BRAZILIAN BILINGUAL BOOK CLUB
| MOACYR SCLiar | MAX AND THE CATS |
13thth December 2018, 18.30-21.00

2018 – The year of reading Brazilian Literary Greats and unlocking the power of our minds!

SPECIAL YEAR 4 CELEBRATORY LITERARY QUIZ

MOACYR SCLIAR (1937-2011)

Max e os felinos (1981)

translated into English as

Max and the Cats (1990, 2003)

A boy and a jaguar in a boat in the middle of the ocean in an extraordinary journey!

Yes, you will correctly think of Yann Martel’s Life of Pi, 2002 Man Booker Prize winning book!
Find out about an extraordinary cross-fertilization of narratives!

Written by a son of immigrants,
who left the bleakness of Bessarabia and Europe for the south of Brazil in 1904, a
public health physician and prolific writer
who dedicated his life to reclaiming memories of his forebears.

You will be gripped by the narrative: a stuffed Bengal tiger watches over the moves of
young Max Schmidt at his father’s fur shop in Berlin in the tumultuous 1930s.

Germany crippled by WWI debt and suffering from the effects of the Wall Street’s stock market crash creating poverty and instability combined with teenage love set in motion a chain of events altering the course of the life story of the young university student with a promising future career.

Instead of pursuing his studies in Naturwissenschaften and animal psychology at Professor Kunz’s labs, Max ends up using every bit of psychology he can as he shares a lifeboat with a jaguar as he is shipwrecked…

A magical and original 1981 tale about flight for life and Brazil as the wonderful and welcoming land which has enabled so many immigrants to find freedom and hope!

DETAILS OF AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS:

ENGLISH

PORTUGUESE
*Max e os felinos* (1981)

SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND TRANSLATION

*Max e os felinos* is a short novel published by the author in 1981. It is not regarded as his best novel. The physician writer Moacyr Scliar wrote almost a hundred books over his lifetime while he worked as a public health physician. *The Centaur in the garden* published in 1980 is usually regarded as one of his best novels. The author once said that he wrote *Max and the Cats* while he was looking after his young son.

Over a decade later, Charlotte Innes in her review of the *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel, entitled *Robinson Crusoe, Move Over*, published on 1st August 2002, contains the following comment:

…Martel also briefly acknowledges his special debt to Brazilian Jewish writer Moacyr Scliar, whose novella *Max and the Cats* also has a hero who survives the sinking of a ship filled with zoo animals and spends days at sea in a boat with a large cat, in this case a jaguar. Scliar’s is the mini-version that Martel fleshes out with more lyrical language and the fruits of zoological research. ([https://www.thenation.com/article/robinson-crusoe-move-over/](https://www.thenation.com/article/robinson-crusoe-move-over/))

Yann Martel’s tale won the prestigious 2002 Man Booker Prize ($75,000) which is open to authors from Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth countries. The event was broadcast from the British Museum. The historian and author Lisa Jardine (1944-2015), headed the Booker Prize committee which selected *Life of Pi*. She defended the selection and described ‘Martel’s novel as the best Booker winner since Salman Rushdie's *Midnight’s Children*. In his introduction to the book, Yann Martel credited Moacyr ‘Scliar with giving his tale the “spark of life.’

I watched it, bought the book and read it unaware of the link with Moacyr Scliar. *Life of Pi* is a lovely book! And I was a reader of Lisa Jardine, too.

*Max and the cats* subsequently attracted a great deal of attention following the announcement of the Man Booker Prize. An article by Colin Blackstock entitled *Booker winner in plagiarism row. Author admits idea came from Brazilian novel* was published by *The Guardian* on 8th November 2002. The piece begins with following:

Yann Martel, the Canadian author and winner of this year’s Booker prize has become entangled in a row over the plagiarism of fictional ideas after freely admitting the inspiration for his prize-winning novel came from another writer’s work.

In the *Life of Pi*, Martel, 39, tells the story of a shipwrecked Indian teenager who ends up in a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger after the ship taking him and his family to Canada sinks.

It is this similarity to a story by one of Brazil's most respected authors, Moacyr Scliar, which has started the row over how much of the idea Martel “borrowed” from Scliar's *Max and the Cats*, in which a teenage Jewish boy is adrift in a boat with a panther after a shipwreck. ([https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/08/bookerprize2002.awardsandprizes](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/08/bookerprize2002.awardsandprizes))

November 2002 pointed out that the Y. Martel’s statements were not exactly straightforward:

….In an interview with The Guardian, the British newspaper, late last month, he said, "I remember thinking, man, that's a brilliant premise" when he came across a critique of Dr. Scliar's book, which he recalled as having been written by John Updike in The New York Times Book Review.

There are no articles in the digital archives of The Times, however, in which Mr. Updike comments on the book, and in a phone interview Mr. Updike said he had never heard of "Max and the Cats" or of Dr. Scliar. The only review in The Times was published in July 1990, after the book, now out of print, was issued in paperback in the United States. In it Herbert Mitgang describes "Max and the Cats" as "a brilliant novella" and praised Dr. Scliar for "expanding the horizons of South American literature."


The matter could have ended in the courts. Moacyr Scliar was puzzled by the references to his Max and the Cats. Also, it did not help that Y. Martel, author of two books, referred to Mr. (Sic!), actually, Dr. Moacyr Scliar as a ‘lesser writer’.

Moacyr Scliar contacted his friends and, particularly Luiz Schwarcz (1956- ) from the Companhia das Letras, to find out about the matter and sought their advice. In the end, Moacyr Scliar just accepted what happened and did not pursue any claims through the courts. The editions in Portuguese of Max e os felinos have since brought a foreword explaining the whole controversy and his decision regarding the confluence of ideas.

The current publisher of the novel produced a video in which the author tells about how he learned about Yann Martel’s Man Booker Prize. It is in Portuguese and the foreword in printed form features in it: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YT0j7N40Nds
SHORT BIOGRAPHY

MOACYR JAIME SCLiar
(23rd March 1937 – 27th February 2011)

I have many reasons, as a writer, to thank medicine: the human experience, the social vision, and last but not least, the objective language, this bridge between not only two, but several cultures.*

*The Lancet Vol 363, 22nd May 2004

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Moacyr Jaime Scliar was born in Porto Alegre, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul on 23rd March 1937. His parents, José and Sara Scliar were one of the Jewish families who immigrated to Brazil from Bessarabia (the Old Russian Empire) in 1904. Many Eastern and Western European families settled in Porto Alegre from the last quarter of the 19th century. He was the eldest son and had two siblings Wremyr and Marili. His mother, a primary school teacher, chose his name Moacyr inspired by a character in the novel Iracema (1865) by José de Alencar (1829-1877). Poignantly, the name means ‘the child of suffering or pain’.

He grew in the borough of Bom Fim in the capital Porto Alegre in a vibrant Jewish and immigrant community. First, he attended the Yiddish School and later the Catholic high school, Colégio Rosário. He graduated from medicine at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in 1962 and then specialized in Public Health. He worked for the local national health service.

He had a great flair for writing from an early age. He became a prolific author as well as a physician. His first book was Histórias de Médico em Formação (Stories of a Trainee Doctor, 1962). In 1968, he published his first fictional work, short stories, O Carnaval dos Animais. He wrote many books in various genres: novels, short stories, essays, chronicles, children’s and teenage literature and wrote for the newspapers. Translations of his works were published in the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, Italy, Switzerland, Norway, Poland, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Argentina, the Russian Federation, Uruguay and Venezuela. His works have been adapted for the cinema, theatre, TV and radio.

He wrote a column for the newspaper Zero Hora during fifteen years on topics of medicine, literature and current affairs. In the 1970s he also wrote for Folha de S. Paulo.
His fictional work explored the themes associated with his life story as a son of immigrants. He often reclaimed the histories of Jewish immigrants. His writing also focused on medical matters and public health issues in Brazil. He also wrote on the history of medicine and about the notable physician Oswaldo Cruz. He depicted the middle classes and urban scenarios in Brazil.

He was awarded various literary prizes: the Minas Gerais Prize (1968), the Joaquim Manuel de Macedo Prize (Government of the State of Rio de Janeiro, 1974), the Porto Alegre City Prize (1976), the Érico Veríssimo Novel Prize (1976); The Brasilia Prize (1977), The Guimarães Rosa Prize (1977); the S. Paulo Art Critics Prize (1980); the Jabuti Prize (1988, 1993, 2000 and 2009); the Casa de Las Américas (Cuba, 1989) and for the book A Orelha de Van Gogh, the PEN Club of Brazil Prize (1990), his novel A Majestade do Xingu, a story about a the doctor Noel Nuttles was awarded the José Lins do Rego Prize of the Brazilian Academy of Letters.

He became a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 2003, patron of chair 31. He was married to Judith Vivien Olivien with one son Roberto. He died in Porto Alegre on 27th February 2011.

**List of works:**


**References and sources:**

*An excerpt from ‘Dissecting Room – Physician Writers – Moacyr Scliar’ published in The Lancet


- Author’s website in Portuguese: [www.moacyrscliar.com](http://www.moacyrscliar.com) – an excellent website with abundant documentary materials – in Portuguese.
The author’s profile at the Brazilian Academy of Letters: http://www.academia.org.br/academicos/moacyr-scliar

Agent: http://www.mertin-litag.de/authors_htm/Scliar-M.htm

HAPPY READING!

Attendance is free, but booking is essential: nadia.kerecuk@itamaraty.gov.br

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