

Landers, Vasda Bonafini. *De Jeca a Macunatma: Monteiro Lobato e o Modernismo*. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1988. 275 pages.

Modernismo under the microscope: what to the naked eye has the shape and coherence of a single organism reveals itself to be a mass of constituent parts. Such are the findings of critical scrutiny since the 1960s, and yet one of that movement's most consecrated features has managed to escape the ongoing attempt to sharpen the focus – namely, modernismo's hostility to Monteiro Lobato. This oversight is rectified by Vasda Landers' *De Jeca a Macunatma*. A meticulously researched analysis of modernismo's debt to an undervalued precursor, Landers' book is refreshing proof that the seamless wall erected by avant-gardists like Mario de Andrade to set their movement apart from its predecessors in post-WWI Brazil was in fact a highly permeable membrane across which ideas and language freely passed. Basing her arguments on the full range of Monteiro Lobato's writings and on studies by (among others) Wilson Martins, Nelson Palma Travassos, Gilberto Mendonça Teles, Júlio Tavares and Cassiano Nunes, Landers succeeds in reclaiming for the author of *Urupês* the recognition he deserves for his role in launching a movement that, as she puts it, turned its back on him for reasons that had little to do, intrinsically, with his accomplishments. In so doing she provides a corrective to views held by the likes of Antonio Candido and Sergio Milliet.

Far from the anachronistic, provincial character derided by his critics, Monteiro Lobato emerges from his correspondence and early journalism as a staunch proponent of "die Moderne" insofar as it reflected a quasi-Nietzschean ideal of heroic individualism. In her opening chapter Landers makes it clear that in this regard Jeca Tatu is as much a product of the reformist intellectual

currents of the teens and twenties as is *Macunaíma*. The problem was that his creator's disinclination to jump on any ideological bandwagon fostered the mistaken idea that he was opposed to progress or change, making him an obvious target for a movement in search of self-definition. The notorious 1917 review of Anita Malfatti's futurist painting, provocatively titled "*Paranóia ou mistificação?*," was all that Mario and Oswald de Andrade needed by way of fodder for their guns: instead of a very modernista-sounding call for an authentic Brazilian art, they read the article as an unwarranted attack on a fellow devotee of the cause, and responded accordingly. In Landers' view, the terrible irony of this falling-out is that Monteiro Lobato was at the time "*adiante de tudo e de todos.*" It wasn't his fault that *Urupês* happened to appear in 1918, a decade ahead of *Macunaíma*.

In the second chapter Landers examines the internal evidence of these two works in order to show how much of what is usually credited to Mario de Andrade first saw the light in *Urupês*. The innovations fall into five categories: the use of topics and tropes drawn from popular native culture; the rejection of non-Brazilian literary conventions when they were out of phase with Brazilian reality; the cultivation of a literature that was simultaneously, in Landers' words, "*popular, flexível e não academizante*"; the acceptance of Brazilian folklore, geography and history as valid sources of literary material; and – perhaps most importantly – "*o impulso dado em direção ao estabelecimento de uma língua nacional que traduzira os sentimentos e anseios da terra*" (83). With the benefit of hindsight, we can suggest that Monteiro Lobato's program for change has been fully realized, if we understand Jeca Tatu as prototype for not only *Macunaíma* but also Guimarães Rosa's Augusto Matraga and Clarice's Macabéa, even Trevisan's archetypal João and Maria: the affirmation of all that is authentically Brazilian wed to the refutation of everything imported, imposed or false – the antihero as superhero/savior.

Monteiro Lobato's modernizing activities were not limited to the written word, however. Landers' fourth and fifth chapters remind us of his pioneering efforts in publishing and his proposals for the creation of national steel and petroleum industries to ward against the encroachments of American economic imperialism, the threat of which he saw with prophetic

clarity. Numerous quotations from Monteiro Lobato's pronouncements on these subjects show him waging the war against undo foreign influence on many fronts: literature and economics, as we have seen, but also grammar, as in his campaign to limit foreign borrowings, to end the tyranny of supposedly "correct" placement of the object pronouns, and to create a dictionary of the Brazilian language. Landers' final chapter identifies the presence of Monteiro Lobato's ideas and terminology in the works of Oliveira Viana, Paulo Prado, Plínio Salgado and Menotti del Picchia.

We lament the absence of an index, but this is a minor flaw in a work which, in addition to its quality as literary history, is written with grace and an appealing sense of humor. Vasda Landers is to be congratulated for doing justice to that "Jeca com muitas idéias. . . cuja presença catalisadora e cujo extenso trabalho ajudarão a plasmar um dos períodos mais importantes de nossa literatura: o Modernismo" (35).

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