

Ivan Ângelo. *A Face Horrível*. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Fronteira, 1986. 223 pages.

The author, a *mineiro* born in 1936, has, in quantitative terms, published sparingly; and, in fact, *A Face Horrível* is, in large part, an updated replay of tales from *Duas Faces* (1961), his first book, written in partnership with Silviano Santiago. There followed *A Festa* (1976), Ângelo's only novel, and *A Casa de Vidro* (1979), five interrelated novellas. These latter volumes — both available in American translations — have become modern classics in terms of style and content: enveloped in a terse, poetic prose are stories reflecting, with caustic humor and sharp perception, the many traumatic facets of Brazil's recent bout with political repression.

The present short story collection, while immune to the deliberate shock effect of such collective woes, government abuse and sexual excess, similarly offers fine narratives. Twelve in all — ranging in length from four to more than forty pages — they mirror, in fascinating juxtaposition, Ângelo's earlier and later creativity. After all, six of the tales in *A Face Horrível* are untouched originals; one was reworked as a triptych; another pair was substantially rewritten; two were minimally altered; and the title story, a piece originally begun for *A Casa de Vidro* and later abandoned, was modified and completed.

Plot development is based on implicit (if not explicit) tragedy. Furthermore, it tends to emphasize the individual through an intimist viewpoint, be it first or third person, inevitably delving into the psychology of either one character or of a single couple. Indeed, the man-woman relationship, in its most disparate forms, dominates the collection. Mental checkmate turns into gang rape in "Bar" while in "Ocorrência policial," it is a trivial *cantada* that proves lethal to the perpetrator and devastating to his girlfriend. In the analogous "Homem sofrendo no quarto" and "Castigo," for instance, men brood masochistically over

the murder of an unfaithful mother and seductive stepmother. Frivolous, sensuous females, however, provide more than catalytic incentive in "O suicida" and "Perdas e danos": theirs is an active interaction, with, respectively, a platonic title figure about to drown himself and a parodied Prodigal Son now taken aback by a former heartthrob. Such characterizational counterpoint raises superficially similar figures to the level of coprotagonist in the title story and triptych. Here, though, it is married couples who defy each other. In the former, a spiraling battle of wits results in new found mutual attraction; in "Dénouement/Entrevero do autor com seu conto/Final," a husband's knowledge of, and reaction to his wife's infidelity leads to multiple anticlimaxes as the author alters slightly the connubial give and take.

When focus is on a sole personage, Ângelo shows a preference for, and uncanny understanding of the female psyche. Youthful daughters timidly grope for understanding in "Menina" and "Moça amando" while the aging spinsters of "Tristeza" and "Promessa" fight off conventional doldrums in unconventional ways: respectively, one finds illusory solace in an inanimate surrogate companion; the other pursues self-deception in the form of a questionable sign from heaven — a rose as wilted as she.

In many ways, the collection is a vibrant retrospective of the author's narrative traits and tendencies. Curiously enough, the individual stories, with the possible exception of the experimental triptych and "Promessa," reveal more consistency in overall style than they do any qualitative evolution. Conclusion: from the outset, Ivan Ângelo demonstrates the same attention to symmetry and detail that has proven to be a hallmark of his better known works. *A Face Horível* thus becomes not an addition so much as a completion of his bibliography to date and a welcome compendium of hitherto out of print and elusive pieces.

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