

LITERATURA LITERATURE

BRAZIL JOURNALS (1970)

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During my year-and-a-half stay in Brazil as Fulbright professor of American literature at the University of São Paulo, in 1969-70, I was asked by the United States Information Service (U.S.I.S.) to give lectures on U.S. literature and society throughout certain sections of the country. This request came after I participated in a six-part "literature and society" lecture series. The series of a different speaker each week over a period of six weeks, included lectures by the novelist and critic Alvaro Lins and the sociologist-historian Gilberto Freyre. On two of my three lecture tours, those taken in April-May 1970, I kept a journal. To be sure, nothing extraordinary happened to me on these short lecture tours, while I was there, certainly nothing that would make my notations of historical significance. But these were parlous times in Brazil, and one could sense tenseness everywhere, especially at the universities that I visited. The army had been in power for 5 years, there were many stories about those who had been imprisoned and professors who had lost their employment

by national decree. The leftists were robbing banks in the major cities at the rate of three, four, and five a day. A major newspaper kept daily a box score of holdups until the authorities ordered them to desist, which they did by replacing the holdup box score with an empty space, until, once again, they were told that that wouldn't do and to fill the space with words, which the editors did with passages from *Os Lusíadas* by Camões. This practice prompted the printing of letters (putatively the work of readers) praising the newspaper for printing excerpts from the classic work. It was a time of political deaths, of the police assassination of the disguised urban guerrilla leader Marighella when ambushed in the center of metropolitan São Paulo in the spring of 1970. It was a time when the American ambassador was kidnapped and held captive for days that ran into weeks somewhere in that warren of streets and alleys that comprise Rio until the Brazilian government relented and freed some 15 or so student leftists being held in jail in the exchange for one ambassador. This event led shortly thereafter to the decision by the foreign embassies to move out of Rio to Brasília, the nation's official capital. Brasília, with its wide avenues and carefully laid out system of streets was suddenly discovered to be much safer than Rio for their embassy personnel and thus less likely to be the victims of politically motivated kidnappings.

Of course nothing of this nature occurred to me directly, either at home in São Paulo or on my U.S.I.S.-sponsored travels.

These journal entries, records of daily experiences and overall impressions, have not been previously published.

24.4.70. Arrived in Salvador about 1;30. Flight from São Paulo (20 min. stopover at

Galeão, Rio) was uneventful. Airport "9 de Julho" in Salvador is about 55 kilometers from the center of the city. Miles of continuous beach on the left side of the road as we drove in. Antonio Passos of the Bi-National Center met me. I'm ensconced in a modern (but hardly luxurious) hotel at 65 novos cruzeiros a day (plus 5% tax). Room is not air-conditioned; that costs another 15 cruzeiros. Apart from that long stretch of deserted beach, I haven't seen anything "Salvadorean." Went out to the university to meet with Luiz Angelico da Costa's class in literature. I had difficulty finding a topic for them since they've read only Eugene O'Neill. Since they at least had heard of Hemingway I talked about him. Not much sank in, I'm afraid. My lecture is at 8;30 tonight.

Well, the lecture was a qualified failure. Only about 25 people showed up. After 20 minutes 2 or 3 left. After 40 three or four more left. At the end were about 15 people sitting in the hall. I answered four questions and it was over. Reasons for failure? Friday night, I was warned as soon as I arrived, is death to all such things. Second, some of the young people seemed not to understand the lecture. Third, it is possible that others took umbrage at the heavily political-social content of the talk. Though it may be too early to say, I think the whole venture is misguided and doomed to failure.

25.4.70 Convinced this morning that the talk was over the heads of a wrong kind of audience. Went for a short walk, got caught in the rain, took refuge, as did three other people, in a church-- lovely ceiling paintings--ornate but not richly ornate. Interviewed two candidates for the Internal Scholarship program. Passos told me that the audience last night (22 people) was a great showing for a Friday. Returned to hotel. Sat in the lobby. I noticed that there were two or three naval officers hanging around; there were also a few sailors I

had noticed outside the hotel earlier this morning. Other officials began to appear, very high ranking. Later more of them, along with a few generals and two or three Air Force generals. In all, finally, there about 30-35 military officers and some "ministers" who were getting considerable deferential treatment from the officers. All the wives were here also. While they (the wives) left in several taxis, the military brass stayed to have almoço at the hall off the back end of the lobby. All the while dozens and dozens of suitcases were being brought down to the lobby. There were also a few secret service men sprinkled about. They were easy to spot, at least some of them were. When I returned later they had all left, baggage, cars and all.

26.4.70. Spent the afternoon with Ginnie Gonçalves, travelling around the city, beginning with the old portion of the city around the Igreja do Convento de São Francisco and the very old portion now famous for prostitution. Lovely old buildings bordering and enclosing narrow cobble-stone streets. These buildings, though for the most part still occupied, are sadly in need of repair. Moreover, there is some littering of garbage in the streets, which were teeming with activity. People sitting in doorways, children yelling across at one another, teen-agers playing with a football. Saw the "pillory," a square at the top of a short steep hill, which was the ancient market-place for transactions in slavery. Later, visited the Mercado Popular, where virtually anything can be bought. It is indoors with individual selling --booths in rows, perhaps a hundred separate booths. Toward the back there are several booths selling batidas, and there was considerable samba music being performed, mostly along the row of batida stalls. Bought nothing, though there was much that was

worth buying. Went on to Basílica do Nosso Senhor do Bonfim, when a mass was going on. The church was full to overflowing. Saw the two rooms devoted to ex-votos, a remarkable collection of photographs, documents, curls and braids, documents, etc. The ceiling was covered with replicas (plastic, it appeared) of arms, legs, organs. Went to dinner with Ginnie, and somehow managed to arrive at Luiz Angelico da Costa's talk about a half hour late. To my consternation it had started right on time so that I missed all but some ten minutes of it. He had about 30 people there, among them several students from the two universities. His talk was well received. Unfortunately, it was not on the social content of Brazilian literature but on the social content of American drama in the twenties. One can see how carefully U.S.I.S. and the Associação Cultural Brasil--Estados Unidos (ACBEU) read the information sheets sent from Rio. Hopefully, the program will be different from here on in. And I hope that it draws audiences which are more nearly suitable, i.e. better-read and more intellectually curious.

26.4.70. Walked around by myself for an hour until the sky darkened and it began to rain. Went to the Castro Alves theater, an impressive complex of theatre, exhibition hall, etc. The theatre was closed (I just missed a youth concert of the music of George Gershwin), so I walked around the building--impressive combination of massiveness and lightness. Spent the afternoon seeing the city, especially the Barravento section, with Ginnie Gonçalves. Ran into Frances Switt, who then drove us around some of the beachfront. Had some Bahian food bought from the Baianas who sell it in the streets. Left in the early evening to fly to Recife. Met by Alan Rogers and David Puentes Wagner.

27.4.70. The consulate (or USIS, rather) sent a car for me, along with Wagner, so that I could see some of the city. The car was at my disposal all day and evening--in fact, until I went to the hotel after the lectures, at 10:45 p.m.! We drove to both the Catholic and Federal Universities, found no one at either place. Then we drove out of town to Olinda, an old colonial town used by the Dutch as their capital when they temporarily replaced the Portuguese in Brazil. Some nice old churches, some ancient streets and houses, some interesting art work (wood carvings, beautiful ones but quite expensive), some paintings, and clay pottery, etc. Bought some small clay figures. Took a couple of pictures but the day was so dark at this hour that they probably won't come out. Returned to the Consulate at noon, and Sue Jamison arrived shortly thereafter, looking for me. We agreed to meet after lunch (I had lunch at Alan Rogers' house, the Joel Pontes were there, along with David Wagner and Mrs. Rogers.) After lunch Pontes offered to take me to see Gilberto Freyre. When he called Freyre, the latter begged off because he was leaving for Europe in two days. Pontes had me talk to Freyre over the phone--to round out Freyre's Brazilian pro forma invitation in Rio. After lunch Sue Jamison and I had the driver take us to the mercado (I bought nothing) and the "great" tourist attraction of mid-town Recife, an old church in a dull square. On the way to her place for dinner, we stopped for a drink along the beach in a thatched roof, semi-open bar on the water. As soon as we got our gin tonics it began to rain--a furious wind-swept rain which drenched the two of us in less than two minutes. We rushed off for her house, which is in a bairro called Afogados (the drowned). It lived up to its name. Four or five blocks off the paved road, three or four blocks to the right, and then

the second house in off an alley. The "roads" were a series of mud pot holes that the car could negotiate at no more than three or four miles an hour. Sue said she would hear about that big car for weeks. The houses got progressively shabbier and smaller as we went along, Sue's house, which she shares with another peace corps worker, is a cement floored shack of two small rooms and a leaking roof. No glass for windows, just wooden shutter-like coverings. The total dimensions of the house couldn't be more than eight feet by ten, that is, each room was about eight feet by five. The walls were made of wooden boards which roughly fit. Thoreau's hut on Walden Pond was palatial compared to this. There were two other peace corps volunteers (from Rio Grande do North) there waiting. Dinner was to be for five. Unfortunately, the chicken for dinner was left in the USIS car. Moreover, Sue had a meeting in the next house of her "women," who were working on handbags, catch-all nets, etc, for a co-operative. I attended the meeting, which lasted about an hour. Some twenty women (including girls ranging in age from about 12 to 16). The issue was what to do about the workers who had failed to appear at their appointed times in the shop in town which sells their wares. The point of their appearing at the shop is to get them into town, to see how things are sold, to whom, etc. The meeting was quite remarkable --a mixture of intelligent women, deadened women, young girls starting out (one saucy, selfish seventeen year old with a year-old-baby and already deserted by her husband), a racial mixture of people. After the meeting Sue made me a tomato sandwich and some slices of avocado, which I finished just as the driver returned to take me back to the hotel. I left wondering what would happen to this group after Sue leaves in December. Later I found that Sue was preoccupied with the same matter. Well she might be.

The talks took place at the Gabinete Português de Literatura (sort of Portugal's counterpart of the Alliance Française). There are two others in Brasil beyond the one in Recife-- in Bahia and in Rio. Including six or seven USIS people, there were a total of about twenty-five people in the audience. Since it had rained hard for most of the four preceding hours, the rain was offered as their excuse for the small turnout. Doubtlessly it had its effect, but I suspect that there is small interest for one-shot lectures on this topic. Rogers tried hard, but to little avail I'm afraid. Incidentally, Rogers' voice sounded so familiar that I spent half the day trying to recall just whose voice it reminded me of. It was Charley Watts'. The lectures themselves went off fairly well and there were 3 or 4 questions--all pretty good. Mainly, they were on the current situation of black people in Brazil. Why does no one in Brazil speak for them was one question. Incidentally, I cut the Styron section out of my paper because my full speech in addition to Pontes' would make for too long an evening. After the talk, Sue, her roommate and I returned to the hotel to see the Kennedy tapestry exhibition and for a drink.

28.4.70. Left Recife by U.S.I.S. shortly after nine a.m. along with Joel Pontes, for the 5 1/2 hour ride to Natal. It had rained all night and several of the streets, alleys, and yards in Recife were flooded. For example, Pontes' entire yard, sidewalk and street were under heavy water. The weather gradually cleared as we went along--through João Pessoa (where Pelé was kept from making his thousandth goal by being switched to goalie) and through several towns. The country was lovely and the people were the rural poor. Many people walking along the highway carrying wood and what-have-you. Donkeys, horses, etc. The last half of

the trip runs through Rio Grande do Norte, the first half through Pernambuco and Paraíba. On the way we were stopped at a federal checkpoint. The car was carrying bundles for the Natal Bi-National Center. When the soldier asked about them, the driver answered simply that they were U.S.I.S. things for Natal. The soldier was perfectly satisfied with the answer. When we arrived in Natal the day was beautiful. They got us a single room at the Reis Magos hotel. New, plush, every room facing the beach. We arrived here at three, and a half hour later went to the beach and went in the water --warmest, most pleasant ocean water I've ever been in. Afterwards I sat at the pool (huge pool) with a gin tonic in hand and with my feet in the water. Then I took a shower, after which I wrote the last few pages in this report. Now I'm going out to the lecture. Pontes saw a local paper which announced the lectures in one line, which is damned lucky, since they announced them for *tomorrow* night.

The talks went very well indeed. There were forty-five people there, including some distinguished guests. Pontes gave his talk first once again, much more hammed up than the first time. I later found out that he is not only interested in the theater but that he spent ten years in the theater. He didn't learn how to act; he learned how to act up. After many smiles and silent giggles on the part of some of the young girl students in the audience, my talk went very well indeed. Most of the after-talk questions were addressed to Pontes although two of them were directed to me. In all, a successful night, I think. After the talk, Pontes and I had a few beers with Protasio de Melo and his brother Verissimo de Melo, a famous folklorist. Verissimo knows Fernando Castro Pires de Lima; so that certifies him. Tomorrow we are going out to the Institute of Anthropological and Folklore Studies. At

two we must be at the airport for our flight to Fortaleza. Heard a story about Bill Housman (who got our TV out of Customs at Campinas) when he ran the Sociedade Brasil-Estados Unidos here. Wont to make surprise, unexpected visits to the center and elsewhere--at any hour of the day or night--he arrived one morning at 2:00 p.m. to find the guard fast asleep wrapped up in the American flag. Houseman walked up to him, tore away the flag, said to the guard, "Use the Brazilian, not mine!" and promptly locked up the American flag. Incidentally, the U.S.I.S. man here, David Rose, is a young Mormon, who looks a little like my Brown colleague Van Nostrand; same smile, same coloring.

29.4.70. Up at seven (though awake at 5:30) so that I could interview four candidates for the Internal Seminar. Took a picture. Sociedade Cultural Brasil--Estados Unidos' car picked me up an hour late--at 9. From 10-12 I visited the Institute for Anthropological Study of the Universidade Rio Grande do Norte. Really a combination of a folk-ethnological museum and an archeological (etc.) exhibit hall. Built a couple of years ago and still incomplete, they are building three additional two-story buildings to house research labs and to provide apartments for visiting scholars. Had lunch with Douglas Rose, the U.S.I.S. man, after which we went to the airport to get our plane to Fortaleza--just 24 hours after we arrived in Natal.

The lecture in Fortaleza was held in the Conselho Universitário. Twenty-five in attendance in a legislative, UN Assembly-type room. Stiff and formal session, with several literary critical types there for an occasion. Questioning was brief but somewhat interesting. Later Pontes and I went out for a drink (since everything around was closed, we were given

directions to a place nearby). When we got there we found that it was not really a bar. Twenty-five or thirty girls hanging around and a few guys. Most of the girls appeared to be in their late teens (though it was too dark to know for sure). We left without having a drink (or anything else). Shortly after we got back to the hotel, Pontes decided to go back for a whiskey. When he returned, he complained that they charged him two and a half cruzeiros for a drink of rum.

30.4.70. Got up early to go to the Mercado, a nicer one by far than the one in Recife. Bought Steve a cangaceiro hat (five cruzeiros) and a hammock for twenty. Went to the Bi-National center to interview two candidates for the Internal Scholarship seminar. Lunch with Pontes, and out to the airport for a 2:00 flight to Belem. Mailed postcards bought at the airport.

No one to meet us at the Belem airport. After some difficulty I reached the U.S.I.S. office by phone. Jake was away, but one of his Brazilian assistants said that he would come right out. Fifteen minutes later he showed up in a taxi, took us to the Jondave hotel where he got us a room (though there had been no prior reservation made). Shortly thereafter Jake called from the hotel bar, where we met him for a drink before walking over to lecture at the center. Again about 25 in attendance in a small room, noisy fans, steamy heat. Lectures went over well enough with some "debate" afterwards. Interviewed another candidate for the Internal Scholarship Program, an older man, Alvarez, who has been asked to teach American literature. Afterwards, we went out to Jake's place for dinner, located some twenty minutes out of town. Good talk, lots of drinks, good dinner, Linda a little skittery.

(Forgot to mention the luggage-mistake in Terezinha.)

Belo Horizonte

27.5.70. Left about an hour and a half late from Congonhas on Monday the 25th. At airport in Belo there was no one awaiting me, of course, since they had no idea when I would arrive. I called U.S.I.S. and George Seay, Assistant C.A.O, came out to pick me up. He invited me to stay at his apartment instead of a hotel and I did so. At the U.S.I.S. office I subsequently talked with Chet and Alita Dawson, I learned that I would have nothing to do until that evening. It turned out that they wanted two lectures at ICBEU, on Monday and Tuesday evenings. In addition, Alita wanted me to meet informally with classes at Federal Univ. on Tues, morning and at Catholic University on Wednesday morning. At noon Monday I had lunch with George Seay, who it turns out, is a close friend of Bill Twaddle and Kristi (Miller) Twaddle, former students of mine. George, who is from Buffalo, met them when they were in the Peace Corps in Brazil. In the afternoon I went to the movies. *Perdidos na Noite (Midnight Cowboy)*. In the evening I lectured. There were 25 people there. My lecture, poorly advertised, was also billed as being in English. Still it was well received, with a few good questions afterwards. Then some beer with Chet Dawson, Preston Amis (here to run ICBEU, and in Belo only a week--ten days), Santiago (Brazilian director of courses at ICBEU), George Seay and Tony (?) (whose father designed the nursing home, etc. at Hospital das Clínicas in S. Paulo). Late supper at George's house.

Tuesday morning met with Federal University students for two hours plus. Sessions

were quite good, some good questions. Later interviewed an Internal Seminar candidate. Lunch with Chet Dawson. Another "small world" item. Dawson recently wrote to Daniel Hoffman to tell him much he liked a recent poem of his. Dawson does not know Hoffman. In the afternoon saw a ponderous movie (French) in opposition to capital punishment. Man is guillotined for strangling three prostitutes. Mildly reminiscent of Caryl Chessman case. Took nap later (at apartment, not movie). Lectured at eight. This time between 45-50 there. Better response to talk. Later beer with Dawson and another fellow, a Brazilian who teaches English at the Catholic University. Late supper at George's. Wednesday morning, again at 8, met one of Alita Dawson's classes at Catholic University. Stayed about an hour and a quarter. Talked briefly with her afterwards. She's a great fan of Lewis Leary's and Van's. Told me that Van had ideas about starting a comparative literature (U.S.--Brazil) cadeira in Brazil, which he would afterwards leave in charge of assistants. Said he talked about it some 4-5 yrs. ago. Another piece for the Van Nostrand puzzle, I took a cab to the airport, arriving shortly after 10. Bought, wrote and mailed cards. And wrote this entry. My plane for Brasilia leaves at 11:30.

Brasilia

Arrived in Brasilia an hour and a half later; no one there to meet me. Tried three times to call the Embassy but had no luck. No answer to the rings. I then took a cab to the Embassy, talked to the driver about the Eucharist meeting going on. He complained that although the clergy had arrived, very few pilgrims had. When I told him that I had read in the newspaper that 100,000 visitors were expected, he replied that 25 to 30 thousand would be more like it. Now if the Pope were to come, he continued, there would be at least

500,000 pilgrims. When I arrived at the Embassy I learned that Toby Surprenant was at the airport looking for me. About 20 minutes later Toby arrived in the company of Ary Galvão. By then it was two and our lectures were scheduled for four at the Casa Thomas Jefferson.

They gave me a room at the Embassy (10 cruzeiros a day). The Embassy is a one-story quadrangle affair with an inner court yard complete with murky, man-made water places, and a large cage full of birds. It also has tennis courts and a swimming pool. At the Casa Thomas Jefferson the lectures went well. There were 50-55 people there. Most stayed and were attentive. Afterwards there were 2 or 3 good questions. Then dinner with Ary and Surprenant. Tomorrow, from 8-10 we are to be driven around Brasilia and about ten or so we go to the airport where we fly to Goiania and Maria Helena da Sousa. I'll be in Goiania about 30 hours, but I will have been in Brasilia about 21 hours; in Belo Horizonte, 50 hours. I wasn't able to buy anything in Belo, and I am not hopeful that I will find time for shopping in Brasilia. Maybe Goiania will have something.

28,5.70. Embassy car drove me around Brasilia for about 90 minutes. Most impressive assortment of tall modern buildings. Architecture is splendid but did briefly pass by a favela, the oldest in Brasilia, Vila Planalto, on the way back from the President's palace. Took 25 pictures, though I do think that I spoiled a few. The Embassy driver, who came to Brasilia in 1960 for a visit (from João Pessoa, Paraíba) and decided to stay, was a very helpful guide. Along the way we discussed Juscelino (Kubitschek). The driver said that Juscelino was the greatest Brazilian of all, that he was the only Brazilian president who got along with the people, was educated, had the "gabarito" to represent Brasil anywhere in the world. Later he

talked about the Indians who used to visit Brasilia when Juscelino was president. He used to go among them, embracing them, talking to them. But since J. they have stopped coming to Brasilia. If they came now, the driver said, they would be arrested. Saw the new cathedral (still unfinished) with most of it subterranean. The theater (also unfinished) is also primarily an underground structure. Beautiful as it is, however, it is disconcerting to know that the individual buildings provided for the various federal ministries, those rectangular, multi-stories buildings which line both sides of the federal esplanade like rows of teeth on a two-edged comb, are almost entirely unused so far. The ministries are still in Rio. Still, Brasilia is a luxury that the country seems to need. Built in the middle of nowhere, it is a clear symbol for the national potential.

Took the airplane for Goiania (NCr. 72,00 for a fifteen minute flight). Met by Maria Helena da Sousa, Helena Faluka and John O'Reilly (an Irishman who teaches at the Federal University of Goias). After lunch at the hotel, Maria Helena and O'Reilly took us around the city (600,000 inhabitants), and to a spectacular country club called the Joa. One of its features is an entirely separate, fully supervised children's club, pools, games, toy village, theatre, nursery, etc. In the evening after dinner at Ary's uncle's house, we were taken to a large fair--cattle exhibition.

Then back to the hotel. The lectures begin tomorrow morning at 8 at the University,

29.5.70. Lectured this morning. I went first, then Ary Galvão. Afterwards we had a spirited question-and-answer session. Rather Ary had made a few references with nods in my direction (about my being American, Paulistano, Portuguese) during his talk, and we

continued the banter. Those who remained, a substantial portion of the 100 or so who attended, seemed to enjoy the proceedings considerably. By then it was lunch time and we returned to the hotel. In the afternoon, three of the teachers at the university took me on a quick shopping tour. At four fifteen John O'Reilly took me to the airport. An hour into the flight we landed to refuel at Uberlandia. Nothing there, except a building under construction with the only thing set up being the toilet.

In retrospect, Goiania was far more pleasant than I expected it to be. The people were most solicitous, and the university most appreciative. The university paid all bills at the hotel (Hotel Augustus). On the entire trip, with lodging for four days, I paid only NC \$10,00 for one night, and that was at the American Embassy in Brasilia. The flight from Goiania to Uberlandia took an hour. The flight from Uberlandia to São Paulo is supposed to take an hour and 35 minutes. Add a 15 minute stop in Uberlandia, and the total adds up to just under 3 hours.