... [*Holding stained white sock*] Deeper in the pile, I found her little sock, and deeper still, [*Holding small bones*] I found what appeared to be bones. “Look Loura, these must be her bones; Marília’s little bones.” And then, as if by a miracle, [*Holding lock of hair*] I found a lock of her hair... [*Holding another lock of hair*] and then another. Oh God! My baby sister’s hair, so pretty, [*Caresses face with hair*] so soft, good hair! Loura, there is nothing here. No flesh! There is no more Marília. Oh Loura, I’m so sorry, so very sorry, my love. [*Projection #22: Mother sees remains*] Witnessing my mother’s dismay, I asked the gravedigger, “where is my sister”? [*Pause*] [*Puts remains back in the box or suitcase*]

Marília was not embalmed. Her socks and the lining of her coffin, being made out of nylon, were the only things the gravedigger expected to find, nothing else. [*Projection #22 fades*] [*Pause*]. Marília was exposed to the wet Brazilian earth for more than 30 years.

Her epitaph said: “*Fui para Deus e voltarei na memória de meus pais e meus irmãos.*” “I went to God and I will be back for my parents and siblings.” We’ve been waiting for her; but, after she died, all we had was the photograph attached to her grave. And now, what?

[*Puts remains back in box or suitcase*]

She promised to go to God and come back to us. I waited but she never came. I brought her back. [*Unveils life size doll of Marília*] Have you seen her? I cling to her; she clings back. Can you see her? [*Picks up Marília*] I cling to her; she clings back. Marília, my dead sister, lives on inside me.

[*Dances with Marília to carnival music*]

[*Carnaval Music “A Jardineira” by B. Lacerda – H. Porto in “O Maior Carnaval do Mundo” cut #2*]

[*Projection: “Accident”*]

Accident

Do you like dancing like this? Mother says she used to play with you like this; she tells me you loved it. Did you?

[*Carnaval Music Fades*]

I try to remember things, but all I know is what they tell me, our mother and sisters – and that is not a lot! What do you know? I can hear your voice in my head: go on, talk to me. I've longed for you all my life, forever wanting to be with you, to be you: the girl angel I never was. Deep down, I thought that I'd see you intact in your coffin, untouched by men, free of obsession, inside the earth as if nothing ever happened. I desperately wanted to finally find *myself* looking pretty like you, but what did I find? Nothing! Bits and pieces of you! Who are you, little sister, lovely images or rotten fragments? I am so angry, furious, that no one was there to save you from that fucking bus. Where was everybody? Where?
[*R transforms into Cida, Marília's mother*]

Often I pretended to be your mother.

[*Picks up white handkerchief and sits*] I am your mother... [*Cleans Marília's face*] In my fantasy, I'd catch you and save you right before the bus ... I'd sing lullabies to put you to sleep and again in the morning to wake you up...

*“Era o começo de um dia. Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!
Uma criança chorava, uma vida sumia
Aquele olhar de ternura... e a inocência das fábulas
Oh! Marília! Eu não posso esquecer Oh! Marília
Oh! Marília”*

I love the sound of my kids and to sing for them, for you my baby; the song you liked so much! My baby daughter; I'm so happy Rogério brought you back. Ever since you left; like him, I also wished that I could be dead with you, but your brothers and sisters needed me, so I stayed.

Rogério grew up to be your age... by the age of three, he sounded just like you, he smelled just like you. Remember Didi, his godmother? Sometimes she dressed him up in your clothes. It was hard to tell the two of you apart. I was embarrassed that my boy was so much like a girl and ashamed of myself for wanting him to be just like you. Since he was a child, Rogério has been asking me what happened to you, “Please mommy; tell me more about Marília.”

[*Soft Carnival Music: “Tristeza” by H. Lobo – Miltoninho in “O Maior Carnaval do Mundo” cut #6*]

[*Cida to audience*] After we unburied my daughter, I finally told Rogério. From the cemetery, we could hear the music... It felt like carnival, but 1966 ... [*Turns to look at projections*]

[Projection #23: Carnival Scene]

[Projection #24: Street and housing project building]

[Projection #25: View of street and project building from inside the bus]

[Projection #26: Moving bus]

[Projection #27: Moving bus tire]

[Projection #28: The human brain]

[Projection #29: Bloody pavement]

[Projection #30: Human brain inside the split skull]

[Projection #31: Bloody pavement]

[Screams frantically]

Marília! Marília! Marília!

[Turns to audience; Marília's brain fall to the floor]

[Carnaval Music Fades]

[Projection #31 fades]

[Cida places Marília on suitcase rack and covers her body]

After all these years, I'm still asking myself if my daughter saw the tires before she closed her eyes. Did she feel the weight of the bus? Did she even close her eyes? Did she see death coming? Did Marília feel any pain? I don't know what my daughter felt. Does anyone?

All I know is that early in the day Marília died, she smeared lipstick all over herself, and all over Rogério and the pet rabbit. I asked my older daughters to clean them up and watch them while I went downtown to run some errands. I took my daughter Millie with me. But, before I left, I promised Marília that I'd bring cookies for her. She loved cookies! I came back a couple of hours later: Marília saw me on the bus and ran outside to greet me. She crossed in front of the bus. The driver didn't see her! Suddenly, there she was, my daughter lying on the pavement. I picked her up, carried her inside, placed her on the table and wrapped her. We buried her the next day. My baby looked like an angel.

This is all I can remember, but Suzana, my oldest daughter, should know more, she must, she was supposed to watch Marília.

[*Cida sits and becomes Suzana*]

[Projection: "Sisters"]

Sisters

[*Cida sits and becomes Suzana*]

My mother is right [T7: mother's voice]; I was supposed to watch Marília. [*Pause*] My guilt weighs heavily on me; but then now and again I ask myself, was she better off dead? [*Pause*] How long would've been before my father touched her? He touched my brother Rogério, he touched me too, and my sisters Patricia, and Millie... he molested all of us.

The day Marília died, my father was working. No one called him; we didn't have a phone. I remember him crying, the poor man, he was so sad... After the wake, I watched my father cutting a loaf of bread, one slice for him, one for my mother, and one for each of us kids. The slices were bigger now that Marília was dead.

The wake was in the living room where we slept, a white coffin, her little face, bruised up and purple, like a dead angel. The sight of her little socks, shoes, clothes, slowly realizing she would never wear them again. Never!

My mother is right, I should know more, but I can't remember. My sister Patricia may know more. Like me, she was supposed to watch Marília too.

[*Suzana stands up to become Patricia*]

Suzana and I were both supposed [T8: mother's and Suzana's voices]; to watch Marília. But why should I care? Why should anyone care? Why are they feeling badly for my father? Why is my mother praising the stupid neighbor who dressed my brother in Marília's clothes? How dare she? My mother said it was Suzana's fault that Marília died, that if she had watched Marília, this would never have happened. I was horrified. Imagine having to handle this accusation ... Suzana was only 13 when Marília died. Gosh, I admire, I respect my mother ... But I avoid thinking that she might've known my father was molesting us and never did anything about it. [*Pause*]

People ask me, "How do you feel about it all?" I was 11 when she died. Marília's accident made me obsessively fearful about my own children; afraid when they crossed a street, when they played ...

petrified that some man might touch them or that they might perish under some stupid bus.

When my mother said that Suzana should be watching Marília; she was talking about me too, all of us... the only one she didn't blame was Millie. She's my mother's favorite. Millie is the eyewitness.

[Patricia sits and becomes Millie]

[Millie is holding a Rosary]

[T9: all voices] I was 7 years old. I was sitting next to my mother on the bus. After we got off, the bus threw Marília far onto the other side of the street. Had I crossed before the bus took off, my sister might be alive today. *[Pause]* When things began to settle, all I could think about was, what's next?

Lost in her grief; my mother refused to accept financial compensation from the company whose bus killed my sister. She said that receiving money for her daughter's death was unthinkable. I wish my mother had taken the money. Like many poor children, Marília died because a few cookies made a big difference.

Sometime after Marília died, Gladys, the sister between me and Marília, lost one of her eyes in an accident. Suzana got married and divorced after Rogério told her that her husband molested her for many years. That's when we sisters finally gathered the courage to talk about our father's incestuous secrets. Rogério says that he spared Gladys because she had lost her eye. And here we are.

Yesterday, I came by my mother's place to see my brother Rogério before he left for the airport. I missed him by a minute. He had gone to the store to buy candies, lots of candies to take home. I couldn't wait for him; I was late to church, but I left this Rosary for him, to keep him safe and happy going back home to America.

[Millie becomes R]

[Projection: "Rosary"]

Rosary

[R picks up the rosary]

The Rosary Millie gave me smells like roses; I loved it instantly! I cried from the moment I left my mother's place until I arrived in Rio. Thank God Clara was there, waiting for me at the airport. She has been so comforting...since college. Clara asked me how I felt after unburying my sister. Unburying Marília helped me understand my vulnerabilities as a child; the obsessive nature of my father's desires; my mother's and sisters' love for me... my love of family. Clara hugged me ever so tightly: "My dear

friend, inside your sister's grave you found the fabulous person you are today... all the little girls whose hair you've cut, all the mothers and daughters you've counseled, the sister you have been to so many of us... you are all of them!" Then my Clara left. The plane took off on time! I slept all night!

This morning, still on the plane, I woke up with light coming brightly through the window; my stomach was tight; my breath so shallow... Gradually we approached the earth... Images of Marília's remains taking over my mind, my thoughts, my senses... I contemplated the mystery of Jesus' *Resurrection*, his welcoming my sister to life everlasting ... the Holy Spirit *Descending* upon Marília. My sister's *Ascension* to heaven... [*Puts Rosary down*] I looked outside the window: the foamy ocean water coming to view. We landed on American soil, *my home!* Inside J. F. Kennedy Airport, I walked toward the American Citizen line, leaving behind young Brazilians whose lives are a mystery to me... What type of visa do they have? What jobs will they get? Are they going to stay and become...what? I felt the ribbon around my wrist... so many wishes fulfilled, so many to come...

Marília's lullaby

[*Talks to "shrouded" Marília as she is gently placed in the suitcase*]

My Sweet Sister Marília

[Projection: "Marília's lullaby"]

*Where did you go?
Leaving me here,
So lonely a boy
Without you*

*I went to school
Learned about the earth
The turns it takes
There you disappeared*

*You left me here
Without direction
To join you; how?
Where are you?*

*Have you left?
I never let you
Held you closely
Made my chest cry*

*My most darling [*Puts Marília in suitcase/grave/coffin*]
I'll forever miss you
But you stay no more
I'm letting you go*

*You deserve to rest
Sweet sister, Marília [Closes suitcase]
Go, go to heaven [Throws a kiss in the air meant to go to M in heaven]
On earth no more*

[Projection #32: Marília's photo]

[Projection #32 fades]

Lights out!