

Introduction

One of Brazil's outstanding novelists of the postwar era, Adonias Filho is also a respected leader among its intellectuals. In the last twenty-five years he has produced four novels and a collection of *novelas*, along with extensive critical writings of major importance. He represents the generation that arose after 1945 in Brazil (as in other parts of the world), advocating experimentation in writing and a more aesthetically oriented literary art. Regionalism and the situation of man in society remain important to him, however, and in his novels he has shown a very Brazilian sense of accommodation of these concerns to the newer aestheticism in art. He later assumed the editorship of a big Rio de Janeiro newspaper and became a publisher, politician and political writer, translator, and, with increasing success, novelist and critic, earning recognition in the form of membership in the Brazilian Academy of Letters and in the post of Director of Brazil's National Library. His novels are now beginning to be translated abroad.

Adonias Filho is the almost exclusively used pen name of Adonias Aguiar Filho — "Filho" indicates that his father, a cacao plantation owner, had the same name before him. He was born in southern Bahia on November 27, 1915, in the municipality of Ilheus, parts of which were at that time still a wilderness. Much of his fiction has dealt with this area and the nearby "Itajuípe Territory," which is becoming synonymous with the isolation, primitiveness, and violence that the author found in its humid

cacao groves, rain forests and, farther inland, arid tablelands, valleys, and mountains. His early schooling was acquired in Ilheus, the cacao port, and later in Salvador, the old colonial capital, now bypassed but still an ideal place for the young man to learn Brazilian history, read the national literature, and meditate on the destinies of his native land. It was also the place he began his literary and journalistic careers—in Brazil, for economic reasons, these are often linked—and completed his formal education.

In 1936 he moved to the capital at Rio to continue his literary career. Working as a newspaperman and contributor to literary journals, Adonias Filho met and collaborated in those agitated days with writers of many different political and literary persuasions. He worked with two of the Catholic modernists, Tasso da Silveira and Andrade Muricy, the strange self-probing “psychological” novelists and innovators Cornelio Pena and Lucio Cardoso, the novelist of social panorama Otavio de Faria, and had as a close friend the “northeastern” novelist Rachel de Queiroz, who, with José Lins do Rego, Graciliano Ramos, and Jorge Amado, were dominating the novel with their intensely social and realistic art.

Though no critic has understood the value of the telluric in Brazilian literature better than he, Adonias Filho’s own evolution led away from realism: “I continue to believe too much in man, and in the possibilities of his intelligence, to accept reality as the life blood of the modern novel”—reality is various and changing, and there is something in man that is superior to it. In the mid-thirties he tore up a documentary novel he had written and rejected another that he was later to rewrite and publish under the almost untranslatable title of *Corpo Vivo* (perhaps *Cajango*, the name of its lively hero, would be acceptable) in

1962. He had also begun to think of another work in his "cacao cycle," but it was not to reach definitive form until 1952, as the present *Memórias de Lázaro* (*Memories of Lazarus*). Part of the same cycle and perhaps the least notable artistically, *Os Servos da Morte* (*Servants of Death*) was the first of his novels to be published, in 1946.

The end of World War II, in which Brazil participated actively, brought significant changes in political, social, and intellectual life, especially in the direction of greater individual freedom. A new literary generation had arisen, the so-called generation of 1945, which was vanguardist, experimental, and interested in the implications of modern art for literature. Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Virginia Woolf, and later the French writers of the *nouveau roman* were major influences; so, particularly for Adonias Filho, were Faulkner, Jouhandeau, Jacob Wasserman, Henry James, and Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. Adonias Filho has been one of the leaders of the new movement, along with Clarice Lispector, whose first novel had appeared in 1944, and João Guimarães Rosa, whose first collection of short stories was published in 1946. Other important novelists of the new orientation are Geraldo Ferraz, Rosario Fusco, and Maria Alice Barroso.

Through the example of his own novels as well as his critical writings, Adonias Filho has done much to further what he has called the "structural revolution"—the re-awakened interest in language for its own sake and new approaches to character development, the handling of space and time, and narrative technique generally. For him, "technique is that which makes possible the clearest understanding of human problems and, in the most subjective way, the psychological delineation of character." Adonias Filho saw technical experimentation as the means for renewing Brazilian literature. The latter he considers to have

arisen in the mid-nineteenth century, after three hundred years of "fermentation" in the form of oral literature, principally religious plays and folk tales, which subsequently influenced more sophisticated forms of drama and fiction. The documentary basis of literature has always been strong in Brazil, but literary conventions—of style, for example—have also shaped fiction. Regionalism has persisted and been given new impetus by the modernist movement of the nineteen-twenties, which, through poetry, and out of respect for the vernacular, freed the literary language from many of its restraints. After 1930, a renaissance occurred in modern fiction, which, without turning its back on folklore, gave supreme value to "Brasília."

In the summer of 1967, in Austin, I had the great pleasure of chatting with the author about his views on literature, especially about the regional basis of *Memories of Lazarus*. He made it clear that the Ouro Valley actually exists, in the hinterlands beyond Itajuípe and Coaraci. "Of course," he added, "it is half truth and half a dream." Under many influences, including Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and certain of the mystery tales of Poe, the valley was transformed. Although he visited the area as a young man, most of the episodes came from his own fantasy. Nor does the novel make any sociological affirmations.

The Ouro Valley is disquieting, if not terrifying, in its strangeness. Since specific links with reality are often dissolved, Alexandre's narration quickly transcends the local; time becomes a function of his hallucinations. In creating the Ouro Valley, its look, its atmosphere, its inner "feel," Adonias Filho has eliminated all but a few specific features—for example, the slough, the searing wind, Jeronimo's cavern, the dusty road, the earth's hot crust, the black sky. Men are described with a similar lacon-

ism in their simple lives and in their primitive society. As a matter of technique, Adonias Filho has depended upon the observation of gesture, facial expression, or other movement to convey inner states and upon a few physical details to establish outward appearance. Constant repetition of these details serves to give an almost sculptural quality to his characters. The author is "visual without being a landscape painter," in the words of Rachel de Queiroz, speaking of Adonias Filho's newest work, *Légua da Promissão* (*Promised Leagues*, 1968), a collection of tales of the same Itajuípe Territory.

The author has created an original literary style. Unlike Guimarães Rosa, who invented a sometimes impenetrable idiom for his stories of the hinterland of Minas Gerais, Adonias Filho stays within the bounds of the Portuguese language of Brazil. He creates through subtle syntactical rhythms that depend, in many instances, on balanced elements, ellipses without verbs, simple short bursts of words, frequently with a ternary rhythm. The critic Sergio Milliet has remarked on its musicality, "which is simple and full like a chant or a Biblical verse." Indeed, *Memoires of Lazarus*, in the original, and hopefully in the translation, demands to be read aloud. When Jeronimo, who is illiterate, speaks, there is no disruption of the stylistic unity; we are merely told that "his language was naturally coarser and his turn of phrase poorer" than the language of the narrator. The author is thus left free to use language as creatively as possible.

Memories of Lazarus is rich in themes, whether of the locality, the national culture, or the world at large. Merely a few examples, at the regional level, are cacao cultivation and backlands ranching as styles of life, and in a limited sense the cyclic drought, with its tragic social implications. These might also be viewed as themes of national import, and indeed they have been

thus presented in earlier northeastern novels. An especially productive national (or even continent-wide) theme is the conflict between the littoral, with its cities, and the relatively uncivilized hinterlands. Probably it is the universal level of interpretation of themes, theses, and symbols that gives the novel its widest appeal. One may recognize men of all times and all places, who have been stripped of every vestige of civilization and reduced to their most elemental humanity—remembering the beautiful wild horses of the Ouro Valley, one hesitates to say “animality.”

Among Adonias Filho's works, *Memories of Lazarus* has already been singled out as a modern-day masterpiece. To many who are versed in nineteenth-century Brazilian literature, it cannot but recall a very different and yet in so many important ways similar book—the classic *Dom Casmurro* (available in English under the same title) by Machado de Assis. Not only is there the same profound knowledge of man but also the same preoccupation with the tragic limitations upon the human capacity to discover truth. The brutalized Rosalia and the darling Capitu are, ultimately, sisters.

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