

EDITOR'S NOTE

In February 1917... Oswaldo Gonçalves Cruz enters the throes of death. His family and close friends keep constant vigil ... It's a warm night, a summer night. The bells of the Franciscan convent in Petropolis toll nine times. Silence reigns in the house on Monte Caseros street, broken only by the rattle of the sick man's breathing.

A sound suddenly makes itself heard, growing louder by the minute: drumming, and a clamor. Family members rush to close the sashes but to no avail; the cries echo beneath the window ...

– What's that noise? – you ask in a shaky voice.

– It's Carnival – they tell you – revelers playing Zé Pereira, you know how it is this time of year ...

You interrupt them:

– It's a demonstration.

Indeed it is... The cries, the hissing...

Yet these sounds grow ever more distant. You no longer see, you no longer hear... you are slowly slipping into a coma ... At nine o'clock on February 11, 1917, you pass away.

With these words, writer Moacyr Scliar concludes the history of Brazil's famous public health doctor as portrayed in his fictional book *Sonhos tropicais* in 1992. This work was followed four years later by a small but polished non-fiction version entitled *Oswaldo Cruz: entre micróbios e barricadas*. And on February 27, 2011, as the jingle of tambourines heralded the arrival of this year's Carnival (from which you will no doubt have recovered by the time you read this page), this same beloved author from the far-southern state of Rio Grande do Sul also passed away. In his splendid writings, Scliar – a public health doctor like Cruz – often drew inspiration from his vocation, bringing us fiction and non-fiction accounts of the history of medicine, health, and the body. *A majestade do Xingu* (1977), for example, is an extraordinary recreation of the life of physician and indigenist Noel Nutels, a Brazilian Jew born in Ukraine, not far from the homeland of the gaúcho writer's parents, José and Sara Scliar, Russian Jews who emigrated to Brazil in 1904. These two titles, along with *Manual da paixão solitária* (2008), are Moacyr Scliar's most highly acclaimed books, which earned him three Jabutis (roughly equivalent to a U.S. Pulitzer or the British Man Booker Prize). *O centauro no jardim* (1980; tr. *The centaur in the garden*, 2003) has also gained frequent mention in biographical entries and obituaries and made the National Yiddish Book Center's list of the 100 greatest works of modern Jewish literature.

In 1962, the year he graduated from medical school at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, capital of the state, Moacyr Scliar published his first book,

Histórias de um médico em formação, reflections on his experiences as a medical student in training. His work as a doctor began at the Service for Home Medical Care and Urgent Care (Samdu), a government agency in Porto Alegre, but this career would not prove as prolific as his career as a writer who left a legacy of over seventy books, encompassing novels as well as collections of short stories, *crônicas*, and essays. These include some must-reads for any faithful follower of this journal: *Do mágico ao social: a trajetória da saúde pública* (From the magical to the social: the history of public health; 1987); *Cenas médicas* (Scenes from medicine; 1988, 2002); and especially *A paixão transformada* (Passion transformed; 1998), a delectable recounting of the history of medicine from the perspective of literature and of medical reports.

Moacyr Scliar became a member of *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*'s Editorial Board in 1997. He had wonderful ideas to offer and wrote countless peer reviews, providing valuable suggestions to authors who have appeared in these pages, always with unfailing patience and generosity. So our sadness is not only over the loss of a remarkable, incisive writer but also of a friend who lent his talents for the benefit of this journal's readers.

On February 27, 2011, the country was saddened by yet another irreparable loss: the death of Benedito José Viana da Costa Nunes, native son of Pará. I borrow my own words, written upon the journal's publication of a brilliant essay of his, entitled "O animal e o primitivo: os Outros de nossa cultura" ("Animals and the primitive: the Others in our culture"; v.14, suppl., pp.279-290, Dec. 2007): the man possessed one of those brilliant minds that every so often blazes across Brazil's intellectual firmament, leaving a trail of original, innovative thought that can actually reshape his contemporaries' perceptions of their own time, of how it came into being and where it might be headed.

One of the founders of the Pará Faculty of Philosophy, Benedito Nunes took his Master's at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he attended classes by Merleau-Ponty and Paul Ricoeur. He later taught literature and philosophy at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) and at other universities in Brazil, France, and the United States. Together with Maria Sylvania Nunes, his wife, and Angelita Silva, his sister-in-law, he founded the Norte Teatro-Escola (Northern Theater School), later to become part of the UFPA. In both regional and national magazines and journals, Benedito Nunes published a great number of articles and reviews on philosophy and expressions of both popular and scholarly culture, covering cinema, dance, fine arts, literature, and so on. His first book was *Passagem para o poético: filosofia e poesia em Heidegger* (1968), a treatise on philosophy and poetry in Heidegger. This was followed by a collection of literary and philosophical essays entitled *O dorso do tigre* (1969); *João Cabral de Melo Neto* (1974) and *Oswald Canibal* (1979), each dealing with important figures in modern Brazilian literature; *O tempo na narrativa* (Time in the narrative; 1988); *O drama da linguagem, uma leitura de Clarice Lispector* (The drama of language: a reading of Clarice Lispector; 1989); two more general works on philosophy, entitled *Introdução à filosofia da arte* (1989) and *A filosofia contemporânea* (1991); and, lastly, a collection of essays on nihilism and other topics, *No tempo do niilismo e outros ensaios* (1993).

In 1998, Benedito Nunes retired as a full professor of philosophy at the UFPA and received the title of Professor Emeritus. He then released yet another collection of literary and philosophical essays (*Crivo de papel*), followed the next year by a book on hermeneutics

and poetry (*Hermenêutica e poesia: o pensamento poético*), which he edited together with Maria José Campos. In 2000, he published *Dois ensaios e duas lembranças* (Two essays and two memories) and *O Nietzsche de Heidegger* (Heidegger's Nietzsche). The year 2002 brought *Heidegger e Ser e tempo* (Heidegger and Being and Time), and in 2006, he and Amazonian novelist Milton Hatoum wrote *Crônica de duas cidades: Belém e Manaus* (The tale of two cities: Belém and Manaus).

Benedito Nunes received his first Jabuti for Literary Studies in 1987; his second came in 2010, in recognition of *A clave do poético*, a work of literary criticism. That same year, the Brazilian Academy of Letters bestowed on him its Machado de Assis Prize for his overall oeuvre.

The loss of Benedito Nunes is personally painful to me. Although it was only on a few occasions that I spent time with him and Maria Sylvia, this was enough to leave strong, lasting memories; I admired the intellectual for what I read and heard, and I always took great enjoyment in the marvelous, tender, humorous stories about the Nunes that my Pará family (who was quite close to them) shared with me on luminous Sundays when we recalled other luminous times.

And so it was on a Sunday, when the jingle of tambourines heralded the arrival of yet another Carnival that Moacyr Scliar and Benedito Nunes left us, *chimarrão* in the hand of the former, *açaí* in the hand of the latter, perhaps chatting away together about the other side of life, about us, poor mortals, forced to reinvent ourselves so we can hold on to them in memory, as we go on living.

Jaime L. Benchimol
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