

“All Anatase” from *Placenta:*
estudos (2019) by
Lucas Lazzaretti

Translated by Emyr Wallace Humphreys

Translator's Preface

Lucas Lazzaretti's "Anatase Tudo" ("All Anatase"), from his Prêmio Jabuti–nominated short story collection *Placenta: estudos* (7Letras, 2019), is a cryptic, uncompromising stream of consciousness that shines a light on a dark part of the Brazilian psyche. Writing in a deft, rhythmic style, Lazzaretti intersperses two separate—though intuitively connected—stories that address themes such as homosexuality, bigotry, power dynamics, and vigilantism. In one, a closeted insurance broker learns of a plot to kidnap and “cure” his boss’s stepson of his homosexuality and decides to take matters into his own hands; in the other, a middle-aged gay man, likewise closeted, meditates—and ultimately seethes—on his now-defunct relationship with a much younger man.

The main challenge posed by “All Anatase” is how a stream of consciousness in translation cannot truly exist. This challenge is where, in my opinion, literary translation takes off its mask and its limitations are made apparent. Unless the reader is content with a literal “stream of consciousness translation” resembling a first draft, the translator needs to make it read *as if it were* a stream of consciousness, by way of producing something which is in fact quite the opposite. The question, then, is one inherent to the craft, and which has been since St. Jerome’s word-for-word/sense-for-sense dichotomy: the liberties a translator can take to replicate the original text’s likeliness in the target language.

Lazzaretti knows how to pack meaning into concise word combinations that break down when translated closely into English. For example, I intuitively know what “fazer de machão” means in Brazilian Portuguese but struggle to translate it both closely and succinctly in English. (To resolve this particular example, I departed slightly from the original: “act all macho.”) There are various examples throughout which require a similarly fluid approach in order to retain the story’s momentum.

Elsewhere, there are sleights of hand that act as devices to pull the reader through its heavy subject matter and visceral, sometimes surreal imagery, such as alliteration, wordplay, and rhymes tucked away within phrases. I didn’t want to gloss over them and risk leaving

the reader with a sanitized impression of the original, so I was keen to replicate these as much as possible in English. I resolved a particularly daunting alliteration (“*pelas falas das focas fodidas feitas de futilidade frívola*”) by keeping relatively close to the original (thank goodness for the existence of fur seals). Conversely, phrases such as “*Chumbo nos viadinhos (mas chumbo de bala, de pau – mas pau de madeira – de porrada – mas não de porra – de morte mesmo)*” required a more significant departure in order consolidate these rapid-fire double entendres into similarly readable English.

Ultimately, I wanted the reader’s eye to dance over the paragraphs and not get snagged on the intricate, Latinate language or the vivid, often bizarre imagery. This momentum is key to comprehending the various complicated themes throughout the story without being overwhelmed by them. Likewise, this momentum helps tell a dense story that is sometimes jagged and angular and sometimes glitteringly beautiful, much like anatase itself.

All Anatase

by Lucas Lazzaretti

A rubber dildo, a pack of Jontex, and a little tub of KY. If someone were to find these in my work suitcase, here in this office full of vultures—though just a bunch of vultures—I'd be more fucked than I'm used to. And it makes no sense to discuss it in terms of love, emotion, the pursuit of happiness via existential realization, Aristophanes' Myth of the Androgyne explained, the ecstasy of a kiss from a loved one, the fulfillment which is, though an angst, fulfillment nonetheless. Those fuckers draw from their bigotry and fire right in my face. Well, not really, but if they could they would. It would be crosshairs and a shot to the face of the fucking fairy, and the respect and pomp and circumstance they're used to can quite literally get fucked. If someone makes more sales, then he's a fucking poof. If someone gets a bonus for closing a deal worth millions, or gets a little thank you from the company, or any fucking kind of distinction, the diagnosis is always the same: he's a fucking poof. My wife laughs at this stuff, which is like taking a hammer to my big toe after cutting out one of my kidneys with a knife. The knife and the laughing woman: all the isolation and fear of being carried away in a wooden coffin to a little brick-and-mortar building without ever having felt complete, the disgrace of never having known love, only a shadow of it.

I miss you so, Little One, some evenings I pretend I have a headache and go to bed early and cry from missing you so much, my puffy face buried in the twisted pillow, dreaming of you and having wet dreams and needing to disguise it as dreaming of random women, and having sex—never making love—with my wife, who is a saint, but you are you, Little One, and I'm middle-aged with a still-intact body, I remember you were this young thing who barely had a beard, Little One, how I miss you. . .

The demonization of what I take part in some nights, under the guise of playing and watching football, serves as the explanation for

all the world's ills. Viva progress, evolution, the advances in cellular technology, television and breadmakers, and fuck everything even remotely connected with the poofs. The individuals involved have one or two issues to do with validation; they cannot cope with the member they have fixed between their legs, but this is just a detail. The relationship they establish with their own sex is just a detail, so long as they set themselves apart from the poofs. A good seeing-to is what those poofs need (I mean with a bullet, or a club to finish them off—I mean to end them—death itself). If they ever open my suitcase, I'd better leave town. Leave the Yorkie with my wife and find brokerage work in some other corner of the world. Perhaps Argentina, perhaps Paraguay.

And there were days when I saw your wandering figure everywhere, thinking you hadn't escaped me, that you weren't studying behavioral psychology someplace far away, that you were at your flat, neatly decorated a mix of childish rock and wanky jazz, and so cheesy because you're so young, Little One, you still can't tell the difference between the life you have and the one they gave you. . .

I am a 6'1" tall man with biceps larger than a baby's head and obscenely broad shoulders who spends hour upon hour in the gym, not to impress anyone else, but to feel the pain before falling asleep, and the hands tracing my toned arms belonging to the boys who know well how this is a trim, proper body, but one for my own delight, the way I see fit; an alibi to fall in line and act all macho. No need to fool anyone. Iron and fine wine, all in the same person; this is not a problem.

Coming home every day and dreaming how the house isn't there anymore, that they took it away along with you, and I actually look back on the street and see the world rupturing apocalyptically, collapsing, while here I am, bricking it about whether I'm going to heaven or hell for having loved you, Little One, who was only 19 years old when I found you.

The problem comes when they discover the son's mental illness, the poor little boy they call the boss's stepson. The whole thing is an unmitigated hypocrisy; they hurl abuse at him from all directions, never once declaring "alright, this kid, the son of the 23-year-old, that was her age when she married the boss, he's a bonus, a stepson, he came included with his mother's tight ass, it just happens he sort of came out on that side, came out a little girly, that's it, the kid's a fag." One of them suggested—loudly—sending the boy to the army, 'cause that's where they make men, or to the pastor, who cures and does miracles, he'd sort out whatever demon or curse you had, he would certainly sort Miguelzinho out, who, poor thing, couldn't handle working in his daddy's office because of all the cruelty, an ugly boy but not malicious, in fact very loving, who's tortured by a gaggle of apes who can barely work out their own ages by subtracting their years of birth from the present year.

I destroy everything around me, I hurl myself into a little basket with your name on it and associate all the bullshit of the world with you, so you know what it feels like to be left alone, then I go to a bar nearby, the one where you found me drunk under the table and embraced me and the barman thought you were my nephew, I go to that bar and moan about my life, I go on about my horrible wife, an ungrateful bitch who's just waiting for the right time to leave me, and you know she's lovely, she's given you sweets, *rabanda*, little treats for you to eat, because I lied that you were an intern at work, so I say these things at the bar, I say how it's my fault, I sacrifice myself for you, you little shit, you Little Fucker! You sucked everything dry.

Even the printing room's become a den where gossip meets the frivolously futile fucking fur seals' fanfare, rattlers, herons, swollen-tailed pelicans, schizophrenic baboons and lemurs who preach the proper, perfect reality and who mistreat miserable Miguelzinho. And I swear it wasn't my doing but the general counsel's, he who would send everyone to hell's headquarters to be "purified" by a sodomite pastor—with faithful women, though sodomite nonetheless—he told

the boss in some corner how he knew some guys who could sort out the little poof, set the boy back on track, it was just about setting him straight, making him disgusted at the whole business, not letting up, you know how it is, give him a good beating and he'll realize this isn't what he likes, that it's unnatural, an aberration of the devil. The boss agreed. He couldn't care less about the boy, he wants to light a fire under his ass. He is no son of his. And here I am, trapped, stuck, shut away inside a wall listening in on the plan to kidnap Miguelzinho: two of the Christian man's guys to take the boy to a derelict shack and really give it to him, the rape would only be to make him see that he didn't like what he thought he did. There was a time, a place, a game plan, the boss just needed to agree; he agreed.

Jesus, Little One, I thought I'd have you forever, until I died, the beautiful boy who'd keep being beautiful, he who passes for a boy to men and as a man, plain and simple, to mature men, and always with that body which could decompress my whole life, and just like that you go. You had other bodies before, Little One, they were bodies, you are the Little One, my little rabbit who ran a few thousand kilometers away and on Thursday evenings after work I'm no longer able to visit your flat smelling of pizza and the dregs of the wine I would always buy to load you with love.

Perhaps through mental incoherence, the self-flagellation of the spirit, the fucked-up values in one's own head, who knows why someone would incur danger on oneself, but it turns out I already know the thing they all call danger, because keeping oneself hidden is one thing, but keeping oneself hidden twice over is completely different. Being willing, loving other men, being a man in a country where everyone is a man and machismo is so constricted, you're already in hiding the first time. But having and living all this is, moreover, to live a secret which gives vent to all one's anxieties, and what makes me anxious is hiding myself a second time and one day the whole thing coming undone. The first time I got it wrong was with a rent boy who was OK with taking it but who didn't want to give, so when he heard this unexpected proposal he decided to use his hands, but

not like that, and I got a swollen jaw and a bit of a black eye, and explaining it away at home as slipping in the shower wouldn't work. After taking the punch from the henchman, I went into the first bar I could find and picked a fight, I took a kick to the belly like a dog and lay groaning on the floor, I left in a worse way than when I entered, but I had the alibi I needed. The second time was from carelessness: an older guy, my age, a party in a town I had gone to for work. He took me to a room and started dealing blows before I could do a thing. He beat me while shouting "poof, sonofabitch, mother-fuckingcocksucker," he tied the belt around my neck and I thought that was it, death by leather belt. A cop who was at the party came in, knocked the comrade out, and saved me from that hovel. While dancing with the cop at his flat I asked him to hit me, deliberately, it was my S&M debut, I was never very extreme, but all that affection from the cop made me feel like a complete man. The next day, on the way home, thinking of all the shit from the night before, between near-death and instant love, I plowed the car into a tree while gripping the steering wheel tightly. I broke an arm and once again was able to explain away the burst vessels and strange incursions on my body.

On TV there's a sequence of programs on the conversion of flesh to the spirit, the confluence of love in the upper Amazon, specters from the afterlife that scrawl blessed and melodramatic messages in pastel colors on concrete walls in gang territories, and I know all this isn't the satellites, but your absence, and my channels don't pick you up, Little One. All the strugglers in the world turned to laughingstocks and stoned to death by morality from on high, mocked and living an inhospitable and hopeless semi-life, you are the Little One, you who escaped, who replaced the nights of silence with a range of adjectives which need to be searched for daily in a little dictionary I bought to hurl insults at you from afar, from my immobile throat that wants to say that we could love each other at a distance, you, my neighbor in the flats across the way, who would sometimes catch my eye through the living room window and turn everything into emulation of paradise, no more sleeping with you, being

with my wife in body, but thinking of you there on the other side of a nearby door, so you know how you're still mine and I know of something other than the insolent lack of feeling represented by your resounding disappearance, you ingrate, you treacherous boy, effeminate-tongued and coddled from everything I got you, you fucking dickhead, this innocent thing I can't even handle imagining and who is still everything I love in this world, and so I face the fact that I am a man, that I have a beard, muscles, years under my belt, money in the bank, respect at work, approval from my family, from society, who votes consciously and brings everything to ruin, in concept, for a cause which ultimately leaves me dissatisfied.

Perhaps in the beginning I didn't want to believe in what seemed like an amorphous idea, that someone could be so vile as to design an atrocity like that, curing the boy of the trauma, committing violence not from bigotry, not from hate, but from banality, from difference; to go in and destroy so as not to be confronted once and for all by the discomfort of one's own ignorance and carrying on in ignorance. It seemed like a dream, but the boss clasped the Christian's hand, signaled "go ahead," and they sorted out the details. I took note of the address of the shack, scribbled it on the flip side of a printout of the boss's net gains per commission that month, and the disjointed nightmare kept going.

It was almost five in the morning, our throats exhaling jittery morning air and it was cold, so cold, when you asked me why I didn't have kids, because I hadn't gotten anyone pregnant, not even my wife, and I didn't want to answer, I rolled off the bed and went to the kitchen to make fried eggs and you pretended to love me from back there. Something between me and my wife, Little One, either I didn't have what it took to give her one, or she the stuff to have one, but we never properly discussed the lack of pregnancy, because the sex was regular, yes, no problems there, and even with my altered desires I'd visit her body with a certain assiduity, I would come inside her, and she'd let me rest there as if on a comforting mother's lap. You were my son, and

this was summarized in the silence of frying eggs. A lover-son, a nephew, an affectionate nephew who'd get unexpected visits from a married bachelor and who didn't want to tell stories but develop narratives of love. On the occasions I wanted a son I would think of examples, of the curtailment of freedom, and later, as I was getting to know you and considering children, I pictured your slender back, your prominent bones and your body's protuberances, between the adolescent and the eternally young, and then I knew I had everything I could ever want in you, even if I didn't want to have you once I had you.

It was like flicking on the lights one Sunday morning, that invasive brightness in the midst of the rest, the certainty of the insult, the cruelty, the absurdity. Committing violence on a boy to cure him, to do the body away with its understanding in order to appease the ignorance of a bunch of gorillas who barely know what they feel or what they are able to. The time and place, taken from the paper and turned to concrete hatred, a store of dissatisfaction, the mundane ingratitude tucked away at home in the form of a .38, the most cliché gun ever for resolving such debasing matters. So they go there, they want to take the boy and teach him a lesson, and if they do it and I happen to follow them, then fine, though it needs to be thought out, the gun needs to be stashed there, ready for my defense, to save as many lives as possible, a series of shots which might come out of necessity to protect the poor dears who have appeared in the boy's ever-lost, reeling existence. In the dead of night, so dark, I preceded the arrival of the torturers. They came a little later, in a blacked-out car, the boy was gagged and bound, and they dragged him in; I could see how they handled him roughly, how they prodded him and kicked him hard. The hand gripping the revolver, loaded with all the bullets I could find at home, ready to let out the indignation. Inside, the boy struggled, shoeless, and some knives appeared to drive the point home, to serve as an example of sadism. The two monsters were fondling the boy's body and pretending not to like it, not to embody and feel the same attraction as the tortured one, they tickled the poor boy's rear end with the handle of the knife and swore that if he didn't calm down they'd stick the blade in and tear up to

his nutsack. I walked into the place, they saw me and brandished the knives. They only had knives and my revolver was already stored in some well-thought-out corner. Even with their knives, I could take those two weak and flimsy demons. But I got to my knees and asked them to take me instead of the poor kid, I let them tie me up, they put it all in, they got to their feet and placed their flaccid members on my face and I pretended not to enjoy those tiny little pricks. I let them enter me one at a time, and while doing so, they slammed my back with alternating blows and kicks, they beat me with a broomstick and by the end my face was deformed, like a vacuum of expression frozen on my satisfied skull. They threw me to the ground and I stayed inert, so they could bring their attention back to the boy who was compulsively crying and sobbing in searing anguish, making an effort to die and not go through the same ordeal I had suffered. And so, while the two lowlifes were distracted, I crawled to the corner and found the gun that was waiting for the call.

Perhaps it wasn't you, nor anyone, perhaps no concrete reason exists for this; a peremptory definition, a classification, and if you, Little One, were to clinically place it in a box, as you would your fictitious patients and odd quirks, it might be too difficult for me to see the need in what was done. I messed up, Little One. I think I messed up, but it had to be done. You should be dead because of the shit I did, but it was as if my love was revived for at least the instant of my resounding fuck-up. You know, in this country, there's no such thing as a guilty party. But still, I fucked up, Little One, and I wouldn't have done if it weren't for your abysmal absence.

I said hello to the monsters and shot one of them in the chest three times. The other one went into a trance as if his lack of a soul had suddenly made him recognize his own emptiness. I wanted a plea for forgiveness, placation, and I made him get on his knees. I told him to turn around and get on all fours, his legs apart. I ran back as far as I could and kicked hard between his legs, feeling his testicles, scrotum, and penis mashing. I really felt the impact and the bellow came out muffled. The boy saw his demon twist and bleat.

Afterwards, once the pain had subsided and he twisted next to me, I shot him three times; once in the head. I set the boy free and made him run, I shouted at him to run far away. I wanted to make a joke and say something like “run, little gazelle,” but I still had the gun in hand and forced myself into an obtuse seriousness. The gun, now clean, was in the glove compartment of the car. I went into a bar and grabbed the ass of a woman who was in the company of some kind of fighter. In the proceeding fight I lost a tooth and, once again, found an excuse. I have no children at home, nor breathing space in the evenings. On top of that, for some months now, I’ve lost a certain sense of life.