

The Poetry that Grows in the Brazilian Jungle

Contributed by Geovana Pagel
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Poetry mixed with Lebanese origins, memories of childhood and of Amazonian legends. Jorge Tufic had a meeting with poetical inspiration at an early age, in the city of Sena Madureira, in the state of Acre, in northern Brazil, with the arrival of the so-called "rubber soldiers."

At the time, he was five years old and the year was 1935. "I used to listen to the rhymes, the sound of 'violas sertanejas' (string instruments typical of the interior of Brazil), the 'repente' verses and the fantastic stories those people used to tell," recalls the poet and journalist, who wrote his first verses at 15 years of age. Currently, his complete works are comprised of 42 pieces, including poetry, tales, essays and sonnets.

As a child, he would get lost in the forest, make up words and let his imagination fly high. But all of a sudden, in a high school book, there appeared surprises that awakened the writer's passion for poetry. "It all happened in Sena Madureira. By the way, the bohemian serenades would elicit in boys my age a romantic feeling much stronger than our ability to express whatever," he says.

A descendent of a traditional family of Arab merchants, he is a son to the Lebanese Tufic Alaúzo, who moved to Brazil in the early 1920s and developed his commercial activities in the rubber tree plantations. Hence the strong influence of the Arabic language, culture and storytelling.

"The influence of the Arabic, which was spoken in our environs before the Portuguese, left a deep mark. There were also the musical evenings, to the sound of lutes, with fine wines, arak and a vast array of typical Lebanese foods," he recalls.

According to him, fraternal coexistence would bring together the inhabitants of the municipality, and some even spoke the language of the immigrants, strengthening even further the ties of friendship.

"Even nowadays, when I least expect it, the emotion evoked by the fragments of the Thousand and One Nights, recited in that tribe's conversations, acquire the format of sonnets and poems that I insert here and there, into the texts that I publish," he explains.

With the decline of rubber production, in the early 1940s, Tufic's family moved to Manaus (capital of the northern Brazilian state of Amazonas), where the author made his first studies. For a significant portion of his life, he worked as a journalist. After retiring he moved to Fortaleza, capital of the state of Ceará, in the Brazilian Northeast, and began dedicating himself exclusively to literature.

His literary debut took place in 1956, when he published *Varanda de Pássaros* ("Veranda of Birds"). Jorge Tufic's poetical discourse is characterized, on the one hand, by strong existential content. The other margin of his poetry is based on formal concerns and on the experimental character of his creative process.

"My literary production reflects my identification with the regional universe, my effort to create an oeuvre that relates to the myths, yearnings and hopes of the Amazonian man," he says.

"Everything that is surrounded by solitude and mystery leads me to feel a need to write something down on paper. Words, however, do not always translate poetry. Still, the mere gesture of pursuing a form filled with poetic content leaves me satisfied - because the poet's raw material is the word, and poetry is not always revealed by means of words," he philosophizes.

Discovering Brazil

The essential readings to Jorge Tufic's literary formation took place at the Public Library of Manaus. "I spent many afternoons there. There was no order, of course, to those afternoons, detached from movements that had not yet arrived at the state of Amazonas, such as the São Paulo Modern Art Week," he recalls.

Authors read at the time included Bilac, Cruz e Souza, Guilherme de Almeida and Machado de Assis. "After I took a trip across the country, from 1951 to 1953, the panorama changed, bringing to me all of the pioneering modernists, including those of the 1930s, such as Murilo Mendes, Jorge de Lima, among many others," he says.

Jorge Tufic, born in Sena Madureira, in the state of Acre on August 13, 1930, began his education in his native city, and later relocated to Manaus, where he concluded his studies. In 1976 he received the "Poet of the Year" diploma, an award granted by the Union of Professional Journalists of the Amazonas, in recognition of his vast and intense literary activity.

He is featured in several anthologies, among which stand out "A Nova Poesia Brasileira" (The New Brazilian Poetry), organized in Portugal by Alberto da Costa e Silva, and "A novíssima Poesia Brasileira" (The Brand New Brazilian Poetry), which Waldir Ayala launched at bookstore Livraria São José, in Rio de Janeiro, in 1965.

He is a founding partner at the International Pre-Andean Academy of Letters, headquartered in the city of Tabatinga, in the state of Amazonas. He gave several literary conferences and is an active member of cultural organizations such as Clube da Madrugada (Late Night Club), the Academy of Letters of Amazonas, Brazilian Writers' Union (Amazonas Section) and the State Council for Culture.

He was a team member of the artistic page of Clube da Madrugada, "O Jornal" and "Jornal da Cultura," the two latter being newspapers published by Fundação Cultura do Amazonas (Amazonas Culture Foundation).

Tufic is also the author of the lyrics to the Hymn of Amazonas, after winning a nationwide contest promoted by the government of the state in 1980.

He collaborated and still collaborates with various print media vehicles, such as A Crítica ("The Critique"), Amazonas Cultural ("Cultural Amazon"), the Literary Supplement of the State of Minas Gerais, Revista de Literatura Brasileira ("Brazilian Literature Magazine), and Diário do Nordeste ("Northeast Daily").

Service

Jorge Tufic

Email: [jorgetufic@hotmail.com](mailto:JORGETUFIC@HOTMAIL.COM)

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