

An update on brazilian publishing history

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CASTRO, Ruy; MELO, Maria Amélia (2012)

O Melhor da Senhor (vol.I) – (The Best of Senhor); *Uma Senhora Revista* (vol.II) – (A First-Rate Magazine)²

São Paulo: Imprensa Oficial do Estado (Official São Paulo State Press. 408 pgs. (vol.I); 102 pgs. (vol.II)

Abstract

In this review we present and analyze the two volumes which comprise an important editorial update of the magazine *Senhor*, a classic on the Brazilian publishing market, published between 1959 and 1964. More than 90 texts, which helped to create the importance and fame of the magazine, are presented in the first volume. The second volume contains eight articles by the magazine's former collaborators, recounting their experiences and reminiscing about outstanding moments of *Senhor*.

Keywords: publishing history, journalism, magazine, society

The history of magazine journalism in Brazil, inaugurated in 1812 with the publication of *As Variedades* (a magazine with a collection of literary essays), registers during these last two centuries the appearance and disappearance of a large number of titles, most of which as short-lived as they were obscure. Others, however, became landmarks and paradigmatic references for the Brazilian press. Examples of this are publications such as *O Cruzeiro*, launched in 1928 by the *Diários Associados*, belonging to Assis Chateaubriand, and *Realidade*, of Victor Civita's *Editora Abril*, in 1966. These two magazines, both coincidentally disappearing in the 1970's – the first due to the economic indigence of the publishing group which maintained it, the second due to a marketing option, even though it was selling 120 thousand copies per month – are emblematic for the light they threw on the journalism of the times and for what they offered to the society which read them in the way of a sensitive understanding of the world.

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² NDT – trocadilho sem tradução, sendo que Uma Senhora Revista tem o significado de “best, first-rate”, melhor de todas...

None of these, however, had the magic power to become, throughout the decades, the consumer dream of impassioned readers, collectors and even journalists (or journalism students), as was the case of *Senhor*. Not the *Senhor* that disputed the title towards the end of the eighties, merging with *IstoÉ* and then disappearing without being missed. But the classic *Senhor*, so to say, created by Rio Grande do Sul's Nahum Sirotsky and launched in March of 1959 and which lasted for an exact 59 issues, until January 1964, when it stopped circulating due to the threat of the military coup's somber trumpets. The magazine, which was also simply known as *Sr.*, became a sort of prize catch of publishing hoarding, since, after it ended its activities, to obtain a single copy became a mission of improbable gold-digging. Whoever had a copy held on to it. To read it, only if one was lucky enough to find a copy in library archives or could count on the good will of assiduous collectors. Nowadays, however, this search has become less arduous. The Official São Paulo State Press has just published two volumes - *O Melhor da Senhor* (The Best of Senhor) and *Uma Senhora Revista* (A First-Rate Magazine)³, the latter with a series of articles about the magazine – in which *Senhor* comes to life again almost in its entirety and can finally quench the longing of its old admirers and show to the new generations what it had that was so special. The organization is Ruy Castro's and the concept and coordination are Maria Amélia Melo's.

What exactly did the magazine have that made it stand out from others of its time and that kept it alive for almost five decades after its disappearance? Without question: style. Style in the diagramming of its 23,5cm x 31,5cm matted pages, in the covers produced by, among others, artist Carlos Scliar, cartoonist Jaguar, in the texts of authors like Paulo Francis, Armando Nogueira, Luiz Lobo, Clarice Lispector, Otto Lara Rezende, Carlos Heitor Cony, Graciliano Ramos and Rubem Braga. All these names which would become a mandatory reference in the Brazilian press and literature contributed to making the magazine much more than just another journalistic publication – which emerged with much difficulty and which almost didn't make it to its second issue – among those hung and displayed on newsstands. With one addendum: *Senhor* did not worry about the factual, about a possible agenda-setting (a term which

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only years later would be coined by McCombs and Shaw). It was worried with behavior, with the Brazils on which the press at large did not focus, with the nuances of the world of the Cold War days and social advances and jolts, with good texts and good reading.

Senhor was the last in the great tradition of Brazilian romantic magazines.

Years later, the monthly magazines which succeeded it exchanged its majestic superiority and Olympic disdain of facts for a sort of Republican urgency and an excessive attachment to the present. (CASTRO, vol.II, page 19)

It was a magazine that based its publishing quality on a story well told, whatever it might be, with the help of a graphic accuracy which differentiated it from all possible rivals. Who, truth be said, did not really exist. To put *Senhor* on the same level with *Cruzeiro* or *Manchete* – the two big ones during the period that *Sr.* was in circulation – for example, would be to make an exaggerated comparison of the stature and importance of the three. *Senhor* ran, so to say, on its own track, directed to an almost exclusive, select masculine audience. Not exactly one which bought the still flourishing and imported *Playboy* but nevertheless a more sophisticated and demanding target audience. An informed, responsible, liberal and prosperous adult, tuned to the latest news. A modern man, as one used to say, and woman, too, since the magazine made a point of flirting with the female public, even though jokingly, as can be seen from its first editorial.

Ladies (...) This magazine will offer you the most complete information about man - his hang-ups, his manias, his tactics, his thoughts, his points of view, his idiosyncrasies, his sense of humor, his tastes, his manner of dress, his shoes, and how he shops, speaks, lies, lives and dies. (...) Thus, producing a magazine exclusively for men, we are – more than ever – working to improve your lives. And ours as well. (page. 9, vol.I)

Castro and Melo's update of publishing history gains added significance as a result of

melhor de todas.....

the well cared-for edition that the Official Press presents to readers. The two volumes are complementary but they may be read separately. The first, which has the best of *Senhor*, brings, in its 408 pages, a selection of the best that was published in the magazine in its five years of existence, including a reproduction of the covers of each of the selected numbers. The sensation is one of having bound copies of the original publications, with only a few pages missing. An excusable omission. Altogether, 95 of the magazine's original texts are reproduced, including articles, reports, narratives, interviews and editorials. Also cartoons and occasional photos of women who were the rage at the time, like Odete Lara – although reasonably dressed.

The second volume contains eight articles which tell, in various manners, a little of the magazine's history as seen through the eyes of Maria Amélia Melo, Paulo Francis, Ivan Lessa, Luiz Lobo and Nahum Sirotsky. Written at different times – Sirotsky's, for example, was sent by e-mail from Tel-Aviv, where *Senhor*'s founder now lives, especially for this publication - , they form an important impressionist mosaic about a magazine which to this day has not found a parallel on the Brazilian publishing market; both for its originality and for its boldness, at a time when Brazilian society, although observing the new with curiosity, still maintained firmly its conservative roots. But it left echoes behind. Perhaps the main one of these can be found today on the pages of *piauí*, which resembles greatly the graphic and journalistic aesthetics of *Senhor*. But, as has been well said by Ruy Castro, *Sr.* was of a romantic period. And nowadays romantic sentiment is not involved.

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