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Brazilian short stories II

Organizadora

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Presentation

In this collection, readers will enjoy a second batch of Brazilian short stories translated into English (the first collection came out in 2008 in *Cadernos de Tradução*), a task carried out during a semester of Translation into English IV by students at Letras, UFRGS, Brazil. Once again, we joined the old and the new in stories stretching out from the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of this one. The variety of styles and subject matter gave all those involved a chance to try out different strategies of translation and experience reading works in their native language (Portuguese) with new eyes and a fresh perspective.

Starting with a chronological view of the chosen works, a bit of information should be given regarding each of the stories and their authors. *The Sorcerers* (*Os Feiticeiros*) by João do Rio, was published in the very early 20th century, during the Belle Epoque of Rio de Janeiro. Do Rio was a journalist, interested in reporting the cultural and religious aspects of the grand city of Rio de Janeiro, and *The Sorcerers* is part of a collection of articles called *Religions of Rio de Janeiro* (*As Religiões do Rio de Janeiro*). Though the factual information of this amalgam of story and chronicle has been proven to have flaws, do Rio's exposure of some of the rites and the people involved more directly with candomblé and other religious ceremonies proves to be colorful and challenging at times. With a style that mixes, on the one hand, information about African languages, the different godly hierarchies and the customs of priests and followers and, on the other, his own comments revealing his doubts as to the veracity of the "magic" he witnesses, the translator must first of all face the terms he or she finds related to the rites of candomblé and try to understand it all in Portuguese before trying to pass it into English. The world do Rio is describing has disappeared to a certain extent, but the mixture of awe and skepticism, in the writer's attempt

to keep a certain journalistic distance from the object of his work, is fully there and the task of the translator is to understand this perspective.

Lima Barreto, another writer from the Rio de Janeiro of the early 20th century, had already featured in our previous collection of *Brazilian Short Stories* with *The Man who Knew Javanese*. This time the story chosen was *The New California*, a fable of greed and hypocrisy that falls right into Barreto's style of criticizing the Old Republic (1889-1930) in Brazil. His text is easygoing and was very influential for the generation that followed, that of the writers belonging to the Modern Art Week of 1922 (the year of Barreto's death), with its colloquialism and references to popular culture. Barreto strongly criticized the pompous style of so many Brazilian authorities (a habit that persists in our times), a fact that is clear in *The New California* in sarcastic comments made about the meticulousness with language of one of the characters. His work sees the downtrodden and the underdog with sympathetic eyes, leaving no respite for those whose behavior reveals all their narrow-mindedness and falsity. Being a mulatto himself, Barreto's sympathies plainly tend towards those of darker skin, the former slaves, the black population and its position in Brazilian society.

Running on the outskirts of the circles in which these writers worked, both in the eye of the storm, so to speak, of the carioca literary and journalistic scene (though Barreto was not as acclaimed at the time as he would later be), we find the gaucho writer João Simões Lopes Neto. The short story *The Gold Pouch* (*Trezentas Onças*) was published as a part of *Contos Gauchescos* in 1912. The world of the frontier cowboy of the southern lands of Brazil, known as the gaucho, is the subject matter of this little known writer not only internationally but also in other states of Brazil. Blau Nunes is the constant narrator of the stories in the collection, telling his young listener the varied adventures he experienced in a bygone age, a period which, by the time Lopes Neto writes his tales, had already passed, placing the gaucho in a mythical reality much like that of the cowboy found in Owen Wister's *The Virginian, a Horseman of the Plains* (1902). Wister and Lopes Neto were contemporary to each other, both writing about this mythical being, each in his own context, but close enough to each other in terms of what they knew about frontier life and its challenges. At another extreme of the planet was Henry Lawson who, from his native Australia, wrote of the outback and the rustic life of its inhabitants. The connections made between these different realities were crucial in thinking about the translation of Lopes Neto into English. Colloquialism, popular frontier life, dangers faced, the code of honor that must remain in order for there to be a sense of structure in life; all of this was necessarily taken into account as students dealt with country life and customs that no longer exist and attempted to translate to a similar context in English.

The Christmas Turkey, by Mário de Andrade, was part of a collection under the title *Contos Novos*, published posthumously (the author died in 1945). Andrade had, throughout his career, been working on perfecting his style in both the art of the short story and the novel, and his spontaneous account of a

Christmas dinner is both comical and endearing. Mário de Andrade was one of the many important intellectual and/or artistic figures to participate in the famous Week of Modern Art in 1922 in São Paulo, an event that brought together presentations and debates about the new courses of Brazilian art in the modern world. Andrade was considered a modernist poet, active in his role as forerunner among writers. It is his short stories that readers today can most identify with and enjoy; their subject matter is the slightly decadent society of São Paulo in the early 20th century whose members, gradually impoverished, were learning to deal with the city's faster pace and new demands; while others, never having had much to begin with, must learn, through pushing and shoving, to find their piece of Zion in a ever-changing metropolis.

Caio Fernando Abreu was a writer and journalist, having worked in many of the main newspapers and magazines in Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil. Abreu's curiosity took him to frequent trips around Brazil and Europe. He was one of the first homosexual writers to publicly reveal his sexual orientation at a time in Brazil in which this was neither common nor welcome. Nevertheless, in 1995, a year before his death from AIDS, Abreu was chosen to be the patron of the 41st Book Fair of the City of Porto Alegre. *A Confusing Story* (*Uma História Confusa*), a work written in the 1970s, perhaps, 1980s, brings up many of the issues the writer dealt with in his other works, such as the complications of love (especially between two men), the difficulties of communication and the feelings of inadequacy that come about when one is faced with the unexpected. Abreu's themes are those of the modern world, fully and clearly understood by the reader for, after all, this is his/her world, and the inadequacies and insecurities are felt by all.

Daniel Galera's *Clichê Romântico* is short and bittersweet: the narrator's first person perspective places him as at the same time a self-assured man in tune with his desires and an insecure lover who will have the rug pulled out from under him by the girlfriend sitting with him at a bar. The ups and downs of the narrator/character are made up of comments that mention, among other things, his girlfriend's body, her habits and "bar philosophy", as Brazilians like to refer to the often liquor-fueled serious observations individuals come out with while socializing in a bar. Daniel Galera's story is the newest of the six chosen, having been published in 2001. The writer has lived most of his life in Porto Alegre and works as a translator as well. He was chosen as one of the twenty best young writers by the British publication *Granta*, therefore he is a name to look out for in the literary scenario of Brazil. In terms of the students' difficulties with the translations carried out here, evidently, Galera's text was by far the one that offered the best possibilities with the colloquial tone of the language and the easily understood context in which the story unfolds.

Translating from Portuguese to English is never easy for most of our students, especially when the works are literary and from other periods. It has been a

challenge to motivate the students' confidence and get them involved in the work. But it has certainly been an even greater challenge for them to plunge into the work without feeling inadequate or insecure. Our class work was slow and meticulous at times, but certainly never dull. The translation into English required a great deal of knowledge of the language on the part of the translators, which meant everything from the reading of other literary texts that could offer mood, style and color; to researching vocabulary and terms that were not known even in the source language. All in all, it was a learning process that allowed students to not only get closer to English but to Portuguese as well, since most had never read any of the stories with the care needed for the transformation that followed – placing them all into English.

Therefore, though most students will rarely work as literary translators, it is essential that they learn to deal with all the possibilities of translation that can be offered. This will teach them to be attentive to style, tone, collocation, sentence structure, and cultural aspects that are not generally observed in the translation of academic or scientific texts (though it is a common mistake to consider cultural aspects secondary in this type of text – but that is the subject of another article!).

With this in mind, I would like to thank the students who participated in the work of translating these stories for all their effort and interest:

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I am also grateful to Professor Ian Alexander who especially helped out by reading our version of *The Gold Pouch*. Our current projects are associated in that Simões Lopes Neto's stories are being translated into English in the Research Project I have been carrying out since 2008. From Machado de Assis to Mário de Andrade to Simões Lopes Neto, the works of these Brazilian writers has been the focus of research and translation and have offered a number of curious and, at times, difficult tasks. Professor Alexander's research of Henry Lawson's work and the paradox of proximity and distance between two cultures such as our gaucho one and the Australian outback have brought up enlightening debates.

I would also like to thank Daniel Galera for allowing us to work on his story and publish it here, as well as Caio Fernando Abreu's family for also offering the writer's story for translation. The authorization to use Mário de Andrade's work was graciously granted by Ediouro Publicações. All the others are in public domain.

I must also express my gratitude to the structure found at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul which has granted me, as a tenured professor, time and the possibility of choosing my area of research and study, now involved with literature and translation. Though, as professors here, we are often overwhelmed with several duties that are, by far, the ones we were least trained to carry out (administrative tasks among them), the silver lining is that we can also grow professionally in those areas we are most attuned to. We are given the chance to help students develop their own skills as well, and to see them learn in class and stand out in academic events, whether nationally or internationally is worth all the effort we make.

My thanks also goes out to our Dean, Professor Jane Tutikian for helping in several occasions in which either a single signature was needed or advice was given on how to proceed with the elaboration of this collection. It is always made clear by Prof. Tutikian that she is first and foremost a colleague who has not forgotten what it means to pursue a project and carry it out.

I sincerely hope all readers will enjoy their reading of these translations and expect them to comment on whatever calls their attention, whether errors or alternatives to a translation. It is, after all, true that translation is an ongoing process that needs constant re-readings.

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