

Literature and Racial Integration

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The historical formation of Brazil is distinguished from the majority of ex-colonial nations by one factor that is especially characteristic: an intense process of ethnic and cultural mixing. The Portuguese colonisers, who, unlike the English Puritans in North America, left their families and arrived in Brazil in small groups mainly composed of men, naturally tended to pair off with the women they found available – first of all indigenous women and later African women. There was nothing in Brazil to prevent this spontaneous behaviour similar to the role played in the English colonies of North America by the strength of the family group or the strict religious observance of the community. Thus from the outset Brazil tended to accept racial mixing as a de facto reality. As Gilberto Freyre correctly noted in his book *Casa Grande e Senzala*:

They mixed happily with women of colour from the very first contacts and many mixed-race children resulted, so much so that only a few thousand men were enough to colonize vast areas and compete with the greatest and most numerous peoples as regards the extent of the colonial territory and the effectiveness of colonizing activity.¹

Although this historical circumstance did not eliminate racial prejudice, it made a strict policy of discrimination, as developed in the United States and most colonial empires, totally impractical. Furthermore, in a society where the white Portuguese held the land and political power, and the Africans or (to a far smaller degree) the Indians were the slave labour, the owners' mixed-race children, who were often freed by their fathers, came to occupy an intermediate social space and turned their hands to crafts, thus forming the population's creative working class from the early days of the colonial period. Some of the most renowned artists in the visual arts during the first period of Brazilian history were of mixed race, and this process eventually found its fullest expression in Aleijadinho (1738–1814), a master of Baroque architecture and sculpture, whose work, coming as it does at the end of the colonial period, is the brilliant outcome of three centuries of artistic creation in Brazil.

There is a relevant document that is both odd and very representative of this mixing of races and cultures and the presence of mixed-race people in the life of the colony: the magnificent representation of the *Assumption* that Manuel da Costa Ataíde (1762–1830) – a remarkable painter who collaborated constantly with Aleijadinho – painted on the ceiling of São Francisco church in Ouro Preto: in this painting it is not only the Virgin who is a mulatto, but the whole heavenly host as well. Ataíde himself was not of mixed race, but according to tradition he used his mistress and the mother of his children, who was, as the model for the Virgin. The noteworthy fact is that mulatto features are not

restricted to the Virgin but invade the whole composition, making it, so to speak, a symbolic representation of the mixing process that had for centuries been at the heart of Brazilian society (the painting belongs to the late eighteenth century).

In the literary field the mixed-race issue started to emerge very early on, as is demonstrated by the work of Gregório de Matos (1633–1696), the great poet of the Brazilian Baroque, who wrote the most expressive part of his work in Bahia in the second half of the seventeenth century. He was the son of Portuguese parents who settled in Brazil and worked in sugar, and he studied the humanities in Portugal at the University of Coimbra. When he returned to Brazil, he completely immersed himself in the working life of the city of Salvador, where he found the rich raw material for his poetry.

Reading Gregório's poem gives us an eloquent glimpse of the significance and extent of the process of racial mixing in this recently formed society, whose precise nature was still undefined. Though mulatto women are praised for their erotic seductiveness, mulatto men on the other hand are the butt of all kinds of criticisms and insults because they are starting to become the whites' competitors in a wide variety of areas. Thus, in a devastating satire in which the author's ironic intention is to define "what Bahia is and has been from time immemorial", the poet allows all his resentment to burst forth in verses 5 and 6:

Whom do you love? blacks.
Are any others more dear to you? those of mixed race.
Whom do you like the most? mulattos.
The devil take those idiots,
The devil take that stupid crew
Who cherish
Blacks, mestiços, and mulattos.²

In this text and many others we get a hint of the jealousy felt by the whites of Portuguese origin, proud of their family and education, faced with the important place mixed-race people were taking on in society (in another poem he refers to "shameless mulattos"). The intense racial mixing that took place in Salvador, the poet's birthplace, which was then the political and cultural capital of Brazil, fed its creativity, especially as far as wit and satire were concerned – which does not stop Gregório's work standing as valuable proof of the ethnic and cultural cross-fertilization that was a vital factor in the formation of Brazilian society from the outset.

However, despite the presence of mixed-race poets in literature even before Independence (1822), it was only after the emergence of Romanticism, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, that themes and characters closely or distantly related to the history of racial mixing took a prominent place in literature, where for the first time they were dealt with in an entirely positive light.

The Romantic viewpoint

Among the non-European peoples who contributed to the historical formation of Brazil – Amerindians and Africans – it was the Indians who first came to the fore in the Romantic imagination, assisted by the nationalistic enthusiasm of the period. It is easy to see why

this was; Brazilian writers, coming from a country that had recently been freed from Portuguese domination, and seeking myths that would give nobility to their origins, naturally tended to put the indigenous people on a pedestal. The Portuguese and the blacks did not seem suited to fill the role of objects of nationalist myth-making: the former because they were precisely the people from whom Brazil wished to affirm its freedom as a nation, the blacks because in the Romantic period the country's economy still depended on slavery, and slaves, who were socially inferior, could scarcely be expected to ignite the national imagination as the mythical ancestors of the typical 'Brazilian'. Besides, the Africans, who like the Europeans had come from overseas, were not naturally linked with the soil of America.

The Indians were perfectly equipped for their role in Romantic literature: they were indigenous and had always resisted to their utmost all attempts to enslave them (which meant they could be cast as martyrs in the cause of freedom, a leitmotif of the Romantic world view). Except in the limited areas given over to stock-rearing, in the *sertão*³ Indian nomads had always rebelled against the slave system, which involved sedentary work on the sugar plantations, a way of life that was utterly incompatible with their cultural practices. And thus it was that Africans had to be brought in, as they were much more used to this type of work, having already experienced it in their native lands. Regardless of the reasons behind the Indians' resistance, the fact is that it helped to reinforce their mythic potential, which can be clearly demonstrated by the (extra-literary) fact that immediately after Independence many Brazilian families, inspired by nationalist fervour, exchanged their Portuguese surnames for names of Amerindian origin. Furthermore, in the Romantic period, the tribes, who had survived a long saga of destruction, lived far away from the urban centres; so there was no risk that the true reality of their lives would interfere with the idealization process that the Indian would need to undergo in order to embody the founding myth of nationhood.

Romantic *Indianism* (the term given to this aesthetic trend towards the mythical idealization of the Indian) was frequently criticized for distorting the Indians' culture and personality. However, this viewpoint arises from a misunderstanding: in elevating the Indian the writers of the period were attempting to construct the myth of national identity for Brazilians who had recently gained their independence and were not at all concerned with the ethnographic reality of the surviving tribes. Heroes of *Indianist* poetry or fiction were supposed to embody values contemporary Brazilians could identify with. And this aim was fully realized.

Among the writers who exploited the *Indianist* motif, there are only two who were completely successful in giving life and expressive force to this school's ideas: Gonçalves Dias, the first great poet of Brazilian Romanticism, and José de Alencar, who was the central figure of Romantic fiction. In the poetry of Gonçalves Dias, even though Indians and their culture are given a heroic story and presented in an idealized fashion, they are treated as autonomous, as if they were being glimpsed at a period pre-Cabral⁴; where Europeans appear, they are presented as a threatening enemy, people who will destroy the values of the tribe. Contact between the two peoples, shown as a promising event, rich in future opportunities, does not figure in the poet's work. This is not the case with Alencar. In his fiction the *Indianist* myth becomes a symbol of a cosmogonic myth, standing for the integration between Portuguese and Indians (or with 'American soil', of which the Indian is a metonymic representation), that provides Brazilians with their origins.

And so, by means of a poetic fiction, Alencar emphasized the mixed-race roots of the Brazilian people.

In two of his novels the *Indianist* theme takes on this cosmogonic dimension: *O Guarani* (1857) and *Iracema* (1865). In the former an Indian chief, Peri, falls in love with the daughter of a Portuguese gentleman and dedicates his life – as did the European knights errant – to serving and protecting her. While Ceci, the heroine, lives in her father's imposing house, a kind of medieval fortress on a riverbank, Peri is scarcely tolerated and is looked down on as an inferior. However, during a battle with a fierce enemy tribe that is threatening the house with imminent destruction, the proud lord appeals to the Indian's courage and loyalty and begs him to save his daughter by taking her away down the river in a rowboat under cover of night. This is done and when the pair are already far away, a terrible explosion destroys both the Portuguese gentleman's world and the ferocious hostile world of the enemy tribe. Only Peri and Ceci survive amid the rich Brazilian natural world. And this is when, in these sublime surroundings, Ceci discovers the beauty and nobility of the Indian. Torrential rain causes a violent flood that carries them away and the pair are saved by the trunk of a floating palm tree. The last scene of the novel shows the palm tree floating downriver and Peri leaning over Ceci to give her a first – symbolic – kiss. In the previous two pages the author recounts the myth of Tamandaré, the natives' Noah, who, in a similar situation, rescued himself and his female companion and then went on to repopulate the Earth. The parallel, which is very obvious, reaffirms the poetic cosmogonic meaning given by the author to the story's ending. From the union of Ceci and Peri (figures symbolizing the European and American worlds respectively) will spring a new man – the Brazilian.

In *Iracema*, subtitled 'a legend from Ceará' (the novelist's home province), the plot is closer to the reality of the colonial period, since it is the Indian woman who surrenders herself to the Portuguese hero and bears him a child, called "the first *cearense*" in the story. In this novel, whose tone is highly lyrical – it is almost a prose poem – the erotic side of the relationship between the Portuguese man and the Indian woman is treated more freely and the *mixed-race* (*cabocla*) nature of this "first *cearense*" is not open to doubt. Thus, by using allegorical allusion in *O Guarani* or quite intense poetic eroticism in *Iracema*, Alencar's Indianism bestows considerable dignity on racial mixing as a factor in the formation of the Brazilian. Clearly, as we saw earlier, in Alencar's time sexual contact between whites and Indians was highly unlikely, except in very remote regions (such as Amazonia), and this made the idealization of Brazilians' mixed-race origins more acceptable to readers.

However, a similar circumstance did not hold for blacks, who lived side by side with whites both on farms and in urban centres, playing an active part in the workings of society – not to speak of the rising number of mulattos, who were, as we have seen, the product of a mixing process that went back to the very beginnings of colonial life. This situation must have contributed to the fact that mixing with Africans was never promoted by nationalism, and never received a poetic treatment similar to that given to Indians.

Some idea of the extremely derogatory image of blacks in the society of the period is available to us in the novel *A escrava Isaura* ('Isaura the Slave') (1875) by a minor writer, Bernardo Guimarães (1825–1884), which is fairly representative of contemporary values. In the 1870s the movement for the abolition of slavery had begun to gather momentum,⁵ and the novel clearly supports the general movement opposed to the institution. However,

the heroine, who is the object of her master's sexual desire (and fends him off stoically), is not a black but a mulatto who is almost white. Isaura lived in the main house (far from the other slaves, clearly, who were relegated to the *senzalas*), and she had received a refined upbringing from her mistress. At the start of the novel she appears singing and accompanying herself on the piano, and the narrator emphasizes her features thus: "Her complexion is like the ivory of the keyboard, of a whiteness that does not dazzle, a delicate matte tone, and it is hard to say whether it is a slight pallor or a somewhat faded pink."⁶ Then her mistress addresses her in these words: "You are beautiful and your colour is wonderful, no one could tell that a single drop of African blood flows in your veins."⁷ And this is in a novel with an abolitionist message! A negro slave would be unacceptable as a heroine to the sensibility and prejudices of Romantic readers (and perhaps to Bernardo Guimarães himself). At the most a very discreet and very remote suggestion of negro blood, just a "delicate tone" in the whiteness of her complexion.

Even in the work of Castro Alves (1847–1871), the great poet of the slaves and one of the emblematic figures of Romantic lyricism, it is noteworthy that, although his poems about negroes and slavery (all written in the late 1860s) are dominated by a denunciation of this odious system and a humane regard for its victims, they do not anywhere feature the important contribution Africans and their culture made to the building of the nation. The African is not linked to the genesis of the Brazilian, not even in the lyrical and idealized form that Alencar applies to the Indian. Castro Alves does not even deal with mulattos, who at this period were an active group in society (but for that very reason unsuited to the melodramatic flights of fancy dear to the Romantics).

The realist republican generation

A mulatto appears for the first time as a novel's central character in the work that opens the realist period of Brazilian literature; in fact its title is *O mulato* (1881). The plot is located in São Luís, one of the oldest cities in Brazil. In this book the author condemns the racial prejudice and narrow horizons of provincial society, which prevent Raimundo, the hero, from marrying a white girl from the locality. In the end the young man is murdered and the girl, who is forced to follow her family's ambitions, marries a Portuguese man. In order to expose more effectively the irrational nature of prejudice, the author makes his character a refined mulatto from a good background with a law degree from the University of Coimbra, who has all the qualities – except colour – which would allow him to aspire to a position of eminence in society. Though on the one hand the novel reveals the underlying prejudice in Brazilian society of the time, on the other it shows that this prejudice is in fact the inevitable consequence of the rise of mixed-race citizens, which was taking place not only through the arts and crafts (for this was already common in the colonial period), but also through higher education: as graduates who had often studied – like the hero of the novel – at European universities. From a sociological viewpoint the situation was complex, since educated mulattos were bound to become competitors for the dominant white class (a fact that was already, as we have seen, a source of irritation for the seventeenth-century poet Gregório de Matos). Nevertheless, the barriers were relative; in many cases intellectual merit helped to overcome them, ensuring that men of colour were fully integrated into society and even achieved a certain prestige.

The most typical case is that of Machado de Assis (1839–1908), the greatest figure in Brazilian literature. The writer was a dark-skinned mulatto (his father was a freed mulatto slave and his mother a Portuguese woman from the Azores). Even though he was sometimes forced to deal with obstacles raised by racial prejudice (for example, when he married a white Portuguese woman whose family did not approve of him), Machado de Assis was recognized both intellectually and socially during his lifetime, and his prestige reached its high point when he founded (in 1897) the Brazilian Academy of Letters and became its first president.

The intellectual generation that was responsible for the advent of the Republic in Brazil, and came to the fore in intellectual and political life from 1880 onwards, was strongly influenced by positivist philosophy and more generally by the scientism that dominated western thought during the second half of the nineteenth century. Among the wide range of ideas that were then considered to be scientific 'truths' was the concept of the superiority of the white race. And so racial mixing was condemned out of hand. Gobineau, who wrote a book that was very influential in this matter (*Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 1853–55), was ambassador to Brazil for a while and there is no doubt that his opinions helped form the new generation's world view. In the early years of the Republic an event occurred in the *sertões* of Bahia that shook the country's consciousness to the core. A huge crowd of *sertanejos* (inhabitants of the *sertão*), most of them poverty-stricken, following their enlightened leader – Antônio Conselheiro, a mystic from the working classes – wandered for some time around the region and finally set up camp on an abandoned farm, where they created a kind of peasant town called Canudos. The *sertanejo* community, which was welded together by a strong religious faith (drawing on Catholic doctrine and millennial beliefs) and took a primitive communism as its organizing principle, grew larger and larger, swollen by new followers who kept arriving; at its largest it became a settlement of more than five thousand dwellings. As they did not comprehend some of the institutions of the new Republic – for instance, civil marriage was considered the work of the devil – Conselheiro's disciples (who were later called *jagunços*, or *fanáticos*, fanatics) instinctively turned against it, though this did not imply a coherent ideological position. It was simply an emotional rejection resulting from the cultural situation of the people of the *sertão*, which was still quite fragile. An accidental clash between the *jagunços* and the authorities sparked off an armed conflict, which became significant because it was mismanaged by those in power. The Republican government, which had its seat in the big seaboard towns and was completely ignorant of the true situation in the *sertão*, took the line in the end that the conflict with the *sertanejos* was a monarchist plot with the diabolical aim of restoring the regime that had been overthrown. Public opinion, egged on by the Republican press, swallowed this view of the conflict. The result was a bloody campaign (1896–7) during which the army was defeated time after time, only managing to destroy the unfortunate township after more than a year of fighting and with more than 10,000 troops, equipped with the most up-to-date armaments (at first the *jagunços* fought with primitive weapons and it was only later that, through the irony of fate, they managed to equip themselves with the weapons left behind in the confusion of the retreat by the fleeing soldiers themselves).

After five years' careful preparation the writer Euclides da Cunha (1866–1909) published a book in 1902, *Os sertões*, that was a major event in the history of Brazilian literature and culture. It was based on his experience on the battlefield (even though this

occurred only during the last stages of the campaign, between August and October 1897) as war correspondent for a newspaper based in the south of the country. The work, which was a blend of historical and sociological essay and epic narrative, shows a decisive moment in Brazilians' realization of the true nature of their country. The issue of racial mixing is fully dealt with in a manner that is both astonishing and frustrating. Frustrating because Euclides, who was a typical intellectual of the positivist Republican generation, adopted the racial theories that were then accepted as scientific dogma and, as we have seen, preached the unavoidable inferiority of mixed-race people. According to these theories, when two races were crossed the characteristics of the inferior race would predominate and the resulting product would inevitably be an unbalanced individual. On the other hand, the author had himself witnessed the *jagunços'* remarkable capacity for resistance and their admirable heroism as they defended their community, virtues that were utterly incompatible with racial theories. In order to find a solution to this paradox, he decided there was a difference between the mixed-race people from the *sertão* and those from the seaboard: because of the gradual harmonious process of mixing over many centuries with diverse ethnic elements (white, Indian, and to a lesser degree black), the former, who lived in almost total isolation, could have avoided the trauma of sudden adaptation: and this would have meant that those produced by this process were not unbalanced individuals but a strong new race. Following this line of reasoning, the (theoretical) supporter of racist ideas wrote the following:

In the *sertões* the organic power of mixed-race people emerges in its integrity and strength, avoiding mixtures of extremes, able to evolve, diversify, adapt to the most noble new purposes, because it is the solid physical foundation for future moral development.⁸

Brought up short by the shock of reality, Euclides⁹ the intellectual, who had come to Canudos armed with the unshakeable dogma of racial science, finally saw "in these vigorous *caboclos* the vital seed of our future character, the living rock of our race".¹⁰ (Or, in an even more explicit image, "the heart of nationhood".¹¹)

His great work is to a large extent an epic, not about conquerors but the conquered. At various points in his narrative the author mentions Canudos, calling it, significantly, "*the Troy built of wattle and daub*": beneath the irony of this term, which seems derogatory, can be discerned an intention to make a link with the world of Homer. At one point in the story describing the superhuman courage of the *jagunços*, who are surrounded by the army with their water supply cut off and so attempt a sortie by night with the near-impossible aim of getting a few buckets within sight and range of the soldiers, the narrator writes:

These events raised the heroism of the *matutos* [country people thought to be backward] to its highest point. Finally they even moved their opponents. [...] Several of the latter eventually conceived an undeniable and sincere enthusiasm for the courage of these valiant martyrs. The picture of them that was on view immortalized the defeated.¹²

Despite its ideological contradictions, Euclides da Cunha's book stands as a crucial moment for awareness of the intrinsically mixed-race origins of Brazilian social reality. The poetic intuition of Alencar's mythic novels seems to be confirmed in tragic mode by the *sertanejos* of Canudos, except that in their case the African element joins Alencar's white and Indian.

Between the proclamation of the Republic and the start of the Modern Movement, during the 1920s, there appeared several noteworthy writers who, like Machado de Assis and Euclides da Cunha, helped by the quality of their artistic production to demonstrate how absurd racial theories were: among them the great black poet Cruz e Souza (1861–1898) and the writer Lima Barreto (1881–1922), a rebel mulatto who in his novels offers a sharp and searching critique of the situation of people of colour in a society that was long marred by racial prejudice.

Though it was a difficult path strewn with obstacles, the rise of mixed-race people – and especially mulattos – in Brazilian society and intellectual circles was, as we have noted, a continuous process starting in the colonial period, and it often provided writers with material. However, it was not until the arrival of Modernism that literature also decided to treat the issue of racial mixing from the cultural viewpoint. To be more precise, Aluísio Azevedo's or even Lima Barreto's mulattos achieve prominence from the fact that the reader realizes they are no different from the whites from the privileged class, since there is no basis for the superiority of the latter compared to the former, insofar as they are all equally capable of adapting to European models of education and intellectual training. In these cases, then, the supposed equality is seen in terms of European culture. It is only with Modernism that literature starts to discuss and give value to the mixed-race nature of Brazilian culture itself.

Modernism

One of the main themes of the Modern Movement, which burst upon Brazil in the 1920s, was the radical exploration of the country's cultural foundations. The start of the new century, a kind of Brazilian *belle époque*, had been marked by a deep conservatism in the arts and a 'Europe-oriented' eclecticism that was largely of French origin. The Modernist generation rebelled against both these trends. Reviving the nationalism that had been so much a part of Romanticism (in particular for Alencar), they called for a wide-ranging examination of the most authentic roots of Brazilian culture. In the irreverent spirit typical of this period, Oswald de Andrade (1890–1954), one of the most representative personalities, founded the 'Cannibalism' movement whose central idea was that Brazilian 'savages' could and should 'devour' European values, provided they were transformed into something new and absorbed into the very flesh of the 'cannibals', just as the enemy's flesh, when eaten, was absorbed into the very substance of the Indian. Influence from abroad, when it was inventively appropriated, could be the source of new and original creation.

In general, the idea of assimilating ethnic groups and cultures, together with a growing consciousness of Brazil's need to set out its own particular values, can be found in the work of several writers from the first generation of Modernists. But it was Mário de Andrade (1893–1945) who, in his book *Macunaíma*, provided its most comprehensive expression, and also produced the most striking results. The novel, which has none of the features of the realist narrative (the author classifies it as a 'rhapsody'), is an attempt to define in fiction what the moral, psychological and cultural character of the Brazilian might be. To achieve this aim, Mário de Andrade deploys a vast repertoire of indigenous myths and legends, which are mixed in with African myths and themes from national

folklore. The hero, Macunaíma, inspired by an indigenous creature with the same name, is an unstable character with both virtues and weaknesses in astonishing measure and his behaviour is always contradictory and unpredictable. Attempting to define the nature of his book, the author wrote in a letter:

[It is] a poem both heroic and comic, featuring a character from legend, in the mystical style of traditional poems, who makes fun of the Brazilian's psychological nature. The realistic and the fantastical merge into one. Symbol, satire and free-flowing fantasy come together. There are no regional features because regional characteristics are merged. Just one Brazil, and just one hero.¹³

The intellectual project of *Macunaíma* continues the nationalist attempts of the Romantics – and particularly the Indianism of Alencar – to define Brazilian identity mythically. But in this case the sublime heroism of the Romantic vision is replaced by a deliberately anti-heroic parodic approach, suggested early on in the work's sub-title: '*the hero without a character*'. The problem, which was so important for the Modernists, of defining an authentic original culture, rejecting slavish imitation of European models, appears in the story of *Macunaíma* in two different guises: first, through the complex tissue of myths and legends, which speak of cultural *difference*; then in the pitiless satire of inauthenticity and imitation that can compromise the still fragile basis of the national *ethos*. But although the hero's lack of character, which the subtitle refers to, reveals the Brazilian's corresponding absence of a stable personality and a clear psychological and moral profile, this does not mean the author has a pessimistic outlook. Indeed, he says of his novel in another letter:

I always dreamed of writing a poem about characterless people, true products of human chaos, moving about in the Brazilian abyss, a reflection of elements thrown into the joyous but uneven rhythm that foreshadows the marvellous destiny of our people.¹⁴

At one particular point in the narrative the hero has to leave his homeland "in the depths of the virgin forest" and go to São Paulo to retrieve a valuable talisman that he had lost and that had fallen into the hands of the giant Piaimã – who in the story is a rich and powerful Italian immigré. The battle that then ensues between Macunaíma and the giant can be interpreted, on a symbolic level, as the clash between the Brazilian and the European, between native values and imported ones, just as the Brazilian's recovery of the talisman represents the conquest of his authentic nature (a 'cannibalistic' fusion of different races and cultures). The eventual victory of the hero, who returns triumphant with the trophy to his own world, could be said to reaffirm Mário de Andrade's belief in "the marvellous destiny of our people".

In *Macunaíma* the issue of racial mixing is extrapolated from the limited domain of social or sociological mimetism to embrace, on a symbolic level, the whole of Brazilian reality. It is of no consequence that in order to achieve this Mário de Andrade makes use of indigenous myths, since, as in Alencar's case, the goal is to express what is Brazilian in general, the product of such a complex and diverse process of cross-fertilization.

From 1930 the Brazilian novel takes another turn and becomes more directly concerned with social issues. To this end it rediscovers narrative techniques characteristic of the realist generation, which the early Modernists had rejected. Among the great writers of this generation Jorge Amado is the one who highlighted the issue of racial mixing, in particular in its Afro-Brazilian manifestation.

We must not fail to note, however, that even before the writer from Bahia was fully launched on his career as a novelist, the anthropologist and essayist Gilberto Freyre (1900–1987) had already completely revised, in *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933), the prejudice-laden notions that we have mentioned in relation to *Os sertões*, and that had hitherto prevailed in scientific circles, relating to the African's role in the formation of Brazilian family and society. For the first time justice was done to the African's remarkable cultural contribution, if we give the word culture its widest meaning, which includes way of life, sensibility, sexuality, religion, music, cuisine, etc.

But the origins of Jorge Amado's fiction are quite different from those that fed into Gilberto Freyre's work. The latter had received a solid academic training in the USA and Europe before starting out on the historical and anthropological research that was to make his reputation; he had also studied at Columbia with Frank Boas, one of the founders of modern anthropology. In contrast, Jorge Amado's apprenticeship had been empirical, intuitive and above all the result of his own experiences in the crucial periods of his childhood and adolescence in the working-class neighbourhoods of Salvador, which had been Brazil's capital till the end of the seventeenth century and where the racial and cultural mingling of Africans and Portuguese had been the most intense and profound. Salvador and the surrounding territories (the *Recôncavo baiano*) had become a veritable natural laboratory for the cross-fertilization experiment, which produced some astounding results: an authentic Afro-Brazilian culture with a high degree of difference and originality.

Before Jorge Amado, the black and the mulatto had already found a place in Brazilian fiction, but they were normally presented, as we have highlighted, with stress laid on how hard it was to make their way in society where racial prejudice was common and the norms remained European. In Jorge Amado's work, Afro-Brazilian culture was for the first time to take centre stage in the narrative world and the Brazilian's mixed-race origins would be presented positively and passionately: "The face of the Brazilian people is mixed-race and so is their culture"¹⁵, says Pedro Archanjo, the mulatto hero of *Tenda dos milagres* ('The Miracle Store', 1969), a novel in which Jorge Amado defends racial mixing to the hilt. The theme first appears in his book *Jubiabá* (1935), a novel whose hero is black and whose title refers to the figure of a priest from an Afro-Brazilian fetichist cult who represents the values of Afro-Brazilian culture in the narrative. Until that moment no writer, not even those who had sympathy with the social situation of mixed-race people, had dared to take seriously, still less defend, a culture seen as primitive and backward. This was the important break that Amado's work represented.

After *Jubiabá* the Afro-Brazilian world was to be, with varying intensity, the inspiration for a large part of Jorge Amado's fiction, but it is in *Tenda dos milagres* that the writer's ideas on the topic are most fully developed:

[*Tenda dos milagres*] is a rewriting of *Jubiabá*, but with a different connotation. It is about the formation of Brazilian nationhood, the mixing of races, the fight against prejudice, particularly racial prejudice, and against pseudo-science, against sham Europe-oriented erudition. [...] Of all my books it is the one I like best, the one whose subject touches me most. And perhaps Pedro Archanjo is the most complete of all my characters.¹⁶

The novel tells the story of Pedro Archanjo, a poor mulatto born and raised in the working-class part of Salvador, who with great effort becomes a self-taught ethnologist of

repute with a deep knowledge of the cultural reality of Bahia, on which he publishes modest but extremely important books. Jorge Amado based his hero freely on a real person, Manuel Querino (1851–1923), a modest black teacher and amateur ethnologist, who in the early decades of the twentieth century had published books on the Brazilian Africans and their customs. In addition the writer projected many of his own values on to his hero, turning him into a kind of imaginary double, and this gives his narrative a very special interest for those wishing to know more about his ideological convictions.

Pedro Archanjo's intellectual opponent, Professor Nilo Argolo, the holder of the chair of forensic medicine in Bahia's Faculty of Medicine, was also inspired – again freely – by another historical figure, Nina Rodrigues (1862–1906), who had indeed occupied the post in the Bahia Faculty of Medicine that the writer gives to his character. But Nina Rodrigues, a celebrated Bahia forensic doctor and respected pioneer in ethnological research on blacks (*The Africans in Brazil* is the title of his main work, which was published posthumously), had subscribed to the scientific theory of the period, insisting on the moral and intellectual inferiority of blacks and mixed-race people, and their criminal tendencies. It is these ideological features of the real-life model that the writer uses to create his character – an arrogant authoritarian man who embodies racist ideology in the novel.

The novel unfolds on two different levels of time: one is delicious satire on the Brazilian political and cultural world of the period when the novel was written (1969); the other, situated in Salvador in the early decades of the twentieth century, is the main section of the work and revolves around the life of Archanjo. As a backdrop, but closely related to the main character's career, a fierce battle is being waged by a small group of far-sighted and courageous individuals to defend the values of Afro-Brazilian culture, which were at the time being threatened by a campaign of violent, systematic repression on the part of those in power locally, who saw these forms of culture as the expression pure and simple of the degenerate primitive nature of black and mixed-race people. Claiming to be preserving the supposed 'Latin' purity of Brazilian civilization, the police banned all cultural expression of African origin, from Carnival *ranchos*¹⁷ to *candomblé* religious ceremonies at the *terreiros*.¹⁸ In the novel, Nilo Argolo indirectly instigates these odious measures, which are tacitly supported by the press and society of the time.¹⁹

Pedro Archanjo, the reverse of Argolo, represents moral resistance to racism and as such is the spokesman for some of the ideas that are dearest to the author's heart. No passage expresses more admirably or concisely his opinion on the matter than the following words, which, in the story, come from one of Archanjo's books:

If Brazil has contributed something important to the enrichment of world culture, it is because of ethnic intermingling – this is the sign of our presence in the legacy of humanism, this is our major contribution to humanity.²⁰

In literature the long process of becoming aware of the mixed-race nature of Brazilian reality – human as well as cultural – comes to an end, so to speak, with Jorge Amado. It is no accident that this role was given to a writer from Bahia, since, as we have seen, Bahia was the site *par excellence* of this cross-fertilization, which came together to produce a new and original culture. Today in Brazil, considered as a whole, this experience has been considerably extended and the original elements of the mix – Portuguese, Amerindians and Africans – have been joined by others: Italians, Germans, Arabs, Japanese, and many

more besides, who are continually being absorbed and are the best guarantee of this “marvellous destiny of our people” of which Mário de Andrade spoke.

José Mauricio Gomes de Almeida
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Notes

1. Gilberto Freyre, *Casa Grande & Senzala*, vol. 1, p. 12 of the Brazilian edition.
2. Gregório de Matos (1976), *Poemas escolhidos*, ed. José Miguel Wisnik (São Paulo: Cultrix).
3. The Brazilian outback. (Translator's note.)
4. Before the discovery of Brazil by Pedro Alvares Cabral. (Translator's note.)
5. After a series of palliative and more or less ineffective measures, the complete abolition of slavery did not come about in Brazil until 1888. In the following year the Republic was proclaimed, ending the Empire that had begun with Independence in 1822.
6. Bernardo Guimarães (1976), *A escrava Isaura* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar), p. 28.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
8. Euclides da Cunha (1985), *Os sertões*, critical edition by Walnice Nogueira Galvão (São Paulo: Brasiliense), p. 177.
9. Like Gonçalves Dias he was of mixed-race origin (through his paternal grandmother) and had the very marked physical features of the *caboclo sertanejo*. Oddly enough, it was not unusual at this period, dominated as it was by a form of racially based anthropology, to find mixed-race intellectuals who were won over by 'scientific' theories and disapproved of racial mixing.
10. Euclides da Cunha, *Os sertões*, p. 580.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 559.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 544.
13. Letter to Ademar Vidal, in Mário de Andrade (1988), *Macunaíma: o herói sem nenhum caráter*, critical edition Telê Porto Ancona Lopes (Florianópolis: Editora da UFSC), Coll. Arquivos no. 6, p. 408.
14. Letter to Souza da Silveira, *ibid.*, p. 416.
15. Jorge Amado (1969), *Tenda dos milagres* (São Paulo: Martins), p. 165.
16. Jorge Amado (1990), *Conversations avec Alice Raillard* (Paris: Gallimard), p. 203.
17. A dramatic folk dance. (Translator's note.)
18. The religion of the Yoruba Africans in Bahia. A '*terreiro*' is a site where these religious ceremonies are performed. (Translator's note.)
19. As for the composition of some characters and also the plot of *Tenda dos milagres*, the author makes use of historical events: repressive police measures against Afro-Brazilian expression did indeed occur in Bahia at this period.
20. Jorge Amado (1969), *op. cit.*, p. 141.