



# BAIXÁS MATTER

PERFORMANCE IN THREE PARTS AND AN EPILOGUE.

CHARACTERS:

FEBRE (*FEVER* in Portuguese)

OSWALD

CHORUS

MAGICIAN

The show has ended. The Magician exits the stage, leaving behind the remains of his tricks, the so-called “*Baixás* Matter.” Oswald and Febre, two young mixed-race adults, who have just seen the performance, now approach the low, white, circular structure while the rest of the audience scatters in a disorderly manner. Oswald goes in one direction, Febre in another, until both stop at a specific place: Oswald on A, Febre on B. Then the two start the usual verbal jousting.

## I. SWALDO AND FUBRÚ

**Oswald finds out Febre is in the throes of *Baixá*. Febre calls Oswald ‘Swaldo’ and Oswald calls Febre ‘Fubrú’.**

FEBRE, *calling Oswald as if he was farther than he actually is.* – Oswaldo! ...

OSWALD, *responding with a voice level adjusted to the distance between them.* – Oswald ...

FEBRE, *still too loud.* – I said Oswald ...

OSWALD. – You called out Oswaldo with an “O”. My name is Oswald without an “O”.

FEBRE. – Swaldo? ... (*Short pause*) You know something Swaldo, you have never called me by my name. Not even once. You get it all wrong: the vowels, the consonants, the inflection, the accent, the phonetics, even the graphomatics, the patagraphy...

OSWALD, *interrupting.* – I never do, because you don’t even have a name. You have a “*petit nom*”, but no real name. (*Short pause*) Want me to call you Fabra? ... No! Fubru? ... (*He ponders*) Fabra or Fubru? (*Suddenly it emerges*) Fubrú! That’s it! Fubrú, servant of the *Baixá* Queen, enchanter of the white iguanas.

OSWALD, *singing* – Pubescent brat / Knows nothing of Bossa / ...

CHORUS. – *Baixá* Matter!

OSWALD. – Your crookbacked arrow / You spit out fire in one go / ...

CHORUS. – *Baixá* Matter!

OSWALD. – Coastal sacrifice / Coast to coast, yet it doesn’t suffice / ...

CHORUS. – *Baixá* Matter!

OSWALD. – Fubrú, cover yourself up / bless yourself / brace yourself, seethe yourself / ...

CHORUS. – *Baixá* Matter!

OSWALD. – Black gold secures / Black gold gives and takes / ...

CHORUS. – You clown!

OSWALD. – You pretend to give / You pretend it’s real / ...

CHORUS. – You bum!

OSWALD, *coming to his senses.* – For everyone’s sake Fubrú ... (*Suddenly stops speaking and then resumes softly, as if hearing a voice, half an inner voice, half an outer one.*) ... That voice...

CHORUS. – *Baixá* Matter!

CHORUS. – Relieve me of this burden / Teach me to weed / ...

FEBRE. – Miraculous!

CHORUS. – Ruby ashes / Colour of colour / Eye-blinking sinner / ...

FEBRE. – Satisfy!

CHORUS. – As you climb, mute chanting / In the *terreiro* white iguanas lie / ...

FEBRE. – I’m fainting!

CHORUS. – Break a leg / it collapsed / barefoot / poisoned / ...

FEBRE. – Resurrect!

## II. SAD COUGH

**Upon hearing Oswald coughing, Febre remembers a creature-girl.**

*As the Choir stops singing, they all remain still, without uttering a word. Febre and Oswald look at one another very seriously, thus starting the “keep a straight face” game: the rule is to look at each other without laughing, the first to break it, loses.*

FEBRE. – You laughed Swaldo. I saw you.

OSWALD. – I didn’t!

FEBRE. – I saw your teeth and almost your larynx, your glottis, and words held by a thin line of pure soft wool.

Short, ugly, slender, and sly words, just like you.

OSWALD. – You smiled first but don’t want to admit it. I thought it would be better if you won this time to make sure you don’t complain about never winning in spite of all your begging and whining about it. This time you didn’t beg, you didn’t whine, you won.... You’re always so demanding Fubrú! You never tire of begging for whatever, that’s why you never get what you want. Actually, you do nothing besides begging, begging, begging! What about waiting?

FEBRE . – Waiting for what? Why wait?

OSWALD . – Waiting for luck to cast the dice, let it do your thing instead. For the love of *Baixá*, let it parasite your elder, your wizard, your court jester.

FEBRE . – What does luck do that I can’t do?

OSWALD . – It doesn’t matter what those things are. They are things for us. The other day, luck brought me a watering can, I did not need one but it’s always nice to have a couple.

FEBRE . – A couple of watering cans?

OSWALD . – One watering can is botany. Two watering cans is (*Coughing*) ... poetry.

FEBRE . – Sad cough. Yours is a sad cough, Swaldo. I met a girl who had the same cough. They called her “creature-girl.” She ate only roots and tubers. She had no knowledge of plowing; what she reaped, she ate.

(*Pauses, thinking of her.*) A simple expression of joy. Like a salvaged shell from the beach, she understood the

beauty of stillness and silence. Her ingenuity seemed to come from a stillness as eternal as abnormal for a girl her age. How old was she? I do not know. Her name? Don’t know either ... I wanted to share my innocence. I was young and a believer until I understood that she would never love me. (*Pulling the skin of his face below his eyes.*). *Baixá* Eye. (*Taking his hands off his face.*). Complete isolation. Forlorn hope. Hostage of that love until I became one of them. The Queen and her. The others? Iguanas like you, Swaldo.

OSWALD. – There’s the sky and there’s humankind. Hair samples. (*Rubbing his fingers as if reducing something to dust.*). Dust. Your time will come. Your complexion will change. My turn will serve for better or worse. Come what may. Without me though as I will be changing course, putting pressure on my thenars, short adductors, opponent flexors, the resilient irregularity of other reptiles and their descendants.

FEBRE. – Poetry?

OSWALD. – ... from the watering can. (*Both laugh.*)

## III. GODIM

**To escape the claws of *Baixá* Dog, Febre makes Oswald disappear. Finally, the name of the creature-girl is revealed.**

FEBRE . – Stop messing about, you’re digging your own grave. You’re a princess, *Baixá* Dog is chasing you. Your home is under a table. (*Angry*) ...The dog is hungry for food ... If I want, I can make you disappear. (*He raises his arms slowly...*) ... The Dog is not humble, its mouth is wide open, no room for more teeth ... (*Lowers his arms suddenly transforming Oswald into an invisible princess.*). Recite poetry now, we hear but do not see. You are in-vi-si-ble!

OSWALD. – In-vi-si-ble or shape-less?

FEBRE. – Either way.

OSWALD. – If I spit, can you see it? Or is it shapeless, declassified, captive – like the rest of the body – of the purest void? Un-do-cu-men-ted spit.

FEBRE. – I’m not inventing anything.

OSWALD. – See how you don’t want to see!

FEBRE. – I see what there is to see, don’t distract me!

OSWALD. – A head that is looking is a head preparing the eye for the act of looking. The head is the fruit, the eye its stone. Do not eat the fruit if you can’t stand its stone!

FEBRE. – I have proof.

OSWALD. – Of what?

FEBRE. – You know.

OSWALD. – So what? You will say the same thing each time that it is ...

FEBRE. – ... That it is .... ?

*Short pause.*

OSWALD, *smiling contemptuously.* – ... That she is called Godim.

FEBRE, *surprised.* – ... Who?

OSWALD. – The girl you were talking about, the creature-girl.

FEBRE. – GODIM?

OSWALD. – Yes

FEBRE. – Are you sure?

OSWALD. – It doesn’t matter ... but yes, I can say I am.

FEBRE, *perplexed, saying her name half-amazed, half-tormented.* – Godim ....

OSWALD. – Do not forget that I am in-vi-si-ble. You made me disappear. I am a princess that escaped the claws of *Baixá* Dog and I live under that table (*Pointing to an invisible table.*).

FEBRE, *still disturbed.* – ... Godim!

CHORUS, *singing.* – Stranded in the reeds / Unlucky from the trunks / Lost in the hiding-hole / Godim turned into a creature to protect herself from humankind / She will turn into something to protect herself from beasts / And into a breath to cope with hunger / Thirst? She’s not thirsty.

OSWALD, *singing.* – Godim!

CHORUS. – Caciques will make her pay / For what they couldn’t live / Others will beat her / For all those who couldn’t be beaten / All shall beat her / And all shall live longer for seeing her suffer.

FEBRE / OSWALD. – Godim!

CHORUS. – So peaceful and so close to death / So beautiful that everything else comforts us / Quadruped Maiden / Burn your brand upon us / Free us from any / Coping breath / Thirst, return / Hunger, none!

FEBRE. – Godim!

CHORUS. – Hindrance only for those who have stopped / Blows from a whip / Highly visible on the chest / On the legs and on clenched fists / Curl up, Godim! / Curl into a ball and roll out / Onto the pier / On board / Without asking / Get the hell out of here / Without yelping / Drink up / No whining / Die / Without hate.

## EPILOGUE

**The memory of Godim disturbs Febre.**

*Short pause.*

OSWALD. – Bring me back, now!

FEBRE, *sitting on the floor.* – Now what?

OSWALD. – Now that you know her name.

FEBRE, *lying on the floor with his hands behind his head and looking up.* – I prefer ignorance. Godim disturbs me. I don’t know what to do.

OSWALD. – Would you prefer to call her Bianca? ...

FEBRE. – Poetry has its limits Swaldo. Botany? ... I don’t know ... I know how to sow. I planted what there was to sow. I harvested and cried from it all. Trees have given me the peace that the earth took away from me. But both wear me out. I remove stone after stone, from the tiniest to the largest, with persistence and a love of things well done. I do it well. Then when night falls, I always repeat the same gestures. I sweep, put things in their place and submerge my plastic boots in water before washing myself in it. The next morning, I don’t remember a thing. Everything has changed. Electric wires and that cheerful humming sound. The puppy. Birds. The puppy’s kennel. My house near the puppy’s kennel. Flowers ...

OSWALD, *soft.* – ... Your flowers ...

FEBRE, *still lying down and looking up.* – I’m not making anything up. Don’t distract me.

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Antonio Contador, 2014.