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Schutzian Frames of Apperception and the Inquisitorial Grammar in Branca Dias

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Abstract

I draw together history and dramaturgy through the figure of Branca Dias Coronel (Koren) (c. 1505–1589). This article offers a phenomenological reading of *O Santo Inquérito*, the play by Dias Gomes (O Santo Inquérito, 1995, p 83), treating it as a symbolic field where forms of violence are reinscribed—religious persecution and sensory and typificational violence. The question guiding my inquiry is whether Branca's posthumous persecution, staged as a sacrifice, might be read not merely as the product of inquisitorial repression but as a dramaturgical condensation of silencing practices that operate at the level of the body, gesture, and sign. I turn to Alfred Schutz in *Symbol, Reality and Society* (*Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, 1967, pp. 297–299), whose distinction of our different orders involved in the appresentational situation—namely, the apperceptual, appresentational, referential, and interpretational orders—provides a generative lexicon for describing the layers of embodied perception that unfold within the scene. A ritual and sensuous dimension of performance emerges, in which Branca's body—motionless, aromatic, inflamed—figures as a living trace of a symbolic struggle for recognition and survival.

Keywords Social phenomenology · Dramaturgy · Inquisition · Sensory typifications · Jewish studies

Resumo

Cruzo história e dramaturgia a partir da figura de Branca Dias Coronel (Koren) (c. 1505—c. 1589). Proponho uma leitura fenomenológica da peça *O Santo Inquérito*, de Dias Gomes (1995), como campo simbólico no qual se reinscrevem violências não apenas religiosas, mas também sensoriais e tipificantes. A pergunta que me orienta é se a perseguição póstuma de Branca, encenada como sacrifício, pode ser interpretada não apenas como produto da perseguição inquisitorial, mas como condensação dram-

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atúrgica de práticas de silenciamento que operam no nível do corpo, do gesto e do signo. Recurso a Alfred Schutz em *Symbol, Reality and Society* (*Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, 1967, pp. 297–299), cuja distinção das quatro ordens diferentes envolvidas na situação appresentacional—a saber, as ordens apperceptual, appresentational, referential e interpretational—oferece um léxico gerativo para descrever as camadas de percepção encarnada que se desdobram na cena. Descrevo uma dimensão ritual e sensível da performance, na qual o corpo de Branca—imóvel, aromático, inflamado—emerge como vestígio de uma luta simbólica por reconhecimento e sobrevivência.

Palavras-chaves Fenomenologia social · Dramaturgia · Inquisição · Tipificações sensoriais · Estudos judaicos

Introduction

I move between the documented persecution of Branca Dias (c. 1505—1589) and her symbolic afterlives in Brazilian theater, song, and cultural memory. Notably, Fritz (2014) underscores that the qualitative shift in organizational communication reveals the centrality of context, narrative, and performativity as indispensable to interpretation. In a similar register, dramaturgical materials can be treated as phenomenological data, in which gestures and silences are not ornamental but constitutive of meaning. By contrast, when inquisitorial records are juxtaposed with their dramatic reembodiments, an interpretive space emerges in which Branca Dias once again resists fixation—apprehended instead as a socially forged identity traversing archive and symbolic scene. At a time when once-rigid religious categories are dissolving into fluid constellations of mutual borrowing and symbolic reappropriation (van der Hoek 2024), and when lived experience is increasingly understood as historically inscribed in dynamic circuits of meaning (Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo 2022), Branca's figure invites a reconsideration of how persecution, memory, and spirituality interlace. Furthermore, as Caro (2024) observes, spiritual gestures often undergo displacement and reinvention in response to crisis.

I argue that a historical-phenomenological revisiting of the interdisciplinary field of religious studies in Latin America is not merely timely but necessary. Branca Dias, whose trajectory begins as a persecuted *cristã-nova* in mid-sixteenth-century Iberian colonialism, gradually transforms—through performance, memory, and ritual—into a symbolic vessel of cultural endurance. What unfolds across the centuries is not simply the persistence of a figure but the unfolding of a grammar of survival: one inscribed in gesture, silence, scent, and embodied memory. This article seeks to illuminate how embodiment, ritual, and memory together shape spiritual meaning under historical duress conditions. Branca's presence—whether evoked through the scent of spices, the upright stillness of prayer, or the swirling opacity of smoke—urges us to consider religious experience not as a static system of doctrines but as a sensorial and performative archive of existential negotiation.

Recent developments in the field underscore the urgency of such a reexamination. It is worth noting, for instance, the debate hosted by the *International Journal of Latin American Religions*, where Topel (2025) explores the practices of contemporary messianic communities in Argentina through field-based ethnography. Her observations reveal a striking tension: gentile participants adopt ritual forms, symbols, and linguistic elements from Jewish traditions to anchor their spiritual authenticity—yet this symbolic claim finds no legitimizing support within conventional frameworks of ethnic-religious recognition. What emerges is a scene of unresolved aspiration and mimetic dislocation, where religious performance exceeds the boundaries of institutional definition.

Schutz's analysis of *finite provinces of meaning*and *multiple realities* remains central for interpreting the mimetic tensions at stake. Equally important is to recall the three forms of transcendence articulated by Schutz and Luckmann (1989) in *The Structures of the Lifeworld, Volume II*: the minor transcendence of spatial limits, the medium transcendence of coexistence with the absent and the dead, and the major transcendence that points toward the ultimate horizon of life and death. Together, these distinctions provide an indispensable phenomenological framework for grasping how symbolic tensions unfold in contexts of displacement and estrangement.

Crucially, as Barber (2017) has shown, religion and humor function as emancipating provinces that suspend the everyday's taken-for-grantedness; they reconfigure normativity, however briefly, and catalyze alternative grammars of coexistence. By contrast, McDuffie (1995) demonstrates that art constitutes an enclave of meaning—bounded yet porous—whose aesthetic ordering resists reduction to the pragmatic province while simultaneously contesting it from within.

Read in tandem, these contributions clarify how the scene Topel describes oscillates between institutional frames and experiential enclaves, a movement in which recognition is at once pursued and withheld. In turn, they dovetail with Garrett's (2021) Schutzian analysis of the stranger, where proximity and strangeness recalibrate relevance structures and expose the fragility—and, ultimately, the conditionality—of shared typifications.

Whatever the case, such tensions invite us to attend not only to what is said and practiced but also to how these practices are inhabited—bodily, emotionally, and symbolically. In this interpretive space, a phenomenological approach, attentive to lived structures of relevance and sedimented meaning (Schutz 1967), may offer critical tools to rethink the category of "religion" itself in the Latin American context.

Rather than reflecting simplistic or naïve syncretism, the phenomenon in question is better understood as a form of interpretive displacement that gradually strips Semitic signs of their original significance. The result is a symbolic reconfiguration in which embodied gestures are uprooted from their historical context and given new meanings. As Topel (2025, p. 6) aptly observes, "Jewish religious signs do not carry their original meanings but become reformulated as expressions of a reimagined spirituality." In this process, lived practices are reinterpreted through external lenses that reconfigure their intelligibility, often nullifying their identity function for the subjects who embody them.

This problem, however, is not limited to emerging spiritualities. It reverberates in the historical treatment of figures whose liminal experiences have been converted

into interpretive anomalies, as in the case of Branca Dias, a New Christian, literate woman, and historical figure from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The documentary research conducted by Ferreira Pinto (1994), complemented by the analyses of Monteiro (2011), Veiga (2013), and Ribeiro (2015), allows us to glimpse how everyday gestures and ways of life marked by non-normative cultural matrices were reinterpreted as evidence of heresy by the inquisitorial sieve.

It is a process that not only reconfigures the sign but also shifts it from its original system of relevance. As Schutz (1964a) puts it, this type of displacement operates by suspending the social familiarity of the gesture, converting it into a strange sign, subject to suspicion and punishment. In this fracture between experience and typification, the proposal of this article is inscribed: to understand, based on a phenomenological reconstruction, how the figure of Branca Dias operates as a symbolic response to epistemic estrangement and historical disempowerment. The dramaturgy of *O Santo Inquérito* (Gomes 1995) offers a corpus in which the memory of the body and voice—emptied of their original inscription—reappears as a denunciation of erasure.

When the common reservoir of background knowledge ceases to function, as Schutz (1967) observes, the very coherence of human action becomes unstable. Gestures, once grounded in lived experience, lose their readability and fall outside the realm of institutional comprehension. Within such a framework, the Inquisition operates not simply as a tool of repression but as a filter that forecloses meaning itself, rendering everyday practices opaque, illegible, and stripped of their original symbolic grounding.

By articulating archival sources (*Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo*) (Arquivo n.d.), a systematic review of Brazilian dissertations and theses, historical documents (Siqueira 1978; Saraiva 1985), critical studies (Haliczer 1987; Ribeiro 2015), and dramaturgical reinterpretations (Bausset Orcutt 1999, 2007), this article proposes an analysis of Branca Dias as a figure on the edge of symbolic disempowerment. Through its staging of *O Santo Inquérito*, the play gives form to the broken memory of the Jewish body and voice as seen through the lens of the Inquisition, exposing the layers of epistemic violence embedded in utterance, enforced silence, and gestures of defiance.

Rather than a biographical study or historical rehabilitation, this is a phenomenological investigation into the conditions of visibility and intelligibility of everyday knowledge in inquisitorial contexts. The central hypothesis is that incriminating gestures and postures were not simply erased but displaced from their contexts of meaning and reinscribed as signs of threat, in a gesture of semiotic violence that persists, even today, as a symbolic mark on the Jewish female body.

Echoes of a Silenced Matriarch in Genealogy, Ritual, and Time

When I first set out to follow the barely discernible footprints of Branca Dias, I confess I expected to meet a rather conventional victim of inquisitorial zeal; yet, almost immediately, she revealed herself to me as someone far less docile and far more refractory (Monteiro 2011). In my view, she emerges as a liminal figure—in

Portuguese simultaneously *mulher* (woman), mestra (mentor), mãe (mother), crypto-Judia (crypto-Jew), viúva (widow), and ré (defendant), whose very plurality unsettles the classificatory reflexes of the historian's craft (Veiga 2013). Every time her name surfaces—furtively in a Lisbon process, resistantly in the marginalia of a Pernambucan genealogy—it seems to shrug off archival fixity, reminding us that biography, family memory, and symbolic time overlap like palimpsests, each rewriting the traces of the other.

In this section, I argue that three contemporary interlocutors—Monteiro (2011), Veiga (2013), and Araújo (2019)—have been my indispensable companions on this expedition. Monteiro (2011), writing from the vantage of early-modern Leiria, frames feminine sociability as a covert conduit of ritual; Veiga (2013), with painstaking Atlantic cartography, reconstructs Branca's migrations and the tactical brilliance of her descendants; and Araújo (2019), provocatively, names the systematic erasure of Judaic ancestry in noble pedigrees "genealogicide," a term whose etymological core—*genea* (lineage) plus *cide* (killing)—already sounds the alarm of symbolic murder. It refers to the deliberate erasure of Jewish lineage from noble pedigrees, a practice that Araújo (2019) argues was widespread and systematic in the Iberian context. These authors, rooted in distinct contexts and manuscript cultures, nevertheless converge upon Branca as a fissure in the Iberian imagination of purity and lineage (Araújo 2019).

She was born in Viana da Foz do Lima, barely a decade after the 1497 edict that enforced the compulsory conversion of Portuguese Jews. Branca grew up along thresholds: public Christian conformity on one side, clandestine observance on the other, motherly nurture alongside the ever-present risk of denunciation, and the prospect of Atlantic exile forever shadowing the hope of local stability. By 1543, she steps, unwillingly, into inquisitorial light in Lisbon, accused—ironically by her mother, Violante, and sister, Isabel—of honoring the Sabbath, fasting on Yom Kippur, and, most telling, washing linens "as Jewish women do." These seemingly innocuous actions became the Inquisition Machine's hermeneutic of suspicion, where laundry could signify law-breaking and the rhythm of domestic labor could summon the specter of heresy (Veiga 2013).

However, the machinery of persecution alone cannot explain the intimate scaffolding of this drama. The Inquisition, after all, did not survive by theology alone; it thrived on parents. Mothers became witnesses, daughters accusers, and the home—ha-seter, the so-called 'hidden house'—was conscripted as a stage for surveillance. Released in 1545 to care for her seven children, Branca was nevertheless sentenced to a life of public shame, her body encased in the penitential habit, her mobility curtailed by royal fiat. Nevertheless, she slipped the net.

By 1551, she had crossed the ocean to Olinda, rejoining Diogo Fernandes, land grantee of the Camaragibe sugar plantation, where she transformed the upper floor of her *sobrado* (colonial house) into what later depositions remembered as the first lay school for girls in Pernambuco. Sewing needles and Psalms, catechism, and clandestine rites—here, the quotidian again became liturgical. As Monteiro (2011) has shown for Leiria, the domestic pedagogy of *mulheres cristãs-novas* was never merely economic utility; it was also a sanctuary of *Sitrei Nashim*—women's secrets—transmitted through touch, taste, and whispered prayer.

Genealogy, meanwhile, tells a more spectral story. Through carefully chosen marriages, Branca's descendants gradually filtered into the colonial elite: Maria de Paiva's union with Agostinho de Holanda Vasconcelos stitched crypto-Jewish lineage to military habit and noble privilege. On the surface, such alliances mouthed the rhetoric of assimilation; beneath, they exposed the fragility of blood-purity dogma. Accordingly, Araújo (2019) detects a compensatory move in Borges da Fonseca's Nobiliarchia Pernambucana (eighteenth century): the complete excision of Branca's *marrana* origins. This is no innocent lapse but, as Araújo (2019) claims, a deliberate genealogical—a textual cleansing designed to bleach ancestral stains and safeguard status. Despite these efforts to erase her memory, Branca's descendants continued to be scrutinized by the Inquisition, with at least five generations of the Dias-Fernandes family winding up under inquisitorial scrutiny for the same alleged offense (Veiga 2013).

Paradoxically, inquisitorial registers preserved what noble memory tried to erase. Veiga (2013) shows that at least five generations of the Dias-Fernandes family wound up under inquisitorial scrutiny for the same alleged offense. In an ironic twist, the dossier that once branded Branca's kin now works as a refuge, safeguarding the voices it meant to condemn. I would suggest that this tug-of-war between deletion and rescue scrambles any neat timeline we might hope to build.

First comes her life span—roughly 1505 to 1589—full of Atlantic crossings, household bargains, and recurring accusations. Next lies the documentary layer, its blotchy ink laid down by inquisitorial clerks; her words fade, filtered through daughters Brites and Inês. Finally, memory outruns paperwork from the eighteenth century onward, allowing legend to eclipse the files that once tried to contain her. Ballads picture her tossing silver coins into the current, a gesture that lets Branca shift, almost playfully, between martyr and matriarch. When we reach Miguel Real's 2009 novel, she even seizes the narrator's chair, teasing historians and storytellers who claim to pin her down.

Returning to the mechanics of repression, one discerns less a singular tragedy than a transgenerational choreography of dread. Brites, tortured in 1597 and paraded in a 1599 public ritual of penance (*auto-da-fé*), embodies the enduring reach of inquisitorial memory and incarnates the longevity of inquisitorial memory; even after Branca's death, her household is revisited during the First Visitation of Pernambuco (1593–1995), its rooms re-imagined as a secret synagogue. Here, gender, kinship, and symbolic violence interlock: women deemed intellectually weaker were, nevertheless, imagined as powerful transmitters of heresy; familial bonds mutated into traps; and punitive symbols—the robe, the confiscation, the marketplace shame—were staged as civic theater, making deviance visible and, paradoxically, unforgettable.

Branca Dias: a Call to Reimagine

Branca Dias.
a friar's desire.
in her sugar mill.

in Paraíba.
she repels.
the sinful love.
Love takes revenge:
she is accused.
of Judaism.
They come to arrest her.
She throws jewels.
and silverware.
into the current.
The water becomes.
the Silver Creek.
—Drummond de Andrade (2014),
Branca Dias Poem,
free translation.

Poetry, essays, dramaturgy, and music are the forms through which the legacy of Branca Dias Coronel (Koren) continues to resonate in Brazil today." The refrain "*Não se apagar, Branca, Branca*" ("Do not fade, Branca, Branca"), from the song Branca Dias by the singer Sefaradi Fortuna, released in 2015, evokes the mystical and biographical figure of Branca Dias through a musical composition that interweaves symbols drawn from multiple Brazilian religious traditions.

Available on YouTube (Oficial 2020), the performance, recorded both inside the *Kahal Zur Israel Synagogue*—the first documented synagogue in the Americas—and in the streets of Recife Antigo, is more than a tribute: it is a symbolic act of reinscription. By singing her name in spaces marked by exile, commerce, and memory, the artist enters into dialogue with historiographical records such as those collected in Branca Dias (Lima et al. 2009), affirming the enduring symbolic and legendary presence of the cristã-nova as an icon of spiritual and cultural resistance. A pure exercise of reimaginations.

Reading Branca Dias' life through dramaturgy—attending to the embodied hesitations, silences, and gestures that survive only in performance—is a form of ethical abstraction. In a Spinozist sense, it is an exercise of imagination in its most responsible and attentive mode: one that does not flee from history but instead traverses it through image, rhythm, and reenactment.

There is something in the everyday gestures of crypto-Jewish women persecuted by the Iberian Inquisition that refuses to be pinned down. The whispered lighting of candles on a Friday evening, the near-ritual care in selecting herbs for cooking, or the steady cadence of bathing routines—all of these gestures bear the weight of an embodied memory, a silent ethics. These were not merely acts of concealment but translations of belonging into rhythm, texture, and repetition. What survives is not silence but an interpretive opacity—a symbolic thickness through which memory finds ways to endure, even under the pressure of suspicion. It is within that thickness that secrecy persists: not as the absence of speech, but as a ciphered language of presence, refusing to vanish.

I wish to dwell on the interpretive potential of *imaginatio* in Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise (2003[1670]) before highlighting her reception of dramaturgy.

Rather than dismissing imagination as an illusion, Spinoza situates it as a prophetic substrate of reason, one through which the mind engages effectively with the world, crafting images that do not merely represent but transfigure reality (Espinosa 2003). Accordingly, when dramaturgy undertakes to resuscitate lives, such as Branca's, it performs more than commemoration. It animates what I would call a kind of *ruaḥ*, a spirited cognition, in which aesthetic form becomes a medium for ethical knowledge.

Over time, I have come to recognize a paradox that repeats itself—not only in national myths or religious doctrines but also in progressive discourses that, despite their promises, often end up drawing new boundaries. As I moved through sacred and secular archives, I noticed how discourses born under the banner of freedom gradually trace new lines of discipline—quietly, almost imperceptibly. What once resonated as an open field of meaning begins, little by little, to resemble a sorting mechanism—a quiet sieve through which presence and legitimacy are filtered. Often, the very language that once opened doors starts operating as a threshold—marking off the sayable, the livable, and the acceptable. I have found that symbolic regimes animated by justice or liberation are not immune to capture. They can fold in on themselves, tightening the space they sought to expand.

Still, what lingers is how Branca resisted—not by confronting the frame head-on but by never fully stepping into it. There is ethics in that kind of deferral. What should disturb us sometimes becomes iconic. What was once unruly and singular is softened and shaped into something exemplary. I have watched her image—fragile, layered, never quite settled—flatten and ease into the same symbolic mold that once marked her as a suspect. She did not live in clarity. She moved along intersecting forces, pressures that did not resolve into names or tidy categories.

Nevertheless, she is rarely allowed to be what she most clearly was to me: a woman formed at the junction of bloodlines, gender scrutiny, and colonial suspicion. Branca Dias has worn many names—martyr, heretic, fiction, and emblem. However, I have found no title that can hold her fully. When I finally sensed the shift, it was not as a scholar that I noticed it, but as someone already caught in the grammar I was trying to read. I encountered not rupture but drift, slow, slanting displacement until meaning no longer felt like itself. Looking through records and performances, I sensed how remembrance, draped in reverence, can quietly extract something for itself. Something always slips away—or returns in altered form, wearing a different face. Even with care and goodwill, I have seen how easily meaning can bend. Justice, as we intend it, remains achingly fragile.

In this light, I find myself drawn to a theological image: the slow drift from the fervor of shared purpose, known as "cruzada," to the cold mechanics of surveillance, known as "inquisição." Ideas like freedom or community cease to liberate when calcified—they measure, sort, and demand. Perhaps it was a refusal, or perhaps it was simply that no single identity could contain her. Either way, Branca's way of being confounded the categories of her time—and continues to resist ours. She was not legible then, and she is no more assimilable now. The many lives of Branca Dias—textual, theatrical, archival—do not merely reflect a dialectic between memory and forgetting; they enact it. Each version becomes a stage where meanings are contested, where absence performs as insistently as presence. I searched, for example,

for clarity in her "auto de fé," a public ceremony during the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, hoping for a conclusive gesture, but instead encountered a choreography of contradictions. Her story does not resolve into innocence or guilt; rather, it unsettles the logic of the law itself. The accusation becomes a cipher—open-ended, recursive, and defiant.

Thus, I return to imagination, not as fantasy, but as an epistemological disposition. To engage Branca Dias through theatrical reconstruction is not simply to narrate her; it is to interrogate the symbolic grammars that have sought to erase her. In this sense, dramaturgy becomes a hermeneutic crucible—a tribunal of the imaginary—where ethical alternatives are rehearsed, not through confession or dogma, but through the insistent vitality of those who refused to disappear. Dramaturgy, in this context, is not just a form of representation but a crucial tool in preserving the memory of Branca Dias.

Over nearly a century and a half, Branca Dias has moved from a sixteenth-century historical subject to a pliable matter in a constellation of narrative, literary, theatrical, and poetic forms. In 1879, Joana Maria de Freitas Gamboa's feuilleton portrayed her as a "rich Jewess" who, sensing her impending arrest by the Inquisition Machine, casts her silver into a tributary of the Camaragibe. This scene would generate the enduring legend of the "Riacho da Prata." In 1905, *O livro de Branca Dias*, a devotional pamphlet by José J. de Abreu (Abreu 1905), and the ecclesiastical writings of Father Nicodemus Neves reinforced her image as a martyr of the faith (Joffily 1993). The 1922 novel *O Algoz de Branca* Dias by Carlos Dias Fernandes entwined genealogy and persecution (Fernandes 1922), while Honório Rivereto's *Branca Dias: tragédia espírita em três atos* (Rivereto 1931) displaced her into a mediumnic Brazil under Dutch rule, staging her memory as a spiritual tragedy performed at the Theatro Lyrico in Rio de Janeiro.

In 1950, Ademar Vidal incorporated her into the folklore of Paraíba, anchoring her traits in regional myth (Vidal 1950). Later, Carlos Drummond de Andrade (2014[1994]) would enshrine her in the poem "Branca Dias," published in *Discurso de primavera e algumas sombras* (1994), where her figure hovers between allegory and ghost. The most canonical dramaturgical rendition, however, came from Dias Gomes. In *O Santo Inquérito*—written in 1964, premiered in 1966, and published in 1995—Gomes constructs an idealized Branca: a *cristã-nova* unaware of her lineage, gradually engulfed by the inquisitorial machinery of colonial Brazil circa 1750.

The play opened on 23 September 1966, at Teatro Jovem under the direction of Ziembinski, with Eva Wilma in the lead role. Nevertheless, the 1978 revival—directed by Flávio Rangel (Gomes 1978) and starring Regina Duarte (see Fig. 1)—marked a turning point in the public reception of Branca's image. Touring nationally and culminating in 1979 at Teatro Anchieta in São Paulo, with Zanoni Ferrite as Father Bernardo, the production transformed the actress once known as the "sweetheart of Brazil" into the embodiment of a Judaizing martyr, producing a crucial symbolic shift.

That shift was political as much as theatrical. *O Santo Inquérito* began to be read, retrospectively, as an allegory of the violence and censorship of Brazil's military regime during its phase of controlled opening (Halfim 2018). Aesthetically, Rangel's production favored expressionist lighting, a scenographic architecture suspended

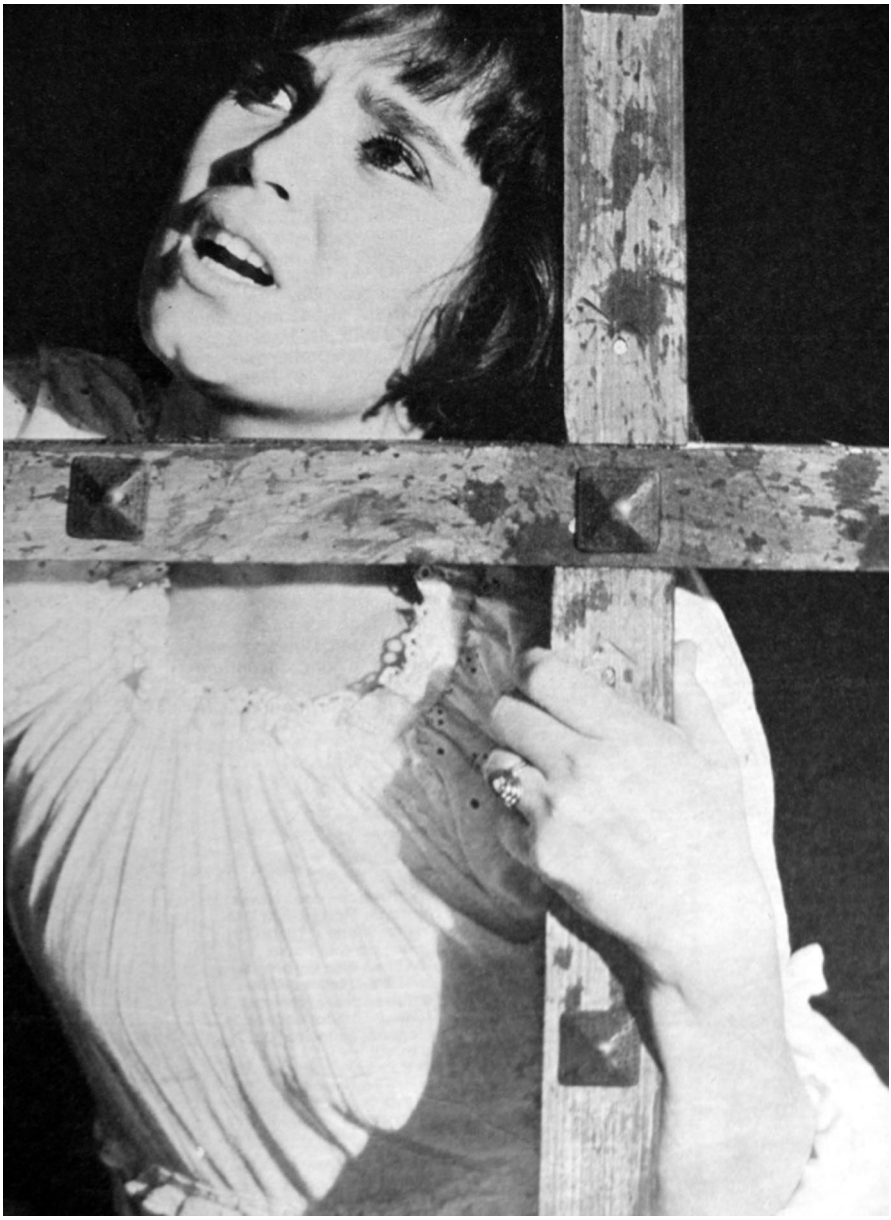

Fig. 1 Regina Duarte as Branca Dias in the 1978 stage production of O Santo Inquérito, written by Dias Gomes and directed by Ademar Guerra. Source: Photo originally published in Revista Amiga (1978), reproduced in Regina Duarte é Branca Dias na peça de teatro, O Santo Inquérito (2010 December)

between colonial adobe and inquisitorial gothic, and a modal soundtrack evoking the Northeast.

Initially pristine in its whiteness, Duarte's costume underwent a slow undoing. With each scene, the fabric darkened, absorbing ash and soot until it became a visual register of descent: from innocence to accusation, from presence to obliteration. It was not mere attire but a second skin narrating Branca's transformation. Opposite her, Father Bernardo emerged not as a villain outright but as a figure caught between desire and decree. The staging allowed his presence to hover uneasily between seduction and sanction, lending their scenes a charged friction: passion straining against the scaffolding of punishment.

Over time, this rendition—exacting in its visual and affective codes—earned *O Santo Inquérito* a permanent place in syllabi, cementing its stature within the allegorical canon of Brazilian political theater. Nevertheless, I find myself wary of this very enshrinement. Branca Dias, in my view, resists closure. Her figure escapes the fixity that canon demands. She does not lend herself easily to emblem, martyr, or heroine roles. Rather, she persists as a layered site, where gesture defies summary, and survival must be continually reimagined in the friction between memory and performance.

Staging Schutz: Relevance and Symbolization in Scene

Alfred Schutz's way of thinking about how we make sense of the world invites us to see social life as something layered—built through shared experiences and meanings. In *Symbol, Reality and Society* (1967), he describes four overlapping ways through which we perceive and organize what surrounds us: the apperceptive, the *appresentational*, the referential, and the interpretive. Each one offers a different path for understanding how we relate to others and to our everyday environment. When we bring these ideas into the realm of theatre, they give us a set of tools that not only help actors and writers shape meaning but also help the audience re-engage with the familiar in unfamiliar ways.

In reading Dias Gomes's *O Santo Inquérito* (1995), I focus on how the character Branca Dias is caught in a web of meanings that both define and destabilize her. She appears to fit into certain social expectations, but this recognition is never fully stable (Chaves 2013). I draw on Schutz's first scheme—the apperceptive—to explore symbols that emerge in this tension. In my reading, influenced by Jewish references and traditions, these symbols seem to clash with others in the text. That friction keeps Branca's presence uncertain, always at risk of being misread or dismissed.

Schutz describes this as a breakdown in mutual intelligibility, a crisis of intersubjectivity. In this space, Branca is both visible and vulnerable. Powerful symbols shape her role, yet those symbols are fragile, and the meanings attached to her constantly shift. Through this lens, Schutz's work proves useful and necessary for thinking about how theater helps us understand those who stand at the edge of society.

In addition to reconstructing the scenes presented here, this section introduces perceptual schemas that could be integrated into Branca Dias's *Lebenswelt*. This framework concerns the most immediate layer of experience, the direct apprehension

of sensory elements prior to any explicit symbolic or cognitive mediation. These components are treated as interpretive anchors in the hermeneutic examination of the play. Although Schutz (1955) reminds us that perception is never neutral, this effort aims to outline the presence of Jewish elements in the adjudicative process. Such presence, however, remains latent, always shaped by sedimented relevancies that prestructure the field of attention. In Schutzian terms, "our apperception of objects, facts, or events of the outer world are guided by the system of typical relevances prevailing within our social environment" (Schutz 1967, p. 327).

This symbolic reanimation breathes new life into the scene by attending closely to its sensory layers. Throughout the analysis, I used parenthetical brackets to call attention to fragments that transfigure Branca across the narrative's progression. Though explicit references to Jewish rituals are absent (Luria n.d.)—save for the Friday bath, which I examine in depth through Gomes (1995)—my hypotheses suggest their spectral presence, particularly when adopting a phenomenological approach. These hypotheses orient the reader toward elements such as *mikveh*, *ruah*, and *máim* and ritual moments like the *Amidah*, *Shebá*, and the *Lag BaOmer* bonfire. Even if these are not named in the play or attested in the historical record, they emerge as embodied allegories of Jewish life. Rather than merely analyzing the representational dimension of the narrative, I focus on the apperceptive resonance of these symbols—muffled sounds, gestures, smells, and silences—guided by the patterns summarized in Table 1. Though not textual in Gomes (1995), these abstractions seek philological grounding through their affective inscription within the scene.

Schutz holds that meaning is never definitively given. It is always filtered through systems of social relevance, which determine what will be experienced as meaningful in a particular time and place. In the second scheme, which he names *appresentational*, Schutz explores how what is absent can be made present through evocative substitution. This is apparent in the trial sequence, where objects and gestures function as insinuations—unspoken charges that carry weight. Schutz (1967, p. 325) argues that one element of experience can stand in for another that remains outside direct perception. This is the domain of symbols. A scent, a phrase, or a glance may evoke a memory or shared affect without needing to be named. These signs are construed in the scene as evidence, but such construction is only possible if a shared interpretive frame is operative. In the absence of this common horizon, meaning disintegrates.

As I delved deeper into the dramatic structure of *O Santo Inquérito*, I outlined what Alfred Schutz called a referential scheme. This symbolic framework underpins mutual intelligibility in everyday interactions. This layer, the third in his typology, seems to take shape most forcefully in the scenes in which Branca Dias becomes the object of inquisitorial scrutiny. Schutz (1967, p. 327) observes, in a passage of remarkable theoretical density, that "our perception of objects, facts, or events of the outer world is guided by the system of typical relevances prevailing within our social environment." In other words, we do not move through the world as neutral observers; on the contrary, we interpret actions, assign roles, and make judgments based on established classifications that we inherit rather than choose. In the case of Dias Gomes' play, these typifications structure the scene and imprison it. Something is disturbing about how Branca is repeatedly read—or reduced—through ready-made

Table 1 Dramatic-phenomenological matrix of Branca Dias — a Schutzian analysis of symbolic breakdown in *O Santo Inquérito*

Scene – Symbol	Apperceptual	Appresentational	Referential	Interpretational
Accusation of nudity; the *mikveh*	Branca's body is perceived through the Inquisition's moral relevances; nudity is fabricated by typified perception	The bath refers to Jewish rites; sensory elements evoke hidden religiosity	Mismatch between a daily gesture and its classification as heresy	Branca tries to explain her faith, but her words register only as hermeneutic noise
Sensory monologue; the *ruah*	Sensations (wind, smell, touch) are re-signified as the dwelling of God	Natural elements evoke the divine; God is appresented through dried meat the and breeze	Branca's sensory religiosity remains unreadable by inquisitorial typification	Her poetic confession is heard as heresy—language without a shared interpretive ground
Kiss to save the priest; the *máim*	Rescue is perceived as lust; a moral code captures apperception	A lifesaving kiss is displaced from a vital gesture into a typified sign of desire and transgression	Caring gestures lack a shared typification; institutional reading is condemnatory	Branca's plea to save life is twisted into proof of sin—sound turned to noise
Smell of hair; the *vessamim*	A praised sensory smell is immediately contaminated by the prospect of moral judgment	Wet grass versus sulfur: scents evoke spiritual states, not simplicity	The lovers' loving typification clashes with the inquisitors' suspicion of the female body	Branca's ironic rejoinder names the trap; her body becomes a text of persecution
The silence; the *Amidá*	The temple's architecture oppresses Branca's senses; she feels suffocated rather than sacred	Stone and shadow fail to evoke God; they only appresent absence	Jesuit typifications of the temple collide with Branca's natural, mobile faith	Her silent prayer is read as defiance; the space excludes rather than embraces her devotion
Refusal to kneel; the *Shemá*	Branca sees the cross as inert wood, not as a sacred sign; her perception diverges completely	The cross fails to evoke devotion; it enforces submission instead of redemption	The expected gesture (kneeling) is not a legitimate option in Branca's symbolic universe	Her upright stance is defined as heresy—silence and stillness become confessions of guilt
Final walk to the stake; *Lag BaOmer*	Branca's dignity remains invisible to the institution; her body is condemned before meaning can form	Her walk appresents fidelity to herself—an embodied symbol of martyrdom	She rejects the sinner's typification, claiming instead the mantle of symbolic martyr	The tribunal fails to read her final gesture; her walk becomes a hidden light across the 33 days of the Omer

Source: Author (2025)

social types. The characters around her do not see her but rather frame her within categories that precede the interaction.

In the referential scheme, Branca is confined within pre-existing social types that precede interaction. She is not seen as herself but through inherited categories that already classify her as a heretic and guilty. By contrast, the interpretational scheme depends on a tacit harmony of relevance that sustains mutual understanding. When this tacit ground fails, meaning fragments: gestures are misheard as noise, silences as defiance, and dialogue as threat. The difference is decisive[1]: in the referential scheme, Branca is typified; in the interpretational scheme, she becomes unintelligible. Schutz (1967, p. 326) describes it as the layer in which the meaning of gestures and silences depends on a tacit harmony between the interlocutors, a pre-reflexive agreement on what is relevant to both.

When this harmony is broken, meaning fragmented, dialogue no longer operates as symbolic mediation but as a mismatch. What should be recognized becomes opaque, and the other—although still physically present—begins to inhabit a foreign scene zone. At that moment, Branca is no longer just a woman standing before a court. She becomes what Schutz would call a stranger—a figure whose presence destabilizes the shared horizon of meanings. The stage no longer accommodates her as a full interlocutor. Her experience exceeds the codes of the inquisitorial scene, which cannot assimilate her without violating her. In examining these shifts, my proposal is not to offer a definitive interpretive solution but to reformulate the symbolic grammar that sustains them.

Upon reexamining the play with attention to the residual layers of meaning—*mikveh*, *ruach*, *máim*, *vessamim*, *Amidá*, *Shemá*, and *Lag BaOmer*—I realize that there is a constellation of erased but still latent Jewish symbols that persist in the dramaturgy as vestiges of a rejected world. They are not there as retrospective ornamentation but as interrupted inscriptions hovering between memory and the attempt at erasure. Perhaps it is precisely in this interval—between typification and silence, between grammar and exile—that Branca Dias reveals her deepest symbolic force, not as a consensual martyr, but as a point of failure in the dominant system of relevance. It is from this failure that another listening experience becomes possible.

The following table presents a dramatized phenomenological reading of *O Santo Inquéirto* through the lens of Alfred Schutz's four orders of meaning constitution: the *apperceptual*, *appresentational*, *referential*, and *interpretational* schemes. Each row corresponds to a pivotal scene involving Branca Dias and outlines how her gestures, perceptions, and expressions are framed, misread, or rendered unintelligible within the symbolic order of the Inquisition. Rather than depicting a merely psychological conflict, the table reveals the structural collapse of intersubjective meaning across layered planes of typification. Schutz's framework enables the mapping of how Branca's embodied faith—rooted in the sensory and the everyday—is systematically reclassified as deviance. As shown in Table 1, the dramatic trajectory of Branca Dias materializes the phenomenological conditions under which symbolic

[1] I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need to sharpen this distinction in order to avoid conflation between the two schemes.

relevance becomes fractured, and the Other is expelled from shared horizons of intelligibility.

In Table 1, I articulate seven central scenes from *O Santo Inquérito*, along with the four schemes of relevance proposed by Alfred Schutz. Each line vividly demonstrates how the inquisitorial court reinterprets Branca Dias' everyday gestures—such as a bath, a kiss, and a silence. This transformation, from innocent actions to signs of threat, is a cause for concern as the frameworks of intelligibility collapse at each layer of meaning: perceptual, evocative, typified, and interpretive.

Branca Dias is a liminal figure. Her existence dramatizes Schutz's (1967) concept of the collapse of the common social world. Her life is not a heretical trajectory—it is a phenomenological crossing. Her body is a language without translation. Her gesture is a symbol that cannot be contained within the inquisitors' stock of knowledge.

The character embodies the condition of the *symbolic stranger* in Dias Gomes's play: someone who does not take for granted what others perceive as obvious. Someone who refuses to see the sacred where they are told it resides feels no guilt in pleasure or perceives crime in sensory freedom. Branca is not an exception—she is an indictment. The play, described below in seven scenes, does not merely represent the trial of a woman. It enacts and gives form to the breakdown of symbolic coexistence.

Indeed, as Schutz reminds us in *Collected Papers II*, the very possibility of social life is reinforced by shared typifications and domains of relevance—fragile, contingent, and easily destabilized. In *Don Quixote and the Problem of Reality*, the knight errant persists as an "undisturbed master in his sub-universe" even while his world appears as "a world of madness to his fellow-men," generating "conflicts arising between the disparate schemes of interpretation" (Schutz 1964b, p. 141). Here, the collapse of coexistence does not signify mere eccentricity; it dramatizes the fragmentation of interpretive grammars, a breakdown that undermines the centrality of shared meaning.

By contrast, in *Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World*, Schutz demonstrates that "the common-sense aspects of equality… have thus a relational character; they depend upon the structure of the system of relevances" (Schutz 1964c, p. 226), with its significance diverging as it is refracted through "the in-group, out-groups, or the social scientist" (p. 227). In turn, the alignment of relevances sustains a viable grammar of coexistence; their misalignment catalyzes rupture, producing the very scarring effect of exclusion and dislocation. Ultimately, Schutz's juxtaposition suggests that equality is not a normatively neutral category but a historically contingent phenomenon whose endurance depends—in large measure—on the negotiated convergence of interpretive orders.[2]

[2] I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for drawing attention to the pivotal role of these interpretive schemes in *Collected Papers II*, thereby strengthening the analytical linkage between Schutz's discussion in *Don Quixote and the Problem of Reality* and *Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World*.

Scene 1. The River as Stage and Sentence

The play begins like a water break: we are submerged without warning. The river flows in the background—not visible but insinuated. It is known that it was a Friday. It is said that there was a bath. It is alleged that Branca was naked. The current of speech precedes the scene. The judgment arrives before the image.

On stage, there is no nudity. There is a rumor. Branca's body is not exposed to it; it is narrated. The bath is not shown, only its residue. The memory arrives already tinged with guilt. The nudity, which may never have occurred, comes into being through an excess of interpretation. The inquisitorial gaze does not see—it reconstructs. What scandalizes is not the act but what the gesture has come to signify.

Branca is said to have undressed on the riverbank. The water—an ambiguous presence—touches the body and transforms it into a sign. What might have been a ritual of purification, or a solitary pleasure, is reclassified as transgression. Friday, which marks the beginning of sacred rest in Judaism, becomes a key element in the indictment. Every part of the scene—water, gesture, timing—is converted into evidence.

Nevertheless, the river does not testify. It flows. Its indifference contrasts with the tribunal's rigidity. Where there was movement, they sought fixation. Where there was a body, they sought a crime. Where there was water, they demanded a sentence.

Branca says little: "I like to bathe freely." It is not a thesis—it is a way of being. Schutz helps us listen: this "liking" contains a world. A world in which the body is not suspect, pleasure is not guilt, and gestures do not require mediation. However, such a world is illegible to the Inquisition.

The river, which for Branca means freedom, is interpreted by the court as deviation. Schutz speaks of this shift: a symbol born of lived experience may be seized by a foreign code. *Appresentation* is reversed—what was the presence of self becomes the evocation of threat. The bath is read as *mikveh*, moist skin as promiscuity, and water as heresy.

It is an inaugural scene not merely because it opens the play but because it announces the central conflict: the issue is not action but interpretation. Branca is not judged for what she did but for what her gesture allows others to imagine. The tribunal does not punish the act—it punishes the symbol. The river, instead of cleansing, brands. Instead of flowing, it imprisons. It becomes a mirror of hostile typification.

Moreover, Branca—who only wished to immerse herself—emerges already condemned, not by the water, but by how she was seen when drying.

Scene 2. The Sensory Monologue

There is silence on stage. The tribunal exits, leaving Branca alone with her thoughts. Her body is still there, damp with accusation. However, now the time has shifted. The light has changed. It is just her and the world she carries, which is about to be judged by those who do not understand her sensory experiences.

Branca speaks—not to the judges, but to what lingers within. She evokes Augusto—the lover, the companion, the body that touched hers with desire and attention. With him, she says, her hair smelled of wet grass. There was a breeze, dried meat, and warm earth with him. Her recollection is not mere memory—it is a vivid, sensory return. Branca's body does not recall—it relieves.

Here, dramaturgy suspends the logic of judgment and opens a space for presence. Language is no longer juridical—it becomes poetic. Schutz's conceptual tools quietly illuminate this scene at this point: there comes a moment when lived experience slips beyond everyday typifications. The gaze of the other no longer guides apperception but by an interior order. The wind, the touch, the scent—all reemerge as meaning. There is no doctrine here—only immanence.

However, there is no naïveté. Branca knows that this world, though full, is precarious. What for her is presence will, for the inquisitors, become evidence. The scent becomes a sign. Pleasure is a sin. Schutz observes that when a symbol arises from lived experience, it may not be recognized by normative structures. Moreover, it is resisted—or attacked when it is not recognized.

Still, Branca continues. She speaks of the smell of dried meat. Of the warmth of the wind. For her, God is not confined to the altar—He dwells between salt and desire. Her faith is tactile. The breeze that blows is not a metaphor—it is a revelation. Schutz would call this *sensitive appresentation*: the manifestation of something absent through the sensuous. There is no dogma, but there is the sacred, and Branca experiences it through her senses.

Yet this sacredness is illegible. The stock of typifications Branca Dias draws upon—of nature, of the body, of the moment—does not match that of the tribunal. Schutz reminds us that without shared ground, the actions of the other become irrational, offensive, and opaque. Branca's body, full of divinity, will be read as provocation.

At the end of the scene, Branca remains whole but already condemned, not for what she has done, but for having felt too much. Her language does not fit into the available listening. The court will not understand that scent is a prayer. That wind is a word. That pleasure is a dwelling.

What arises in this scene is not a defense. It is a creed. Branca does not protect herself—she affirms. Her faith has no intermediaries. Her body is the altar, and the *ruah (*wind), the hymn.

Scene 3. The Life-Giving Kiss

The *máim* returns. The river reemerges not merely as a place but as a symbol—the threshold between breath and suffocation, purity and accusation. Another bank. Another body. Father Bernardo—unconscious, submerged. Branca sees him. She runs. She acts. Without calculation, without invocation, she descends toward the current. Mouth to mouth. Air into air. A gesture unfiltered: immediate, vital, and whole.

However, under the eye of the Inquisition, no gesture remains pure.

Branca draws life back into a drowning man—and with it, seals her own fate.

The kiss, in its elemental register, is nothing but rescue. Breath retrieved from below. A touch born not of desire, but of urgency. One body answering the call of another in its final moment. There is no deliberation. The current demands a response. Action precedes doctrine. Life precedes law.

Yet the waters, which once cleansed, now accuse. The *máim* (water) surrounding both bodies becomes the frame of suspicion. What should have been a scene of grace is recast as transgression. Instead of erasing, the river preserves—not the truth of the act, but its distortion.

However, the scene does not describe an emergency but rather ambivalence. The transformative power of societal perceptions is evident as the gesture will be remembered, distorted, and retold not as salvation but as a scandal. The contact between the woman and the priest will not be seen as a necessity but as seduction. The mouth that gives breath will be reinterpreted as profane, underlining the weight of societal judgment.

Schutz's (1967) categories, in my perspective, discreetly clarify her background: *Apperception* is always filtered through prevailing relevances, the dominant social norms, and expectations. What is seen is not simply what is, but what one is prepared to see. Moreover, what is expected of Branca's body is guilt, the societal judgment that she is inherently sinful or wrong.

Appresentation acts violently: the present gesture—mouth over mouth—evokes something feared and absent in the tribunal's eyes. The kiss, no more than a resuscitation technique, is reclassified by inquisitorial relevances, shifting from a gesture of rescue into evidence of desire and defiance. "Symbolic interpretation may result in a shift of meaning," Schutz warns. Here, meaning is not shifted to it; it is torn out and replaced.

Branca knows this. She does not explain. Nevertheless, neither does she retreat. When questioned, she will say, "I tried to save you." The sentence, however, like all her others, is stillborn. The stock of typifications leaves no room for ambiguity. In the inquisitorial grammar, a woman does not save life—she contaminates it.

The gesture becomes illegible because it disrupts the shared frame of reference. Schutz cautions: when typifications diverge, the act of the other turns into noise. Furthermore, noise must be silenced. In attempting to offer life, Branca hands the institution yet another piece of evidence against herself.

At the interpretive level, collapse is complete. The priest—now breathing—does not testify. The court does not listen. Furthermore, when the gesture cannot be controlled, its interpretation inevitably escapes control. Once again, Branca is not what she does—she is what she comes to characterize. Her act, necessary, is recorded as blasphemy.

The gesture that saves becomes the gesture that condemns, a tragic turn of events that evokes a sense of pity for Branca.

Instead of being remembered as a miraculous event, the scene is recorded as evidence of the threat posed by a woman who deviates from expectations. This unjust condemnation of Branca serves as a stark reminder of the societal norms and expectations that often lead to the misinterpretation of noble acts.

Scene 4. The Scent of Grass and the Hair

It is night, or nearly. The scene is small and intimate—yet it holds an entire world. Branca is with Augusto—her lover, perhaps her accomplice, or simply the man who does not fear what she is. He says gently, "Your hair smells of wet grass." A simple compliment. Natural. However, nothing is simple when the female body is treated as evidence.

Branca smiles—but she does not retreat. She replies, half-laughing, half-strategic: "If I were possessed, it would smell of sulfur." The line comes lightly, but it comes loaded. Irony and warning at once. She knows affection can become an accusation, that a scent can be classified. That a body, even when desired, is always under suspicion.

What Augusto offers as intimacy, the inquisitors would hear as proof. What is sensory communion between lovers becomes encrypted speech to the ears of power. Branca's body is smelled, read, and interpreted. It is not enough to be—she must also emit what is expected. The innocent woman must carry the right fragrance, gestures, and temperature. There is no room for an aromatic error.

The scent of wet grass signals earth, dew, and contact with the soil—life close to nature. But nature, in this world, is ambiguous. It may suggest purity—or paganism—freshness—or disguise. What begins as a compliment curdles into a threat.

Branca knows this in the eyes of Gomes (1995). Her answer contains it all: clarity, resistance, mockery. It reveals that she understands the grammar of power but refuses to reproduce it. Her irony is a form of metalinguistic dissent: she names what is being done to her. It is not only her body on trial but also its translation. Hair is no longer just hair. The scent is no longer just scent. Every trait becomes an index.

The brief scene becomes a liturgy of sensory judgment. No tribunal is in sight, but the sentence has already been passed. Schutz (1967) would say that typical relevances, the socially constructed norms and expectations, structure perception. Yet here, typification becomes something crueller: the body is rendered into a surface for projection. It ceases to be dwelling and becomes text.

Branca knows that innocence is not enough—one must perform it. However, she refuses. Her irony is a performative refusal of submissive aesthetics. She does not adorn herself to appear holy. Nor does she disappear to avoid looking wicked. She stands in between grass and fire, desire and verdict, touch and pyre.

In that space, where scent becomes an argument, she exposes the trap: the female body is always a potential symbol, never just flesh. Furthermore, when the gesture cannot be controlled, interpretation is. Perfume does not absolve—it accuses. Like the *besamim* of Havdalah, the spices used to console the soul at the fading edge of the sacred, the fragrance lingering in her hair is read not as memory but as defiance. What once marked the gentle passing of Shabbat becomes, under the inquisitorial gaze, in my view, the trace of a crime: a scent that should have disappeared but dared to remain.

Scene 5. The Silence

Branca enters the Jesuit college. A priest walks beside her. The space is heavy, symmetrical, and defined by stone. Light filters in at an angle, restrained, narrow. The stone dominates. Silence lingers—a cold silence. The floor echoes underfoot, but it is not welcome. Nothing in that place breathes.

Branca looks around, but she does not pray. What should be the beating heart of the Catholic world—the place of proximity to the sacred—seems hollow to her. She says she misses the wind, the light, and the sun's warmth on her skin. She speaks of absence. She says, "God is not here."

The scene unfolds with silent violence. Branca does not scream or swear. She simply states, "I don't feel Him. I can't find Him." What the priests see as holiness suffocates her. The temple, which should be a place of meditation, is an obstacle.

Here, architecture is not a backdrop but a doctrine in stone. The stone is dogma. The shadow is surveillance. The symmetry is controlled. For those within the tradition, these elements point to transcendence. However, Branca comes from another world of sensation, where the sacred moves, stirs, and grazes. For her, divinity does not dwell in walls but in the wind that does not enter, in the light that does not reach her.

In Schutzian terms, socially sedimented relevances shape perception. Nevertheless, Branca's body resists that arrangement. Her skin does not consent. Her apperception breaks with expectations. The space no longer speaks a language she understands.

One symbol is notably missing: the river. Outside, the water flows, a symbol of motion and life. Inside, everything is held still. Rigidity silences gesture. Shadow denies embodiment. Prayer, here, is architectural and, therefore, mute. Branca finds no trace of her God because this place has no room for the sacred in motion.

The appresentational order fails. The space does not evoke what it claims. The cross is there, but it does not signify. The altar stands but offers no opening. Faith here does not breathe. Branca, whose belief arises from sensation, presence, wind, salt, and firelight, now finds herself enclosed by a theology that cannot hold her. The temple becomes a symbol of absence.

One could apply Schutz's phenomenology of the social world to this moment: without shared typifications, the world of the other becomes opaque. As mentioned, it refers to the common understanding and interpretation of symbols and spaces. What is recollection for the priest becomes confinement for her. The symbol that should unify becomes the wall that excludes it.

She does not reject God. She rejects that God. She rejects that architecture. Not the mystery—but the stained glass that traps it. Her rejection is not a mere act of defiance but a declaration of her independence from the confines of traditional architecture.

This is not a scene of rebellion. It is a scene of witnessing. Branca does not challenge the church—she declares its hollowness, and that alone is enough. In the eyes of the Inquisition, her silence already signals danger. Not finding God where she was told to look is as good as denial—or worse, as imagining another way to find Him. The Inquisition perceives her silence as a threat, a challenge to its authority.

Furthermore, the worst part of all is the thought of finding Him without a mediator. She stands still, says nothing, and does not kneel. Perhaps—though no one will ever know—it was during that moment, in that foreign hall of stone and shadow, that Branca crafted her *Great Amidá*. Not aloud, not for anyone else, but erect, steady, and silent. Branca's determination and strength are palpable in this moment of silent defiance.

Scene 6. The Cross and the Refusal to Kneel

The tribunal is established. The cross in the Gomes (1995) view and the *Shemá*, in my apperception schematization, have been brought to the forefront. There are no grand declarations, only the gesture that is expected. The inquisitors demand no confession. They want a single choreography: Branca kneels. Nothing more. One movement. Small. Absolute.

She does not move.

The scene is stark. There is no room for ambiguity. The cross, the ultimate symbol of the faith that judges her, is no longer an object of devotion but a test. Not to bow is to betray. Not to kneel is not to believe. Refusal becomes blasphemy.

However, Branca does not reject God. She refuses the imposed equivalence between symbol and submission. What is asked of her is not belief but recognition—recognition of a code she does not inhabit. The cross is wood for her, not because she despises it, but because it does not speak to her.

Here, the apperceptive scheme itself breaks down. Along Schutz's line of thought, one could say that Branca sees what the inquisitors perceive as a sacred sign as an inert object. The very cross that stirs reverence in them evokes estrangement in her. The conflict is not about essence but about meaning.

The symbol has lost weight because the flesh has been stripped from it. It no longer carries presence. It no longer gathers. It only commands. Moreover, Branca does not bow to a command without soul.

On the level of *appresentation*, the cross fails. What should point to redemption now enforces submission. The symbol, deprived of inner resonance, collapses. For the inquisitors, this collapse is intolerable. For if the cross is not felt, then salvation is void. Furthermore, if salvation is void, only judgment remains.

Branca's gesture, to remain standing, is not theatrical. It is visceral. It does not defy; it affirms another presence. That of someone who no longer shares the same symbolic ground. Schutz suggests that communication breaks down when no interpretive horizon is shared. Here, there is no common horizon.

Typification is immediate: a woman who does not kneel is a heretic. Her stillness is read as arrogance. Her silence, a confession. Her upright body becomes a threat.

The court cannot tolerate ambiguity; it must decode, name, and rule. When it fails to do so, it erases. Branca, standing there, becomes inscrutable, and for that reason, she must be eliminated. Yet her refusal is not negation; it is an affirmation. She does not reject faith. She reveals another way of believing. One that does not require kneeling before wood. One perhaps is closer to breath, to salt, to light. A faith that has no place in that temple.

And that is why she cannot be forgiven.

Nevertheless, in standing, Branca fulfils the *Shemá*—not in words, but in presence. With all her heart, with all her soul, with all her might.

Scene 7. The Walk Toward the Fire

Final scene. No more tribunal. No more argument. Only the fire—assembled with ceremonial precision. The cross remains in the background but is no longer in the center. The institution has said all it needed. Now, it simply watches.

Branca walks.

Not dragged. Not pushed. Not pleading. She walks with her own body—the body that has been interpreted, denied, typified, and condemned. Now, it moves by itself. Upright. Whole. Silent.

Yet, her silence is not a void but a weight that fills the air. Schutz might argue that the gesture still carries meaning even when language fails. Here, the gesture is all there is. Branca's poise is not defiance. It is a revelation. The world around her no longer understands her. That is why it must burn her.

Phenomenologically, this is where all relevant structures collapse. The institution sees only a condemned body. Her dignified walk no longer presents faith but obstinacy. The interpretational field? It has dissolved. No one listens. No one translates. Branca has become a pure symbol—but not a symbol the institution can possess. She has become opaque. Inassimilable. As Schutz writes, the Other appears as irrational or dangerous, and danger must be removed.

She does not fade into the background. She persists. With each step, she asserts her presence. She no longer seeks to persuade—she bears a witness. Her march is a wordless midrash. Every footfall is a verse legible only outside the archive. She did not kneel, recant, or run. She walks as if to say that meaning is not yours to own. She has become a symbol of resistance, her presence a powerful testament to the limits of institutional power.

To the inquisitors, she is no longer a human being. She is a symbolic threat. A remnant of a world that no longer fits in the world. A body that still signifies after being outlawed.

Nevertheless, some do see her. The spectators. Time itself. The silence lingers after the final cry. Schutz no longer needs to be invoked. He is fully present here: Branca is the stranger of strangers who refuses to be fully translated. The one who lives outside dominant relevance. She has no available code, yet she contains a world.

The fire ignites. It burns—but it does not consume all.

Branca vanishes from form. Regardless, the light she casts remains, as in the 33-counted days of the *Omer*, a hidden illumination carried across generations.

The Seven Elements

There are moments when a symbol does not declare itself—it lingers in the body. I revisited the role of *bessamim*—aromatic spices—in the ritual of *Havdalah*. Etymologically linked to separation (*badal*, in Hebrew), this ritual marks the passage from the sacred to the profane, from Shabbat into the everyday. Nevertheless, this passage is not merely conceptual—it is sensory. The scent of the *bessamim* functions as a trace of a departing presence, evoking the *neshamah yeterah*, the "additional soul" believed to dwell within the body during Shabbat and quietly take its leave as the day ends.

The blessing over the spices is not simply a liturgical act but an affective farewell. A parting made tangible through smell softens the descent from spiritual fullness to ordinary time. As recorded in the *Sidur Shabat Shalom* (Congregação Israelita Paulista 2020, p. 176), this sensory ritual experience anchors itself in what we might call embodied memory. Alfred Schutz (1967) offers a compelling lens: such moments operate within the *apperceptual scheme*, where sedimented cultural relevances guide perception. In this context, the scent is not merely an object—it is an immediate sign of something spiritual that can never be entirely spoken, only evoked.

This kind of sensorial meaning reverberates throughout Dias Gomes (1995). For instance, water that runs through the mill or rinses the fabric washed by Branca's women is never just a backdrop. It assumes the symbolic status of *mayim chayim*, "living waters." As Crispe (2012) suggests, water is felt as freshness, flow, and vitality; it functions as an embodied metaphor for Torah. It is a *sensitive typification*, where water signals life and continuity, even in silence. It is not an allegory but the sediment of ritual knowledge, absorbed before words can form.

Similarly, Branca's upright and restrained posture before her inquisitors is not passive. In her silence, there is density. The scene, perhaps unconsciously, gestures toward the bodily form of the *Amidah*, the silent standing prayer. The *Amidah* demands radical stillness (Bloom n.d.), not as the absence of action, but as presence in interiority. The play activates this liturgical posture: a spiritual resistance felt before it is understood. The standing body becomes a vessel for unspeakable resolve.

Another register emerges through the dense smoke surrounding Branca during dramatic tension, especially beneath the fig tree. It evokes the *ketoret*, the sacred incense of the Jerusalem Temple, which, according to Shurpin (n.d., n.d.-a, n.d.-b), was meant to bridge the earthly and the divine. Here, the smoke requires no explanation. Its hovering materiality signals expiation, mystery, and transcendence. The symbol does not declare itself—it smolders.

The gesture of immersion—though not literal in the play—is summoned symbolically by the allusion to deep waters, which calls forth the imagery of the *mikveh*. Slonim (n.d.) emphasizes that the *mikveh* functions as a ritual rebirth, a bodily submission to purification felt in the flesh before the mind apprehends it. In this light, the scene in which Branca and the women wash their linens becomes a veiled ritual marker of belonging. The water purifies, yes—but it also binds.

Finally, the bonfire that closes the play—marked by a sacrificial tone—recalls the fires of *Lag BaOmer*, not as a historical claim, but as a symbol. Shurpin (n.d., n.d.-a, n.d.-b) explains that such fires commemorate the spiritual light revealed at the moment of a *tzaddik*'s death. By drawing this image toward Branca, the dramaturgy transfigures her death into an affirmation of faith. Heat, light, and combustion act directly on the viewer's sensorium. A symbol need not explain itself—it burns.

In Schutzian terms, each element—water, posture, smoke, fire—operates as an apperceptual conduit of meaning. They are not initially read as symbols; they are felt. They are smelled, touched, seen, and absorbed through the body. They are, to borrow Schutz's formulation, "forms of apprehending the life-world that are sustained by taken-for-granted relevances"—traces of ritual knowledge that precede discourse. In *The Holy Inquisition*, this repertoire is mobilized not to present Branca as a historical figure but as a liminal presence, a body that condenses the invisible.

For this reason, the scenes beneath the fig tree—both the kiss and the burning—should not be read as historical testimony. There is no record of Branca being burned alive. On the contrary, available sources suggest that her persecution by the Inquisition occurred posthumously. The scene, then, does not document—it translates. It renders tension between body, desire, and death in theatrical form. As Dias Gomes wrote (1995, p. 83), Branca's sacrifice carries a dramaturgical meaning beyond historical fact. Her burning is symbolic—perhaps all the more real for that reason.

Conclusion

This article offers a new perspective on the continuities and transformations of Catholicism in Latin America by reinterpreting, through the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (1964a, 1964b, 1964c, 1967) and the dramaturgy of Dias Gomes (1995), the symbolic practices inherited from—and resilient to—the Inquisition, which continue to reverberate in the collective imagination. By analyzing key scenes from *O Santo Inquérito* as subversive rites—from the river bath to the silencing at the stake—I propose a methodological model that brings together semiotics, performance analysis, and cultural history, capable of exposing the tensions between dogma and sensory experience, and between clerical authority and popular faith. This interdisciplinary lens engages directly with the themes outlined in the call, shedding light on the forms of Catholic power woven into both public and private ritual, recovering the complexity of popular religiosity, and interrogating the modalities of symbolic exclusion that continue to structure political and social life across Latin America.

I present symbols such as the *mikveh*, *ruah*, *máim*, *vessamim*, *Amidá*, *Shemá*, and the campfire that marks the thirty-three days of *Lag BaOmer* as a semiotic repertoire. This repertoire, through which sensory, ritual, and bodily signs can be seen to both sustain and dismantle social worlds, has the potential to empower and enlighten. The *mikveh* marks the threshold between purification and transgression; *ruah*, as vital breath, gestures toward the grammar of the invisible and the dramatic dynamic of "absent presence"; *máim* reintroduces water as both a medium of purgation and accusation; *vessamim* draws the olfactory sense into the

play of hidden and revealed identities; the *Amidá* and the *Shemá* articulate the semiosis of upright and kneeling bodies; and the counting of the *Omer* encodes a time of symbolic resistance. Woven into my phenomenological-dramaturgical reading, these elements invite further inquiry at the intersection of ritual, embodiment, and power, revealing the potential of sacred semiotics to resist fixed hierarchies of meaning.

These *apperceptive* analyses, grounded in Alfred Schutz's theory of relevance structures, may also be interpreted as gestures toward what Caballero-Navas (2006) (2006 identifies as the "*secrets of women*"—embodied, often silenced epistemologies that encode alternative forms of medical and spiritual knowledge. In this light, Branca Dias's corporeal experience can be read as resistance to inquisitorial dogma and as the encrypted transmission of a feminized, pre-modern symbolic grammar. As Caballero-Navas argues, these "secrets" inhabit the tension between ritual, memory, and gendered bodies, offering a hidden archive of cultural continuity beneath regimes of control (Caballero-Navas 2006 2006, p. 122).

In *O Santo Inquérito*, I see in Branca Dias not merely the story of a woman accused of heresy but a tragic enactment of the slow collapse of intersubjectivity. This tragic story should evoke empathy and compassion in all of us. Schutz describes in his theory of relevance structures that when Branca is accused of "nakedness" for bathing freely, her body enters an apperceptive field that no longer perceives her as she is but as she "ought" to be, judged through a distorted moral lens. When she evokes touch, the scent of her hair, or the wind on her skin, the *appresentational* scheme—through which the present evokes what is absent—is swiftly re-coded by the tribunal: her kiss, her refusal to kneel, and her silent walk are read not as signs of faith, but as symptoms of transgression.

At the referential level, I see Branca as inhabiting a world of natural, embodied sensitivity, while her accusers live within a world typified by hierarchical dogmas and rigid rituals. There is no bridge between them—no social type available to accommodate her experience without distortion. Once that gap becomes irreparable, the interpretational scheme fails. Dialogue gives way to monologue; her words, gestures, and silences are no longer heard—they become unintelligible, cloudy, and excluded from the shared horizon.

It conforms to me that the play's power lies precisely there: Branca Dias is condemned not for violating dogma but for embodying another grammar of the sacred—an embodied mode of signification that the tribunal could not assimilate. Her tragedy is hermeneutic: the court does not refute a doctrine but extinguishes a lived way of seeing, feeling, and signifying the world. Every rigid power system begins by dictating how the Other must be perceived.

Branca Dias was not punished for violating a doctrinal code but for embodying an alternative sacred grammar, one rooted in sensory and perceptive forms of experience that call for renewed recounting and investigation. Significantly, her surname Coronel has been read as a derivation of Koren, as noted in genealogical records of her descendants (Lima et al. 2009). Her tragedy reveals how systems of power create symbolic meanings that eradicate ways of life that cannot accept differences.

Declarations

Competing interests The author declares no competing interests.

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