

## ON BRAZILIAN LETTERS

*IMPRENSA LITERÁRIA DE PÔRTO ALEGRE NO SÉCULO XIX.* By ATHOS DAMASCENO FERREIRA. (Pôrto Alegre: Edições URGs, 1975. Pp. 231.)

*MODERN BRAZILIAN SHORT STORIES.* By WILLIAM L. GROSSMAN. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974. Pp. 167. \$2.25.)

Despite the considerable number of scholars and amateurs devoted to exploring the role of journalism as a positive force in the cultural development of Rio Grande do Sul, much of the material for a complete study of the subject is still lacking. Ferreira's monograph has two goals: that of expanding the bibliography concerning the history of journalism in Rio Grande do Sul, including details such as dates, formats, tables of contents, and names of collaborators; and that of offering sources and critical material for the study of the ideas expressed in the periodicals listed at a time when they were the only means of literate communication in Rio Grande do Sul. From their beginnings in the mid-nineteenth to the end of the century, these journals were the newspapers of the region, providing what newspapers provide, and also the vehicles for all forms of intellectual and artistic expression.

It must be recalled that, both preceding and during a large part of the period in question, conditions in the South were far from conducive to the production and dissemination of books. One of a number of provincial revolts or civil wars in Brazil, the Guerra dos Farrapos, tore Rio Grande do Sul apart from 1835 to 1845. The wars with Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay lasted from 1851 to 1870. It is remarkable, then, that any writing should flourish in such a troubled time.

Among the different forms to be found in the journalistic endeavors discussed in Ferreira's work, the essay quite naturally stands out as the most prevalent and most successful. The essay is considered by many critics to be the most original expression of Brazilian literature. It combines philosophical and social preoccupations with the artistic and literary, becoming therefore more than belles lettres, a tradition that originated with the Luso-Brazilian of the seventeenth century. The question may arise as to what role to assign these journalistic essays on the literary scene. Often they do not exhibit aesthetic qualities to the extent of creative literature. There is to be considered, of course, the research that may be involved in preparing essays of this sort. There may be also the organization of various kinds of materials, sometimes in vast amounts, into a coherent whole to prove a thesis. Frequently, the work is much more one of popularization, in many instances foreign in content, and gives evidence of considerable sifting and weighing of previously acquired materials. All of these processes are artistic in the broadest sense of the word. In addition, however, there may be a significant measure of creative thought and even imagination, a good deal of personal feeling and style, which although perhaps not especially artistic, reflects these qualities.

Regional, Modernist, or whatever, Brazilian literature in general has tended to be self-conscious, dedicated to the national effort to be distinctive, particularly vis-à-vis Portugal. This pragmatic attitude, while usually beneficial to the nation, has often been prejudicial from an aesthetic point of view, sometimes lacking imaginative play to the extent that belles lettres is no longer an appropriate term. The element of self-analysis in behalf of a new society, restricted as it often is to the purely local, may compromise not only the art but the universality of a work. Brazil's neoclassical phase counterbalanced these tendencies, but sometimes resulted in excessive rationalism and, together with the sense of national urgency, confused literature and journalism in a way typical of immaturity. The youthful vigor of this literature has been socially very useful because of its historical sense and power of communication, which are essential ingredients of authentic literature. Hence the tradition of a *literatura empenhada*, which apart from its utilitarian values has often been artistically stimulating.

Witness the celebrated Brazilian novel of the Northeast in the 1930s and 1940s and the less well-known theater of the 1950s and 1960s. Both bodies of literature exhibit the blend of the Regional and the Modernist that is so characteristic of Brazilian culture in general and of the works discussed in this review in particular. Ferreira's compilation shows the efforts of journalism in Rio Grande do Sul during the nineteenth century to assimilate and propagate world culture and to create a culture in the region. William Grossman's collection of seventeen modern Brazilian short stories (in translations that are mostly good but still often smacking of translation) reveals Regionalism to be alive and most fundamental in Modernism.

Brazilian Modernism began in São Paulo in 1922 and lasted through several phases until 1945. One offshoot of the movement that was also a reaction to it, Northeastern Regionalism is extremely important. Modernism in its beginnings was principally an aesthetic and cultural revolution. Its objective was to break down a colonial mentality in art and letters that largely ignored national realities in order to imitate foreign currents in these areas. It did not intend to limit itself to São Paulo nor to arts and letters, but to embrace the whole nation and integrate activities in every sphere. It was successful in bringing about a vast transformation in Brazilian life through studies in the arts and sciences, particularly the social sciences. In theory and practice the great leader of Modernism from its inception to its close was Mário de Andrade, whose death in 1945 coincided with the end of the movement. There were more talented authors than he, yet none so significant in shaping Modernism.

The movement not only modernized Brazilian thought and action, but made a more integrated Brazil known to the world. The nation became liberated, independent at the same time that it continued to adapt foreign materials, and able to contribute to world culture. Regional culture, traditions, folklore, and language, including the contributions of the principal races of Brazil, took on new national meaning for Brazilian intellectuals who revitalized them in their works, whether creative, scholarly, or critical. They no longer felt cultural or intellectual life was impossible away from the metropolis, whether Rio de Janeiro

or Lisbon, and many preferred to remain in their native states rather than move to the capital as before.

There was constant emphasis from the beginning, not only on the independence of Brazilian letters, but on the aesthetic value and autonomy of a work of literature. Most of the numerous polemics of Modernism dealt with questions of form and technique rather than content, with the result that later Brazilian authors, perhaps more *engagés* than their elders, have generally been marked also by greater professionalism than they. Another important question was that of developing linguistic studies and a Brazilian Portuguese suitable for literary purposes. The growth in number and quality of secondary schools and universities throughout Brazil has been in large measure both the cause and effect of this concern with language and literature as a discipline. On the one hand, the time of amateurism or dilettantism of authors for whom literature is a youthful or leisure occupation has passed. On the other, Modernism has been a breath of fresh air to Academism. Despite the problem of making a living, still a great one for writers in Brazil, more of them have devoted their talents and energies exclusively to their work than in the past, when other occupations or peripheral literary activity took most of their time.

A certain reaction against Positivism, the materialistic philosophy that prevailed in Brazil during the nineteenth century, in favor of more spiritual values, placed emphasis on the reform of poetry during the first phase of literary Modernism. After 1930, however, the reform spread to prose fiction. The novel and short story had undergone considerable transformation through the Romantic and Realist periods, but it was the revolutionary spirit and experimentalism of Modernism that brought them out of the sphere of European influence and made for uniquely Brazilian expression in these as in other genres. As regards content, much progress had been achieved to incorporate the Brazilian scene by various nativist movements such as Indianism. In fact, except for the psychological novel, most Brazilian literature was Regionalistic. Whether rural or urban in nature, however, this literature tended to show man determined by his environment, in keeping with the Naturalism which was then in vogue.

In the case of the psychological novel, Symbolism and Impressionism were the predominant European influences. Modernism was to serve as the necessary catalyst to produce something new of the several "isms" with which Brazilian novelists had already experimented. The result was a more nationalistic Regionalism, sometimes propagandistic as in the early Jorge Amado, sometimes documentary as in Lins do Rêgo's "Sugar Cane Cycle" or Amado's later works of the "Cacao Cycle." Usually allied to the regional in urban centers, the psychological novel continued to develop as with Erico Veríssimo or, especially, Graciliano Ramos. As for the short story, Modernism abandoned the well-made type à la Maupassant for evocative, impressionistic, slice-of-life pieces such as Graciliano composed. Again, it took some time for formal and linguistic problems to be resolved satisfactorily. The Brazilian *crônica*, a subjective reaction to some current event or situation, much like the American newspaper "column" or informal English essay, has been one highly satisfactory solution, despite its

somewhat circumstantial, transitory nature. While Modernism has tended to avoid the historical and the concrete for the spontaneous and spiritual, it has sought to develop works of lasting, universal value.

The Modernists had as their goal, then, to write authentically about their native land. In the short story, the authors most involved in this objective were Mário de Andrade, Antônio de Alcântara Machado, and Ribeiro Couto, all of whom are represented in Grossman's anthology. Except for Clarice Lispector, all the writers in the collection reflect to some degree the Modernist tendency to be nationalistic. In Brazilian literature as generally in Brazilian civilization, it must be emphasized, nationalism may be interpreted variously. In a country as huge as Brazil and with so many contrasts, the native land is often thought of as a state or region rather than the whole nation. Mário de Andrade and Alcântara Machado write about São Paulo, and Darcy Azambuja deals with the far South. Marques Rebêlo is concerned with Rio de Janeiro, while Magalhães Júnior exploits the Northeast as have many others. The common denominator must be found in the authors' similar attitudes and aesthetics rather than in the particulars of their stories. All present Brazil through the many Brazils that make up the country.

In his introduction Grossman discusses briefly some of the chief characteristics and themes of the stories in his anthology. Irony may be explicit or implied, as in José Carlos Cavalcanti Borges' "With God's Blessing, Mom" or Alcântara Machado's "Gaetaninho." Death is a frequent theme. Along with others, it is one of the causes of a persistent sadness among Brazilians, as in Mário de Andrade's study of a child, "It Can Hurt Plenty." Many stories deal with children. Marques Rebêlo's "The Beautiful Rabbits" offers not only lyrical but tragic aspects of childhood. A most pervasive Brazilian trait is that of deep religious and mystical feeling, reflected in Luís Jardim's "The Enchanted Ox." It must be pointed out, however, that humor of various sorts is frequent also in these stories.

Again, despite the regionalism of many of the short stories, on the one hand, and their nationalism, on the other, there is nothing either purely provincial or chauvinistic about these examples of Modernism. The effort is always to strive toward a universality based on the particular, an effort to create a national literature that at the same time can and does contribute to world literature.

RICHARD A. MAZZARA

*Oakland University*