

Maria José Silveira.***Pauliceia de mil dentes: All the Injustice We Need***

The largest and richest city in South America has been a temptation as well as a source of literary inspiration since the modernist explosion of 1922. Hundreds of poems, short stories, novels, and plays have attempted to re-create the human atmosphere of São Paulo, although few have managed to complete the task so successfully as the novelist Maria José Silveira. *Pauliceia de mil dentes* (*Pauliceia with a Thousand Teeth*), her sixth novel, once again shows her wisdom as an extraordinary narrator, which could be observed since her debut book, but now she also uses new creative components mobilized to face the endeavor. Being both an overflight and a dive, the novel is a work of quiet stylistic maturity, which gave the author ammunition to delve into the stomach of the metropolis and fly over its polluted areas without falling into clichés, or into the opportunistic fragmentation that masks narrative weaknesses, and without being only made of broad strokes that would turn her rhapsody into a mere blur, an out-of-focus photograph. I begin by calling attention to these constituent aspects of the work because São Paulo has often been victimized by these less noble features, almost always presented with the veneer of modernity. *Pauliceia de mil dentes* is on the same level as Mário de Andrade's verses, João Antônio's short stories, or Ignacio de Loyola Brandão's prose.

Something terrible (for the poor) and wonderful (for the rich) has happened to São Paulo over the last fifty years. When choosing São Paulo as a character, the author had no alternative but to accept the absurdity of her choice. She initially decided to dive into the belly of the metropolis, with its inhabitants who are about to lose their minds, who suffer nervous breakdowns due to false illusions, who are overtaken by the vertigo of the daily frustrations that lead them to the brink of suicide. Each character comes into play as if they had stepped into a proving ground where they receive their baptism of fire, burning quickly in great turmoil. None of them have the full view of their own existence and they all ignore that in that belly even the initial promises fail to mature because digestion devours any vitality or desire for innovation. Here and there this inexorable fate seems to be denied by a simpler soul, but it is soon crushed by time, ethical crisis, and the urban apocalypse.

Nevertheless, on a whim, the author makes the texture of these existences through the unveiling of an urban mind that comprehends this same scenario, that is, who is familiar with that womb—hence the feeling that the narrative is also a flyover. A Dionysian spirit takes ownership of those lives, and they shine in the midst of their failures. Failed sons, failed mothers, failed artists, failures, failures, failures. The terrible thing that has happened to São Paulo prevents full victory. It is a nightmare repeating all the time that we live in a process of self-disintegration which is the psychosis of our consumerist times. When these creatures—which make up the multifaceted face of the metropolis—soar, they traverse the narrative space in which its contradictory pieces of life are the only stable equilibrium in this unstable navigation. The Paulicéia, however, has a thousand teeth to devour paradoxes.

This novel, in its almost perfect way of narrating, not afraid to recount chaos, leads the reader to see the true spirit of the metropolis and what it hides in its labyrinths of lives so lovingly presented by the author, as if in midst of so many lives torn apart one could still see glimpses of humanity, of pathos and of poetry, which is what it is worth recording even when hope is no more than a dispersing cloud on the horizon.

Paulicéia de mil dentes is a novel with an admirable moral in these times of virtual nihilism, of fetishism for alleged changes that are in fact the result of immobility. At a time when many authors contemplate their own navel and wash their hands of the life that slips away in blood and burnt flesh, this novel dares to go into the streets, and does it in good spirits. It dares to look at a metropolis without neglecting anything, especially those creatures which played to win and eventually lost. Maria José Silveira, however, does not want to propose any creed for our interesting times, much less say everything there is to know about São Paulo, since the narrative itself, when closing, confesses that ours are times of frightening abysses. Yet on the asphalt of the metropolis we have all the injustices we need.

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