In their heyday, one could listen to Brazilian soap operas just by walking down the streets, as TV sets were tuned to the same omnipresent channel. What led to the success of the medium and the genre? How was it experienced in the 1970s and 1980s, under dictatorship and then democratic opening? And what does it say about Brazilian present challenges regarding new media uses and democratic life? In this presentation, we will look at two iconic soap operas, the 1975 “O Grito”, set in fast-growing São Paulo, and the 1986 [censored in 1975] “Roque Santeiro”, set in the fictional Northeastern city of Asa Branca. We will bring the larger Brazilian media context regarding literacy and orality to shed light on this fascinating cultural phenomenon.