

# *Portraits of Brazil*

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**Abstract:** *The period of Modernism (from 1922 onwards) was also one which exhaustively attempted to understand and explain Brazil through literary works of various genres: fiction, poetry, essay. This paper attributes to these works the general category of “Portraits of Brazil”. It is important to highlight its central issue: the miscegenation of three races (indigenous peoples, white Europeans and African slaves) has formed the Brazilian population. We examine here the sources of different diagnoses and proposals.*

**Keywords:** *Brazilian Modernism; Paulo Prado; Mário de Andrade; Oswald de Andrade.*

When we consider Brazilian Modernism, we notice a significant convergence of texts from the 1920s attempting to draw a “Portrait of Brazil”. This was the title of the influential book by Paulo Prado, which had four successive editions – an absolutely rare phenomenon at that time (Berriel 2000; Waldman 2014). Prado was also personally influential, being a devoted Maecenas of Brazilian Modernist writers; he would open his pockets and his house in São Paulo to every artist. Mário de Andrade dedicated *Macunaíma*, published in 1928, to him; in the same year, Oswald de Andrade (whose first book, *Pau Brasil*, was prefaced by the same Paulo Prado) published “Manifesto Antropófago” [Anthropophagic Manifesto]; and Paulo Prado himself published *Retrato do Brasil* [Portrait of Brazil]. Each one of these texts, despite differences in nature and size, aims at providing a global interpretation of Brazil. The way they proceed, their preoccupations and their reach offer interesting material for analysis and reflection.

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the so-called “racial issue” was boiling in Brazil. Amongst many studies that dealt with this subject, those by Silvio Romero (1888) offered the conclusion that Brazilian society was the result of three different races which, in different ways, shared the same existential feeling, that of *saudade*<sup>1</sup>; the Portuguese and the Africans, being expatriates; the Indians, having been deprived of their land.

In *Retrato do Brasil*, Paulo Prado narrows down lightly this interpretation, delegating it to a psychological variant of *saudade*, that is, sadness. And thus he takes Brazilians as the outcome of the miscegenation of three sad races – the epitome of ethnopessimism.

The Modernists will rebut this argument. Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma*, in spite of being dedicated to Paulo Prado, surely overflows and goes beyond such conception. And Oswald de Andrade's poetry, favoring yet other perspectives, opens a horizon of unsuspected possibilities.

## 1928 milestones

The year of 1928 – when Modernism, inaugurated by the *Semana de Arte Moderna* [Modern Art Week] of 1922 in São Paulo, was in full-bloom – is very productive both for literature and Brazilian social thinking, thanks to three events that would become historical milestones. As we have already seen, 1928 was the year when *Retrato do Brasil*, by Paulo Prado, *Macunaíma*, by Mário de Andrade, and the “Manifesto Antropófago”, by Oswald de Andrade, are published.

The first book mentioned is one of many others and, incidentally, amongst the last ones written with the aim of postulating the notion of ethnopessimism. Presented by its author as a “purely philosophical essay” (Prado 1962) (which it no doubt **is not**), it enjoyed an enormous success and, within three years, reached the unusual figure of four editions. Paulo Prado, as we have seen, was a prestigious Maecenas amongst the Modernists, playing a prominent role in the movement, having exerted his influence on them not only with his writing but also with his personal acting. Various points of convergence among these three authors can be pointed out. Most of all, *Macunaíma* is dedicated to Paulo Prado, who prefaced *Pau Brasil* (1925) – the first book of poetry written by Oswald de Andrade – and who sometimes either in this preface or in his own book practices the Modernist “telegraphic style”.

Concerning *Macunaíma*, at once “a hero without a personality” and “the hero of our people” – as the novel itself declares–, we all know that he is Black/White/Indian, that is, he embodies in one single character the three races that form the Brazilians. Although the issue cannot be restricted to Paulo Prado's *Retrato do Brasil* – for it is more than that –, the characteristics Prado attributes in his book to the ethnic amalgam can be found in *Macunaíma*: lust, covetousness, sadness and its correlate, lazyness, as well as romanticism. Lazyness might be more striking to the reader, thanks to the ever present refrain in the hero's mouth, “Ai que preguiça!//Aw, what lazyness!”. But that is not enough: to encompass all the richness of the subject in Mário de Andrade's novel, we must go beyond *Macunaíma*. In his poetry, especially in “Rito do Irmão Pequeno” [Young Brother's Rite] the word *lazyness* (*preguiça* in Portuguese) is given various connotations, be it to refer to the mammal called sloth (also *preguiça* in Portuguese) in poem VII, be it to refer to the abstract noun in poem IX (Vamos, irmão pequeno, entre palavras e deuses / Exercer a preguiça, com vagar //“Let's go, young brother, among words and gods / and slowly practice lazyness”). In the form of the animal it also appears in the poem “Brasão” [Blazon], figuring in the heraldic bestiary the poet postulates for himself (Andrade 1996; Mello e Souza 1988, 1979, 2014). And for certain all the irony

and parodic ludicrousness of the novel overflow from a conception which, at bottom, is really narrow.

As to “Manifesto Antropófago”, it bears neither the thesis of sadness nor that of the three sad races; on the contrary, there we find a reiterated assertion: “Happiness is the litmus test”. Therefore, it *repels sadness*. And under different verbal refinements of form, it also repels covetousness whether it is in the form of the “capitalist modus operandi”, whether it is by chastising Father Antonio Vieira (1608-1697) for the infamous pecuniary commission he received by mediating a loan for Brazil. There is, however, a trait taken with great joy: lust, which matches with the Freudian notion of “de-repressing” proclaimed by the Dionysian and libertarian posture of the Modernists.

The fact is that Anthropophagism, of which *Macunaíma*, despite Mário de Andrade, would be the most hailed masterpiece of Modernism, gives the concern with miscegenation – which was seen by all as degrading– a different turn. And it finds an identification with an emblematic indigenous man, as far from reality as the Indian/knight errant of the Romantic Indianism had been, but that is now a metaphor devised to propose a new relationship with the colonizer. A relationship which would not stem from the shame of being colonized: the Anthropophagus being proposed is, as it is known, that one that ritually devours the colonizer to absorb the values of his culture, which he deems interesting. Insistently, the “Manifesto”, by modulating the tone, dwells on one watchword: “The transfiguration of Taboos in Totems. Anthropophagy”, which, as it is known, can only be consubstantiated if the taboo is cannibalized in the anthropophagic banquet.

Naturally, the Modernists, like all vanguardists, aimed their batteries of derision against everything that had preceded them. Besides the Parnassians and Academics in general, the Romantics were ridiculed; among the latter, their special target was the literary Indianism, in the figure of the Romantic prose writer José de Alencar and the poet Gonçalves Dias. The “Manifesto” reads “Against the torch holder Indian, Maria’s son, Catherine de Médicis’ godson and Antonio de Mariz’ son-in-law”, referring to Peri, the hero in *O Guarani*, a novel by Indianist writer José de Alencar.

### **And since Gonçalves Dias’ name was mentioned...**

With respect to Gonçalves Dias, it can be said that he, recklessly – for what happened in posterity – wrote the “Canção do Exílio” [The Song of Exile], which would become the most popularized Brazilian poem. It is a fine piece (Merquior 1990) unfortunately difficult to be valued nowadays, after a century and a half of superposed layers of ostentatious flag-waving kitsch. Written in Coimbra (Portugal), in 1843, “Canção do Exílio” opposes two adverbs of place expressing the two spaces of the poem: here and there. Here is the space of the exile, about which barely anything is said; and there is the space of the homeland, about which the comparative terms used are so absolute that they become superlative: everything there is more.

“Canção do Exílio” ended up being unrivalled as far as parodies in our literature are concerned, stretching pseudopods even to our National Anthem (“... thy smiling, lovely fields have more flowers / than the most cheerful land away / our woods have more life / our lives in thy bosom more about love to say...”<sup>2</sup>) and the World War II Brazilian Expeditionary Force anthem (“However many lands I visit / May God forbid I cease to exist / before I come back to the place ... /.../ where the thrush gives me solace”<sup>3</sup>).

And much later, in 1973, in a minimalist poem by José Paulo Paes (1986), the song ended up being stripped to its basic terms – *here* and *there*; showing aversion to the former and a boon with regard to the latter. It should be noted that the two adverbs are given merely two monosyllabic interjections; and one stanza made of five short nouns, all of which are oxytones in Portuguese, reinforces the rhyme in the adverbs and binds all the lines together. Thus, the poem, programmatically unlyrical, reveals its obsolete side resulting from a trivialization, while it demystifies the privilege embedded in demagoguery and reaches the apex in the desacralization of the model:

#### **The Song of Exile facilitated<sup>4</sup>**

there?  
aw!

thrush...  
mash...  
manna...  
sopha...  
*sinhá*<sup>5</sup>...

here?  
bah!

#### **Oswald de Andrade’s Interventions**

What would Oswald de Andrade do in his time? A parody, of course. It is included in the “Loide Brasileiro” [Brazilian Lloyd] section of *Pau Brasil*, his first book of poetry, published in 1925, with a very enthusiastic foreword by Paulo Prado himself (Andrade 1966). This is the poem:

#### **The returning home song<sup>6</sup>**

My homeland has palm trees  
And a twittering sea  
Chirping little birds from here  
Are nothing like those over there

My homeland has more roses  
And almost more love  
My homeland has more gold  
My home land has more land

Gold land love and roses  
I do want it all it has  
God forbid I should die  
Before I am back there

God forbid I should die  
Before I am back to São Paulo  
Before I see *Rua 15*  
And the progress of São Paulo

The interventions Oswald de Andrade resorts to, in general terms, are described below.

“The Returning home song” opens with great impact, by boldly using an impropriety that shares an affinity with the “pungent metaphor” proclaimed by Modernist poets. Now it is the sea – no longer the bird – that chirps: in one single move a metaphor is born and a cliché is undone.

It is worth noticing the comic demotion – for example, the diminutive *little* preceding birds, instead of just *birds*; *from here*, instead of just *here* – used in the transposition into a more colloquial style. Confirming the parodic inversion, the journey is made backwards, and “exile” becomes “return”.

Add to this, an abasement in *thrush* and *palm trees*, emblems of the homeland, which were very materialistically replaced with “Gold land love and roses”. Indeed, the “love and roses” romantic markers are still there; however, they are preceded in the stanza by more concrete and self-seeking terms such as “gold land”, forming a partnership that tips the scales in favour of the pocket rather than edifying feelings. Moreover, the anaphoric lines, narcissistically, are no longer first person plural – they become singular.

On the one hand, Gonçalves Dias had closed his poem by praying to God that he still might at least catch sight of the palm tree where the thrush warbles (notice the subtle paronomasia that does neither resort to etymology nor to semantics: in Portuguese *aves* [birds] and *aviste* [catch sight of]). And however iconic the palm tree may be, it is not there for nothing: in its emblematic canonicity, it would mean *constancy*, a virtue that binds the poet to his homeland. On the other hand, when Oswald de Andrade closes his parody, he replaces the two natural beings that incarnate the homeland – in the case of *sabiá* [thrush], even its very name has an Indian origin – with a cynical and hilarious triad which forms one single emblem: São Paulo/rua 15/progresso [São Paulo/15th Street/progress]. Nature is out, the three components belonging to the realm of culture: the most prosperous city in the country; the street where banks can be found; and an

evolutionist notion connected to industrial modernization, of which that city is considered a depository. *Sabiá* and *palmeira* [thrush and palm tree], generalized to cover the whole country, are thus particularized, reinforcing the singularization of the possessive pronoun, in an ambiguous move of what is referred to as localism: cheerful *nostos* – without any nostalgia – of a well-to-do São Paulo citizen.

But that is not all. The disqualification of the national emblems undergoes yet two formal operations. The first one is a process of synthetization whereby 24 lines are reduced to 16 – or precisely to two thirds; the second is more complex and interferes in several albeit converging levels. We could refer to it as pseudoconservatism, in the sense that in a concealed way it reproduces norms that Modernism claimed to blast: such verses are neither blank nor free.

In this way, the metrification repeats the same traditional verse and the most common one in Portuguese: the seven-syllable line – similar to the English ballad metre. As to syntax, it is respected in that the limits at the end of a line coincide with the elements of the sentence; rhymes are preserved, but this is barely noticeable thanks to the expedient of either repeating the same words in the rhyming position or combining consonant rhymes with assonant ones; or one-vowel words with diphthongs, or paroxytones with oxytones. In this aspect, they also emulate the original, though at this specific point in an irregular way, and occurring in other parts.

And there is more: 1) as it happens in Gonçalves Dias' poem, the predominant rhyming pattern comes in *a (palmares, mar, lá, lá, lá, Paulo, Paulo)*; 2) the other more frequent rhyme coming in *ô/ó (rosas, amores, ouro, rosas, morra, morra)*, comes equally from "Canção do Exílio"; 3) only two lines are left out, the third one (*daqui*) and the last but one (*quinze*), which stress a spatial opposition while, disguisedly, rhyming with each other, and thus end up completing the rhyming alliance of the entire poem. Even this very rhyme comes from the only non-rhyming line of Gonçalves Dias' poem: "Nossos bosques têm mais vida" [Our woods have more life], marked only by an internal rhyme in the subsequent line: "Nossa vida mais amores" [Our life more love]. And all this is masked when the punctuation, in a typically Modernist trend, is rejected.

### **Oswald de Andrade's poetry**

Compared with his numerous prose books, Andrade's poetic production is scarce: *Pau Brasil* [Brazilwood] (1925); *Primeiro Caderno do Aluno de poesia Oswald de Andrade* [The first notebook of poetry by student Oswald de Andrade] (1927); *Poesias Reunidas O. de Andrade* [Oswald de Andrade's Collected Poems] (1945), bringing, as the very title shows, the two previous books together with the addition of *Cântico dos Cânticos para Flauta e Violão* [Song of Songs for the Flute and the Guitar], besides *Poemas Menores* [Minor Poems]; and, at last, a small set of poems, "O escaravelho de ouro" [The golden beetle](1947), reproduced in the journal *Revista Acadêmica*, and

which would only appear posthumously in book form in *Poesias reunidas* (1966), in an edition organized by Haroldo de Campos.

Yet there were still unpublished poems. *O Santeiro do Mangue*, awaiting publication for decades, finally came to light in 1991 in *Obras Completas* [The Complete Works], in 22 volumes, coordinated by Jorge Schwarz for Editora Globo.<sup>7</sup>

As we have seen, in the inaugural book, *Pau Brasil*, the first part is titled “História do Brasil” [Brazilian History], which is another aspect that Oswald de Andrade shares with both Paulo Prado’s *Retrato do Brasil* and Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaíma*: here, it is the case of a rereading of chroniclers and travellers, the first ones to write about Brazil.

That time, as even the most cursory glance at the then existing bibliography may show, was dominated by an almost obsessive attempt to recover these colonial foreign authors; after all, they were the ones who recorded the beginnings of our history. What is less obvious is to find them in Brazilian social thought, in Oswald de Andrade’s poetry, and in the fictional prose of *Macunaíma*. The entire first part of Paulo Prado’s *Retrato do Brasil* comprises a learned and comprehensive analysis of the chroniclers and travellers. And it is by relying on them that the author infers the features of what being Brazilian means, that is, by basing himself on the attribution of psychological traits to the “three races” and the result of this ethnic amalgamation; back to what we have already discussed: lust, covetousness, sadness, laziness, and romanticism as the outcome.

In Mário de Andrade’s case, more specifically in *Macunaíma*, such authors are submitted to parodic inversion in different passages. The pieces of information they have – which are the most varied possible and have widely different levels of absurdity, ranging from being an eyewitness to the existence of monsters to the ravished look at the abundance of naked and acquiescent women –, are glossed and disparaged through parody as phantasmagorias of the European explorers. And the best – and stylistically most coherent – example, is the celebrated “Carta pras Icamiabas” [Letter to Icamiabas], which not only is written by one “chronicler and traveller”, but by one of those who take to paroxysm the mythology of “Edenic motives”, much later studied by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in *Visão do Paraíso* (1969).

At the core of these motives, all that has to do with the abundance of women and wealth stands out. One of Mário de Andrade’s great findings is the description of São Paulo city in the twentieth century in archaic and incongruous language, which in the case, was given by a visitor from the colonial times. With this kind of language, carnivalization here becomes debauchery at its highest level in an attempt to handle the urban civilization both of the machine and money. Such is its impact that *Macunaíma* is compelled to exhort the Amazon tribe of which he is the king, the Icamiabas, to abandon their rigorous chastity in order to emulate another tribe of women, that one of the prostitutes of São Paulo city. Such suggestion – a marvellous effrontery – aims at restoring his shaky financial situation caused precisely by the expenses he incurred in connection with the latter ladies.

Yet in Oswald de Andrade’s poetry, the same writers appear in *Pau Brasil*, in a direct, but peculiar and original way. Oswald de Andrade returns to these texts, prunes

them drastically and appropriates a barely retouched snip in free and non-punctuated verse, of fragments metamorphosed in *ready made* poems, as Haroldo de Campos defined them in the edition mentioned above. As examples I take two of them, where the attribution of a title which is both modern and extraneous to the text decontextualizes the poem and transforms it into an allegory.

The first instance is a re-elaboration of a well-known passage of Pero Vaz de Caminha's Discovery Letter, where the beauty of the native women's bodies is exalted :

**The gare girls**

They were three or four very nice young ladies  
With their shoulder-length black hair  
And their private parts so high and fit  
That despite much staring at them  
No shame did we feel <sup>8</sup>

The second example comes from Gandavo's book (1980), accounting for the incredible sloth, the animal that seems to have been invented in the very fertile imagination of the author; but it does exist and left other fellow writers deeply impressed. This animal, with a human-looking face, appears in the etchings of a memoir written by Jean de Léry (1990) in the very first century of the New World. It would, though, be necessary to wait for many more centuries to go by until Lévi-Strauss claimed its relevance also for the native peoples, not only for the appalled foreigners. We only have to see the primacy this anthropologist assigns to it in one of his last books, *The Jealous Potter* [*La potière jalouse*, in French].

Incidentally: according to Lévi-Strauss, in the native peoples' myths, the sloth, by embodying the anal-retentive principle, is opposed to the principle of voracity – therefore, oral –, represented by the wind-swallowing bird; this latter, thus, would be more compatible with the anthropophagic devouring instinct. The poem follows:

**Race party**

Also in these parts a certain animal is found  
Which is given the name Sloth  
It has a thick mass of hair in the nape  
And moves at such a slow pace  
That even though it perseveres for fifteen days  
It will not cover the distance of a stone's throw. (74)<sup>9</sup>

In this way, the *ready made*, by allegorizing through the title the excerpt of the chronicle, results in a poem of the finest imagetic origin, a genuine graphic illustration of Mário de Andrade and even Paulo Prado. The sloth, a sophisticated index of primitivism – especially for Mário de Andrade, to whom it was an Amazonian and anti-European sign of creative idleness, retrieved from the Christian fate of the original sin (Mello e Souza *op. cit.*) –, here stands for the Brazilians' heraldic animal.

## *About Oswald de Andrade*

Oswald de Andrade is so interesting a character that he deserves our lingering a bit more over him. Amongst the Modernists he was, as we all know, a rough, insolent, and sharp-tongued polemicist.

Besides everything he wrote and published, this paradoxical protagonist left to posterity various rather unorthodox diaries, which he would cherish since his childhood, by keeping scrapbooks where he used to make notes, draw and stick reminders. Among these, the most spectacular is *O perfeito cozinheiro das almas deste mundo* [The perfect cook of the souls of this world], the facsimile edition of which is absolutely perfect.

After so many unpublished writings having come to light we can now see Andrade in full, in all his exuberance: his passions and his love life; his brawls, his tantrums, and his quarrels; his outbursts; the polemics he entered into; his forked tongue; his verbal dexterity assisted by a temperament which would rather lose a friend than a jest, which, by the way, he frequently did. At the same time, his great generosity, his ineptitude at bearing a grudge against anyone, as well as his irrepressible talent and loyalty to writing, which, one way or another, he practiced every day of his life.

Journalism befitted Oswald de Andrade's bellicose nature; he had an early start, and death only would silence him. He began as a reporter and editor in *Diário Popular*, covering events of arts and shows; two years later he would leave to open his own weekly publication, *O Pirralho* [The Brat], with satirical overtones. He gathered a nice team, which included caricaturist Voltolino, and Juó Bananere, the author of celebrated daily accounts using the typical parlance of the Italian immigrants. Andrade would found, direct or be just a member of the most relevant periodicals of the Modernist movement, among which stood out *Klaxon* and *Revista de Antropofagia* [Anthropophagy Journal]. Later, with Patricia Galvão, he would publish *O homem do povo* [Everyman], a communist weekly newspaper, which eventually was defused by the right wing. Moreover, he would work as a columnist for the main Brazilian newspapers; as time went by, he would change the mediatic means he worked for and the goals he had in mind. The family's finances, which sustained *O Pirralho*, allowed him to set sail for Paris, in 1912, at the age of 22. The first of many voyages would define his route and would be decisive for Brazilian Modernism, as he established this bridge with the French vanguardist movements, the most brilliant of all at that time.

Andrade was no sinner either in terms of constancy or in terms of coherence. In his kaleidoscopic points of view, his penchant for the multiple is to be highlighted. In his writing, rhetoric and even grandiloquence collide with the colloquial and with coruscating formulas of his own concoction. Everything tinted with his optimism – impervious to any denial suggested by reality, firmly anchored in his faith in utopias he never lost sight of.

Nor could we frame Oswald de Andrade's works in the path of a rectilinear evolutionary process. His brilliant poetry sprang forth in outbursts. His seven novels comprise one trilogy, two stand-alone books, and a second – unfinished – trilogy, the

trilogies being rather more conventional than the stand-alone novels. However, the first trilogy was written concurrently with the two stand-alone books, the “unique pair” to quote Antonio Candido, the most important Brazilian literary critic. As it is well known, *Serafim Ponte Grande* and *Memórias Sentimentais de João Miramar* [João Miramar’s Sentimental Memoirs], along with *Macunaíma*, stand on the pinnacle of experimental literature the Brazilian Modernist prose reached by then. Later, he would pen two further novels of the second trilogy, but it did not go beyond the second volume; planned but unfinished, these books are anything but vanguardist and many layers below the experimental level mentioned above.

Still, in the midst of all this, he also showed his interest in drama; producing such transgressive plays that not until half a century later did they reach the stage, but this happened only thanks to another transgressor, that is, José Celso Martinez Corrêa, who directed the first staging of *O rei da vela* [The Candle King]. The great theater actor Paulo Autran, who came from another and more austere school, and far from being transgressive himself, declared more than once that this staging had been the most important one in the entire history of the Brazilian theatre.

Presumably, and if we take as a parametre the audacities he performed, Oswald de Andrade displayed a tendency to operate in different registers by advancing and retreating. Soon after having written the “unique pair”, he opts for delivering speeches to the working class by addressing workers as *vós* – in Portuguese, a more literary and archaic use of *you* –, since, in all sincerity, he might as well use retrograde language despite his progressive goals. Though contemporary with the lack of boldness of the second trilogy, he would leave unpublished one of the most subversive of his works, the poem *O Santeiro do Mangue*. The *mangue* [mangrove] of the title is the region in Rio de Janeiro where brothels are located, the characters are prostitutes and their pimps, and the language is full of obscenities. There is no fun; in verse form, it is an accusation of the chauvinist exploitation of women.

Otherwise, there is plenty of material for those who want to indulge in the findings of this writer who was the spearhead and the *enfant terrible* of Modernism, shooting verbal darts everywhere and, besides being a great writer, his most colourful figure. When comparing poems, it is worth noticing Andrade’s versatility.

### ***Two poems***

As we have seen so far, amongst the accomplishments of the Modernist generation, a rediscovery of Brazil is one that stands out, and as Oswald de Andrade himself concedes, this could happen in Place Clichy, in Paris. This was the generation that, besides revolutionizing the fields of letters and arts, attempted to map Brazil and its heritage. Among the many tasks the group would carry out, there was a journey to Minas Gerais state, as we have already seen, convoying the Swiss vanguardist poet

Blaise Cendrars, who wanted to make acquaintance with the regional Baroque. There was also Mário de Andrade's tours to the Northeast and the Amazon region, reported in *O turista aprendiz* [The apprentice tourist].

Oswald de Andrade would also be the creator and theorizer of the anthropophagic movement which proposed a very special relationship with the colonizer, which meant devouring it. The movement's manifest is impudently signed and dated as "year 374 of the gobbling of Bishop Sardinha", thus selecting a cannibalistic event – when the Caetés Indians captured and devoured the Portuguese prelate, an object of study in schools – as the beginning of the anticolonialist endeavours.

As we have seen, this rediscovery implied a return to the pages of chroniclers and travellers, our first historians, readings whose evidence is found in many Modernist writings. Apart from Oswald de Andrade's texts mentioned above, *Retrato do Brasil*, by Paulo Prado, and *Macunaíma*, by Mário de Andrade are also to be considered here; and still later, Murilo Mendes would tread a similar path with his set of poems *História do Brasil* (1932); the same title had been given by Oswald de Andrade to a cycle of short poems in his book *Pau Brasil*. By picking fragments from those pages, he makes the language of the originals worth enjoying along with the candid perception of the prodigies of the New World – from the nudity of the native women to the improbable arboreal mammal, the sloth.

Below is a poem taken from the *Primeiro caderno de poesia do aluno Oswald de Andrade* (*op. cit.*) [ Student Oswald de Andrade's first notebook of poetry ] :

### **A Portuguese mistake**

When the Portuguese arrived  
under a raging storm  
he dressed the Indian  
what a pity!  
had it been a sunny morning  
the Indian would have undressed the Portuguese<sup>10</sup>

This is a perfect example of an innovative proposal of the Modernist aesthetics, the "jest-poem": utmost concision, an outrageous statement, the impact caused in the reader by its originality – all this in prosaic diction, emulating the speech in one single utterance.

In Andrade's poem, the apparently colloquial spontaneity hardly conceals the sophistication of the making process, exposing the reader, with a remarkable economy of means, to the clash between two cultures. The opposing verbs *dress/undress* resonates in further opposites such as *Portuguese/Indian, rain/sun, arrived/had been* – all of which arranged according to two axes – historical fact/utopia. In this way, sardonically, the poet attributes only to the climate the power the colonizer has to oppress the colonized; and this, incidentally, was the subject of heated racial debates which marked those times. Would inferior or mixed races, or even the tropical climate, be blamed for our

backwardness? Was it a coincidence that all the wealthy countries with a white population were located in the northern hemisphere, or was it that cold weather boosted operosity? It is also worth noticing the felicitous double entendres mobilized in the poem; first, in the concrete and abstract dimensions of the Portuguese word “pena” – which, translated into English means both “pity” and “feather” –, skillfully explored; secondly, the cliché in the common meaning of the title – which, in Portuguese, points to a language issue –, by being dislocated to refer to people coming from Portugal as conquerors, is transformed in a wide and ominous historical commentary.

Another poem, from *Pau Brasil*, illustrates Andrade’s precise opposite

### **Twilight<sup>11</sup>**

In the mountainous amphitheatre  
Aleijadinho’s prophets  
monumentalize the landscape  
the white domes of the Passion events  
and the upturned headdresses of the palm trees  
stairs to the art in my country  
no one else has ever stepped on them

soap stone Bible  
bathed in the gold of the mines

As it is clear, from an ascending perspective, the view is that of someone who stands before and beneath São Bom Jesus de Matosinhos Church, in the town of Congonhas do Campo, one of the most famous baroque towns in Minas Gerais State. Drawing inspiration from and very similar to the homonymic church in the city of Braga, in Portugal, it is not to be confused with the latter, especially in view of the soap stone statues of the prophets spread in the church atrium, an artwork resulting from Aleijadinho’s chisel. Aleijadinho was the greatest sculptor ever of Brazilian history. The poem surely is the product of the journey the Modernists took to the baroque towns of Minas Gerais – towns which were set up by virtue of the prosperity of the gold mines but which fell under the stagnation caused by the decline of the mines –, a part of their “discovering Brazil” project.

Now to the making of the poem: in longer and more regular metre than the previous example, the main stanza ends with a couplet in the most typical Luso-Brazilian verse, the seven-syllable one, both lines relying on the alliteration of the same phoneme, which echoes in its interior. The beauty of the description, in its sharp selection, leaves out the church and elects the sculptures as agents of art over nature. A subjective evaluation closes the stanza by dislocating the apparently objective remark to an ascending movement which borders on the sublime. The radical synthesis of the

couplet manages to bring everything together, the soap stone as raw material transfigured by art, the perception of what is sacred, the underlying historical element.

Nevertheless, a most peculiar feature about the poem lies in its respectful nature. While the first of the two poems above is playful, irreverent, vanguardist, irregular in form, anticolonialist – ultimately a jest-poem – the second one is solemn, purposefully slow, with a more protracted and regular pace, reverent towards the colonial heritage, virtually dumbstruck by the beauty of Congonhas. It expresses and conveys an epiphany that takes possession of the iconoclast, roused by the power of the aesthetic experience. As to the title, it can be read in two ways, that is, by alluding to the time of day, and, more importantly, to the level of the artistic accomplishment, since then unachievable.

### **A profusion of Portraits of Brazil**

This is how the poet Oswald de Andrade, of whom two of his most distinctive poems are exemplified here, succeeds in reconciling very different things, as he does in the remaining of his work. As it can be noticed, here we have dealt with still two other outstanding “portraits of Brazil”, according to Oswald de Andrade.

This gem of Modernism, Oswald de Andrade, is undoubtedly a milestone. With his poetry and also the vanguardist prose of *Serafim Ponte Grande* and *Memórias Sentimentais de João Miramar*, he contributed to purge Brazilian literature – in what was the task of the Modernist generation – from all the dregs of a backward-looking rhetoric, be it Baroque, Romantic, Parnassian, Symbolist and even Realist-Naturalist, let alone our high-sounding tradition. In the preface to *Pau Brasil*, Paulo Prado compares Andrade’s short poems to the Japanese haiku and adds: “Having, in the form of pills, minutes of poetry”. Haroldo de Campos, in the first major study of Andrade’s poetry<sup>12</sup>, resumes Paulo Prado’s statement, calling these short lyrical pieces “pill-poems” and “minute-poems”, in that they are minimalists, paraepigrammatic texts.

Even if dated, Paulo Prado’s book remains as a good example of a deep reflection upon the issue of miscegenation in Brazil. Only in 1933, with the publication of *Casa Grande & Senzala (The Masters and the Slaves*, in the English translation) would Gilberto Freire shift the discussion from **race** to **culture**. He had absorbed from the lessons of anthropologist Franz Boas the relativization of cultures, which had nothing to do with race; and thus the twilight of ethnopessimism is heralded. Such ideas have irremediably perished – but the poetry and the prose of the Modernists have not; they are still absolutely splendid.

Trans. Alzira L.V.Allegro and Gisele Wolkoff

## Notes

- \* Translators' note: unless when otherwise indicated in square brackets, the translation of the titles of the works by the authors examined in above article, are provisional and serve merely to clarify the reader.
- 1 The noun *saudade*, in Portuguese, means nostalgia or longing for an absent something or someone.
  - 2 In the original: “Do que a terra mais garrida / teus risonhos, lindos campos têm mais flores / nossos bosques têm naus vuda / nossas vidas em teu seio mais amores...”
  - 3 In the original: “Por mais terras que eu percorra / Não permita Deus que eu morra / Sem que volte para lá.../ .../ ... onde canta o sabiá”.
  - 4 In the original: “Lá? / ah! / .../ sabiá... / papá... / maná... / sofá... / sinhá... /.../ cá? / bah!”
  - 5 Form of addressing the slaves used with regard to their female bosses.
  - 6 In the original “Canto de regresso à pátria” : “Minha terra tem palmares / Onde gorgoeja o mar / Os passarinhos daqui / Não cantam como os de lá / .../ Minha terra tem mais rosas / E quase que mais amores / Minha terra tem mais ouro / Minha terra tem mais terra / .../ Ouro terra amor e rosas / Eu quero tudo de lá / Não permita Deus que eu morra / Sem que volte para lá / .../ Não permita Deus que eu morra / Sem que volte pra São Paulo / Sem que veja a rua 15 / E o progresso de São Paulo”
  - 7 Refer to the meticulous study undertaken by Diléa Zanotto Manfio, “Poesias reunidas de Oswald de Andrade: elementos para uma edição crítica” [Collected poems by Oswald de Andrade: elements for a critical edition], in K. David Jackson (org.), *One hundred years of invention: Oswald de Andrade and the modern tradition in Latin-American literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992.
  - 8 Oswald de Andrade, *Poesias reunidas*, op. cit. Cf. Di Cavalcanti painting called “Cinco Moças de Guaratinguetá” [Five Young Women from Guaratinguetá] (1930). In the original: “As Meninas da gare”: “Eram três ou quatro moças bem moças e bem gentis / Com cabelos mui pretos pelas espáduas / E suas vergonhas tão altas e tão saradinhas / Que de nós as muito olharmos // Não tínhamos nenhuma vergonha.”
  - 9 In the original: “Festa da raça”: “Hu certo animal se acha também nestas partes / A que chamam Preguiça / Tem hua guedelha grande no toutiço / E se move com passos tam vagarosos / Que ainda que ande quinze dias aturado / Não vencerá a distância de hu tiro de pedra”.
  - 10 In the original: “Erro de Português: Quando o português chegou / debaixo duma bruta chuva / vestiu o índio / que pena! / fosse uma manhã de sol / o índio tinha despido o português.”
  - 11 In the original: “Ocaso”: “No anfiteatro de montanhas / os profetas do Aleijadinho / monumentalizam a paisagem / as cúpulas brancas dos Passos / e os cocares revirados das palmeiras / são degraus da arte do meu país / em que ninguém mais subiu / .../ Bíblia de pedra sabão / banhada no ouro das minas.
  - 12 “Introduction” to the edition mentioned. Another notable study is Richard M. Morse’s “Quatro poetas americanos: uma cama-de-gato” [Four American poets: a pitfall], in *A volta de McLuhanáima* [MacLuhanaíma’s return] São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1990, a comparative analysis of Oswald de Andrade’s, William Carlos Williams’, e.e.cummings’, and Mário de Andrade’s poetry. About the latter’s poetic production, see also, *O Espelho de Próspero* [Prosper’s mirror], São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995, by the same author.

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