

Macunai?ma

By Ma?rio de Andrade

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Macunai?ma By Ma?rio de Andrade

Announcing a major literary event: here is the first translation into English of a landmark precursor of Latin American magical realism, which has informed the work of contemporary writers from Garcia Marquez to Salman Rushdie. Macunaima, first published in Portuguese in 1928, and one of the masterworks of Brazilian literature, is a comic folkloric rhapsody (call it a novel if you really want) about the adventures of a popular hero whose fate is intended to define the national character of Brazil.

"Inventive, blessedly unsentimental," as Kirkus Reviews has it, and incorporating and interpreting the rich exotic myths and legends of Brazil, Macunaima traces the hero's quest for a magic charm, a gift from the gods, that he lost by transgressing the mores of his culture. Born in the heart of the darkness of the jungle, Macunaima is a complex of contradictory traits (he is, of course, "a hero without a character"), and can at will magically change his age, his race, his geographic location, to suit his purposes and overcome obstacles. Dramatizing aspects of Brazil in transition (multiracial, Indian versus European, rural versus urban life), Macunaima undergoes sometimes hilarious, sometimes grotesque transformations until his final annihilation and apotheosis as the Great Bear constellation in the heavens.

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