

REIS, Roberto (Ed.) *Toward Socio-Criticism: Selected Proceedings of the Conference "Luso-Brazilian Literatures, A Socio-Critical Approach"*. Introduction by Roberto Reis. Tempe, Arizona: Center for Latin American Studies, Arizona State University, 1991. 236p.

The twenty papers in this volume are selected proceedings of a 1988 University of Minnesota conference at which Brazilian critics, North American Brazilianists and, at least, one Portuguese critic participated. In addition to papers within a broad socio-critical orientation, the conference included homages to Guimarães Rosa and Drummond.

The initial three essays are overviews of approaches to socio-criticism. Domício Proença Filho establishes the critical tendencies of Brazilian literature since the 1950s. Carlos Reis examines the relationship between literature and ideologies of criticism in European letters. Roberto DaMatta's essay is a practical application of his well established ethnographical theories to specific works of literature.

The social concerns dealt with run the gamut: sexual orientation and sexuality, feminism, politics and society, race, war, religion, etc. Representations of sexual orientation and sexuality in Brazilian literature criss-cross and complement each other in studies by David W. Foster, Francisco Caetano Lopes Junior (whose essay merited better editing) and Berta Waldman. Foster and Caetano Lopes Junior point to artistic camouflage for dealing with the homosexual theme: through subsuming the gay relationship as part of a subplot (Foster); or through an artistic device of creating characters fleeing "o jogo social de uma comunidade fechada e muito hierarquizada" (Caetano Lopes Junior), a technique he calls *subjetividade outra*. Waldman studies heretofore ignored serial novels published by Néelson

Rodrigues during the 1940s under the pseudonym Suzana Flag. The thematic concerns with moral and sexual perversions, which reign in his theater, also flourish in these novels and lead Waldman to conclude: "O certo é que Nelson Rodrigues alcança. . . expor como poucos autores brasileiros um determinado aspecto de nossa identidade".

A review of Antônio Cândido's seminal essay "Literatura e desenvolvimento" (1972) by Renato Cordeiro Gomes introduces the major series of essays on social and political themes. Leslie Bary recasts Oswald de Andrade "Manifesto antropofágico" within a post-colonialist framework. Randal Johnson studies the Estado Novo's cultural cooptation of literature through a detailed investigation of "official" attitudes toward two lesser known novels of the early 1940s. Teresa Cristina Cerdeira da Silva deconstructs the symbol of the Inquisition in José Saramago's *Memorial do Convento*. Renata Wasserman's rather incisive study of women as victims in works by Maria Teresa Horta and Lya Luft fails to place the works within the context of contemporary feminist criticism. Phyllis Reisman Butler's reviews the role of language as an ideology in the creation of an Angolan national identity through an examination of Luandino Vieira's writings.

The writer's role and participation in society is another theme of the volume. Lúcia Helena Costigan's essay refutes the negative critical attitudes towards Gregório de Mattos since the late nineteenth century as the result of miscomprehension of his aims and the artistic moment. She compares his reception to that of *criollo* writers in other Latin American countries. Marisa Lajolo breaks new ground in her study "Machado, Graciliano e Rubem Fonseca: Diferentes itinerários do escritor brasileiro", which highlights how a writer "customizes a product" for a changing capitalist society.

A final group of essays demonstrates how politically and socially compromised discourses have shaded interpretations of the Brazilian reality, such as the significance of the Inconfidência Mineira (Gregory McNab) and Canudos (Lori Madden). David J. Hess's analysis of the literary context of popular spiritist texts is quite revealing about Brazilian culture.

While all the mentioned essays and the others are commendable, two general considerations about the volume must be raised. First, one goal of this volume should have been to break

the barrier which has allowed criticism of the literatures we study to remain widely ignored in the broad field of literary studies. Thus, it is erroneous for American critics to publish in the U.S. in Portuguese and for essays by Brazilians not to be translated into English, or to lack English language summaries.

Secondly, the title and sub-title chosen for this collection are puzzling and misleading. The use of the word "toward" suggests that socio-criticism has yet to dominate as the prime avenue of criticism of Brazilian literature. Nothing could be further from the truth. Brazilian literature has – since colonial times – almost always had a social focus. The Inconfidência Mineira generation not only made the link between literature and social concerns but also confirmed it as an inherent part of the nascent concept of national identity. In the history of Brazilian literary criticism, one would be hard pressed to identify a notable critic who has ignored the social context of the literature.

A related concern presents itself with regard to the sub-title: "Luso-Brazilian Literatures." There is very little "Luso" in this collection. Of the twenty published studies, sixteen and one-half solely treat Brazilian literature (three have brief references to works of Portuguese literature); one essay (and the afterword by Ronald W. Sousa) deals with Angolan literature (is Luso meant to include Lusophone African literature?); one and one-half of an article treat Portuguese literature; and one is tangential to "lusó" or "Brazilian" literatures. "Luso-Brazilian Literatures" is, by 1990s standards, a totally vacuous term and should probably be banished from our critical vocabulary – unless, of course, the contents clearly reflect the interrelationship of the Portuguese and Brazilian literatures. Admitting both these latter points, a more faithful title for this excellent collection would have been: *Onward with Socio-Criticism: Literatures of the Portuguese Language (Brazil, Portugal and Angola)*.

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