

JOURNAL IN THE "SERTÃO"

(JORNAL DO SERTÃO)

The popular literature in rhymes is the most widespread "media" of the northeastern hinterland (sertão). It originates with improvisations to be sung at the weekly market or on the farm. The authors, sometimes also interpreters, like Severino Pinto, use traditional metrics - the sextain and the decimal, also called the "hammer". Its themes are of medieval iberic tradition, as well as the songs of the "Cangaço", moralizing romance, adventures of witty heroes, as well as comments and criticism of social events. The descriptive poem is first orally composed and only then takes a printed form.

The booklets are made on cheap newsprint, bound in xylographed covers and then distributed. The editors acquire all the rights when buying the originals. Editions are sometimes as high as hundreds of thousand of copies which are sold through an enormous network of distributors. It is this network which brings the "string booklets" (literatura de cordel) to the analphabet and low income part of population, as the most efficient way to transmit cultural information.

Due to the new communication network formed by radio, TV, new roads and the effort to build up a inform national market, the isolation of the Northeast is broken. And now the "string booklet literature" which was in itself an affirmation of tradition, spreading social and ethnic values in a closed-system society, is unable to resist progress. The northeast spreads ou and is subject to outside influence - and in order to become a consumer market of products made in the south and coastal strip, has to change habits, and adapt itself to new forms of behavior. The "string booklet" is also rewritten, gets new colors on its covers, being cheaply in São Paulo; it is again distributed through the same channels as before in the northeastern interior.

The old popular and spoken literature is thus pushed further into the hinterland, or has to adapt itself to new urban values, to vie for existent markets. It is only on farms at the foot of the mountains, that we find again the improvising singer, where he still represents the most efficient and the only form of cultural communication.