

ABSINTHE

WORLD LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

Brazil with an S

Edited by Júlia Irion Martins

30

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ABSINTHE

World Literature in Translation

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ABSINTHE 30

- 1 Introduction
Júlia Irion Martins
- 9 Maria Clara Escobar, *Medo, medo, medo* (selected poems)
Translated by Miriam Adelman
- 27 Maria Esther Maciel, “Ants and Cockroaches” from
Essa coisa viva (excerpt)
Translated by Xavier Blackwell-Lipkind
- 37 Marcelo Mirisola, *Quanto custa um elefante?* (excerpt)
Translated by Paulo Candido
- 57 Caio Fernando Abreu, “After August” from *Ovelhas negras*
Translated by Julia Garcia
- 73 Caio Fernando Abreu, *O homem e a mancha*
(selected scenes)
Translated by Isaac Giménez and Jason Araújo
- 99 Cristhiano Aguiar, “Firestarter” from *Gótico nordestino*
Translated by Ana Guimarães
- 111 Tobias Carvalho, “The Things We Do to Come” from
As coisas
Translated by Jon Russell Herring
- 123 Lucas Lazzaretti, “All Anatase” from *Placenta: estudos*
Translated by Emyr Wallace Humphreys
- 137 Edimilson de Almeida Pereira, *O som vertebrado*
(selected poems)
Translated by Jane Kassavin
- 147 Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, *O imponderável Bento contra o
crioulo voador* (selected scenes)
Translated by James Langan

- 169 Natércia Pontes, selections from *Os tais caquinhos* (excerpt)
and Clarah Averbuck, *Máquina de pinball* (excerpt)
Translated by Júlia Irion Martins
- 189 Michel de Oliveira, selections from *Fatal Error*
Translated by Sam McCracken
- 211 Maria Valéria Rezende, “At the End of the World” from
A face serena
Translated by Thomas Mira y Lopez
- 219 Moema Vilela, *Fotos ruins muito boas* (selected poems)
Translated by Raquel Parrine
- 235 Maria Valéria Rezende, “Fátima” from *Outros cantos*
Translated by Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey
- 255 Cidinha da Silva, selections from *Um Exu em Nova York*
Translated by Felipe Fanuel Xavier Rodrigues
- 267 Luisa Geisler, “The Orange Tree” from *Contos de mentira*
and Natalia Timerman, “From Your Arms” from *Rachaduras*
Translated by Meg Weeks
- 285 Contributors

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Júlia Irion Martins

Introduction

When I was soliciting submissions for this issue of *Absinthe* in February 2024, my Instagram Reels algorithm kept serving me the “Brazil com Z x Brasil com S” (Brazil with a Z vs. Brasil with an S) meme. The video begins with the caption “Brazil com Z” superimposed on images stereotypically associated with Brazil, often backed by a classic MPB (Música Popular Brasileira) track. The colorful tiles of the Escadaria Selarón, saturated images of Sugarloaf Mountain and Guanabara Bay, Christ the Redeemer with not a tourist in sight. After several seconds of these images, the images and caption—but not the music—shift. Suddenly, we see images of houses made out of unplastered tijolo baiano, a caramel colored mutt sitting outside a boteco, the embroidered kitchen towels protecting the glass stove covers from oil splatters. The caption now reads “Brasil com S.”

The basic joke of this meme is that Brazil “com Z” represents a romanticized (and seemingly exclusively Carioca) imaginary of Brazil belonging to those in the Global North (“Brazil” with a “Z” being

the English spelling of the word). Brazil “com S,” the Portuguese spelling, then, represents the “true” Brazil of Brazilians—one that, while not glamorized like “com Z,” ends up taking on an idealized bent due to its memeification. The copo americano filled with coffee, the concrete graffitied soccer pitch, the tiny thin straws served with Guaraná become points of pride for the *brasileir@*, things that, while not as romanticized as drinking out of a coconut at Ipanema, become of aesthetic and national importance simply because the gringo just won’t “get it.”

It’s from this meme that “Brazil with an S,” the title of *Absinthe* 30, comes. As the title suggests, this issue seeks to challenge and expand the limited vision of Brazil “com Z” by prioritizing narratives from areas of Brazil less seen in global media representations. That said, the germ of this theme lies not with the meme, but rather *me*. I came to the University of Michigan to study architecture and space in Brazilian film and literature, yet I’m now finishing a PhD in contemporary American autofiction and digital studies. When the opportunity to edit an issue of *Absinthe* came up, I understood it as a chance to bring Brazilian literature back into my academic life. But it’s also personal insofar as the texts in “Brazil with an S” pay particular attention to the Northeast and the South of Brazil—the regions that my father and mother, respectively, are from.¹

The internet has shaped my experiences of Brazil, past and present, from the novelty of Skyping family members in the mid-aughts to, more recently, meeting my longtime Brazilian Twitter friends when I studied abroad in São Paulo. But it’s not just me—Brazilians, in general, are *incredibly* online (find me an American nostalgic for Orkut—you can’t). As of January 2024, 86.6% of Brazil’s population was online (compare that to 91.8% of the United States’ population). But the onlineness of Brazilians isn’t so much about quantity as it is about quality. Brazil, “sometimes referred to as King of Memes,” is one of 10 (12 if you count Sealand and Ohio) countries to have

¹ In the past few years, these regions have begun to receive more international media attention. The Northeast for its role in reelecting President Lula da Silva and for Kleber Mendonça-Filho’s internationally acclaimed films and Rio Grande do Sul, sadly, for the recent devastating flooding.

its own dedicated meme page on the database Know Your Meme. And in the more circulated of these memes, Brazil is often the butt of the joke, such as with “Come to Brazil,” “You’re going to Brazil,” and “Brazil mentioned.” (If you’re not familiar with these memes, this footnote is for you.)² In these highly circulated Brazil memes, “Brazil” bears a certain desperation: Brazil begs musicians to play there, Brazil clamors at any mention—positive or negative—of itself (which is the seventh most populous country in the world).

Yet there has been a shift in these memes. Brazil memes have taken on a more positive tone, especially evident with the TikTok microtrend “Brazilcore.” This trend, which peaked in 2022 when Hailey Bieber posted a selfie in a Brazil-yellow baby tee, constitutes wearing Brazilian colors, soccer jerseys, and Havaianas (obviously the ones with the little flag on the strap).³ Posited largely by Brazilian celebrities as a reclaiming of Brazil’s flag from the far right in time for the World Cup and the 2022 elections, Brazilcore brought national tensions to an international audience. But to explain the political situation of a country through a TikTok microtrend minimizes—my gut response to seeing “Brazilcore” float around the internet for a meme cycle remains “Brazil mentioned.” As such, I read “Brazil com Z x Brasil com S” as a response to both the idealistic and even “empowered” affect of Brazilcore and the desperation of “Brazil mentioned.” It is a meme that excludes those who don’t “get” an “authentic” Brazil unfit for gringo consumption, and, at the same

² “Come to Brazil” originates in 2008. The meme—which took off in 2009 when Justin Bieber joined Twitter—comes from the frequency with which Brazilian users comment “come to Brazil” on videos of their favorite musicians performing. Though perhaps originally posted in earnest, many (including Brazilians) post it ironically. “You’re going to Brazil” first appeared in 2020 in a GIF of someone falling down a pit, captioned “NOOO I DON’T WANNA GO TO BRAZIL NOOO STOP AHHH.” This meme, obviously, suggests that Brazil is an undesirable place to be. “Brazil mentioned,” which can be substituted for other places, first appeared in 2021. The image is of Yui Hirasawa from the anime *K-ON!* celebrating. The meme is often used as a response image when a country—particularly Brazil—gets mentioned in a negative context, suggesting that Brazilians are so desperate to be acknowledged that they’ll take even the worst mentions. To explain a meme is always humbling.

³ The callback to “Come to Brazil” taking off because of Justin Bieber is too good not to point out!

time, it is a meme that rejects the desperate need for gringo acknowledgment. In Brazil “com S,” Brazil mentions itself.

In their book, *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production*, Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman propose that online Latin American culture takes on what they call a “postregional” positionality.⁴ To discuss the postregional in an introduction to an issue so singularly focused on regionality might seem contradictory. Yet it is this very contradiction that underscores Taylor and Pitman’s theorization of Latin American digital culture as postregional. In toying with the “unresolved tensions” that the online brings up between the local and the global, Latin American online cultures “dismantl[e]” conventional conceptualizations of “Latin America” through the very engagement with “tropes and discourses of ‘Latin American-ness.’”⁵ To be regional once again, this issue is not a “Latin American literature” issue—it is a *Brazilian* literature issue. While yes, it is the first issue of *Absinthe* to exclusively feature Latin American authors, it is also one that specifically only features Brazilian authors. Following Taylor and Pitman on the contradictions of the postregional in Latin America, it is precisely this hyperfocus on Brazil as the first Latin American issue of *Absinthe* that can affirm Brazil’s status as a Latin American nation⁶ while also calling attention to the postregional nature of Latin America more broadly. Furthermore, this issue’s focus on regionalism within Brazil works to situate the “regional Brazil” within the context of internal migration from the Northeast to the Southeast (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) and even the South.

This nesting doll of regionalisms and postregionalisms continues. The stories, poems, and plays in this issue don’t just deal with the regionalism of Brazilian states or Brazil’s regionalism within Latin America—they also speak to Brazil in a global context. For Brazil “com S,” global media cultures play a major role in Brazilian

⁴ Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman, *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production* (Routledge, 2013), 21.

⁵ Taylor and Pitman, *Latin American Identity*, 21.

⁶ It’s worth noting that the US Census does not consider Brazilians to be Latinos and that if one selects both “Brazilian” and “Latino/Hispanic” on the Census, their answers are recategorized.

identity. This practice of adopting other cultures' referents and placing them in Brazilian art isn't unique to contemporary Brazilian literature, but rather it builds on Oswald de Andrade's 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago* (widely translated as the "Cannibalist Manifesto"). The manifesto opens with a pun on Hamlet: "Tupi, or not Tupi, that is the question." Notably, the pun appears in English in the original otherwise Portuguese language manifesto, doubly introducing Andrade's project of theorizing the ways in which Brazilian culture cannibalizes and recasts other cultures as its own. He goes on to write, "Só me interessa o que não é meu" (I am only interested in what is not mine).

This issue of *Absinthe* opens with James Langan's translation of scenes from Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *O imponderável Bento contra o crioulo voador* (1988). The earliest text in this issue, this Cinema Novo script set in Brasília deals with authoritarianism and its relationship to journalism as well as the aesthetic legacies of Brazilian modernism. The other script featured in this issue, a play by Caio Fernando Abreu (Caio F.), also brings very much to mind the ideas of the *Manifesto Antropófago*. Co-translated by Isaac Giménez and Jason Araújo, *O homem e a mancha* (1994) adapts Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* for the stage. In itself a reference and recasting of a European novel into a Latin American context, Caio F.'s script deals with the mediatized nature of personal relationships and the ensuing emptiness that comes with such practices. In a similar vein, one of the stories featured in this issue is Maria Valéria Rezende's "At the End of the World" (2019), translated by Thomas Mira y Lopez. This story takes the form of story within a story: An older narrator recounts her grandfather reading to her as a child a medieval fable set in Galicia. If Caio F.'s text borrowing from a European novel deals with the emptiness of mediation, then Rezende's fable-like tale presents a moment of connection through layers of mediation.

The ethos of "Tupi, or not Tupi" does not solely come up through form. It also comes from stories that emphasize cultural references. In my translation of chapters from Clarah Averbuck's *Máquina de pinball* (2002), the reader bounces from reference to reference to reference to American and British rock bands (especially

the Strokes—the narrator’s cat is named “Julian”). The other Caio F. text, “After August” (1995), a short story translated by Julia Garcia, is also replete with references to Twiggy, the Bible, and wordplay and inclusion of other languages such as French, Spanish, and English.

Stream of consciousness narration connects several of the stories in this issue of *Absinthe*. As a scholar of post-internet literature, I find it hard not to link stream of consciousness in contemporary literature with scrolling. In “After August,” the stream of consciousness narrator searches for how to live life after receiving an AIDS diagnosis. In Paulo Candido’s translation of Marcelo Mirisola’s *Quanto custa um elefante?* (2020), the narrator navigates making a deal with the devil in Rio de Janeiro—one might say that the scroll of the fever dream-ish chapter is a doomscroll. “All Anatase” (2019) by Lucas Lazzaretti feels like a more darkly quotidian doomscroll as Lazzaretti intersperses stories of two different middle-aged men experiencing homophobia and shifting power dynamics. In his preface to the piece, translator Emyr Wallace Humphreys discusses the complexities of translating this mode of narration.

Another form that authors in this issue experiment with is the list, which also resembles the online in its overwhelming density of data and information. In my translation of chapters from *Os tais caquinhos* (2021), Natércia Pontes uses lists as form to make felt the act of hoarding in “Hunger Feels So Good” and the feeling of lack in “Mother.” “Ants and Cockroaches” (2024), by Maria Esther Maciel and translated by Xavier Blackwell-Lipkind, also explores the complications inherent to mother-daughter dynamics through Maciel’s signature use of lists and other utilitarian forms such as encyclopedias and bibliographic entries.

The texts in this issue resemble the online not merely in their form but also in their affect and diction. The poems from the collection *Medo, medo, medo* (2019) by Maria Clara Escobar feel like Twitter in the best way. Written with simple lines and language with erratic capitalization, Escobar’s poetry achieves a vulnerability we might recognize from our own social media feeds. In her preface to these poems, translator Miriam Adelman puts Escobar in conversation with the new Brazilian feminism, or the *explosão*

feminista (feminist explosion). This feminism seems to me in conversation with Clarah Averbuck's *Máquina*, which, partially inspired by her blog from the aughts, seems to me to predict the ways in which writing feminine subjectivities takes shape in a time when everyone is encouraged to constantly reveal, share, and post. If Averbuck's online approach to writing women's sexuality feels brash, Natalia Timerman's "From Your Arms" (2019), translated by Meg Weeks, takes a quieter approach to millennial women's ennui and sexual autonomy but retains a certain bluntness in its lack of sentimentality.

This issue also contains a collection of expressly digital stories, all of which consider contemporary anxieties about app cultures. In Sam McCracken's translation of Michel de Oliveira's "Unfollow" (2021), a relationship ends via ghosting because one party wasn't photogenic enough for the other's Instagram. In Tobias Carvalho's "The Things We Do to Come" (2018), translated by Jon Russell Herring, the typical fears of an IRL dating app meet-up ("will I be murdered or will we simply not vibe?") mutate into a queasy class-based paranoia when a Grindr date goes awry. Other stories present less banal, more dystopian anxieties about app cultures. In "Hunting Season I" (spoilers ahead), also by Oliveira, a "dating" app turns out to be more of a home-invasion murder app. "Firestarter" (2022), by Cristhiano Aguiar and translated by Ana Guimarães, also considers geolocation apps but through environmental catastrophe via disaster tourism in Brazil's sertão rather than intimate relations.

"Fátima" (2016), our second story by Maria Valéria Rezende, also considers the harsh climate of the sertão. In Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey's translation, we follow Maria as she experiences the sertão in comparison to other regions of the world she's traveled to, such as the M'zab Valley in Algeria and the Zacatecas desert in Mexico. The question of landscape introduced in both Aguiar's and Rezende's stories connects to Edimilson de Almeida Pereira's poetry from *O som vertebrado* (2022), translated by Jane Kassavin. Almeida Pereira's poems deal with the inescapable legacies of the colonial environmental exploitation of Minas Gerais and the exploitation of

enslaved Africans brought to work the mines.⁷ The legacies of the transatlantic slave trade extend globally, as seen in Cidinha da Silva's stories from *Um Exu em Nova York* (2018), which place Afro-Brazilians within the greater global Afro diaspora. In his preface to the pieces, translator Felipe Fanuel Xavier Rodrigues describes his considerations in translating Pretuguês (a portmanteau of “preto” [black] and “português” [Portuguese]) into African American Vernacular English, ultimately inviting readers to reflect on transnational Black contexts and voices.

If it seems that I'm ending this introduction with Brazil's relationship to the global, I want to bring us back to the regional. Many of the translators for this issue write in their prefaces about the challenges of translating regional slang and dialect—a reminder that even when connecting through themes, the regional is necessarily lost or distorted in translation. Taking one approach, Meg Weeks acknowledges that her translation of Luisa Geisler's “The Orange Tree” (2011) loses the regional slang that clearly situates the story in Rio Grande do Sul to the Brazilian reader. Translator Raquel Parrine takes another approach when translating Moema Vilela's poetry from *Fotos ruins muito boas* (2022)—the feminist themes and casual style of which very much resonate with Escobar's—choosing to maintain particular regional terms in the original Portuguese.

And finally, a plug: For anyone reading and interested in hearing directly from several of the authors featured in this issue, let me recommend the contemporary Brazilian literature podcast *Rumor*.⁸

With that, *Absinthe 30* invites you to “come to Brazil. . . com S.”

⁷ Such legacies feel especially urgent when considering the continued role of mining Latin American nations for resources used in global information technologies (e.g., the lithium mines in Bolivia).

⁸ Available on Spotify, <https://open.spotify.com/show/1Rooq56w3SLYs85Mao8TVy>.

Selected poems from *Medo,*
medo, medo (2019) by
Maria Clara Escobar

Translated by Miriam Adelman

Translator's Preface

Ana Paula Portella¹ begins her preface to Maria Clara Escobar's poetry collection with incisive musings on the countless ways that our current forms of life—the many crises that we have inherited from previous generations, steeped in legacies of inequality, violence, and environmental destruction—give us a variety of reasons for fears coming from endless sources and directions. Portella recognizes that the fears Escobar names, confronts, toys with, and turns into metaphor have universal elements. However, Escobar's collection—as a feminist text—speaks especially of and to the fears that permeate the everyday lives of girls and women, as well as the ways women look at these fears, attitudes, and needs. They take us right into the eye of the storm, where we are able—or perhaps obliged—to rethink our acts, our relationships, our survival, and our creativity.

I first read Escobar's collection *Medo, medo, medo* (Fear, fear, fear, 2019) in 2021, well into the COVID-19 pandemic and the gripping fear it stirred across the globe. Her work resonated with me beyond the context of the worldwide spread of the virus, a mere chapter in a long saga of human striving and blunder. At the time, I was fortunate enough to be participating in one of Alison Entrekin's online translation workshops. Tackling the challenge of an English-language version of Escobar's poem became an opportunity to plunge into the work of a young Brazilian writer and a chance to test my own evolution as a translator of poetry, from Brazilian Portuguese to English. Years and circumstances had initially led me in the opposite direction—translating from English into Portuguese—in partnership with friends and colleagues who were native speakers of the latter. Hence, what became a reversal was also the continuation of my many years of translating English-language feminist writers and poets into Portuguese: a task that had compelled me, a kind of driving need to share my beloved sources—my *bibliografias!*—with my friends, my students, and my community. In both cases, it meant bringing out women's voices as voices that resignify, appropriate,

¹ Ana Maria Portella, "Medo como matéria de conhecimento, arte e mudança," in *Medo, medo, medo*, by Maria Clara Escobar (Nosotros Editorial, 2019).

defy, and diversify many centuries' worth of so-considered "canonical" literature. Today these women writers take their place as part of a potent and vibrant movement, an *explosão feminista* (feminist explosion), a phrase coined by Brazilian cultural critic Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda and the title of her 2018 book on the subject.² The expression refers to an unprecedented blooming of women's voices in the realms of art, culture, and politics in the Brazil of the new millennium. In the field of poetry specifically, Hollanda (who today publishes under her maiden name, Teixeira) refers to the decade that began in 2010 and its groundswell of women writers who are "poets of feminism, but not necessarily feminist poets."³

Escobar's poetry evokes a feeling of being on the brink. Have human greed and cruelty tipped an already failing balance in the definitive direction of our demise? In her interweaving of the personal and the political there is a simple, brutal honesty that ruptures any attempt to sweep hurt, damage, and injustice under the rug. There abound failed love affairs and frustrated attempts at connection, precarious lives, perilous streets and loneliness amid the urban multitudes, and vulnerability in a technology-driven world (as in the fear of airplanes that Escobar invokes in the first set of poems presented here). Yet Escobar also expresses intense feelings of empathy and tenderness for the many others who inhabit her verse; she weaves in stories that reveal her identification with the experiences, if not the destinies, of other women.

Participating in this veritable explosion of women's voices, Escobar's poetry moves to its own beat. Yet, as a poet, Escobar nevertheless shares the critical irreverence of many other young poets I've read recently, including Tatiana Pequeno, Lubi Prates, and Luiza Romão. In fact, the voices multiply much more quickly than any one of us—as readers, scholars, or critics—can keep up with. As a diverse group imbued with a bursting energy to tell their stories, these women speak from the specific ground they inhabit: both legacy and change, more shifting than solid. Yet however singular their

² Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, *Explosão feminista: arte, política, cultura e universidade* (Companhia das Letras, 2018).

³ Hollanda, *Explosão feminista*, 106 (my translation).

experiences may feel, to write them is to place them within wider webs of understanding.

Working here on the English-language version of these poems, I was reminded of a workshop I took taught by the millennial, gaúcha author Natália Borges Polessa called “A escrita da ruína” (Writing the ruins). Destruction, fear, and the feeling of desperately trying to navigate a largely unsalvageable world come to the forefront as hallmarks of our time, it seems. As I finish this brief commentary, Brazil is confronting the trauma and shock of recent flooding that has affected the overwhelming majority of municipalities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, taking human and animal lives and destroying entire towns, farms, natural landscapes, and city neighborhoods. Tragedy as a wakeup call, if that is still possible. *Medo, medo, medo*. As a poet, Escobar recreates this twilight atmosphere and perhaps reminds us we must think about what to do about fear and with fear.

Finally, let me share some brief thoughts on the ongoing challenges of translating Escobar’s poems. I have tried, above all, to capture her emotional environment and the rhythm and feel of her colloquial tone, her key which is intense and direct. There were the usual tricky spots, inevitable in Portuguese to English translation, such as the differences in the way nouns and adjectives are gendered or not. Such grammatical gendering is a major issue for the current wave of feminist translation, because language has been shaped according to patterns that are steeped in gendered meanings and expectations. Finding other ways of naming things or people may mean inventing words or inflecting speech in ways that cause strangeness or discomfort. In English, pilots, doctors, workers, and other such nouns are neutral, but on occasion, translating them from the Portuguese, when the context calls for marking gender, may become clumsy. For example, I will probably not want to write “female doctor” or “woman pilot.” Yet I am tasked with finding a way of preserving the gendered meaning of “doutora” or “pilota.” Likewise, there are moments of interpretation, as in Escobar’s “Medo das ruas, deles e da morte,” where I chose “men” over “them.” In this case, “deles” might not necessarily mean “only men,” but context tells me it does. Other ambiguities, like when a double entendre in Portuguese might get lost—such as a simple “ligar mesmo já não

liga para ninguém,” which could describe calling someone, paying attention to them, or both—led me to different solutions, since I didn’t want to make that choice. In the end, the daily life of poets and translators is just this: paddling our way through a sea of infinite choices or juggling pieces of a composition that can fall into place—or fall flat on the ground.

The poems you find below are the first pieces in an ongoing project, my attempt to capture the spirit and thrust of a young poet whose work resonates with other voices of her generation and further unfurls in her third volume, *Zonas de guerra* (War zones). Sometimes the words spill out, and I might even get it right; other times, the words come out *cuidosamente vertidas*, as if poured carefully from the cadence of Brazilian Portuguese into the defiant mold of the English language, through the filter of a person caught in, and captivated by, all that is *entre-between*.⁴

⁴ Cristiane Busato Smith, ed., *Entre-Between* (Editora Kotter, 2023).

Selected poems from *Medo, medo, medo*

by Maria Clara Escobar

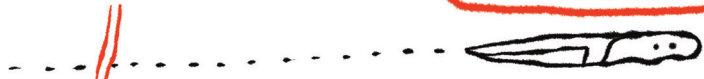
*my grandma died, my mom died, my aunt died, my friend died, my
neighbor died, my great grandma died, my acquaintance died, my
cousin died, my niece died, my self died.
my language: she will die.*

Sequence of untitled poems from Part I, “Fear of airplanes”

i'm fat, so is my face, i make fat faces
the girl next to me, on the plane that is landing, makes
ugly faces
she sleeps ugly, she yawns ugly.
the plane circles and i'm thinking about that whole sea
santos dumont, what kind of faces did he make?
for sure not fat and ugly ones.
he was a champ.
now i'm going around in circles and nearly die in an airport
too small

where only
airplanes
too small
land

i make fat faces—the girl next to me, ugly ones
as we pray to our father in heaven who wears no life vest
that we don't have to swim



you heard about the chapecó crash, didn't you?
no, what about it?
the only ones who survived

the only ones who survived were the ones who followed the safety
instructions
the others were screaming, running about—the lights went off, the
gasoline went dry
the ones who survived followed instructions
they put on their masks, they braced for impact

i would have put on the mask, but brace, maybe not.
they put on their masks.
the only ones who survived

and me here thinking about death, the instructions i didn't follow
when i sat next to you,
so getting on a plane

i'd put on the mask,
but not
brace for
impact.

The plane is taking off
Turn off your electronic devices
Look, that's where Aunt Sonia's house was
Aunt Sonia, poor thing, she died of a heart attack
Yeah, inside a plane

Even today I just keep thinking
How can a gray
Tube
Fly, full of people inside

They've evolved, you can't deny that
They say Marcelo always does a go-around
I'm not getting on board with him

Aunt Sonia, well the man spoke to her in German
She got nervous thinking it was going to crash
Had a heart attack
It was a false alarm

You folks know, but a reminder won't hurt
You're not allowed to smoke on board
Pay attention to the safety instructions
Even
If you're a frequent flyer

I always check to see if the life jacket is under the seat
Remember the days when they let you smoke?
At least it calms you down, yeah it does
Do those phones work? If we're crashing

Tchau

Tchau

I'm crashing, I'm dying
Wishing you all a nice trip and thanks for flying with us.

The spaceship to Mars is ready for takeoff
The men are here to say goodbye to their brave wives
They are the ones who are leaving this time
The men hold the snot-nosed crying kids in their arms
Say goodbye at the docks
Not just husbands, but fathers, uncles, granddads too
Someone has to stay home
Some kids are leaving too, if they're girls
And when their families have two moms—oh those are the
 lucky ones
Let's settle somewhere else, begin anew in another place
This place was a fail, guys
Farewell, *tchau tchau*



She said that if the plane crashed
She wouldn't care
She'd free herself from the fear of dying
But it's sad

She doesn't find meaning in life anymore
She thought
If the plane crashes
I don't have anything anyway
It's sad

I'm afraid of being alone
My mom was like that too
We were trained
Nothing belongs to anyone
Nothing is for sure

A woman, to have pride
Has got to be alone
She can't be sitting in the corner crying
Over anyone

What tomorrow will bring
No one knows
Money, the bank makes off with it
(My mother learned from President Collor)

Better to have a house

I'll never be a homeowner
If I can't trust the banks, then who?
They asked me the other day
If I trust not in anyone
Not in my life either

If the plane crashes, I'll fly it
I won't leave it to anyone else
Much less to pilots
And doctors
With their files and medications

If you want to survive you must disobey
The world wasn't made for us, little daughter.

Two untitled poems from Part III, “Fear of the streets, of men, and of death”

My uncle
Roberto Vinicius
Lived on a bank pension
In the city of Petrópolis
He used to go in every month
To pick up his pension
But stopped showing up
It's been a few months
They were thinking about getting a detective
A private one
To find out if he's dead or alive

They know he used to go in every month
To get his pension
Now they know nothing
I jot that down

I always wanted to be a detective
For a few days
Take a crash course in downtown São Paulo
Put on a cape, put on some shades
Follow someone

Uncle Roberto Vinicius
Who I don't even know if I've met
It must be sad, to not even know if he's dead or alive
Alone for sure, sad who knows
But someone is looking for him, wants to know

If he's alive or not alive
If he's dead or not.

And if he is, why isn't he picking up his pension
And if he isn't, who buried him

Could Uncle Roberto Vinicius be lying
Stone cold at home?
Left the bathroom, tripped, no one noticed
To die at home alone is one of my fears
You're there sprawled out
And no one realizes till a week later
When you don't show up for your pension check
Or pick up the phone no one picks up anymore
Went out for a walk, no way to know
Petrópolis is far away, it's big
São Paulo too

Cities can hide people
The homes, the dead.

I asked her
What is it you wanted to be, if not what you are
And she says
Are you really going to ask me that?
I say
Yep
So she says
I don't know
And cries
You don't remember anymore?
I don't know
But what did you used to want?
Her partner answers
She liked cameras
Journalism, that sort of thing
She cries too
She no longer knows
We go on surviving, doing our things
One day we don't know anymore

“Ants and Cockroaches”
from *Essa coisa viva* (2024)
by Maria Esther Maciel

Translated by Xavier Blackwell-Lipkind

Translator's Preface

Maria Esther Maciel is fascinated by the taxonomic, the nameable, the catalogic, the listable. In many of her most recognizable works (*Pequena enciclopédia de seres comuns*, *O livro dos nomes*), Maciel mines apparently utilitarian forms—the encyclopedia, the alphabetized roster of names—for their surprising narrative potential. Her writing interrogates the power of lexical accumulation, the capacity for parts to coalesce into wholes.

Essa coisa viva (This living thing), published in 2024 by Editora Todavia, is no exception. In this striking book about violence, plants, and memory, the narrator, Ana Luiza, addresses her dead mother, reflecting on the experiences that bind them and enumerating—along with the photographs and flowers that surround her—the abuses she suffered as a child. In the first chapter, “Formigas e baratas,” translated here as “Ants and Cockroaches,” Maciel offers the reader lists upon lists: “tubes of lipstick, rings, bracelets. . .” Out of these inventories emerges a tale of fear and infestation. The titular ants and cockroaches appear, in the present and in the past, crawling and still. Dreaming, Ana Luiza sees mounds of dead bugs replaced by heaps of shining fruit. She cannot excise insects from her memory, but, in these pages, she stops being afraid of them and, perhaps, of her mother.

Maciel, who has taught literature at the Federal University of Minas Gerais and the State University of Campinas, puts her academic training on display in *Essa coisa viva*. The book closes with a list of “Ana Luiza’s Bibliographical References.” This bibliography doubles as a window into Maciel’s influences, the authors with whom her narrative of loss and life is in conversation: E. M. Cioran, Stefano Mancuso, Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida, Fiama Hasse Paes Brandão, and Harri Lorenzi, among others. To this list I might add Machado de Assis, in whose *Quincas Borba*, Rubião (cf. Rubinho, the diminutive assigned to Ana Luiza’s brother) kills several ants, then, overcome by regret, thinks, “Pobres formigas mortas!” (Poor dead ants!). Poor ants, indeed. In Maciel’s literary world, too, the formigas are dead: big, motionless, waiting to be described.

Translating Maciel's prose presents several interesting challenges. I paid particular attention to the vivid descriptions that dot these pages. Maciel deploys recurring modifiers in her depictions of insects and fruit: In one instance, cockroaches are "graúdas, lustrosas"; later, jaboticabas are "graúdas e brilhantes"; later still, cockroaches are "graúdas e reluzentes." I translate these adjective pairs as "fat, lustrous," "fat and shiny," and "fat, glistening," respectively. Maciel is a writer who uses subtle motifs to great effect, and I have done my best to leave her intentional repetitions ("graúdas") intact while simultaneously respecting the slight tonal adjustments ("lustrosas," "brilhantes," "reluzentes") with which the text experiments. (See also the reappearance of screams and screaming in various parts of the translation. By my count, the source text includes six invocations of "gritos," in one grammatical form or another, in the first chapter alone.)

One instance in which I have permitted myself some stylistic latitude is the dream scene described above, in which an unsettling accretion of insects gives way to a vision of a fruit-filled orchard: "When I fell back asleep, I dreamed. I dreamed that a foggy-faced man, wearing boots up to his knees and carrying a broom in his right hand, began to sweep a cockroach-covered floor." The two alliterative hyphenations—"foggy-faced," "cockroach-covered"—reproduce Maciel's "de rosto inexato" and "repleto de baratas mortas," respectively. My hope is that this slight rearrangement accurately renders, in English, the oneiric quality that animates the original prose.

Ants and Cockroaches

by Maria Esther Maciel

Yesterday was a year since you died. I tried to cry, but I couldn't. I just wrapped myself in a vague and indistinct sadness, as if overcome by an old pain, the kind of pain we carry in our bodies for many years, without knowing exactly where it comes from.

The night that followed seemed unending. I returned, without progress, to a book I had started the night before, then combed through headlines about the pandemic on my phone, dreading the impossibility of returning to the life that I had been planning, carefully, since the moment you left. What story will exist for my life after the world stops ending?

I live alone in a big house with a garden since I sent away the man I thought I loved and did not love. You didn't get to meet him. We lived together for a bit more than a year. It was the first time, since my separation from Pedro, that I had dared to live with another person. If I didn't tell you about him before, it was to protect me, and to protect him, for obvious reasons. I don't think you know, either, that I ended up selling that apartment where I hosted you various times when you came to Belo Horizonte to consult your favorite doctors. I couldn't put up any longer with my neighbors, the noise of the cars, the distance of the places I care about, the smell of mold in the closets. And I needed, more than ever, to be able to abandon all of that for a less corrosive life.

I remember that, in those recurring visits you paid me when you had your appointments—visits that tended to last at least a week—my days turned upside down. You seemed to realize this, but you couldn't care less about the mess you always left, clothes scattered across the bedroom, used sheets of toilet paper overflowing from the bathroom trash can, sauce spilled on the tablecloth, handprints on mirrors, faucets left running, shoes dropped in the living room. And you even opened my drawers when I wasn't around and took my things like they were yours: tubes of lipstick, rings, bracelets, tweezers, hairpins, nail clippers, creams, perfume bottles. Complacent, I let you do it. Today I know that, if you could, you would take from

me everything I had, everything you considered remotely relevant to my life.

More than ever, I wanted to erase those memories and the crystallized feelings they unearth, since all that weighs on us and stretches beyond the time to which it belongs prevents us from being free of that weight. But those things still attack and consume me a year after your death. Besides, the force of experience is so staggering that we end up getting used to its consequences as the years go by, and only when those consequences grow larger than us do we search to rid ourselves of them. That's what I'm doing now, as I write what could be called a letter, even if you can't read any of my words. Or can you?

The truth is, I slept very badly last night, ruminating about what I could never understand. When I got up, I was sure that my Saturday would be rainy, judging by the heavy clouds I saw when I drew the bedroom curtains. Hair mussed, rather dizzy, I turned toward the bathroom. Then, suddenly, I came across the ants, motionless on the floor. But how had they appeared like that, so abruptly and in such great numbers? Since moving here, I had never seen a single ant in this house, and certainly not big, rust-colored ants like these.

I crouched to see if they were alive. They weren't. No movement of the legs, not even a tremor. All of them dead and spread across the beige floor. Frightened and uncertain, I walked to the service area and looked for the vacuum. And just as I started vacuuming the bugs, a convulsive sob forced me to sit on the edge of the bed and unplug the device, letting it fall on the bedside table. I don't know how many minutes passed. But once I regained my composure, I managed to complete the task of cleaning the room, relieved to have dealt, albeit reluctantly, with the inexplicable death of those insects.

It was then that I realized that certain scenes attach themselves in strange ways to our stories. The dead ants could only be here this morning to bring me the memory of the cockroaches, the monstrous cockroaches that you poisoned while I—maybe three or four years old—still slept beside you, in that massive room that was also Dad's. Fat, lustrous cockroaches that, when night fell, emerged from the cracks of the old floor, built with long, wide planks. That night, you had spread insecticide in every corner of the room, and, in the morning, you turned on the lamp—I don't know why. I woke to your

terrible screams, and I saw you kneeling on the bed, pointing at the floor, which was spattered with dead cockroaches, while Dad tried to calm you down. You were screaming so much that I started to cry out of fear. Not a fear of the cockroaches themselves, but a fear of the screams, and of your panicked expression. Things only calmed down after Dad found a broom and got rid of the insects, using a dustpan to put them in a plastic bag. I never forgot that. Perhaps because of that scene, I, too, have come to fear cockroaches, as if the fear you felt had saturated me forever.

One of them sent me into a state of shock once. I don't think I ever told you this. I was already married to Pedro and I was tidying the house. Barefoot, as I liked to be during the private hours, I went into the bathroom and started to wash the sink. Suddenly, I felt something on my foot, something living, brushing my skin with a subtle and imprecise motion. I looked down, and there was a cockroach—medium sized, but still a cockroach. My first instinct was to strike my foot on the ground several times and grab the washcloth to banish the bug from my right shin. I managed to do it, though not without screams. So loud that Pedro heard and ran to see what was happening. I was screaming more than I had seen you scream, that lost morning of my childhood. Pedro held me tight and hugged me. Then he went to get a cup of water and a sedative. I got in bed and slept deeply. I woke in the early morning, slightly dazed, my mouth dry; I drank water and went to the bathroom. When I fell back asleep, I dreamed. I dreamed that a foggy-faced man, wearing boots up to his knees and carrying a broom in his right hand, began to sweep a cockroach-covered floor. Then he vanished. I went toward the door, running after him. When I opened it, I found all the cockroaches piled up, blocking my way. I don't know how, but I closed my eyes and crossed that dark and glistening mountain, with a leap that carried me very, very far. Looking around, I found myself in a sort of orchard, under a jabuticaba tree. On the ground was a mountain of jabuticabas, fat and shiny. Overflowing with joy, I began to eat them. And I woke up.

Today, I am no longer afraid of cockroaches. I prefer to see them “technically,” as the dictionaries describe them: “Orthopteroid insects of the family Blattidae; in homes, by virtue of their



wide-ranging diets, they contaminate food, take on an unpleasant odor, and become serious pests.” But they must also have their reasons for being, in human eyes, like this, so frightening, so noxious. Perhaps this is what we are in their eyes, too.

I never imagined that, one year after your death, the cockroaches would return, disguised now as ants. “What is not cannot be until it is,” Dad would say, always alert to surprises, to things that, however absurd, can arise when they are least expected. At the very least, thanks to those insects, I managed to cry.

Crying—silently or eloquently, covertly or explicitly—has always been a contradiction in my life. I know that I cried excessively as a toddler, when I was spanked or grounded, in moments of sadness or contentment, experiencing profound loss or feeling compassion. But I don’t remember having faked tears to justify unfelt pain, much less to please anybody.

Do you remember when you took me to a wake for the first time—that, I believe, of some cousin of yours whom I didn’t even know—and, in response to what you perceived as my coldness toward the situation and the people there, started to pinch me to make me cry? And how many times did you hit me so that I would smile when you called the photographer to take photos of Rubens and me? Before he was born, there wasn’t that ritual of taking photos every year. God, how I hated those moments! More than anything, I hated them because I was forced to wear such lacy, frilly clothes, to put ribbons in my hair, to wear ridiculous gold bracelets. I couldn’t stand that business of clothes and ornaments and still can’t. Now I understand that you wanted to make me almost as beautiful as my brother, whom you loved more than everything in life. It certainly didn’t work, because in all the pictures that remain (I keep them in an old photo album), I appear with a grumpy face and sad eyes, trying to fake a smile, less to look good in the portraits than to avoid the slaps that would leave my arms burning. Not Rubens. Always smiling, with his fat little legs stuffed into shorts with suspenders, he stole the show. And, once the photos were ready, you showed them to everyone, saying: *Ana Luiza needs to learn from Rubinho how to look good in pictures*. I should mention that I always found it strange how you pronounced my name: While everybody in the family called me

Lulu (except for Dad, who preferred Analu), you insisted on saying *A-na Lu-i-za*, emphasizing every syllable with a tone of authority.

Striking, too, how after Rubens' birth you started to treat me like I was the most detestable person on the face of the earth: ugly, scrawny, grimy, resembling the members of Dad's family, whom you referred to as "simple people." Rubinho, besides being the "young man" you hoped I would be when you got pregnant with me, was always my opposite: blond and green-eyed, corpulent, princely. Just like everyone in your family of *senhoras e senhores* who had lived for years and years in our house, before you inherited it and it grew infested with fat, glistening cockroaches.

As Aunt Zenóbia says, each man heals himself however he can. But scars remain as traces of what we try to forget, since it's impossible for past experiences to stay silent forever. The effort to erase memories tends to be foolish and useless, for the poison of things lingers like a curse. So I am trying to heal myself the best way I can.

But no, I didn't want to bring all of this to the surface on the day of the anniversary of your death. I didn't want to succumb to any shadow of resentment. What I did want was to cry from longing, to go to the cemetery alone to put flowers on your grave and pray for your soul, to post photos of the two of us on Instagram with loving words, to write an elegy, a lyric poem exalting your existence in my life. I wanted to remember your abundant beauty, your talent for ballroom dancing, the almost childlike malice with which you spoke of men and fleshy fruit.

Might I manage to do it someday?

Chapter 1 from *Quanto custa
um elefante?* (2020)
by Marcelo Mirisola

Translated by Paulo Candido

Translator's Preface

Marcelo Mirisola (b. 1966) is a contemporary Brazilian writer born in the 1960s and, as such, his work pays tribute to 20th-century Brazilian and Latin American literature. The chapter presented here opens his novel *Quanto custa um elefante?* (2020), which translates to “How much does an elephant cost?” Mirisola and I felt that such a direct translation of the title did not convey the original version’s rhythm. So the English version lost the interrogation and became an affirmative statement, “The price of an elephant,” without losing its somewhat strange flavor.

Mirisola writes the novel as a first-person account of the author’s experience, beginning with a note to his lost lover—herself a character in the book—and descending quickly into a tale that incorporates Afro-Brazilian religious rites, the biblical Devil, and a whole host of local references, both to the Brazilian context as a whole and to Rio de Janeiro, where the novel takes place, in particular. It is quite hard to convey the text’s whole context to a foreign reader. Yet we try.

Latin American magical realism (known in Portuguese and Spanish as “fantastic realism,” or *realismo fantástico*) was an overwhelmingly predominant literary trend throughout the region during the 1960s, when the Cold War and our colonial heritage joined forces to turn Latin America into a military-led bloodbath sponsored by the West. It would be naive to attribute the rise of magical realism solely to the political and social conditions during which it happened, but it is curious that several of our most celebrated novelists—names like Nobel Prize-winner Gabriel García Márquez from Colombia, Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar from Argentina, and Isabel Allende from Chile—were all either practitioners of, or seriously influenced by, magical realism. Many important Brazilian authors have also drunk from the waters of magical realism, including writers such as Jorge Amado, Érico Veríssimo, and Dias Gomes, among others. Although, two decades into the 21st century, magical realism has already turned into a mainstream genre globally, one may still read *Quanto custa um elefante?* as a latter-day magical realist novel, as the genre’s influence and defining traits prove prominent in it. Marcelo does not make the reader wait; just after the small note to

the narrator's lost lover, Ruin, the first paragraphs of the first chapter dive right into the Devil's invocation by an Umbanda priestess, and from there, we are not in the proverbial Kansas anymore.

Dom Juanito, described as "the sorcerer of the rich and famous," has nicknamed the narrator's lover Ruin in a previous book by Mirisola. Just like a One Ring or Scotland's throne, Ruin is the source of a relentless obsession, a bringer of chaos and destruction. The mention of Juanito also serves to inform the reader that our hero has already been involved in supernatural affairs.

Juanito's lines also present the first translation decision: to keep the words spoken in Spanish and repeat them in English, an addition to the original text we thought was justified by the importance of the phrases to the story development and the severe loss of context the suppression of the Spanish text would represent had it been translated into English. It is important to observe here that I was lucky to work directly with the author, so all translation decisions were discussed and agreed upon by both me and Mirisola.

The next interference in the text was editorial: We decided to explain references to some local aspects in footnotes; since the text was written in Portuguese for Brazilian readers, we felt that the mentions to places in Rio de Janeiro and to the Brazilian currency, while obvious to the local reader, deserved short explanations. Finally, all terms related to Afro-Brazilian religions were either explained directly in the text or left as a breadcrumb for the more curious readers.

Mirisola's vast arsenal of Brazilian popular and religious themes, as well as his dialogue with the Western literary and philosophical traditions, turns the translation of this small chapter into an amusing challenge. Hopefully the English-language reader will be able to enjoy a taste of the original text's style and spirit.

Chapter 1 from *Quanto custa um elefante?*

by Marcelo Mirisola

My love,

I deny, with all my powers, the existence, the contents and, especially, the flash drive's "materialization" in our hotel room. I can't accept it! And I also do not recognize myself or you during that damned weekend. I wish you could understand, this is not our story, I am not losing my mind, much less trying to avoid any responsibility. The past has already happened. We can't go back in time: only that supernatural cesspool, the *Macumba*, or the arbitrariness of the Universe would explain, my love, the sequence of horrors poured upon us, as if we were, just the two of us, the sole recipients of the 10 plagues of Egypt. That damnable weekend!

We were trapped!

Besides, the sole outcome of such a violence speaks against my style. Or do you really believe I would be so foolish as to—once again!—write another book about our bad luck and our misfortunes? You know my style is directly linked to my ego, and I don't bargain over it, not even with the devil.

Not this time! I swear to you, and to myself, this time our story will not be turned into a novel.

That's because we are talking about something unfit even for the outskirts of reality. . . much less for fiction! I wouldn't be so crude, neither to you nor to my already stained "reputation."

You know me, you know my writings, take a breath and think: Nothing happened of any relevance, any elan, I would never devise such a stupid plot. . . much less after the books I've dedicated to you in order to praise myself. By the way, I loved it when you said that I'm "my own ego tourist guide". . . Bingo! That's exactly the case, right on target!

I am an egomaniac, an obsessed man, but above all, you know that. . . I am a fucking artist! According to the poor plot written without our consent, I am dead to you and I've wasted any chance of reconciliation. . . but my love, that may not have anything to do with me (the records show I am your monster, so do you really believe it?), my

love for you is above any excuses and any broken spells, my love (that you have left here) is one that gives the finger to the supernatural and defies all special effects, all traps, all pitfalls. . . and stays the same. Exactly the same. Use it as you will, it is yours. The same applies to Belchior's¹ compact discs and to the small hippie sandals you have also left behind, and now everything is being dispatched by priority mail.

Yours,
Marcelo

1

– If he were that good, why was his house stoned? – Mother Valéria was quick to downplay Dom Juanito, El brujo. El brujo de los ricos y famosos. *The sorcerer of the rich and famous.*

For those of you who don't know it, it was after a session with El brujo that I kicked off *As If I Was Smoked*, my previous novel. If I recall correctly, in the second or third paragraph Dom Juanito delivers his message, which is more than a message, it is the novel's motto and mantra:

– Es su ruina, olvida a esa mujer. *She's your ruin, forget that woman.*

He also made another threat, one I haven't mentioned in that book; I thought it was an unnecessary piece of information, I didn't expect I would need to write almost 150 pages to close a seemingly minor demand:

– Suerte que vino aquí – he warned me. – Se fuera en cualquier otro lugar te iban a desplumar. *You're lucky to have come here. If you went anywhere else, you'd be ripped off. "Deplumed," as he colorfully put it.* – Despertarte, hombre! Ponete las pilas! *Wake up, man! Turn yourself on!*

* * *

And I was counting on being "deplumado," or ripped off—and it was not even a very unconscious or hidden wish—so I went to see Mother Valéria. I would never be able to forget Ruin, even

¹ Belchior is a beloved Brazilian singer and songwriter who rose to popularity in the 1970s.

feeling continuously threatened by her shadow. My diabolical heart demanded otherwise.

And speaking of the devil, it was Mother Valéria who curtsied and brought me to the presence of such an illustrious, distinct, and renowned creature. She was the one who guided me to my heart's main square and introduced me to the devil.

I was completely adrift, but my bank account was full of money. Lots of money. A supernatural quantity of money, something I had never imagined I would have. Suddenly I was a *CitiGold Private Client*, me, this person here, against all odds, turned into a shiny, golden, and very private client.

Money falling from the sky: urban properties, stores, warehouses and gas stations, coffee farms in full production, cattle, trucks and tractors, and a fortune in government titles, paid just after my parents died. An inheritance, falling at once from the sky into my now-VIP checking account.

And if it fell from the sky, it was—obviously—the devil's share. It was his. At least the money in the bank, that was his. And it was the first thing the son of a bitch sniffed: As I was desperate after losing Ruin in a quite gruesome weekend, my millionaire sucker face was probably flashing, in large shiny letters, for something like this: SUCKER AND MILLIONAIRE ASKING TO BE RIPPED OFF, ripped off, ripped off, ripped off. And the devil, never a fool, obliged. He wanted his share. He wanted it all.

It is incorrect to think that everyone seeking the devil wants to sell his or her soul. Of course, most go looking for a bargain and end up offering themselves for a trifle. But all rules—I hate being forced to repeat such commonplaces—all rules have their exceptions.

People seek out the fiend to solve their earthly demands, to order an accident or a small cancer to an enemy, to make a 12-year-old stepdaughter fall in love with her nice and wholesome stepdad, a lottery prize here, some petty requests over there. No one seeks out the devil to ask for the preservation of the Amazon rainforest or to help a neighbor who lost their oven, fridge, and two-place sofa to a flood. For the latter causes there are Leo DiCaprio, the Catholic Church saints, and a myriad of NGOs and charities—not all of them managed by God.

I never felt like selling my soul, less so after Valéria made it clear my soul was of no interest to the devil. I wanted an explanation for the awkward weekend with Ruin and, if at all possible, and God willing (I dragged God into the story because I am a chicken-hearted bastard, a coward, and because, oh well, I believe in Him. Deal with it), God willing and if my fate was really tied to Ruin's fate, I (besides being a coward, plus a superstitious and corny hypocrite) wanted her back.

* * *

The devil—with good reason—ripped me off. In his place I would have done the same, damn the do-gooders. From now on, I would have much more than an explanation and a relief for my despair. In a moment I will talk at length about how I was fooled and about the weirdest fucking weekend of all time.

* * *

Mother Valéria/“the man” (because they really had, in fact, a pact between themselves), in a half possession, half warning mood, in order to prevent any illusion of a middle ground and/or any suspicions I might develop, and obviously trying to impress me—and impress me she did—slashed herself, opening a large cut in her index finger. A gushing stream of dark, thick blood poured onto the image dedicated to Lucifer and, as the sticky liquid fell generously over the icon, the altar, the Congá darkness lit up in frightening flashes: It was one of the most beautiful, threatening, and impressive scenes I ever witnessed. It was as if my dizziness and my loss had mingled with Valéria's blood and faith, and together, and only then, they all turned into light: Lucifer.

Awed and frightened by what I saw, and presented to a state of things—or a state of the world—to which I didn't have any chance of even beginning to devise some kind of response or explanation, besides being psychologically broken and completely disoriented after I'd been cheated, I did what anyone in my place would have done, I caved in. To put it briefly, I may say “the man”/Valéria made

me a proposition not only worth his or her or its name, but on par with the image it represented:

– We sacrifice a child. We can find one in Rocinha² right now.

Such a suggestion assured me I was standing before the devil himself, in flesh and blood, in horns and all other common features and images we usually associate with the said creature, including a strong stench of sulfur that pervaded the room, mixed with special effects and all the evils of the world. It was the man. It could only be him. His voice showed no hesitation: “We sacrifice a child. We can find one in Rocinha right now.” *In natura*. And it was perfectly down-to-earth, inside that hellish context he was supposed to operate: Do you want to solve this matter? It is very easy, kill a child.

– No! No, mind you, Mr. Devil, we need not go that far.

He got mad at me.

Before resuming the account, it is important to make a remark and remind the reader of something: It was not like I sought out the devil. I could have gone to an Argentinian psychoanalyst, but I went instead to a *mãe de santo*, an Umbanda priestess, because I was completely perplexed; when choosing my supernatural flavor, I’ve just traded Freud for *Macumba*.

The idea of calling him, the evil one, was hers. And I, a polite man who was going through hell, did—I insist—what anyone in my situation would have done, I opened my arms to the devil. I was caught with my pants down—I even wonder if I’d not been ambushed. And I, a man who, in principle, had just been fooled again by Ruin, I was now in the presence of the Prince of Darkness. And one would think he must have gone through considerable troubles to travel from the comforts of his deep kingdom to Mother Valéria’s Congá, just to meet me, another Pierrot crying for the love of another Columbine, another fool in a large crowd of betrayed men, every single one of us deluded and hopelessly in love.

So, I reckoned that for Satan himself to be there, in person—rather unsettled, let me tell you, and impatient, too, before a paltry

² Rocinha is the largest favela (the local name for “slum”) in Rio de Janeiro. As a matter of fact, it may be the largest favela in Brazil.

insect like me — something more than the proverbial kick I had been served in the ass must have been happening. Why such a high honor?

I felt both deeply flattered and like I would soon pee myself, but I also had nowhere to run. It was all or nothing, so we had to reach an agreement.

– Instead of a child you may offer money. He accepts money – said Valéria, cheerfully.

I pretended I didn't understand. Then I decided to throw out some bait and risked a counteroffer:

– What if I wrote a book exalting Your Excellency?

The devil's impatience immediately changed or lowered its frequency. He inhaled deeply, and he may have missed for a moment his quiet life in the depths of Hell. He nodded, briefly caressed his horns and then he, the very one who had certainly chatted with Thomas Mann and Goethe, he, the good, old and tired Dorian Gray, he opened a puzzled smile of incredulity and amazement, and answered:

– Fuck your fucking exaltation; I want six elephants.

I looked to Mother Valéria and asked:

– How much does an elephant cost?

– Thirty thousand – the woman answered promptly – an elephant costs 30 thousand reais.³

Besides ignoring my past and future writings, the devil asked for six elephants, 30 grand apiece!

Look, I could be in the presence of Satan himself, but the one thing larger than Heaven and Hell put together is my ego. And thanks to it — my large and unrepentant ego — I manage to regroup my forces, there in that fucking place where the devil had sent me. And I said:

– No, you can't have six elephants.

The Good Old Fellow's rage boiled. Nothing could escape him, he said, he would catch me in the whirlwind, I would fucking regret it dearly if I didn't stop being a cheap coward, he hadn't emerged from the depths to waste his time with me, he wasn't kidding around.

³ The real (R\$) is the Brazilian currency. At the time of writing, one US dollar would be traded for something between five and six Brazilian reais.

I was about to respond with something like “it’s too much information. . . I need to check my balance, I can provide an answer in. . .”

Valéria quickly pulled me out of this train of thought and cut to the chase:

– A hundred twenty thousand in cash. For the first installment.

First?

– Yes, there will be two burnings. One hundred fifty thousand total. In the second session we will burn 30 thousand. Now we need 120 thousand, ’cause he’s hungry.

I was going to ask for some time to think because I really needed it; it was too much information at once, the devil was hungry and he fed on *mo-ney*, and I started doing some calculations in my head: “What if we find an innocent child for a cheaper price, say, in Cordovil, Brás de Pina, in Morro do Pica-Pau?”⁴

Then Mother Valéria, who was also in a hurry, said:

– Forget the elephants, my son, let’s talk about cash. Cash.

The creature was hungry, and his meal would cost me no more and no less than 150 thousand reais.

They, she and the devil, were talking about burning money. A fortune, 120 thousand now, followed by another 30 thousand. But how could they know I had that kind of money in the bank?

And on the top of it, I said to myself, holy fuck, my soul goes down the drain.

Should I waste all this money for the sake of a woman? A woman I love, my home, my life, yes, a woman that for seven years now had been driving me crazy, a woman that made me write three fantastic books, a woman that was my sunshine, my only sunshine, etc., etc. — but such an amount of money just because I was in pain for having been cheated?

I am in fact quite a coward, more than that, I am more a wacko than a coward. I had no objection to wasting a fortune that had fallen on my head without any effort on my part (other than living in tiny apartments for 50 years). I had no attachment to it. But besides wasting the money, would I lose my soul just because she left me?

⁴ Cordovil, Brás de Pina, and Morro do Pica-Pau are poor neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro.

Mother Valéria, after we went all-in, was quite helpful and explained the obvious: It was not a “sale,” because the “will to receive” came from the man. I should feel thankful and lucky for making an “offering,” a gift to the devil. She told me not to worry, me and my little soul would emerge uninjured from that minor venture. It was not a sale, much less a bargain, an exchange or a trade. If I could not offer a child in sacrifice, if elephants were impossible to find in the market, the circus and the zoos, I could pay in cash. The devil was hungry:

– He does not want your soul. Let us burn the money, it is equivalent to sacrificing an innocent’s life. You have this choice, and we won’t wait your answer for much longer, you either accept it or you’re pretty much fucked.

– Hell – I thought.

The devil immediately interrupted my thoughts:

– Are you going to haggle with me?

Fuck! A thousand flying fucks! Where the hell is my guardian angel when I need him?

Mother Valéria, noticing the situation was getting out of hand, begged the devil’s leave and whispered in my ear:

– Take it or leave it. You won’t find another opportunity like this elsewhere. Do you have any idea of what is happening here and now?

– No, I’m pretty clueless.

– We’re here – said the woman – to celebrate life. And a life that is treacherous, after all we live on Earth. Did you know, my son, that Earth is just a Hell’s patch of land?

At this point the devil burst out in laughter. Valéria seized the moment to bring the point home and said the magic words, “he who loves does not haggle”:

– My son, you know this better than anybody. Why would you try to bargain?

Using all their charm and wit, the Beast and the *macumbeira* managed to corner me. In the end it was a kind of godsent relief, let me tell you. Besides, I have also enjoyed the unquestionable conclusion that our little blue planet is just a patch of Hell.

– The point – continued Mother Valéria – is to socialize with this guy here, who rules the world and our illusions. It is a rare opportunity, if you don't take it now you may well forget it until another lifetime.

And she added:

– The only real sin, my son, is to cower from life.

The time was running out.

– What are you waiting for? Only he – she concluded, pointing her chin toward the entity – only he has the power to give back what the bowels of the world has taken from us.

In five minutes, the *mãe de santo*—inspired, naturally, by the demon who shamelessly plagiarized me—said things the Brazilian literature was unable to express for the last 25 years (and there would be much more. . .):

– The devil rules the world and our illusions, the Earth is but a Hell's patch of land, only the devil can return what the bowels of the Earth have taken from us. He who loves does not haggle.

* * *

Before the witch could go on, we were interrupted by her son, an albino gorilla-sized jiu-jitsu fighter, who entered the Congá carrying a goatling. Mother Valéria explained: “The man there asked for it, to start the rite.” I thought to myself: “How is that? We haven't even closed the deal, and he wants to start the rite already?”

I almost forgot to tell you something. So many weird things happened that night and in those days that the facts and the details, which in the end are what make the account plausible, end up slipping from the mind.

Let me explain: Satan possessed a foreign sorcerer, who had arrived directly from Mozambique to Mother Valéria's Congá. This surprised me when I entered the sacred chamber, actually an enormous room in the apartment—“The devil gave it to me”—the woman kept in Ipanema.⁵ Room or Congá: The Candomblé word “Congá” means magic temple, place of ways, offerings, rites,

⁵ Ipanema is an upper-middle-class neighborhood in Rio.

conjurations, etc. The Black man dressed in a green tunic was almost two meters tall. He snorted through his nostrils and spoke with a very heavy accent, giving the impression that he had really come from another world, from Hell itself; he was the one who growled impatiently and threatened me, at the same time offering me his toxic and far from orthodox services; so, as I was saying, a gorilla-sized albino man, Valéria's son, entered the room carrying a teenage goat, almost an adult goat. My eyes moved from the black man to the small animal, and it looked back at me, creating a bond of complicity, tenderness, calm, and affection: How are you, little guy, is everything OK?

The devil could not believe what he had just heard, "How are you, little guy, is everything OK?" What could I do? We had a moment, the little goat and me, I think the devil got jealous and would certainly unleash all hellhounds on me. But before he could admonish me once again, Mother Valéria interfered:

– Besides lighting the Earth – she said, pointing to the sorcerer, who in turn shot me a disapproving grimace – he is also our caretaker, and the caretaker of corruption, and it was him, in that exact and unique moment in which you were distracted and in love with that woman, when you were lost in the world, dazzled and unprotected, it was him who collected, guarded, and cared for you and your treasure. He guarded your treasure, I'm talking about your life, my son.

– Life – she added – that is ours only in those moments we lose control, when we are not participating. That is the devil's workshop. Come on, my son, take your life back, if that is God's will.

I found it curious that she ended her speech with "if that is God's will." The literary metaphors and images Mother Valéria used, like "the Earth is but a patch of Hell" and others, also made an impression on me. Also, I had never imagined that the devil was watching over me: Could it be possible that he was my guardian angel?

Finally, when she said "if that is God's will," and the devil nodded, "yes! If that is God's will," well, seeing and hearing all this—maybe just an act to trick me, as they've tried to trick Jesus in the desert, but I am not Jesus—I ended up letting myself go with the flow, and then, not exactly comfortable but happy and dazzled by the poetry coming directly from the depths of Hell, I started to be ripped off.

Although I was somewhat satisfied, I was also in a state of submission, I was subjugated. So I could not counter them. Nevertheless, I both had and didn't have all that money. I forgot to mention it, before I could reach the devil for the first time, Mother Valéria had "locked" my body through the celebration of 12 dark masses in my honor. According to her, besides the high-quality coffins where I was, I mean, my bodily fluids were symbolically buried, besides that she had to require the help of almost a hundred "filhos e filhas de santo."⁶ Also, seven dozen black oxen and uncountable goats and chickens had to be sacrificed to rid me from all curses I collected in 20 years of literature. "Envy, my son, lots of envy: even a Japanese fellow ordered a *macumba* against you."

A fuckload of envy: If even a Japanese guy ordered a *macumba*, things were really very bad for me. That I knew.

She had not just freed me from two decades of envy and its weight, she had also cured me from prostate cancer, thrombosis, and dying of respiratory failure in the waiting room of a public hospital. It cost me 120 thousand reais. Money not burned, mind you, but transferred in the most common way to Valéria's son's (the gorilla-sized albino jiu-jitsu fighter) bank account.

I made a quick mental calculation and concluded that besides scrapping my bank account, I would also have to sell my one-room apartment in the neighborhood of Bixiga in São Paulo, the sole property in my name. Everything else, thank God, was frozen until the end of the inheritance proceedings.

Valéria told me to calm down, there was nothing to worry about. Him, "the man," would let me pay in "installments."

And she would vouch for me and act as my bondsman; she would pay the debt herself if I failed to raise the money. She said I should close the deal already, because "the man" was about to lose his patience. I insisted I didn't have all that money, so we agreed to burn 30 thousand reais, the equivalent of one elephant. Then, when I managed to raise the rest of the money, we would make a nice bonfire with the remaining 120 thousand. Immediately thereafter the devil chastised me again, saying he had never made a deal

⁶ The Brazilian Candomblé/Umbanda lower-rank priests and priestesses.

like that before, that he was making an exception for me, and that it was shameful on my part to use a *mãe de santo*, one of his own daughters, as the guarantor of a sacrifice. So we closed a deal—an act that had other repercussions I will explain as we go along—for now, all I will just say is that 30 thousand would be set on fire immediately.

There were also many ceremonies performed by Valéria after that (“just to be sure”), I don’t know how many chickens, ducks, and roosters, maybe a whole poultry farm, plus pigeons, oxen, and goats, all of which ended up cleaning out my bank account. I also renovated Mother Valéria’s living room furniture in her gorgeous Ipanema flat and paid a six-month gym membership for her gorilla-sized albino son. I took a 50 thousand real hit on my credit card. The devil was hungry, very hungry.

– Yeah, sucker: try being nice, go ask the devil for love and peace and see what happens.

But the fact is, all this madness has a reason, one that left me completely satisfied and fulfilled, something that went and will go far beyond a fortune burned to satisfy the devil’s hunger. I have nothing to complain about. A madman, as Chesterton noticed, is someone who has lost everything but his reason.

* * *

A thought before going on:

I am talking about burning money, a lot of money. Money in cash. Fire, money. Bill upon bill, a hundred reais, 50 reais, one over another. I even threw some dollars and euros in the bonfire for good luck and to cheer up the devil, who was still mad at me.

You should try for yourself, dear reader, to burn a small bill. Under normal circumstances, it is very hard. Under extraordinary circumstances, it is also very hard. Unthinkable. Now, think about killing a child. Also unthinkable.

On the other hand, think about killing a son of a bitch, think about the amount of useless people in this world wasting oxygen and carbon gas. Think about a certain former president of the Brazilian Senate, who has been embezzling public funds for decades, who makes deals to benefit his friends, lovers, and relatives. Think about

this guy who paid for a hair implant with public funds, remember he dyes the implanted hair shades of mahogany.

How much is such a son of a bitch's life worth?

Remember you've spent your life saving what little money you managed to earn. Think about the way money moves the world. Realize that money is life, ask any Jewish man and he will confirm, money is the sap that feeds the tree of life, money is the acquired knowledge and the wisdom, the happiness and unhappiness of a man. Understand then, my dear, burning money is far more serious than killing someone. Sometimes, a life is not worth even five cents. Most people are worth nothing, and life does not have the value men and their judgment have put on it. Even the Bible, a story of holocausts, confirms this impression. Newton, yes, Sir Isaac Newton, was a son of a bitch. Some people are not worth two reals, add it up, burning 150 thousand reals is equivalent to many genocides. Stalin and Hitler have not killed that many people. Nero has burned just one city. Think about it, only a monster would commit such an insane, barbarian, and crazy act, a grievous act of unpredictable consequences. Think that an act like this has the potential to move the present and change the future. Think about a black hole.

It is not just bullshit, not just a disdain for the myriad starving souls out there. Although people do not starve for a lack of money, they starve because the money owners prefer to amass their money instead of burning it. But I am neither Robin Hood nor a liberal banker, I have no intention of saving the world, far from it, my goal was just to put 150 thousand reals to fire. Just that.

For me, beyond the holocaust, beyond the unjustifiable and maybe unforgivable madness, before everything and anything, strange as it may seem, I did what I did for love. Yes, it was an act of love. An act whose purpose was not just to unclog the devil's arteries and feed his heart. It was, or better said, it is—because it is a major and continuous act of love, certainly an act previously unheard of, perhaps the first and the last unconditional act of love I managed to perform in my miserable life. To keep it short, it is an unconditional act of love, a love whose reason of existence was self-sufficient. By the way, it has gone far beyond any expectation, I was suddenly launched into a future I thought was long lost: I burned

150 thousand reais because the devil promised not just to bring back the woman I loved, he also promised me a son. The devil promised me a son from Ruin.

Before passing judgment and declaring me a vain and selfish man, let me do it for you. The money was mine, I would waste it anyway, so fuck you, you who will now throw away this book, you who does not have even two reais in your pocket to insert into your own asshole: Good for you, bye, have a nice life.

A son, a life that probably wouldn't make any difference among the many lives inhabiting the planet's five continents, another Pierrot to fall victim to an asshole of a Harlequin, another sufferer among billions of hopelessly romantic Pierrots, cheated and useless clowns crying in the crowd. Maybe he would be a peaceful and successful violinist, or a numb waiter serving jerks at a tasteless burger joint in Vila Madalena,⁷ or even the owner of a burger joint. Perhaps a saint or a murderer, who wouldn't do anything special or anything different from what any other saint or murderer who ever walked on Earth ever did—anything but a writer, because that would be too much of a disgrace.

A fuckingsonofmine. The revelation cut deep, it really touched me. Inexplicably, the promise of a son made sense out of my life's incurable senselessness, out of a 51-year trance. Fifty-one years stumbling and held down, hungover and drifting. It was as if something clicked and the tune abruptly changed.

The devil's sudden revelation had healed me from myself. It made sense. It was not God or the fucking literature that made it dawn on me, but the devil. He was the one who gave me a compass, solid ground, a direction, a reason to keep going on. It is like the path drawn by a man who puts a gun in his own mouth. To him, it makes perfect sense to pull the trigger. So, if it makes sense, it is alright. Life is alright. It was as if I had earned a do-over. As if I had gotten my future back. I, who had arrived completely lost at Mother Valéria's home; the new fact, therefore, was not my lack of direction, I've always been disoriented. I can't recall a moment when I had somewhere to go, a

⁷ Vila Madalena is a famously bohemian neighborhood in São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil.

goal. And I've never complained about being a drifter, I was used to it and felt comfortable that way. I've never considered ways or directions to anything or anywhere, more so for having acquired—by my own means, let it be clear—a non-place of my own.

What else could I want?

When I was young, I had the future to exact revenge on the world of my elders, a world that had nothing to do with me. Yes, I had a brand-new future to waste, and I dedicated my life to that task. Until I reached that future, and failed to recognize myself (or had not recognized myself) in it—the same way I couldn't recognize myself, when I was young, in the old world of the elders. But now I'm the elder and it would be—theoretically—impossible to “exact a revenge” from the future, since all I had ahead of me was more past. And then, trivial as it may seem, the new fact was the son—the impossible revenge. And it was much more than mere vanity. Alright, I recognize it could be my old male bachelor vanity. But beyond that, and more important than that, a son was something that made sense.

A dangerous and improbable coherence? A contradiction? Yes and yes.

It does not have any logic. It suits me: It does not have logic, but it makes sense. If we were talking about some later-day surrealism, the question would be already closed.

Still, the devil promised me a son from Ruin.

Let us get back on track. How does a guy (yes, I am talking about me) who had cracked the code for self-deception, and who had not only knowledge but also practical experience with a goddamned system that had already failed—and that had no chance of working—how does such a mess of a man, old and tired, a guy who despised the infamous “free will, hope, and destiny” triad, how does such a guy suddenly, out of nowhere, just because Satan himself said so, how does such a guy suddenly start believing there is a meaning, any meaning, in this fucking life? How does an improbable revelation, 51 minutes into the second half of the soccer match, a son from Ruin, how could it make any sense?

Analyzing it all coolly, what did we have? Ruin. Always her, the cheater, the staggerer, the one who has never loved me back, the

most improbable woman, the card Dom Juanito, *el brujo de los ricos y famosos*, advised me to discard from my deck, the woman who has always fled from me and left me speaking to myself, the woman who has never been mine, the asshole who cheated on me with a street poet and then left me for a hipster, the woman who satisfied her hungers eating street garbage. Never a reliable woman, and yes, I had three reliable women, and dumped them one by one, for Ruin. It was her, the *macumba* in woman form, the black mass, a devil recommended by the Devil himself. She was the one who would bring me the future and fulfill the devil's promise through her own womb, she would give me a son. Well, for me it made sense, it has always made sense.

“After August” from *Ovelhas
negras* (1995) by
Caio Fernando Abreu

Translated by Julia Garcia

Translator's Preface

Caio Fernando Abreu's last published short story, "Depois de Agosto," is about a man's life after being diagnosed with AIDS. Written 12 months before the author's death at 47 due to complications of the same disease in February 1995, "Depois de Agosto" ("After August"), could easily be read as autofiction. That is the case of many of Caio's stories: a raw, passionate dive into the life of someone who experiences the world differently from everyone else around them. In fact, the sense of absolute intimacy in Caio's oeuvre is evident in how he is still often referred to in scholarship and in the media: by his signature, Caio F. This might sound weird to readers in English, but Brazilian scholars tend to be on a first-name basis with this author, as he no doubt would have preferred.

Still, when presenting "Depois de Agosto" in *Ovelhas negras* (Black sheep, 1995), Caio calls it "um tanto cifrada," a bit enigmatic. Having just finished it, he doesn't feel like he has much to say about it. This is the last short story in the collection, and it stands out: All other stories were "black sheep" (hence the title), pieces that had been written for a collection but not made the final cut, or that were only ran in newspapers, or that had been censored by the Military Regime in Brazil (1964–1985), against which Caio was vocal. The stories span the author's entire career, from the mid-1960s to his untimely death, and "Depois de Agosto" is by far the most recent one. Unlike the others, this one seems not to have been edited. Caio introduces each short story with some quick context and lets the reader know whether it has been edited or what follows is the original, but this one is "too close." Could this be the reason for the sense of mystery he perceives in the text?

Caio wasn't exactly known for having an "easy" style. His passionate but obscure language has often been compared to that of Clarice Lispector and Virginia Woolf—not surprisingly, some of his biggest influences. Even his third-person narrators feel close, more all-*feeling* than all-*knowing*. "After August" could just as easily have been written in first person and little would change about it. The same is true for several of his works, most notably in short story collections such as *O ovo apunhalado* (The stabbed egg, 1975) and

Morangos mofados (1982, English translation *Moldy Strawberries* published in 2022 by Bruna Dantas Lobato). Caio's stories are often concerned with finding one's place in the world, fighting loneliness, forging bonds in an inhospitable city. More than describing this state of mind, his text embodies it. There is a refusal to explain that echoes throughout his work. His writing is often proudly hard to reach.

Much of that comes from some of Caio's trademark quirks: the unnamed characters, referred to mostly by pronouns; his *use-of-hyphens*, turning multiple words into a single one; the run-on sentences that mix narration of events, thoughts, and direct quotes. Caio's plays with language, not only in Brazilian Portuguese but regularly including Spanish, French, and English, require attentive reading. Although in his introduction he worries that "After August" might be enigmatic, he also is confident that "a good reader" will not let that hinder their understanding.

This absolute trust in the reader is a key aspect of Caio's work, and in this translation I have attempted to follow his lead. Whenever I had to choose between two versions and was tempted to favor one for clarity, I went back to the text and analyzed it again to see whether this could be one of the "ciphers" he alludes to. Caio's text expects reciprocity: It offers you a glimpse into someone's most intimate workings, and all it wants is for you to experience everything in its entirety.

As I worked on "After August," I treaded a fine line between producing a readable (and hopefully pleasurable) translation and *explicating* the text. Would that still be *translating* Caio's work? Is it the translator's job to make the enigma a little bit easier to understand for those without a shared language to start from? Like Caio, his characters were raised in a time of repression and fear. What they don't say matters as much as what they say, if not more. They either live in hiding or live proudly but are always aware of the risks of doing so. Most of his characters are gay; they are often dealing with the freedom of adulthood after a lifetime of shame. This is all in "After August," with a further sense of urgency that can be hard to follow at times. The man in the story is trying to find life after a death sentence, and as he travels through different cities—never explicitly named, only hinted at—there is much he does not yet dare

articulate. The text reflects his process of coming to terms with the life ahead of him. It isn't easy, but it is beautiful. I tried to favor that quality, even if it meant relying, here and there, on a few more words than Caio needed.

Today, nearly 30 years after his death, Caio is unfortunately more widely known for things he did not write. His passionate style has become a source of inspiration for many writers, and across social media hundreds of products of this influence have been misattributed to Caio. He has thus become associated with self-help quotes that do not bear even a passing resemblance to his work, such as "Life is short, live it. Love is rare, enjoy it. Fear is terrible, face it. Memories are sweet, cherish them." It is as if there had been two Caio Fernando Abreus: one telling you to live, laugh, and love, and another concerned with exploring what those things effectively meant in a world that seems to be against you all the time. Sharing stories such as "After August," so representative of his favorite themes and the way he sculpted them into the text, is a way of highlighting Caio F.'s real legacy. May he be remembered and celebrated for who he was, and may other "black sheep" find solace in his work.

After August

by Caio Fernando Abreu

(A positive story, to be read accompanied by “Contigo en la Distancia”)

Author’s note: Written in February 1995, in Rio de Janeiro, Fortaleza, and Porto Alegre. There isn’t much to say about it, it is still too close for me to be sufficiently cold and removed. It might be a bit enigmatic, but a good reader won’t let a little bit of mystery keep them from understanding.

“For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These 40 years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing.” Deuteronomy 2:7

LAZARUS

It was already too late on that August morning. That was the first thought in his mind as he crossed the hospital doors sunk on his two friends’ shoulders. Guardian angels, one on each side. He made a list: too late for joy, too late for love, for health, for life itself, he kept repeating those words to himself without uttering a word, trying not to look at the sun reflected on the grey headstones across Dr. Arnaldo Avenue. Trying to see not the graves but rather the crazy life inside the tunnels and highways that flowed into Paulista Avenue, he experimented with a new laugh. Step by step, in part because he didn’t want to scare his friends, in part because it really was a little funny to be back to that metal vertigo of São Paulo, a city he had left behind but a month before.

Let’s have some sushi at a restaurant you like, said the woman on his left. And he laughed. After that we can go to the movies and see that Tom Hanks guy you like, said the man on his right. And he laughed one more time. The three of them did, a little uneasily, because from that August morning, even though they and everyone else who knew or would come to know (since he was proud of not having anything to hide), even though they all would try to

tenderly pretend not to, they all knew it was too late for him now. For joy, he repeated, health, life itself. Overall, it's too late for love now, he sighed. Discreet, prudish, conformed. Never-again. Love was what hurt the most, and of all his pains, this was the only one he would not dare to confess to.

SPRING

But it almost didn't hurt, in the following months. Spring came and brought so many purples and yellows to the jacaranda trees, so many blue and silver reflections to the waters in the river, so much movement in the faces of People on the Other Side with their delicious stories of living unimportances, and cloud shapes—an angel, one day—and shades in the garden in the late afternoons—on another day, two butterflies making love against his thigh. Thigh Love Station, he laughed to himself.

He wouldn't always laugh. For there were also hard times, hard drugs, nauseas, vertigos, words escaping him, suspiciously hanging from the roof of his mouth, a sweaty terror strangling his nights and eyes low on the mirror each morning, so that he wouldn't see Cain's mark on his own face. But there were still other sweet abstractions like a sense of pining for things before they were gone, since everyone knew it was too late, and a pounding faith irrationally hoping for some science fiction miracle; there were sometimes magical signs in the colored plumes lost around the house. And most importantly, there were mornings. They were no longer August mornings, rather it was September, then October, and so on and so forth until a January in the new year which just last August he had not dared to hope for.

I'm still strong, he found out one day, full-blown summer in the southern city he had moved to, deserted and crowned by the sun, white and hot like a Mediterranean village in a Theos Angelopoulos movie. So he decided: I'm going to travel. Because I haven't died, because it's summer, because it's too late and I want to see, glimpse, spot, behold everything I haven't seen yet and even more of what I have seen, like someone who's been condemned, I want to see like Pessoa, who also died without finding it. Damned and lonely, he dared to decide: I'm going to travel.

JADE

Towards the coast, near the sea, where the green waters looked like jade glistening in the horizon, as if he were part of a kitschy postcard, he drank coconut water wearing a straw hat under the shade of a palm tree in the seven o'clock sun, collecting colored shells hemmed in the sea foam. At sunset he would sometimes treat himself to a beer, watching forever unattainable young men playing beach soccer.

Too late, he never forgot. Then he would draw his breath in slowly, restrained, saving his karmic prana by filling his stomach-back-lungs, in this order, softly raising his shoulder blades and then letting the air out in a smile, a tiny Samādhi. Devotional, Buddhistic. For if it were indeed too late to do all the things the Oblivious Living Ones (as he started referring to the People from the Other Side—only to himself, as he didn't want to sound snobbish) still did, for if it really were too tragically late, he would light a guilty cigarette and, fuck them all, he would in all his arrogance conclude: If it were too late, it could also be too early, don't you think? he was breathlessly asking no one.

Ships slid through the green horizon line. He philosophized: If too late came after the right time, too early would be before that very moment. This time was then set, the exact time, between before-after, night-day, death-life and that was everything, and in being everything it was neither good nor bad time, but rather the right and just one, all the time he had. Between this and the other side, this and that, a coconut in his left hand and a cigarette in his right, he smiled. Supported by fleeting and fierce things, guardian angels and guard dogs.

Not bad for someone who was brought back to life, he pondered. And right after that, irrationally: I'm happy. It was true. Or it almost was, because:

ANNUNCIATION

Then came the other one.

First by phone, as he was friends-with-a-friend-who-was-traveling-and-told-him-to-check-on-him. Whether he needed anything, whether he was alright even if that meant being "alright."

So annoyed he was at being reminded of his own fragility as he found himself in that crowning tropical January, nearly expelled from the Paradise he had worked so hard to reach after his private season in Hell, that he had a violent impulse to treat the other one like barbed wire. Hearing a voice belonging to the *other*. Being invaded by the *other*. The kind cruelty of the *other*, who certainly belonged to the Other Side. A member of the Compliant Collaborators, at times even more hateful than the Dirty Discriminators, get it?

But there was something—a nuance?—in this other one’s voice that made him feel nostalgic for laughing until his throat got sore while chatting away with people of either side—it made him feel like there were no sides but rather slides, he guessed vaguely—like he had unlearned to do since before that August. Oh, to sit at a bar table to drink whatever water Brahma Light alcohol-free Cerpa (and he had been so fond of cognacs), praising or disparaging whatever movie, book, creature, as ships stitched the green horizon hem and tan muscular young men would forever play soccer on the beach sand with their colorful Speedos protecting sweaty curly pubic hairs, their salty, hairy balls. He took a deep breath, slowly, forgiving the other one sevenfold. And he asked him out on a date.

ORIENT

He knew it the second he saw him. Maybe his tan skin, maybe his Chinese eyes? Interesting, a certain gypsy vibe, perhaps a Persian nose?

Maybe so much who knows *quizas peut-être magari* as they rode around in a car listening to crazy tapes *but you’ve got this one I can’t believe any other creature besides me in the entire galaxy: You’re crazy, boy, I never would’ve thought.*

The windows, open to the almost-February breeze, made the hairs on the top of only one of their heads float around, since he had started balding since August. Quivering hairs in their arms—the salty scent of the sea, marine magnetic movements—and muscles in the naked thighs underneath white shorts shook in breathless cramps each time one casually touched the other. A bit by chance, fumbling hands at first expecting a possible rejection, then more confident,

entangled snakes, pupils crashing for the length of fireworks in a whisper—and all of a sudden my santo antônio a wet tongue kiss in the mouth all the way to the heavens and almost their throats, flooded to their knees in the tropical rain of Botafogo.

But if the other one, *cuernos*, if the other one, like everyone else, was perfectly aware of his situation: How dare he? *Why do you try, if we can't simply be friends*, he hummed absent-mindedly. Pity, suicide, seduction, hot voodoo, melodrama. As if since August he had become so impure that not even the lepers of Cartago would deign to touch him, he, the itchiest of all dogs of the nastiest alley in New Delhi. *Ay!* he moaned in thirst, riding him like an Andalusian in the *rosso* desert of the city of the center.

SONNET

He woke up in a state of delight. In another city, even farther up north, where he'd fled to after that kiss. But he could barely look outside anymore. Like he used to, when he was part of the gang, like when he was really alive—but fuck if I haven't fucking died yet, he almost yelled. And maybe it wasn't too late, after all, since he desperately started to have once again that craving feeling: hope. As if that weren't enough, along came desire. A blood-thirsty desire of a live animal for the flesh of another live animal. Calm down, he said without sleep, taking too many lexotans, lukewarm showers, shiat-sus. Forget it, renounce it, honey: Those tarts aren't for you to taste, my dear summer child. . .

Acting as if that wasn't what he was really doing, he took a concealed look at his reflection in the mirror of the hotel hall, for the first time since August. The marks had gone away. A bit skinny, *bien sûre*, he thought, but *pas grave, mon chér*. Twiggy, after all, Iggy Pop, Veruschka (wonder what she's been up to?), Tony Perkins—no, forget about Tony Perkins—he listed, he was kind of a sixties guy. Anyway, if you didn't already know you would never guess, don't you think, dear? But the other one did know. And inside the delight, the hope and the desire, mixed with all that he started pitying the other one, but that wasn't fair, so he tried hate. Experimental hate, of course, since although a good man, he had Ogum with his spear straight up right in his face.

Screaming in the shower: If you know about it you fag then what do you want with all this wooing? Let go of me, leave me alone, you've ruined my life. He started to sing an old song by Nara Leão that always made him cry, this time more than usual, *why did you come down to my dark basement, why did you uncover me in abandonment, why didn't you leave me in my sleep?* But the water would often get shut off in that city, and dry and covered in soap he stopped singing.

ESCAPE

Because he could no longer take those things inside and on top of that the almost-love and the confusion and the pure fear, he came back to the city of the center. He booked his flight back to his hometown in the south a week from then. It was still summer, there were almost no spots left, and everyone kept moving from the sea to the hills, from north to south, and the other way around all the time. Thus, the fateful return. In seven days. Only on the third, the one with the fruit trees, he gave him a call.

The other one, yet again. The other one's voice, the sound of the other one's breathing, the pain of missing him, his silence. For three more days, each of them on opposite sides of the city, they schemed unlikely escapes. The traffic, the rain, the heat, the need for sleep, the need for rest. Not fear. They wouldn't say fear. They left choppy messages on each other's answering machines, at the sound of one's voice the other would pick up the phone right away or let it ring without picking it up, their voices getting lost in the first degrees of Aquarius.

Yes, it was a misery to want and not to have. Or to have without wanting to. Or not having nor wanting it. Or wanting and having it. Or all and any other combinations of wanting and having each of them found himself in, it was all a misery.

MIRROR

He had a dream then. The first one he could remember since August.

He arrived at a bar serving tables on the sidewalk. He lived in an apartment on top of that bar, in the same building. He was distressed, waiting for a message, letter, note, or anything showing the other's urgent presence. Smiling at the door of the bar, a young man greeted

him. He didn't know him, but he greeted him back, not so much in confusion as in a rush. He ran up the steps, he opened the door breathlessly. No note on the floor.

No message on the answering machine. He checked his watch, too late, not coming. But he suddenly remembered the young man who greeted him at the door downstairs, that tan man he didn't recognize—that was the other one.

I don't see love, he found out when he woke up: I dodge it and fall right into rejection.

CAPITULATION

Since they could no longer postpone it, at the risk of sounding rude at the bare minimum—and they both had good manners—the day before he was set to leave, he lit a candle to Jung, another one to Oxum. And so he went.

Like a damsel, he shivered as he got out of the cab, but some virile adrenaline coursed through his muscles and some crazy endorphins in his brain told him: It was back, the desire that had ached so hard before and with such intensity that because of that he had gotten this way. Nosferatu, since August, that raised sword, neck in the guillotine, a grenade whose pin no one would dare to pull.

MIRROR

In the bright and clean room, he started to talk nonstop about another city farther up north, its jade-like sea, and the other one farther down south, the purple tunnel of jacaranda trees. About everything that was not there in the bright and clean room at the center where the other one stood still staring at him, about everything that had been before and that would be after that moment, he spoke. But not once about that moment, that exact second, when he and the other one looked each other in the eye.

“Tomorrow is Iemanjá day,” he finally said.

The other one invited him:

“Sit here by my side.”

He did. The other one asked:

“Did our friend tell you?”

“What?”

The other one held his hand. Soft, light, fresh.

“Me too.”

He didn’t get it.

“Me too,” the other one said again.

The sound of the cars turning in Ipanema, new moon on the lake. And like an electric shock, Iansã’s rays, he got it. He got it all.

“You too,” he said, looking white.

“Yeah,” the other one nodded.

WALTZ

They hung around half-naked in bed all night sharing stories since childhood, between folding fans, peanut shells, Gatorade cans, star maps, and tarot arcana, listening to Ney Matogrosso moan a sad and tired story about a traveler in a house, birds with renewed wings, dethroned kings with immense cowardice. I used to be fat, one of them said. I used to be ugly, said the other one. I’ve lived in Paris, one said. I’ve lived in New York, said the other. I love mangoes, I hate onions. Stuff like that, they talked until five.

Sometimes something crazy would happen, like the tip of one’s foot sliding so deep inside the other one’s shirt sleeves that a toe would suddenly brush against a hard nipple, or one’s sweaty head resting for a second on the other one’s shoulder, sniffing musk. That the other one had almost died, even before him, in a previous August perhaps in April, and since then all he could think was: It was too late for joy, for health, for life itself, and above all, oh, it was too late for love. He split himself into swimming, vitamins, work, sleep, and intense wanks so as not to go crazy with horror or horniness. The lungs, they said, the heart. Retrovirus, Pluto in Sagittarius, liquorice, zidovudine, and Ra!

When they went out for dinner outdoors, they didn’t mind that the others would stare from various vantage points, on many other sides—at their four hands often clasped together over the blue and white checkered picnic cloth. Beautiful, unreachable like two cursed princes, and for that very reason, even nobler.

ENDINGS

It was nearly morning when they exchanged a long hug inside the Simca-like car. So fifties, they laughed. In that morning of Iemanjá, he threw white roses to the seventh wave, then left, alone. They didn't make plans.

Maybe one of them would come back, maybe the other would go. Maybe one of them would travel, the other one would flee. They might exchange letters, late-night calls, Sunday sermons, crystals and beads through Sedex, since they both were a bit mystical, a bit gypsy, a bit *babalaô*. They might get healed, at the same time or not. One of them might go, the other might stay. One might lose weight, the other his eyesight. They might never see each other again, with earthly eyes at least, they might go crazy in love and move to the same city, or maybe travel together to Paris, for instance, Prague, Pittsburgh, or Crete. One might kill himself, the other one might go undetectable. Abducted by a UFO, killed by a stray bullet, who knows.

Maybe everything, maybe nothing. Because it was too early and never late. It was still early in their non-deaths.

BOLERO

But they made a pact: Four nights before, four after the full moon, each in their own city, at a specific time, they open the windows in their bachelor bedrooms, turn off the lights, and hugging themselves, alone in the dark, they dance bolero so tight that their sweats mix, their smells can't be told apart, their temperatures go over 90 degrees, throbbing hard between each other's thighs.

Slow boleros that sound like mantras. More India than the Caribbean. Persia, who knows, Hebrew Buddhism in Celtic and Yoruba. Or simply Acapulco, spinning around in an *embujo de maraca y bongó*.

Since then, even when it is rainy or overcast, they always know when it's full moon. And when it wanes and disappears, they know it will be reborn and grow and wax again and again for centuries and centuries, because thus it has always been and thus it shall always be, God willing, and may the Angels say "Amen."

And they do, they will, they are, they already have.

Selected scenes from
O homem e a mancha (1994)
by Caio Fernando Abreu

Translated by Isaac Giménez and Jason Araújo

Translator's Preface

Why did Caio Fernando Abreu turn to Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, widely considered the first modernist novel *avant la lettre* and one of the most translated books in the world, at the end of his life? Why did he choose to do so through what, at least on the surface, seems to be a theatrical adaptation? *O homem e a mancha* (The man and La Mancha) was written in 1994, a very critical year for the author and playwright. Not long after his return to Brazil from a stay in France as a guest at the Maison des Écrivains Étrangers et des Traducteurs (MEET; The House of Foreign Writers and Translators), he was diagnosed with AIDS. Caio F. Abreu passed away only two years later, and, as a tribute to his memory, the play made its official debut in January 1997 at Casa Gávea in Rio de Janeiro after a brief run in November 1996 at Porto Alegre's Teatro São Pedro.¹ Directed by Luiz Arthur Nunes and performed by Marcos Breda, the play has only been performed twice after its premiere: in 2016 for its vicennial and again in 2021 as a multimedia performed reading.²

Primarily known for his confessional prose, which relies heavily on stream-of-consciousness narration and themes of hopelessness, belonging, and queerness, Caio F. Abreu has not received the same critical attention as a playwright. There are various possible explanations for this: Although anthologized and published in 1997 as *Teatro completo*, his plays only gained broader circulation in 2009 with the release of a new edition by Editora Agir, and, to the best of our knowledge, they don't yet circulate in translation. On the other hand, Caio F. Abreu's playwriting is more visceral, humoristic, and often labeled as derivative of his narrative prose, perhaps rendering the task of both theater makers and scholars more challenging. Anticipating next year's tricennial, it is remarkable the extent to which *O homem e a mancha*, while connecting the HIV/AIDS world epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, a central part of the history of the queer/LGBTQ

¹ For more information, consult Severino J. Albuquerque, "Caio Fernando Abreu, Theatre, and AIDS," *BRASIL/BRAZIL: A Journal of Brazilian Literature* 11, no. 20 (1998): 81–98.

² Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YbKZA699wQ>.

community, with the Iberian literary traditions, continues to resonate with the spectacular nature of the increasingly mediatized interpersonal relations of today. In a time of the hyper-commodification of human experiences and the feelings of emptiness it often brings, Caio F. Abreu presents the world of fiction, and literature itself, as a means for personal transformation and multiplicity. First, he uses a single actor to embody five different characters, each confronting a similar sense of confusion and loss while also taking the audience across different cultural and geographic territories. Second, through what might be considered “uncreative writing” à la Kenneth Goldsmith, Caio F. Abreu engages with the Brazilian tradition of cultural cannibalism, known as *antropofagia*. This cocktail of literary devices and references, though delightfully intoxicating, poses a number of challenges for the translator.

The play reads as a monologue and yet alternates between the voices of five distinct characters experiencing and experimenting with various moods and psychological states. The difficulty for the translator here resides in finding ways to maintain each character’s linguistic specificity while also allowing for the actor to perhaps blur the lines between these distinct voices. Like Russian dolls, a single performer is asked to shift between characters, costumes, and tones that move across temporal, geographical, and fictional realities. Another translation concern is how to capture the humor and the campy sensitivity of a painful universe while remaining playful, ironic, erotic, and full of allusions to pop icons and revered cultural figures. In this regard, we focus primarily on striking a balance between keeping some of the cultural references, sexual connotations, and word games while still rendering some sort of textual estrangement by playing with sound and queering both the characters and situations.

It is also important to mention that the play is written in the long shadow that Cervantes’ magnum opus casts not just on Caio’s retelling of *Don Quixote* but on the larger legacy of Iberian letters. The Spanish novelist’s ghost appears throughout the play via the short baroque and descriptive introductions for each of the 28 scenes.³ These elements not only draw attention to the original inspiration for

³ This includes the Prologue and the Epilogue.

the text but also emphasize the extra-theatrical nature of *O homem e a mancha*. As we see it, the play, which Caio F. Abreu considered “a creative rereading of Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*,” should also be regarded as an *intradução* or an “untranslation,” borrowing Isabel Gómez’s translation of Augusto de Campos’ term. In other words, this creative rereading challenges legibility by hyper-fragmenting the source text and mixing it with Caio F. Abreu’s personal and literary archives. To illustrate this point, the play ends with the author’s signature followed by “São Paulo, Carnival of 1994.” This seemingly insignificant detail may in fact serve as an additional stage direction: The play should take into account the *carnavalesque* both in a literary mode as well as in the mode of socio-political commentary of this particular moment in the mid-1990s for queer communities around the globe.

Though preoccupied with literary legacies, one can also argue that the play reflects the author’s contemporary lived situation, his own biography. In a series of *crônicas* titled “Cartas para além dos muros,” published in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* between August and September 1994, Caio F. Abreu openly talked about his HIV+ condition and would often use simple word games to both clarify and obfuscate meaning. For example, he would use the location “Gay Port,” a type of direct translation of Porto Alegre, a gesture that can be understood as a deep respect for the power of writing as worldmaking. Caio F. Abreu shows us that both writing and translating are tools for appropriating and re-situating queerness and queer culture within the Iberian and Latin American cultural traditions, an act that pushes to destabilize prescribed canonical readings while allowing for new interpretations aimed at contemporary audiences. In his first “Carta para além dos muros,” Caio concludes, “A única coisa que posso fazer é escrever [...] A vida grita. E a luta, continua.”⁴ Both *vida* and *luta* are central to his plays, and in this spirit we took *O homem e a mancha* as an invitation to play, hoping that our efforts inspire others to both read and engage with Caio F. Abreu’s theatrical oeuvre.

⁴ Included in Caio Fernando Abreu, *Pequenas epifanias* (Editora Agir, 2006), 106–14. Originally published in *O Estado de São Paulo* on August 21, September 9, and September 18, 1994.

**Selected scenes from *O homem e a mancha*⁵
by Caio Fernando Abreu**

A creative rereading of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

In memory of Clarice Lispector who used to call me "Quixote."

"And having said this, may God grant you health and not forget me."⁶
(Miguel de Cervantes, 1605)

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS (to be played by a single actor)

Actor

Miguel Quesada

Man of La Mancha

Don Quixote

The Sad Faced Knight

Willy, a voice from offstage

SET

There is a table in the middle of the stage, towards the back. On the table there is a fairly large globe and, to the side, a stool where a "bossa nova singer" might sit.

To the right, a striped recliner. It can also be a divan or a couch of some kind.

⁵ The word "mancha" can mean a stain, whether of blood, sperm, paint, or dirt. Ultimately it signals an imperfection or something morally reprehensible, which resituates the play within the political and social context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s.

⁶ Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (Ecco, 2003). This is the last sentence of the Prologue in the original. We chose Edith Grossman's translation, and all quotes and citations from Cervantes' *Don Quixote* that appear throughout the play are her translations.

To the left, a dressmaker's dummy. There is only a torso: no head, no legs or arms. The torso is supported by a wooden base.

In addition, there are three independently painted screens. One is in the back, while the other two are placed on either side, all painted as bookshelves in a library, stuffed with books. Depending on what is happening, the screens can go up and down.

PROLOGUE

Where we deal with the condition of the actor in search of the general in order to arrive at the particular.

The screens drop.

*While the audience walks in, the ACTOR is on stage, partially shaded, sitting on the portable table wearing only a black leotard. They⁷ are sitting in a position that evokes Rodin's *The Thinker*, perhaps. Sitting on the recliner looking down, the ACTOR carefully stares at the globe. After the third announcement the house lights go off while the spotlight grows on the actor. They do not seem to realize and continue looking at the globe. By the fourth or fifth announcement the ACTOR finally reacts.*

The ACTOR is frightened and trembles. They look up. They are visibly nervous. They make the sign of the cross. They try to put themselves back together. The ACTOR slowly begins looking around in seven different directions with very defined head movements—to the left, to the right, upwards, downwards, etc. With each direction they choose different intonations (childish, lyrical, somber, etc.) as they repeat:

⁷ The "Actor" could be any gender/person and hence the use of the pronoun "they."

ACTOR – Once upon a time. . . once upon a time. . . once upon a time. . . once upon a time. . . once upon a time. . . *once upon a time*. What the hell, once upon a time? Whose once upon a time? When and where? It is so hard to decide. So hard to begin. Let's see, maybe this will help jump start an idea [*They spin the globe. Using their index finger, they randomly stop on a place*]. Once upon a time in. . . Greenland. Too much ice, too white, too many penguins, too many Eskimos, and igloos, too cold. Nah, too boring. Not dramatic at all. Let me try again [*They turn and spin the globe again*]. Once upon a time in. . . the Sahara. Too much sand, too sunny, too many camels, too hot, too dry. My God, I am already so thirsty. . .

The ACTOR grabs a glass or bottle of water that is placed next to him from the floor and drinks it voraciously. They stare at the glass. They touch their face as though they were seeing themselves reflected.

ACTOR – Once upon a time. . . I. Of course it has to be something that I am familiar with. So it's me. For almost 40 years I've been living with myself. I might know a few things about me. That's right, me! Why not? After all, I find myself quite intriguing.

The ACTOR leaves the glass or bottle of water. They spin the globe one last time with exasperation. Then they stand up and face the audience with great conviction.

ACTOR – Once upon a time there was an actor. Too much stage, too many rehearsals, too much spotlight, too many aisles of seats, too much backstage, too much audience—thank God—too many feelings, too many fantasies, too many illusions. Too much. . . too much “Once upon a time.”

Circus-like music. The ACTOR steps down from the portable table and walks towards center stage, arms open.

SCENE 1

Where the ACTOR experiences a small narcissistic episode and yet ends up acknowledging the need for the Other to exist.

ACTOR – Ladies and gentlemen, I am an actor. My name is Carlos. As you can see, I am more or less tall, kind of thin, and quite shy. I don't have much hair left. I am not very muscular, though I think I am. . . likable, fun. I know my body well; I can move, make dramatic, funny, strange, scary gestures. [*While posing and illustrating what they are referring to*] I can also sing [*They hum some improvised song*] I can dance [*Showing some dance moves, flamenco would be ideal*]. Although overall, I mainly perform.

The ACTOR recites a brief text—Shakespeare, a Greek tragedy, Molière; it can be a different text every night. It is important that it is a text somehow familiar to the audience.

The ACTOR [*More serious*] – When I perform, I remain myself, but at the same time I become another. I wouldn't be a good actor if I wasn't able to become that Other. I am not talking about the Other that watches me, even if I am also that Other, because they always see themselves in me, even when they don't like what they see. I am talking about the Other I turn into, that I embody, the one I become when I'm being an actor. The character, that's who I'm talking about. An actor can't be an actor without a character. [*Pause, confused*] So, right here, right now. . . Am I an actor? Am I myself? Am I just nothing, damnit?. . . Am I boring? Am I tripping? Where is the character?

The ACTOR becomes more frenetic. They walk around the stage searching for something until they leave the scene. The last part of their speech is offstage.

ACTOR – Where is the Other? The Other is essential for my survival! Where is the character? I don't make any sense without a character! I will go nuts without a character! I need the Other! [*As*

they exit the stage] They are coming for me! This is sabotage! [*Off-stage, farther away*] We are in production! I told them not to cash the check. Stop, stop it! I want it like that because I want the character. The production company is calling! Where's my phone?

SCENE 2

*Where we meet the figure of Miguel Quesada,
the unfortunate anonymous worker.*

On the empty stage, the light barely illuminates the globe. One hears loud urban noises, truly awful sounds. Car alarms, ambulances, cars honking, police and fire truck sirens, people screaming, typewriters, brakes screeching, the subway rumbling, sidewalk vendors, jackhammers, etc. An imaginary door opens through which MIGUEL, the character, enters. Over the ACTOR's costume MIGUEL wears a suit, tie, perhaps even a hat. He is carrying a briefcase (James Bond style) and various shopping bags, as well as a broom, along with many boxes and packages. He's rather excited. He places his things somewhere on stage and gestures as if closing a door. The noise subsides, now muted, as if from the inside.

MIGUEL – Alone, finally. Far away from all the craziness, free from that nightmare that seemed to never end. Today was definitely the last of those. . . How many years? I don't know, 30 something, 30 or so. Neverending years. I even gave up counting. It felt like time never passed. [*Changing tone*] But then it passed. Time always passes. This is the only guarantee people have. Besides death, of course. [*Excited*] But today I don't want to think about death. I want to think about life. About my new life.

MIGUEL takes off his jacket, his hat, leaving only his tie on over mesh armor. He starts to run around the stage, a bit ridiculously. He begins to dance, tapping his heels in the air, humming "Singin' in the Rain" or something like that.

MIGUEL – I’ve finally arrived at the big day! Miguel Quesada: the unfortunate anonymous worker, the solitary depressive, the insufferable neurotic, the unloved, the nobody-who-never-had-anything-but-his-crazy-impossible-dreams. Miguel Quesada is now free. [*Enlightened, somewhat pedantic*] Ree-ee-tiii-reddd. . . What a beautiful word! It must be one of the most beautiful words in any language. I’m not referring to the pension, of course. Not to all that waiting, obviously. Certainly not to all that misery. [*Poetically*] I’m speaking about the sonority. A question of aesthetics — not economy. A word rich in melody, so full of meaning. Retired. Re. . . tired. Sitting. . . after it all. Sitting. . . in his room, tired. . . Sitting. . . tired. . . in his room. So tranquil, so quiet. This is a sacred thing, silence. Where the angels live. In the most perfect and absolute silence. [*A brief, silent pause*]

Suddenly MIGUEL opens the imaginary door. The urban noises return, insufferable. So loud as to shake the audience.

MIGUEL [*Screaming*] – *Adiós* to this inferno! So long, bloody hell! Goodbye neurotic city dwellers, folks who never wanted me! *Au revoir*, hellish municipality of my daily grind! *Sayonara*, evil metropolis of my solitude without cure! *Adiós*, “*locura*”! I don’t need any of you anymore, women who didn’t love me, friends who betrayed me. *Arrivederci*, scum! [*A knock on the door. The noise disappears.*]

SCENE 3

Where Miguel’s radical decision to disconnect from the outside and the measures taken to do so are revealed.

While MIGUEL speaks, the three painted screens begin to illuminate, making what appears to be a huge library. They descend slowly.

MIGUEL – Beginning today and until the day I die, God knows, I will never leave the house. Just like Marcel Proust, like Juan Carlos Onetti after him. I don’t need anything from the outside. I have

this room here. . . [*He hesitates. He looks at the audience, then at the screens. For a second he becomes the ACTOR again, aware of the three theatrical walls.*] Well. . . here are the three walls of my apartment. I have absolutely everything I need to live without ever needing to leave this place. [*He begins to take things out of the bags and spread them across the stage.*] Food, drink, prescriptions, provisions for many, *many* years. And I also have my souvenirs, my memories that—modesty aside—are mine alone. [*Ironically*] There is no personal gain in this. After all, any man approaching 50 who has worked non-stop since he was 15, no matter how boring his grand life has been—and mine, frankly speaking, was very boring—any man like that can afford to spend the rest of his life living, nothing else. Nothing “real,” I mean. Such a man can only remember, chew, and rummage in his memory chest. [*With melancholy*] Ever since I was young, I’ve always been jealous of old people, those who no longer need to do anything but remember. As if in their minds there is an. . . an overflowing trunk of memories, shining as precious as joy. Amethyst, ruby, emerald. And it doesn’t matter if they’re sad, miserable, or cruel things. They have already been lived and no longer pose any danger. [*Pensive*] Because you have the time. Time chisels away at the stone. [*Aside*] So, I need to take note. . . And besides, everything in this life is a story. Somehow all these things that happen to a living thing are unbearably real, even dreams. . . What was I even saying? Oh, that everything in this life always starts with “Once upon a time.”

The screens should now be fully down. MIGUEL is surrounded by books. The effect is somewhat claustrophobic, though colorful. Miguel climbs onto the platform.

MIGUEL – Once upon a time there was Miguel Quesada, the man who was fed up with everything and never left the house. Buried alive, they said. Demented, a maniac. But he didn’t give a damn. He had his own stories to remember. [*Poetically*] And when I’m tired of thinking about everything I’ve lived, I’ll still have the books, those that I’ve loved the most since childhood in which there are yet other stories. All the stories of the world. So

marvelous! No contact with the world out there, this godforsaken world that we call “reality.” No more waiting in line at the bank, no more signs that read “closed,” no more running around, anxiety, or violence. No more desire. No more people, no more nobody. Only the indispensable, only the essential, only that which is strictly necessary. [*Going towards the telephone*] Then, no matter what, there is always the good ol’ telephone. Just pick up and call. [*Checking the Rolodex*] Let me see here. . . I have the phone numbers for the pharmacy, the supermarket, the pizza joint, the video store, the emergency room. Even the police if I need them, God knows. Rapid, efficient, modern. Nowadays you can have everything delivered. Even sex.

SCENE 4

From the first and inevitable invasion of the so-called Unbearable Reality and the way MIGUEL deals with it.

The telephone rings. MIGUEL is shaken, hesitates, and doesn't know whether or not to answer. Then he makes a gesture as if pulling the phone cord out of the wall. But then he thinks better of the situation as the phone keeps ringing, very loudly, and after a few rings picks up.

MIGUEL [*With a disguised voice*] – Hello, who’s this? Who? Auntie Flora? Whose auntie? Oh, you’re the auntie. Whom are you looking to speak to? Miguel who? Speak up now, dear, the signal is terrible. . . yeah, that’s better. Miguel who’s that? Casa? Nada? Ah, Que-sada! I see you’re a Spanish speaker. That’s the weirdest name, but whatever. [*In a hurry*] No, honey, there isn’t anyone here by that name. What I mean to say is that there was someone but now there isn’t. They’re off traveling. Yeah, this guy Miguel is traveling. Nada, nope, no idea where, sweetie. I don’t know a thing, *capiche?* Hell, I don’t even know him. I just came with the apartment. Better call 4-1-1, ha! *Lo siento*, sweetheart. See ya!

MIGUEL hangs up with force. Preoccupied, he walks across the stage reflecting and trying to keep calm.

MIGUEL – Calm down! Cool it! It always starts the same. After all, I never told anyone about my plan. Some folks are going to call, insist, question. It's a pain in the ass, but it's okay. That way we all get used to it. [*Ironically*] People forget about each other with such ease. What did my mother use to say? "He who is not seen is not remembered." Absence does NOT make the heart grow fonder. That's it. But maybe it's better to take some precautions.

MIGUEL takes the answering machine. He presses some buttons and records a message in a disguised voice.

MIGUEL [*Recording*] – "This is a recording. Miguel is off traveling. He didn't say when he'd be back. Maybe never. No point leaving a message after the beep." [*Electronic beep. MIGUEL continues the monologue.*] There are so few people. William at the storeroom. . . Silvana at the bank. . . Zeca at the bookstore. . . Who else? Oh, Auntie Flora, of course. But the poor old thing is so old and deaf, so debilitated, it isn't even worth it. [*Pauses*] And there's also Caroline. [*With melancholy*] But I don't think Caroline has my contact details. Never asked and never offered. [*Sighs*] No father, no mother, no brother or sister, no neighbor, no creditor, no lover. [*Tired*] I've waited so long for this day. So long. So long. Such a struggle and without truce. I won. I'm exhausted. I don't really know where to begin. [*Stretching*] But let's not be in a hurry. Starting today I have all the time in the world. All the time in the world to no longer do anything.

MIGUEL lies down on the recliner. He yawns and sprawls out. The light dims while he winces, then draws himself in like a baby. Nearly in the dark, he talks to himself quietly.

MIGUEL – To sleep. . . perchance to dream. . . how is it done? So, so tired. Maybe just a little nap. Oh to sleep, good God! What

incredible fatigue. Immense. [*Light shines on the globe*] Like the size of the world. [*Sleeps*]

SCENE 5

*Where a new and disturbing character is introduced,
as well as his strange obsession.*

MIGUEL is asleep. Peace and quiet. Soft light over the globe. We hear some Spanish melody, perhaps just the sound of castanets or zapateado tap dancing. Passionate yet very soft flamenco rhythm. When MIGUEL wakes up, he has already transformed into THE MAN OF LA MANCHA. The transformation is subtle, though progressive. Every now and then, MIGUEL and the ACTOR, both of whom make up the MAN, return to him. Then QUIXOTE begins to emerge.

MAN [*Suddenly waking up*] – La Mancha, my God. La Mancha. Where did that stain go? It was here just a second ago. It can't just disappear like that. [*Searching on the floor*] Right here, it was here, right there. It was clear as day; I remember that. It wasn't a filthy stain; it wasn't ugly either. It was. . . it was just a different color. Almost transparent. Like. . . as if everything was in white, or black, or gray, and somewhere on that surface, out of the blue, la mancha emerged. Do you get it? Still, quiet. Of a different color. Sky blue. Water-yellow. Lilac, violet, purple as a bruise. [*Getting agitated*] No, it can't be that. It can't be purple, for God's sake, not purple.

The MAN wakes up from the reclining chair. QUIXOTE steps down.

QUIXOTE [*Rising, dramatic*] – Ah, damn it! Certainly this must be one of the wizard's grotesque enchantments that keep tormenting me!

The MAN walks on stage searching for the stain. He walks towards the platform as he talks.

MAN – I don't know. I don't remember. I think I was inside. No, it wasn't really like that. It wasn't exactly inside. The stain wasn't around me, like a net, like a piece of fabric, like a bubble. I was standing in the middle of it. That was it. Like I was in a rain puddle. Or was it in a net, in a cage? I don't recall; I don't know. So clear, my goodness. It must be somewhere.

The MAN stands in front of the globe. He jumps on the platform, sits on the stool, in a similar position as the ACTOR during the Prologue, and begins spinning the globe.

MAN – The Indies. . . The trail to the Indies. . . Ethiopia, Persia, Madagascar. And the New World. People say a new world exists, on the other side of an infinite ocean. How would it be over there? How would the perfumed mornings be in the New World? Species, macaws, hibiscus. [*Changing tone*] Where would the stain be? Maybe here, a bit to the South of Trabzon. But Trabzon doesn't exist on this globe. Strange. More to the North, who knows. How strange, the Pasargadae should be located here. But it's not here either. Where would Eden be? Funny. Not to the East, nor to the West, neither Northeast nor Northwest. It might be close to Barcelona, I guess. Or farther up North, by El Camino de Santiago. [*Agitated*] The stain must be here, somewhere, I was inside it. Inside. . . not really inside. On top of it, under it. I don't know. I don't recall. It doesn't matter. If it's not here, it doesn't exist. And if it doesn't exist, I don't exist either. . . [*Taking his hands to his head, touching it*] Unless it only existed inside my brain. A stain somewhere inside my brain. A ganglion, a hemorrhage, an aneurysm. But it doesn't hurt, it doesn't beat, it doesn't bleed. [*Touching his body with his hands*] Inside my body. In my skin, like a tattoo, a burn. Although I don't feel anything. It has been a while since I felt anything. [*He starts jumping on one foot, hitting his ear with his open hand.*] Not even this feeling when water gets inside your ears. Not even a buzz, vertigo, a labyrinth. No, nothing!

The MAN throws the globe far away, violently. Then he calms down and steps down the platform, completely transformed into QUIXOTE.

QUIXOTE – Ah, slander, conspiracies, evil schemes. Once again the black legions of Lucifer’s devotees are trying to bewilder me with their malignant cunning. You should know I am not afraid of you demons! [*Walking solemnly to the center of the stage, he then quotes Mario Quintana*]:

“Come, crows, jackals, road thieves!
Ah! From this greedy hooked hand,
No one will dig the sacred light out of me!”

SCENE 6

*Where, at times, the ACTOR reclaims his voice,
but he is fully taken by the quixotic character.*

The MAN remains still, with his clenched right hand dramatically reaching up in the air. The Spanish melody plays again, a bit louder this time. Then, as if he were the ACTOR again, he grabs a heavy, old book and reads attentively.

ACTOR [*Reading*] – “Miguel Esteban, Villaverde, Esquivias, Tisteafuera, Quintanar de la Orden, Argamasilla de Calatrava and Argamasilla de Alba. These were the seven villages in the Region of La Mancha.” It’s right here, in the book. The book doesn’t lie. It was there where the stain was. That’s where it happened.

*The ACTOR stops speaking, with the book still in his hand.
We hear a prerecorded voice reading the first sentences of Don Quixote by Cervantes.*

PRERECORDED VOICE – “Somewhere in La Mancha, in a place whose name I do not care to remember, a gentleman lived not long ago, one of those who has a lance and ancient shield on a shelf and keeps a skinny nag and a greyhound for racing.”

The ACTOR closes the book and turns into the MAN OF LA MANCHA again. He speaks in a pedantic and professorial manner.

MAN – Gentlemen, though my ideas may be unbalanced, as people say—and perhaps they are right about that—certainly, the ideas of this author weren’t when he chose to begin his magnum opus precisely with the line: “Somewhere in La Mancha.” In fact, when he wrote “somewhere”—*en un lugar*—this obviously indicates that the previously mentioned stain occupied—or occupies—space. Physical space, real space. Therefore, even if I can’t find it anywhere, there is evidence that it exists. [*In a different tone*] Even if there isn’t any, who cares? Within me, inside or outside, even around. Could be a net or a wound. Geographical or psychological. Virus or hallucination. The stain exists. And I need to confront it.

The MAN leaves the book on the side. He begins his transformation into DON QUIXOTE. He walks nervously. He grabs a wooden or plastic sword.

QUIXOTE – It seems so obvious that all these jokes are no more than just that. Mere decoys, a paltry scam. Funny business. But as a knight, I won’t succumb to vulgar mumbo jumbo. [*Sighs*] Oh what a fate. . . reverie and perdition. I feel here again the time to depart for new adventures has come. [*Excited*] Spear in hand to defend myself from the villains, from the corrupt ones. Wizards, wicked Moors, oppressors from the global village, beware my name! Your days are numbered.

SCENE 7

When the dreaming knight dresses up as the knight errant and asks the other men who came before him for their blessing.

QUIXOTE gets dressed as he talks. Clothes and armor are improvised with the objects he takes from the business suitcase and/or from the bags MIGUEL brought, more objects spread out on stage.

QUIXOTE – Even if I am temporarily debilitated due to kidney pain [*touching his hips, moaning*], what just happened almost took the life out of me. I will never leave the noble order *de los caballeros andantes*. [*With pride*] Defending damsels, protecting widows, and assisting orphans and other poor, unfortunate, suffering souls! [*To the audience*] Even if the Golden Age⁸ has already passed and only ashes from its previous splendor remain; even if we all feel today that we are about to surrender to the filthy crawls of these laden years which have resulted in my kidney pain and the pain I imagine that you carry in some part of your body or mind, a pain that certainly torments; even if all the vulgarity and prejudices that move freely around the world—the work of knights errant needs to be preserved at all costs. That’s why, in addition to me, who gracefully resists all attacks on destiny, I want to loudly praise other *caballeros* who have, valiantly, kept the flame of dignity and ethics alive.

DON QUIXOTE is completely dressed now, and he naturally looks quite bizarre. Vibrant Spanish music plays in the background. Quixote stands in front of the audience, lifts his sword, and salutes them. He can even ask for the audience’s applause.

QUIXOTE – *Viva the brave Amadis de Gaula, who never gave up the ghost! Long live the valiant Felismarte de Mircania,⁹ who never spent gunpowder in chimango! Long live the never sufficiently eulogized Tirante, the White, eternally confrontational! And long live also Don Belianis, from Greece! And all the others that I have*

⁸ Idade do Chumbo in the original may also refer to the most repressive years of the military dictatorship (1968–1972), often referred to as “anos de chumbo.”

⁹ Caio Fernando Abreu slightly alters the name here. In Cervantes’ original text the term is “Hircania.” Caio changes this name which might refer to “myrcene” and hence cannabis.

perhaps forgotten, not because of contempt, but more so because my departure is imminent and your patience is growing thin.

SCENE 8

Where the baptism of the old nag ultimately known as the Scrawny Rocket Rocinante is narrated nobly and with grace.

QUIXOTE picks up the broom that MIGUEL brought in with his other purchases. With choreographic ritual, he treats it with incredible care. He holds the ribbons as if they were a harness; a feather boa becomes the horse's mane. He improvises and makes the cushion a saddle. He does all this while speaking.

QUIXOTE [*Speaking to the broom*]-I will call you Pegasus just like the hero Bellerophon's winged steed, born from the severed throat of the dreadful Gorgon. Or perhaps Bucephalus as a tribute to Alexander the Great's stallion. But I'll let you in on a secret. Keep it between you and me. We can't have the riff-raff listening. In my opinion you belong to a lineage far greater than the two I just mentioned. For although you do not have wings nor a mythical birth, you are valiant and as swift as the wind that shakes the olive treetops. We were made for each other, and, like a centaur, one creature we will be. Your name will go down in history, my friend, and that name, forever immortal, needs to be worthy, sonorous, and glorious. A name that dignifies you and me, and on whose back I will ride, page by page, across roads and centuries, centuries, amen. By the blood spilled from the brave fallen in battle, my nag awash in dew, I baptize you Rocinante in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, amen again.

QUIXOTE ceremoniously makes a cross over the dressed-up broom. Then he mounts the broom in reverse—that is, with the straw in front of his face, making a sort of horse's head—and starts to trot slowly in place.

QUIXOTE – Trot, trot, trot. Rocinante, Rocinante. Don't you love your marvelous sounding name? Don't you see how well it suits you? [*Changing tone*] Enough pleasantries now. Let's go: off to confront dark giants and evil sorcerers. Let's go: to rescue captive white maidens. Let's go: to pluck hateful tyrants from their sordid thrones made of blood. Charge, brave Rocinante, for life is short and the road ahead long.

SCENE 9

How the idolized figure of Dulcinea del Toboso, the beloved of our excitable character, arrives into the narrative.

The Spanish melody is even louder, more vibrant. Mounted on the broom, aka Rocinante, Quixote rides wildly across the stage, crying out, darting about in madness. During his ride he knocks over various objects, screaming, with his sword raised. Slight confusion. The music then quiets as he suddenly stops in front of the seamstress's dummy.

QUIXOTE – Hold your horses, Rocinante my Magnificent. It's not my tendency to leave without first saying goodbye, with a deep attention to detail, that which determines the deepest motivation for my actions. Faced before this divine apparition—waving at me, see that?—as if it were human, the cambric of her white tear-laden handkerchief. It would be disrespectful to address her mounted on the back of the likes of you. Stop here, you beast, I'm shaking. [*Looking at the seamstress's dummy with intense emotion*] Dulcinea! Dulcinea del Toboso! My damselle!

SCENE 10

Where we deal with the sudden and unexpected emergence of the unfortunate Miguel Quesada who exposes his frustrated loves.

Dismounting Rocinante, QUIXOTE gets tangled up in the ribbons, in the ornaments, and takes a nasty fall. Distraught and still on the ground, for a moment he slips back into the character MIGUEL, also somewhat influenced by the language of QUIXOTE.

MIGUEL [*To the dummy*] – You were the only person who could have contributed some color to my life in sepia. I never dared to say anything, Caroline. You were far away, so loyal to your husband, to your boys, to your banal and squeaky-clean existence playing the honest woman. You never dared to think of me as a lover. Me, the invisible man, with no grace, not born like this. [*With bitter irony*] A fellow worker. . . Good morning-good evening-how was your weekend-want some coffee-happy birthday-please-thank you so much. Amiable, sociable, expendable. How terrible and lovely to meet you every morning all those days over all those years, Caroline. [*Tragically*] Woe is me, my platonic and pathetic self. [*With much suffering he musters some verses by Fernando Pessoa/Álvaro de Campos, with a slight Peninsular accent.*]¹⁰ “I will always be the one who waited for you to open the door at the precipice of a wall with no threshold,
And sing the infinite song of capoeira,
In a covered well and hear the voice of God.”

Suddenly MIGUEL collects himself. He puts on a very colorful Spanish shawl. He kisses it and places it against his heart. MIGUEL places the shawl on the shoulders of the dummy. Where the head should be he places a red rose.

MIGUEL – I adorn your naked shoulders, Caroline, so that the night shall do no more damage. And because I know it’s useless, like a sad crow I say goodbye. Never again. . . never again. . . never again.

MIGUEL continues to repeat “never again” as he turns to mount Rocinante. He then transforms back into QUIXOTE.

¹⁰ In the original text the accent is specifically European Portuguese, but for this translation we needed something more territorially capacious.

He then takes a deep, solemn, and loving bow to the mannequin/Dulcinea.

QUIXOTE – I promise to return milady. Balm of my soul, my mischievous guardian angel, my bird’s wing of a wounded heart. From the four corners of our vast Spain, I swear to sanctify your name, Dulcinea del Toboso.

Intense Spanish music plays. QUIXOTE nudges Rocinante and leaves the scene in a gallop. For a moment the stage is naked. The light above the globe remains, as well as on the recliner and on the mannequin cloaked in a Spanish shawl, everything a bit unreal.

SCENE 11

How Quixote is looking to be consecrated as a knight and other mundane events.

One of the side curtains lifts. Still trotting on Rocinante, QUIXOTE enters. In his mind, he is going to a castle’s courtyard. He greets everyone in a kind and affable manner, sometimes using expressions in Spanish.

QUIXOTE – Good morning, toiling villagers. Hello, beautiful ladies. Greetings, ladies and gentlemen of this charming town. [Stopping to talk to someone] Sorry to bother you, young man, but could you please show me where to find the steward of this remarkable property? Of course, I can. And what is his name? Don Giraldo de Villacañas. ¡Qué guapo! What? At the Inn of the Wild Boars? There must be a mistake. Don Giraldo doesn’t spend his time resting on his cushions, enclosed by courtesans. No, no. It’s not that I am doubting your words, my charcoaled chap. Muchas gracias. ¡Vale!

QUIXOTE leaves trotting after saying goodbye very politely. He is laughing to himself, happy. He goes around the stage greeting constantly as he wonders.

QUIXOTE – Actually, that’s right! That Don Giraldo must, after all, have his weaknesses. [*Changing the tone*] How are you, Doña Rosita? Still single? [*Aside*] Such a queen! [*Pensive*] As commoners say, Don Giraldo must enjoy drinking left and right. [*Changing the tone*] ¡Buenos días, Bigas Luna! [*Aside*] Such a pervert! [*Pensive*] And on top of that, as the competent administrator he seems to be, he must enjoy a more intimate connection with the people. Nothing more laudable, nothing more political. [*Spurring Rocinante*] And it is still possible. It is possible to find him at the inn, as that chap mentioned.

QUIXOTE “parks” Rocinante, dismounts, and makes a gesture as he enters the Inn of the Wild Boars. In the background, the prerecorded noise of people laughing, fragments of conversations, glasses clinking, loud music, shouts. QUIXOTE asks for permission as he moves through.

QUIXOTE – [*With an As-salamu alaykum*] Noble Castilian Don Giraldo de Villacañas, let me introduce myself. I am the future legend, Don Quixote of La Mancha. . .

SCENE 12

Where we deal with the unexpected and inopportune emergence of the disturbed Man of La Mancha, still with his obsession.

The canned noises stop completely. The MAN OF LA MANCHA returns to the word “stain,” of course. The MAN starts looking around.

MAN – Excuse me? *La mancha*. . . it must be around here somewhere. Can you please get up? Thank you. Sir, you wouldn't have by any chance come across a stain somewhere here. . . No, not like that. No, much larger, and not so dark either. A transparent stain. What's that? [*Louder*] No, no dear, no. Cheaper. Meaning, not so precious. TRANS-parent, I said. It's just a stain. Come again? It's just that without it I'm nobody, *chica*. I live nowhere. Unhoused? No, no I don't know what that means. I'm loose with space, do you get it? [*Agitated*] Damn-it, I have to find this shit stain! Do you understand what I'm saying?

The MAN stops and looks around. There is absolute silence. In just seconds the MAN transforms into the ACTOR. And the ACTOR, panicked, looks at the audience, as if he went blank and forgot the lines.

ACTOR – . . . What am I saying. . . [*Louder*] Saying. . . I was saying. . . [*Disguised, snapping their fingers, aside*] Leave it, goddamnit!

[End of the translation. These are 13 scenes of a 28-scene play.]

“Firestarter” from *Gótico
nordestino* (2022) by
Cristhiano Aguiar

Translated by Ana Guimarães

Translator's Preface

Cristhiano Aguiar is a Brazilian writer and professor of literature, born in Campina Grande, Paraíba. As a writer, Aguiar has published two noteworthy collections of short stories—*Na outra margem, o Leviatã* (On the other shore, Leviathan, 2018) and *Gótico nordestino* (Northeastern gothic, 2022). The latter solidified his literary presence and earned him the Clarice Lispector Award for Best Short Story Collection.

With the publication of *Gótico nordestino*, an anthology of nine short stories, Aguiar challenges the cultural imagination formed by a canon of Brazilian literature from and about the Northeast region. Aguiar's work constructs and deconstructs the Nordeste—not as a region necessarily constrained by cartographic coordinates, but as one within the national and international imagination.¹ In his stories, Aguiar provides fresh interpretations of canonical tropes, such as differences in urban and rural life experiences, migration movements, class conflict, local superstitions and legends, and the description of harsh landscapes, by focusing on the specificity of the geographical region and its people. The stereotypes about the Brazilian Northeast and its people lead it to be seen as a region of revolts, poverty, droughts, backwardness, non-whiteness, and folklore. These stereotypes were created and circulated in Brazilian society as part of nation-building projects of the late 19th and 20th centuries.² Since then, the Northeast has been, discursively, figured as a place in a subaltern position in relation to the Rio–São Paulo circuit.³

¹ Here, I follow the lead of scholars such as Barbara Weinstein and Sarah Sarzynski who use “Northeast” to refer to the Brazilian region and “Nordeste” to refer to the culturally constructed plural images of the region.

² Drawing on the seminal work of Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr., Sarzynski argues that “the trope of *o Nordeste* emerged in the late 19th century as intellectuals defined Northeastern Brazil and its inhabitants, *nordestinos*, as the backward, nonwhite, folkloric, impoverished, and violent Other threatening the modern Brazilian nation.” Sarzynski also shows how elites and non-elites contributed to the emergence of these tropes and symbols. Sarah Sarzynski, *Revolution in the Terra do Sol: The Cold War in Brazil* (Stanford University Press, 2018), 17; see also Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr., *A invenção do nordeste e outras artes* (Cortez Editora, 1999).

³ For example, in *The Color of Modernity*, Barbara Weinstein explores how disparities in re-

To a certain extent, Aguiar both nurtures and subverts these images in his collection. He nurtures them by grounding his stories in familiar tropes and settings, aiming to reflect the everyday realities and traditional narratives of the Brazilian Northeast, providing a sense of authenticity and cultural depth. At the same time, he subverts these images and their status as authentic by incorporating references and elements from Greek and Catholic deities, fantasy novels, fables, fairy tales, and dystopian and post-apocalyptic scenarios. This blend of traditional and unconventional elements creates rich, multi-layered narratives that engage both local readers and those unfamiliar with the region. In *Gótico nordestino*, creatures such as jaguars, insects, vampires, the dead, and unknown and inhuman beings populate the stories, conjuring and assembling a beyond-human-centered narrativization.

In “Firestarter,” the story selected for translation and publication in this issue, Aguiar sets the scene in a Northeast scarred by fires in the sugarcane mills, dirt roads, and plantations in the surrounding areas of Itabaiana. The imagery of fires, individuals in exile, and the struggles of resident rural workers is symbolic in the national imaginary and widely disseminated in 20th-century regionalist literature, such as José Lins do Rêgo’s *Fogo morto* (Dead fire, 1943). This imagery also appears in national film productions such as Lima Barreto’s *O cangaceiro* (The cangaceiro, 1953) and in many forró songs that depict the semi-arid region, as famously represented by Luiz Gonzaga. These elements feature prominently in Aguiar’s work. “Firestarter,” however, presents a landscape of environmental catastrophe with an unusual twist.

In “Firestarter,” these images intertwine with references to pop culture, stressing the story’s intertextuality with modern technology and apps culture of real-time sharing and instant updates. Set in a futuristic backdrop where adrenaline fuels the narrative, “Firestarter” introduces the reader to the tale of fire collectors or fire hunters. This fire-hunting activity blurs the lines between entertainment

gional development have led to the formation of racialized identities. Barbara Weinstein, *The Color of Modernity: São Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil* (Duke University Press, 2015), 15.

and religious-like performance, creating a culture where groups of people move like a procession venerating fire. As a reference to the phenomenon of Pokémon Go, which encourages people to interact with their surroundings, in “Firestarter” the TPF app—*Tá Pegando Fogo* (It’s on fire, or It’s catching fire)—shares information on users’ screens, mapping wildfire locations and alerting users of the beloved capturable fires. This gamification of wildfires incentivizes local exploration by fire collectors. Aguiar invites readers to follow the collectors on their hunts. Readers encounter familiar and unfamiliar imagery of the Nordeste while venturing into the collectors’ memories and dreams, which are as poetically beautiful as they are deadly.

Aguiar’s *Gótico nordestino* is not the first to blend uncanny elements to the Northeastern landscape in Brazilian literature—Maria Firmina dos Reis and Augusto dos Anjos in the 19th century also played with some eerie, degrading, and daunting elements in their respective oeuvres, and the examples of such elements in 20th- and 21st-century literature make for a long list. Additionally, Aguiar’s project *Gótico nordestino* aligns him with a new generation of Latin American writers who explore their own cultural imagery, engaging with and reshaping the aesthetic representation of the uncanny. This group includes authors such as Mónica Ojeda, Samanta Schweblin, Mariana Enríquez, Fernanda Trías, María Fernanda Ampuero, and Ana Paula Maia, to name a few. Although these writers come from various countries and focus on their own particular settings rather than the Brazilian Northeast specifically, they contribute to articulating contemporary Latin American literature as a tool for critical speculation. Their works move beyond a mere shared set of textual tools and literary images. These authors explore various manifestations of the uncanny, poetically curating and creating old and new symbols to articulate their worlds beyond anthropogenic metaphors.

This translation aims not only to introduce Aguiar’s work to an Anglophone audience but also to highlight the intricate influences that breathe fresh air into contemporary Brazilian literature about the Northeast. As readers engage with Aguiar’s work, they, too, become part of the process that redefines the region beyond its geographical confines. Aguiar’s work invites us to continually reimagine the Nordeste.



Firestarter

by Cristhiano Aguiar

On the left-hand side of the road, the anticipated and beloved fire.

The smoke, the column of smoke, was an unstable worm.

The screens of our cell phones displayed the TPF app—Tá Pegando Fogo (It's on fire)—the most important thing in global entertainment since the creation of the first Pokémon. If summer brings the fire, it also brings the fever: With the fire season open, thousands of Brazilians throw themselves into the hunt, filming, photographing, sharing on social media all types of fire, embers, blazes, flames, flare-ups, burnings.

On the shoulder, there was a fire brigade truck. Our convoy parked nearby. We turned off the car headlights, finished putting on the protective gear, and started the procession. It was past 10 p.m. and that stretch of road, in the vicinity of Itabaiana, was unlit. The night was sprinkled with stars, but the stain of smoke, playing the role of a reverse Milky Way, ripped it from top to bottom.

The established authorities still didn't understand our hobby. They hindered us with nonsense about safety, standards, and the like. They warned that fire cannot be domesticated; fire has neither face nor name, has neither reason nor party; it is at best, a partner in work (or in misery). Of course, risk, *real* risk, exists. There is a risk when stepping into an elevator, when eating an apple (Eve and Snow White!), in the air we breathe.

Our group made a 12-minute walk through the open field to the fire. It was not possible to see the firefighters, although blotches—a contrast between gray and brown blotches, movements—gradually came into our field of vision. Out there in the field, only sparse grass. And nothing more. Or almost nothing—outlines of trees, hints of bushes, I think one or two sad, semi-dormant houses, reminding me of my grandmothers' homes.

What kind of flames were we going to find, we asked ourselves in whispers.

The game works like any collection. Like a set of collectible cards, your father's stamp collection, or a superhero action figure protected by a dome and displayed at Comic Cons.

There are the common flames in the deck, unsophisticated, frizzy, swaying to the sound of the wind without any precision. It's a run-of-the-mill fire. A clock-punching fire, without joy, without class, without creativity. Fire without flame. A fire is always a fire, so even one of this type is worth it, but we're on the road to capture the jokers—the extremely rare, chromed dragon. The Poop Fire, for example, is a good catch, it curls up into a spiral and forms a little tip at the top; the Clown Fire, more rare, because it has almost a smile in the middle, a sense of humor, a psychopathic look that turns towards us (which is quite chilling, just imagine if fire built a civilization, or could have a good, hearty laugh, a burp made of glowing coal chunks?); the Terminator Fire, because it follows a fast, unstoppable march, the flaming muscles of an Arnold Schwarzenegger firing spark-bullets left and right; the Harry Potter Fire, because it lets off magical puffs through the wind, explosions born from Latin dictionary entries; the Merlin Fire, whose beauties only a more trained eye captures, not the eye of these neophytes. . . ah, the Merlin Fire. . . turning blue as it strolls driven by a destructive pacifism. The beauty to behold in the Merlin Fire is its short, precise flames. They carbonize birds, flowers, plants, plastic bottles, dolls, fingers, leaving behind graphite crumbs. And what about the Phoenix Fire? Extremely rare, rare; the Aphrodite Fire is more of a mirror than prey—it's the greatest of fires because you cannot hang anything on it, no words, it just crushes us. Actually, it's scary.

With each new fire we come across, I am moved to reminisce about the first one. It's a childhood memory, *of course*. As poignant as finding the first dead bird in the backyard, or when the pet cat, Miao-Miao, leaves some torn-apart creature on the entryway mat. It was some books, turned into a bonfire in the vacant lot on the street where I spent my childhood in Recife. I have no idea why they were burning, but I learned what a book is. It's something quite heavy, crude, made of vertical and horizontal axes. A book is a dinosaur that the meteor forgot to exterminate. We open a book and find a mystery inside, the waterfall of line-sentences. But then comes the disappointment. "Is that all?" we ask the book, because around it, promises seem to form, but then, when we open it. . . a burning book is a shell closing in. And in closing so much, the shell cancels itself

out, leaving a pearl of ashes, which, thank God, is swept away by the wind. Everything becomes spirit. It spreads through the air—cough, cough.

The firefighters formed a semicircle around the flames. They used dirt, shovels, and fans as weapons against the fire. We couldn't see any hoses or water.

Nowadays, with the trend of chasing fires, firefighters, albeit reluctantly, are trained to deal with collectors like us. A female firefighter soon noticed us and broke away from her group. She ran towards us, yelling and waving her arms above her head. Neither I nor anyone from our small and select group understood what she was saying. The firefighter gestured; we gestured back, waving our cell phones; her arms over there, our arms over here. We informed her how far we had traveled and that we were prepared. We were wearing proper masks and visors; our internet was 7G.

The flames covered a decently sized circular area. However, the light was no longer scalding. Lukewarm, it remained submissive to the ground. Our group eventually came to an understanding with the firefighter. After reaching an agreement, she led us closer to the flames, and we joined her colleagues who had crossed their arms and seemed relaxed or bored.

I asked the firefighters if they would continue to act.

"I think it's all good, man," one said.

"Better not bother anymore," another commented.

"Let it be," they concluded.

Someone laughed. Crackles and sparks of fire hitched a ride on the heavy wind. The firefighters cast a last glance in the direction of the fire, then turned their backs, headed towards the shoulder of the road, and left.

Contrary to the firefighters, we swore allegiance to the fire. We sat on the ground, ate potato chips, opened beers. We took photos, made videos. We shared. Our cell phones, glowing in the warm night, were also born from the fire, from the fire's cold, hoarse face.

The strength of the flame diminished over time. We ruminated. I was captivated by the thick columns rising to the heavens, columns of sacrifice. . . yes, it's true that there is pleasure in smoke. Risk and death. Our hearts in those hours of the hunt are bursting. We started

to sing. I sing the smoke: in 1986, an African village, located near a volcano and a lake, woke up dead. Not just the men, women, and children of the village. Across the ground, throughout the perimeter of the village, a carpet of cows and thousands of flies lay dead. Few survived death. The survivors reported that, hours before the tragedy, the immense lake had exploded. Its furious waters soared into the sky in the shape of a jellyfish; then, tremors were felt—an explosion had occurred in the heart of the lake, something fiery and molten had escaped from beneath the earth, leaked out. Today investigators and scientists know about the volcano's inner fires. Like a serpent, the smoke, invisible, carbonic, slithered along the ground, through cracks, swayed lanterns. And it suffocated.

Notifications popped up on our small screens. The app warned us: There was another fire —a big one!—close by. We packed up our things (leaving the trash behind) and rushed to the vans. We entered the location instructions into the autopilots' panels and set off. Shortly after we left, another group of fire chasers had just arrived. You were late, fools! You've missed the best part of the show.

The road continued for us—beautiful.

Every so often, our headlights caught a glimpse of a family, or pairs or trios of men, walking along the edges of the road, perhaps on their way home. They were made of charcoal, they were made of saltpeter. They wore humble clothes. They carried hoes and objects wrapped in cloth bundles. They are different from us, who have our vitamins, our creams, our apps, our robots, our 7Gs, and our air conditioners. The season, indeed, was hot! The proof? Dozens of incandescent foci in the darkness. All around—what a beauty!—the rolling landscape burned, but from a distance. Straying from the road and invading the brush and other people's properties could earn several points in the app, but our group was more in search of the spectacle than the competition. And, as the app promised, there was a spectacle of easy access just a few kilometers ahead.

So many fires made the air denser, coiling within itself. Insects flew in a panic, splattering on our windshields; animals ran across the road and along the shoulder—the lights of the vans forced their eyes to shine. Some of us took the chance to nap before reaching the main prey. Not me. My body was restless, my legs trembled. I

strained my eyes to the fullest. I contemplated the orange lights in combustion. I cherished each one, trying not to forget any of them. If I fell asleep now, I would undoubtedly dream of fires. It was a beautiful idea, wasn't it? If each of my slumbering companions had fiery dreams, how beautiful would that be. Because there is also the invisible fire. Being invisible is not just the privilege of smoke. Years ago I had a girlfriend in Brasília, and during one of my visits, she took me to an abandoned building, a theater in Asa Norte. The money ran out, or the money slipped into other people's pockets, she'd explained.

No, no. That wasn't it.

Contemplating the skeleton of the theater, what had I seen there? What had I seen, ladies and gentlemen, right there? A sculpture. A sculpture made less by human hands and more by an unwillingness. No chisel was used. Nothing like that. They used flames. Yes. Transparent flames. Turned inside out above our heads, over the roof and good taste—volcanic gas. Flames of lakes opening up like the split heads of jellyfish. . . what style, what style did those flames have?

"We've arrived," someone said.

The abrupt stop woke me up. I had slipped into a dream, unaware of who was still real.

We got out of the vans. The fire in front of us—dragon wings unfurled—illuminated all the land and the entire sky. An old sugar mill, transformed into a roadside hotel and museum, was burning: The manor house, the chapel, the small homes, the corral, the sugarcane crusher, the boiler and furnace houses, the gardens, the scrubland, the fences. . . everything that could exist, everything that could still have life, was burning.

The authorities—police, firefighters—had not yet arrived, but two or three of their drones were already flying over everything. A group of hunters had arrived before us. They were filming, taking pictures, sharing. Other people gathered, perhaps they were workers or residents of the nearby areas: children, women, men, all with smoky faces.

Our group clapped. Meanwhile, in the background, little children cried and the wood crackled.

The groups debated how to classify it. At first, we thought it was a grand Akira fire, but I argued, and everyone followed, the idea that the show was even greater, more precious. The mill had transformed into a very rare Phoenix fire. Its heat twisted the skin of the plants, the walls, our faces. Beyond there, nothing else existed. There were no words, internet, hunger, return.

How, how can we bear so much beauty, we commented.

How to withstand a lake of fire that is a god taking a stroll?

Aroused, shaken, in love, we shook ourselves and danced.

And, on the final night of the world, we began to be returned to the fire.

“The Things We Do to
Come” from *As coisas* (2018)
by Tobias Carvalho

Translated by Jon Russell Herring

Translator's Preface

When Júlia put out the call for this issue on contemporary Brazilian writing, I immediately knew I wanted to submit a translation of something by Tobias Carvalho. This story comes from his collection *As coisas* (Things, or Stuff, 2018), which is glorious. It's a wry, touching, and funny snapshot of what young guys get up to in and around Porto Alegre, the capital of Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul.

Carvalho is a playful, self-referential writer: In one of the later stories in *As coisas*, his protagonist responds to a question about what he's been up to by saying, "I've been writing about gay characters." Although we read it as autofiction at our peril, Carvalho does predominantly write gay characters—and he writes them really well. His prose is unadorned and articulate, sacrificing nothing to the style or to the pleasure of storytelling. He isn't particularly interested in coming-out stories, preferring to write, instead, about what happens after that. And he doesn't seem to feel the need to "represent," so as a result, his characters are morally complex and never outrageous, toned down, or one dimensional.

In a recent interview for *Artefact* (the online magazine by journalism majors at the London College of Communication), the students asked Carvalho how he feels about being referred to as the voice of a generation. His response was, "Oh, wow, that's a bold statement. Could it be 'a' voice of a generation? I don't want to talk over anyone; I'm one amongst many."¹ Just before that in the interview, he'd spoken about how it's not easy for Brazilian writers to find an Anglophone audience, and while I believe I'm among the first—if not the first—to have a piece of his published in translation, I know I won't be the last.

In bringing the story over to English, my main aim was to find the laconic, matter-of-fact voice of the narrator, who knows he's

¹ Fellipe Pigatto de Andrades, "'I'm Proud of It,' Says Young Brazilian Author on Being Associated with Gay Themes," *Artefact*, January 8, 2024, <https://www.artefactmagazine.com/2024/01/08/im-proud-of-it-says-young-brazilian-author-on-being-associated-with-gay-themes/>.

telling a great, funny story but is still unassuming and self-deprecating. The sentences are often quite short, and their rhythms hint at a mixture of boredom and occasional disbelief. But when the narrator is in moments of high stress, the phrases stretch out, revealing the anxiety beneath.

In terms of cultural specificity, there isn't a lot of Brazilian context that I felt an English-speaking reader would need extra context for, apart from the reference to a character voting PSDB (the Brazilian Social Democratic Party) as shorthand to show his difference from the narrator, and potential antagonism towards him. In the main, one of the thrills of the themes and language in Carvalho's work, for us readers, is that the *porto-alegrense* and the universal coexist so seamlessly in what he communicates. In that sense, it was exhilarating to translate in general, and I did not feel the occasional resistance of Lusophone phrasing and syntactic structure that I might encounter in translating other Latin American writers into English.

One aspect that did give me pause—in this otherwise galvanizing sense of flow as I worked—was that as a British writer I kept believing I'd found the *mot juste* for a certain piece of dialogue, description, or narratorial observation, only to realize that it was a big fat Britishism and needed to be recast into US English. I toyed with the idea of translating into UK English, because why not? But while this might be acceptable for UK readers—helping them understand that a story like this from Rio Grande do Sul could equally happen in Nottingham or Brighton or Norwich—I knew that I didn't want US readers of the translation to be pulled out of the text into a Britain where people moan about having to “drive to the arse end of nowhere,” or where kids who borrow their parents' car to meet boys for sex in a country lane would “get a right bollocking” if they got caught. After all, Carvalho writes in the Portuguese of the Americas, and I felt that the right thing to do was to try and recreate his world in an English of the Americas also.

There is one other key linguistic feature in this story: the terminology and shorthands that gay men use on hookup apps. As translator, I was aware that there may well be specific, in-community terms that straight readers would be less familiar with. As a gay translator, the categories, labels, and behaviors described in the app-facilitated

hunt were still occasionally new territory in Portuguese. However, some use borrowings from English, others have almost cognate terms in both languages, and for the rest, Google was my friend and can be the readers' too.

I am extremely grateful to my American editors on *Absinthe* for their comments and edits on this and more besides. (I hope we caught all those Briticisms.) I'd also like to thank Nick Campbell for reading and commenting on drafts, Daniel Hahn for his generous guidance over the last few months as my mentor, and Tobias Carvalho and Agência Riff for granting us the rights to publish the English version of his story in this issue.

The Things We Do to Come

by Tobias Carvalho

I open Grindr and message the first guy I see: top, hairy, 42, no photo, 88 kg, 180 cm.

The first thing I say is *How's it going?* and the second is *Horny?* and he says yes. I ask for pics and he sends me one of his cock, hard, straining up against his hairy belly, something that always seems to do the trick for guys my age for some reason, us Lolita boys in the arms of semi-pedo HxH types who're into smooth twinkles with our killer blend of boredom, projection, and unresolved feelings of paternal abandonment, *aka* daddy issues.

I started at two in the afternoon. I put on "1999" by Prince and went looking for a quick fuck like I'd done on many previous afternoons. I'd hang around online, find someone, say *How's it going?*, *Horny?*, ask for pics and hope we could meet at his. (The nearer the better.) I'd drive over, say hi without asking his name, go into his apartment, kiss, suck, do it, chat a bit (maybe), and leave.

There wasn't much else to do in Porto Alegre.

If he wasn't up for it, if he was masc4masc, if he was vers/bottom, if he was into fisting, dildos, bears, bis, couples, or tops, I'd move straight onto the next as long as he was close by and interested in someone with a profile like mine: 20, toned, 177 cm, 66 kg, white, student, Aquarius, insecure, unresolved feelings of paternal abandonment, *aka* daddy issues, atheist, socialist, depressive.

But OK, the hairy top, 42, etc. can't accommodate, doesn't seem that enthusiastic, isn't into horoscope nonsense, isn't very good looking, even though his cock is arguably OK.

The next one's 27 and lives over by Cavanhas, he's got an undercut (which would've been cool three or four years ago) and he's a Cancer. Body type toned, height 176 cm, and he's ticked *native american* for ethnicity even though he's clearly white, which might indicate an identity that's not externally apparent, or just that he isn't very clued up on what *native american* means.

But the next one's my type. He's 19, he's hot (bordering on chubby, not chubby, but definitely not toned, a bit of a beer belly, but more like a drinking-Skols-on-a-Sunday-with-your-homies belly,

the cheapest bottles in the bodega, the beers you drink on mini-benders when you don't let on you *are* a bender), and his photos are great. There are a few different ones, full length, in the mirror, in bed, some with the front camera, others taken by someone watching him fuck another guy. In his profile it says he lives in Viamão.

Viamão. Yep, Viamão, i.e., down Protásio Alves then off to bumfuck nowhere along Antônio de Carvalho, with no idea where it twists and turns. But he's hot. After all these hours looking, he might be worth it. He's worth it.

I check again: He's a top, he's got a place, he's alone, he's up for right now, he doesn't mind waiting for me, he says he's into me, he likes long slow sessions, and he's not in the closet after all, which proves my instincts are still a bit unreliable after all these years of opening apps the moment I wake, only closing them when I'm about to fall asleep. I tell him I'll get there within the hour.

I get dressed, I put on some boxers from Lupo, shorts and a surfer-ish T-shirt. I get in the car and set off. It's hot: It's summer.

I open Waze and follow the route it takes me, passing through Campus do Vale and reaching Viamão, where I drive down a few cobblestone streets that seem quite calm, but still have a bit of a grubby look to them. I get to the address I put in and see the guy waiting out front, wearing Lycra shorts and a sleeveless top. I flash my lights and he gets into my car.

Hey. I'm Jonatan.

Hey.

Bro, I need to tell you something. My folks are home. We need a plan B.

Fuck. You could have said.

I thought they'd be out.

So what do we do?

I know a place.

He gives me directions to a hillside nearby. He says it's not dangerous, it's an area with upmarket housing and not much through traffic. The plan is to do it in the car.

We head off in that direction and follow a few roads till we reach one that's surrounded by more fields than buildings, something you only get outside Porto Alegre.

My car is all a gay could want for. The back seats push right down, level with the floor of the trunk. It's practically a motel. It's nine at night when we park up.

Now that I can finally focus on Jonatan, I can see that his dick is nearly poking out of his pants. He smiles at me, then kisses me, greedily tasting every inch of my lips, he switches the AC on, he throws me into the back of the car.

And he fucks me like an animal.

I enjoy sex, but I don't usually find it easy to talk when I'm naked with someone new. Jonatan doesn't suffer from this problem.

Sit here.

Suck it. Harder.

My nuts.

Sit right on it. Now pull away. Sit back.

Get on all fours.

Get on all fours and moan.

Moan like you mean it.

Moan louder, little bitch.

You like a big cock, don't you.

You love it.

We both come at the same time, me having moved through quite a few positions, some of them new to me.

I notice a burning sensation in my lower back and realize it's from rubbing against the rough floor in the car. He laughs at the grazes.

You had a good time there, huh?

Yes.

Me too.

Great.

When a guy feels like getting laid, it's great. And you came all the way out to Viamão.

I did.

So slutty. I love doing it with a guy who's not ashamed to act real slutty.

Right.

Lying in the back of my car, we chat for what feels like only a few minutes. We talk about college, star signs, politics. He's studying

film, he's a Leo, he votes left. The car windows start misting up and then I hear the AC cut out.

Jonatan.

What?

The battery. It's dead.

In denial and still only in my boxers, I try turning the key in the ignition. It's unthinkable that I'd be such an idiot to leave the AC on while the engine isn't running.

Don't worry.

Yeah, Jonatan. It's easy for you to say don't worry. I'm on a hillside in Viamão, a town that's notoriously unsafe, at 10 o'clock at night with a dead battery, in my underwear, in the heat. My parents went to the beach today. I mean, if they knew that I came to Viamão and let a boy fuck me in their car while it was parked out on the street, I don't want to think about what they might have to say.

We'll ask for help at one of the houses, he says. It's the only thing for it.

My foot hovers over the brake pedal while he pushes. It's downhill for a few meters and then the road ahead starts to rise. I worry that he won't be able to keep the car moving, but he's a strong guy. We stop outside a house and he rings the doorbell while I wait in the car.

A window opens and we see a muscular bald guy in his 30s, also wearing Lycra shorts and a sleeveless top, but he's definitely straight and unlikely to be favorably disposed. He has a tribal tattoo on his thick arm and he's giving off the vibe of someone who doesn't like being disturbed.

Good evening, sir, says Jonatan. Our car battery died. Have you got a cable so we can try and do a jump start?

What d'you mean, died? What do you want?

The battery went flat. We just wanna get it working.

But what were you doing in the car?

We were listening to music and we left the AC on by mistake.

You were listening to music in the street with the engine off?

Yeah.

Wait. I'm coming down.

I notice he's taller than I expected and there's a big bulge in his pants as he approaches. But he's not bringing anything to help with a jump start—he's got a gun.

Take it easy, buddy, I say, feeling anxious.

I'm easy, he says. If you guys try anything, I'll put a bullet in you.

We just wanna get home, I say, and get out of the car. I unlock the trunk and see if I can spot any jumper leads stashed away in there.

Does this car belong to you?

Yes, it's mine. But the moment I close the trunk, the car horn starts blaring and won't stop.

Jonatan, I think you'd better go to that house over there and see if they've got a cable.

Yeah, good idea.

While Jonatan walks across to the house, the man keeps staring at me. I don't know if he's genuinely wary of us or just wants to intimidate us. It's summer, it's 40 degrees, I'm standing by my unlocked car in a dark street in a satellite town of Porto Alegre with a man who probably votes PSDB and has a gun.

What's up, Jonatan?

They said they don't have a cable.

OK, so what shall we do?

We'll work something out. We can ask at the other houses.

There's no point, the man says. No one's gonna have a jumper cable, there's no gas station round here, and if you knock on someone's door at 10 at night, they're gonna think you're trying to break in.

So what do you suggest, buddy? I say.

Ah, I don't know.

Irked by his lack of concern, I suddenly notice it's only me who's tense. I don't know if it's because I'm the one whose car it is, or because I don't live in Viamão and don't know the lay of the land here, but I realize that Jonatan isn't bothered by the gun or the man's unhelpful attitude and random remarks. His face is carefree.

I'm calling my dad, he says.

Your dad?

Yeah, he's got tools and bits and pieces for the car. He'll come and jump-start us.

There's no alternative. He calls his dad, who says he'll be here in 20 minutes. The bald guy still thinks we might be dangerous and decides to wait with us until everything's sorted out.

Jonatan's dad pulls up in a pickup. The other guy tells him what's been going on and goes back inside. Jonatan's dad shows no sign of disapproval, grabs his gear and without once looking me in the eye, sets about bringing my car back to life without any help. Everything's sorted in a matter of minutes.

Jonatan tells his dad to go home. He says he'll see him there.

On the way back, Jonatan puts his hand on my thigh.

Wow, that was nuts, yeah?

Nuts, Jonatan?

Nuts.

I thought we were gonna die.

Hey, it wasn't that bad.

Your dad had to come.

My dad, yeah.

Do you reckon he knew we were there because we'd been fucking in the car?

Of course, he wasn't born yesterday. But it's no problem. He knows I like getting laid. When a guy needs to get laid, you just gotta let him.

Think about what just happened. There was kinda no need.

But at the end of the day we got off, I mean you enjoyed it, right?

Yeah.

And I actually prefer it when something a bit edgy happens.

Why?

I dunno. Like, you always remember each other afterwards.

“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, placcation, 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.

Selected poems from
O som vertebrado (2022) by
Edimilson de
Almeida Pereira

Translated by Jane Kassavin

Translator's Preface

Contemporary Brazilian poet Edimilson de Almeida Pereira writes of his poetry collection *O som vertebrado* (A backbone sound): “The printing of the first edition of this book occurred in 2022, more than 400 years after the first excavations in the land we now call Minas Gerais. The sound of this work of *explor-action*¹ can still be heard among the ground, animals, buildings, and people. This work is one of those reverberations. Another consequence of these sounds is the work of the poet, composer, musician, and multi-instrumentalist Milton Nascimento, to whom this book is dedicated, on the year of his 80th birthday.”² In establishing a resonance between the physical attributes of the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais (general mines) and his poetics, Almeida Pereira emphasizes writing as a *material* act of both unearthing and investigating a complex and multilayered territory. His note, as well as the references to the materiality of writing and reading (to ink, paper, and printing), foregrounds a poetics of weaving together the seemingly opposing categories of the natural and cultural, the animal and human, the visible and invisible, and the audible and inaudible, as well as the colonial and racial past and present that have cemented these divisions over centuries. *O som vertebrado* remains attuned to languages both human and nonhuman, inspired by a land whose cultural traditions Almeida Pereira has studied for many years as a prolific anthropologist, poet, and novelist. In the poems that follow, syntax and language are broken and made strange in order to write another kind of history and geography of Minas Gerais.

¹ My choice to translate the word as such points to the poet's double meaning of the word “exploração” as both an exploration or an investigation and a word associated with mineral extraction.

² Edimilson de Almeida Pereira, *O som vertebrado* (José Olympio, 2022), 168; “A impressão da primeira edição deste livro foi realizada em setembro de dois mil e vinte dois, mais de quatrocentos anos após as primeiras escavações na terra que hoje chamamos de Minas Gerais. O som desse trabalho de exploração pode ainda ser ouvida entre solo, animais, construções e pessoas. Esta obra é uma dessas reverberações. Também consequência desses sons são as criações do poeta, compositor, músico e multi-instrumentalista Milton Nascimento, a quem este livro é dedicado, no ano de seu octogésimo aniversário.”

In addition to his work as a poet, Almeida Pereira is a well-known anthropologist and literary scholar of *Afro-mineiro* traditions and Black Brazilian writing and cultural production. Many of these poems are “extracted” from the landscapes and histories of Minas Gerais and the Indigenous and Afro-diasporic traditions fundamental to this land. I use the word “extraction” quite literally, as this term is necessary for reading Almeida Pereira’s poetic and scholarly work. Minas Gerais was the site of the Brazilian Gold Rush in the 1690s, which brought over 500,000 enslaved Africans to the region. Portuguese colonizers employed slave labor to build infrastructure and mines, which continued as Minas became the epicenter of gem and crystal mining through the 18th and 19th centuries. By the time slavery was abolished in 1888, many of these mines had also been exhausted. As a result, once-populated cities with their ornate architecture and colonial monuments quickly fell into ruin, becoming ghost towns. Meanwhile, mining and environmental disasters continue to afflict the region into the present: One recent example of this is the Rio Doce disaster, of which the Indigenous philosopher Ailton Krenak has written extensively.³ As Almeida Pereira tells us, this is the same afflicted land that defines the melancholy music of the famous *mineiro* singer Milton Nascimento.

My philosophy as a translator has been to maintain certain moments of ambiguity and estrangement to the best of my ability and to prioritize the formal and poetic aspects of Edimilson’s words as much as his “literal” meaning, which is often impossible to definitively “extract.” It is my belief that to make the English version more legible would be to flatten the sense of strangeness and dis-articulation of language that this work stages, or to replace a multidimensional and palimpsest-like Portuguese with an all too fluent English that harbors its own histories of colonial and imperial domination. This notion of ambiguity is relevant to Almeida Pereira’s work across multiple registers: As a literary critic and anthropologist, he has written Black Brazilian and *Afro-mineiro* identity as multiple, defined

³ Ailton Krenak’s *Futuro Ancestral* references this disaster directly and was recently translated into English as *Ancestral Future* by Alex Brostoff and Jamille Pinheiro Dias (Polity Press, 2024).

by its internal conflicts and contradictions, impossible to pin down.⁴ These works, as well as their formal and theoretical implications, are essential for ongoing discussions surrounding Blackness in Brazil, and the relationship to Black Diasporic cultural production more broadly.

I thank the many readers who were essential to the completion of the translations below, who helped me attempt to maintain the strangeness and hermeticism of these poems without rendering them as excessively literal or unnecessarily opaque. Two of the poems below, “Dream River” and “Gautherot,” carry the specificity of Minas Gerais into English through their proper nouns and references. “Dream River,” for example, references a steamboat that once traversed the São Francisco River and was originally built in Mississippi and brought to Brazil, while Marcel Gautherot was a French photographer whose work documented many rural traditions of Minas Gerais. In both of these poems, and the two others I include, use of passive and reflexive verbs and ambiguous subjects give the work an especially dreamlike quality, so much that one image or moment fades into another and makes one scene, person, or element hard to distinguish from its surroundings.⁵ My translations intend to preserve this ambiguity—an ambiguity inherent to the “coming and going of signs,” as Almeida Pereira writes of in “Dream River.” In this sense, if *O som vertebrado* imagines ways to hear the speeches and sounds of the people, animals, ghosts, and land of Minas Gerais, then rendering his poetic reverberations in English is also an attempt to hear those sounds across multiple geographies and temporalities. This hearing is necessarily uncertain or difficult: It is a release from the prison of syntax and toward the other, yet unimaginable, grammars, geographies, and places that Almeida Pereira’s poetics attune us to.

⁴ See his work *Entre Orphe(x)u e Exunouveau: análise de uma estética de base afrodiaspórica na literatura brasileira* [Between Orphe(x)us and Exunouveau: An analysis of Afro-diasporic aesthetics in Brazilian literature] (Fósforo Editora, 2022). It has not been translated into English.

⁵ I thank Nayla Ramalho and Lara Bourdin for this insight.

**Selected poems from *O som vertebrado*
by Edmilson de Almeida Pereira**

Dream River

In a dream I walk with Domingos
down the street, barefoot.
We are unbothered, no sounds
on the balcony.
We are free to accuse
the ignorant.

Despite them, we sail
someone weighs anchor
eager to go on: the Benjamin
Guimarães carried sisters
to the north, left cousins destitute.
She gropes along the San Francisco.
There are dead from the first touch
within these waters
and a fierce flow of new beginnings.

Sometimes grains reach the table,
the fraud is an opera
and no one takes the blame.
The myth and the rock were
reduced to the coming and going of signs.
Writing with toothaches
is no longer hard—metaphors
ordered by mail
with no prescription.

Carried by the thread that once wove
and now strangles, some skin themselves
in bad deals.
Not all surrender,

but still, I see them,
throwing oxygen tanks
at police stations.

In a dream, Domingos
abandons me if my burdens
burden him.
Not long ago he discovered
there is no river or boat,
only
the journey that journeys itself.

Gautherot

a river watches Marcel Gautherot
as he photographs

a wedding with newlyweds and oxcarts

if it had a son the river would say of the stranger
in a white
suit
like sand under the oxcart—shifting
almost
delaying the yes

if it were a stranger the river would say that he cuts
figures
from one passage to the next

that migration unites people and birds

if it were a guest the river would have Gautherot's
eyes
that sees through a lens
the chance of this moment never ending

but a river
is not worried by human worries

the newlyweds and ships
leave
cathedrals burn in france, an heir
is struck down
the river would say if it were a prisoner of syntax

Second Warning

This book won't contribute to any theory
only that
of the seed collectors.

The heavy breath on the word reveals the dust

where a message
should be.

Backbone

The harpoon tip breaks off
as do fingers
the promise
us too—writing
mends us.

Imperfectly another
form
is linked to what collapsed.
They are fused
to make a circus
from an error

an island
uninhabited because

another
in us
refuses to follow orders.

There is pressure
in the instant when
all is alive and intact:
the tongue of one cavity
in another
not so secret, but
closed—

The hole where the rain
won't weaken
the wick
sign of a body that was once
whole
in some place—

this is more
and less than the shell
without the insect
now within—the uterus
where those lost at birth
await

under pressure
now
all is broken—we barely feel
the syntax
new, archaic
that we will write.

Selected scenes from
*O imponderável Bento contra
o crioulo voador* (1988)
by Joaquim Pedro de
Andrade

Translated by James Langan

Translator's Preface

Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, a leading figure of Brazil's 20th-century Cinema Novo movement, wrote the screenplay *O imponderável Bento contra o crioulo voador* (The imponderous Bento versus the Flying *Crioulo*) between 1986 and 1988. Cinema Novo grew in Brazil out of the Italian neorealist movement and the French New Wave. The director Glauber Rocha, one of the movement's forefathers and Andrade's contemporary, crafted the mantra "a camera in hand and an idea in mind" to emphasize the desire for a national cinematic tradition that could reflect the material reality of life in Latin America through low-budget, independent productions with amateur actors. Rocha would famously term the stripped-down nature of Cinema Novo films an "aesthetics of hunger"—scarcity of capital and the peripheral position created by such deprivation become their own kind of semiotic and aesthetic property.

The motifs of hunger and the desire to consume foreign modes of cultural production took center stage in the nascent Brazilian modernist movement of the 1920s. Poet Osvaldo de Andrade's oft-cited 1928 "Cannibalist Manifesto" puts it quite bluntly: "Cannibalism alone unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically." Cannibalization became a potent metaphor for writers and filmmakers in 20th-century Brazil, and the "metabolizing" tendencies—the push to digest and repurpose the scraps of Indigenous, African, and European influences in Brazilian culture—of the *modernistas* gave way to the *cinemanovistas*' strategy of engaging filmic production as a form of social criticism.¹ Critics of Andrade have noted that in comparison to other Cinema Novo figures, Andrade was particularly drawn to this first wave of anthropophagic *modernismo*; he counted the poems of Manuel Bandeira and the prose of Mário de Andrade among his greatest influences.

¹ Kenneth David Jackson's monograph *Cannibal Angels* (Peter Lang, 2021) is one recent examination of how the concept of anthropophagy remains essential to understanding how Brazilian (and Latin American) modernism and subsequent movements figured themselves within a tradition of digestion, hybridity, and transgression.

Bento, in many ways, picks up where Andrade's notable past works leave off, dialoguing with and expanding upon *cinemano-vista* preoccupations with authoritarianism, the aesthetic legacies of Brazilian *modernismo*, and the issue of depicting Brazil as a harmonious racial and sexual democracy. The entirety of the text must first be understood as a focused critique of the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 through the 1980s. Despite his upper-middle-class standing, the protagonist of the text, Bento, is identified early on by Larroque, a highly ranked commander in the Brazilian armed forces, as an enemy of the sitting military dictatorship. His love interest throughout the story is Taís, a social-climbing journalist at the dictatorship-friendly *Correio de Brasília*. The majority of the screenplay takes place in Brasília; the ubiquity of military and police personnel in the capital's streets imbue the text's landscape with a latent paranoia.

At the beginning of the text, Bento miraculously survives a plane crash in the Chapada dos Guimarães, a formation of cliffs in the tropical savanna of Mato Grosso, and subsequently joins a cast of mythical hermits in the forest. Bento's hallucinatory experiences in the forest—which culminate in his first experience of flying—carry with them traces of Andrade's most famous work, the 1969 adaptation of Mário de Andrade's 1928 modernist epic *Macunaíma*. Halfway through the screenplay, Bento develops the mystifying ability to fly, attracting attention from ogling women in Brasília and, less fortunately, the repressive government. A team of journalists at the *Correio* hatch a plan to topple Bento that includes plucking a *crioulo*, or Afro-Brazilian man, off the street, dressing him in a Superman costume, and staging a sighting of him flying above a marsh outside the city limits. The ridiculous premise of this "Flying *Crioulo*," to be sure, follows a long legacy in Brazilian 20th-century cinema of *chanchada*, a satirical, burlesque genre of films.

The *crioulo* in question, a working-class man named Tição, does not say much throughout the text and remains on the periphery. He's treated with disdain by the *Correio* journalists who depend on him for their sensationalist story. Even Bento, in the final scene of the screenplay, refers to him by the word "neguinho," an antiquated diminutive term to refer to an Afro-Brazilian individual.

Those who have viewed Andrade's *Guerra conjugal* (1974) or *Os inconfidentes* (1972) may be able to identify how the body continues to be represented here as a site of blasphemous and erotic potential. In a 1988 interview with the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, Andrade explained that while writing *Bento* he was drawn to thinking about how his own thoughts on Brazil's Catholic cultural heritage influenced his screenwriting strategy: "Excessive sin puts the individual in touch with holiness. This last film I made was about holiness and flesh, things that I find funny. Because chastity is a delusional invention of the spirit to deny one's own body."² Though we may overlook it due to its widespread popularity as a given name for men in the Portuguese-speaking world, the word "bento," it should be noted, means sacred or blessed. Indeed, Bento's unusual flying abilities instantly earn him a sort of "saintly" status among the upper class in Brasília. Some characters interpret his levitating abilities as an escape from the greed and violence that pervade the streets of Brasília under a dictatorship. Others perceive Bento to be a sort of heretical figure, who dares to fly into the sacred skies against the wishes of God. What is particularly striking here is an aesthetic hierarchization akin perhaps to Pasolini's "heretical" aesthetics: High-brow cannibalizes low-brow; the profane contaminates the sacred.

The sky in *Bento* predictably features not only as a site of potential flight from problems on land but also as further proof of the ubiquity of a repressive regime and its sophisticated structures of surveillance. The impossibility of escape is perhaps most explicitly alluded to by the *Comandante* Larroque, who declares in the antepenultimate scene: "What happens in the air here in Brasília is under my jurisdiction!"³ The press, Andrade insists, is essential in reinforcing the discursive and physical domination of the authoritarian regime. Taís' job as a journalist complicates her relationship with the increasingly iconoclast Bento. In one conversation with Larroque, for example, she explains: "Larroque, newspapers need to sell,

² From an interview with Ute Hermanns, conducted in 1988, and published by *Folha* on April 21, 1990 (my translation).

³ Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, *O imponderável Bento contra o crioulo voador* (Editora Todavia, 2018), 78.

and a lot, if you want to make up people's minds. Isn't that what you guys want? To make every poor person an anticommunist?"⁴

In lieu of technical jargon and didactic references to camera movement, Andrade takes an unconventionally literary approach to this screenplay, dedicating large sections of the text to realist descriptions of natural landscapes and tender scenes between characters. Carlos Augusto Calil offers in his note at the end of the 2018 edition of *Bento* that Andrade took great inspiration from the Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars' fascination with Brazilian skies and Brazilian modernism's general metabolizing tendencies in his development of the script. Moreover, in the late 1980s, Andrade was simultaneously working on a never-completed film adaptation of Gilberto Freyre's seminal text, *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*, 1933), which certainly lent itself to the screenplay's commentary on the socioeconomic and racial divisions that define Brazilian social relations.

In 1988, Andrade passed away from lung cancer in his home in Rio de Janeiro. *Bento*, having been completed just months before, would never see the silver screen. The script was published by Marco Zero, a small press in São Paulo, in 1990; 28 years later, *Todavia* would issue a second edition. In that sense, any translation of *Bento* must take this very unfinishedness to heart. My translation begins immediately after the plane crash that leaves Bento stranded in the Chapada das Guimaraes, some 1,000 kilometers from his home in Brasília. The collection of ensuing scenes that I have translated will touch upon several of the thematic and aesthetic concerns described above, such as the role of the press in preserving the dictatorship's power, contact with a "mythical" forest and its inhabitants, the racial divisions essential to the founding of modern Brazil, and a particular depiction of sexual licentiousness and libidinal excess for which Andrade was well known.

Though Andrade's *Bento* was never realized into a feature-length film, the haunting memory of dictatorship-era repression that it interrogates continues to loom over Brazil today. In this text, then, readers should take note of how Andrade, for whom Brazil's eclectic literary tradition served as a central inspiration, asserts a poetics of hallucination and haunting that presents new opportunities to reshape understandings of the post-dictatorship fallout in Brazil.

⁴ Andrade, *O imponderável Bento*, 72.

Selected scenes from *O imponderável Bento contra o crioulo voador*

by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade

24. The search commences.

A military helicopter prepares to take off. Unrest at the Air Base. Soldiers in field uniforms from the search-and-rescue service hastily hop on board. Commander Larroque appears, wearing Ray-Ban glasses and off-duty sportswear. Tense and extremely irritated, he boards and takes a seat at the front next to the pilot. He harshly gives out orders. The door closes and the helicopter takes off with Larroque still fastening his seat belt.

25. Bento climbs the face of the rock.

Reaching the end of the road, Bento comes across an immense rock face. He stops for a moment and looks up without any expression. He then begins to obstinately climb the steep slope. He clings to the vegetation and to tumbling rocks. He soils and scratches himself up, but he never stops climbing.

26. Plane located.

The rescue helicopter approaches the damaged plane reduced to wreckage scattered around a burned, still smoking crater. The helicopter begins to descend, flying in circles. Inside the aircraft, Larroque scans the ground beneath him. He mutters to himself and then to the pilot.

LARROQUE: Son of a bitch. Alright. Let's descend.

The helicopter lands. The specialized personnel jump out with their equipment and begin to move frantically amid the wreckage. Larroque remains at a distance. He looks for a while, then turns his back on the scene and lights a cigarette. The chief officer of the rescue team approaches him.

LARROQUE: So. . . ?

OFFICER: We've only found one body, commander. Major Mauro's. Captain Bento must have jumped out with a parachute.

LARROQUE: This Bento-was-in-the-plane business. . . is it true?

OFFICER: Yes, sir. They boarded together and both spoke with the control tower.

LARROQUE: Go give another look and scan the area.

27. *Bento arrives at the Chapada dos Guimarães.*

Torn up, dirty, covered in scratches, and with blood stains on his overalls, Bento, having just climbed the wall, happens across a fantastic landscape dominated by surprisingly and capriciously eroded formations. Towers, columns, arches, totems, shapes that resemble pre-Columbian sculptures erect themselves from the ground up. The scrubby, almost desert-like vegetation of the *cer-rado* is softened here and there by a few rare, flowering yellow ipe trees. Pulled in by the sound of running water, Bento sets out walking.

28. *Bento's bath.*

Bordering a swampy land proliferated by insects, Bento arrives at the purest of waters. A crystal-clear stream, a waterfall, and a natural well lined with pebbles invite the chance to swim. Just as he is, dressed in his flight suit and already equipped for survival in the jungle, Bento dunks his head in the frigid water. He washes himself and quenches his thirst at once. Finally satiated, he sheds his wet clothes and equipment and abandons them on a rock. Completely naked, he sets out walking once again.

29. *Meeting with Macário.*

Continuing through the fantastic landscape of the Chapada dos Guimarães, Bento encounters the hirsute, peculiar figure of Macário, who stands absolutely still. Bento observes him. Macário has, in fact, been standing there, without moving, for several days. He doesn't seem to be aware of Bento's presence or any other outside element. Suddenly, Macário slaps himself violently on the shoulder. Horrified by this mechanical gesture, and foreseeing the tragedy, Macário examines the bloody mosquito that he has crushed with the palm of his hand. With a loud scream, he flees towards the swamp where the insects proliferate.

30. *Macário resigns himself to the mosquitoes.*

Arriving at the swamp, Macário, in a great hurry and with much distress, seeks to make amends for the cruel act he committed and slides into the mud until the stagnant water reaches his neck. Motionless once again, with tears streaming from his blocked eyes, he lets the mosquitoes, in a cloud that surrounds his head like a halo, help themselves to his blood.

31. *Isidoro's supper.*

Dusk in the Chapada dos Guimarães.

Bento remains where he was when Macário left. Near Bento, a large stone slithers across the ground. From the hole that the stone had covered emerges Isidoro. Without realizing Bento's presence, Isidoro prepares to have dinner. He places a *buriti* leaf on the stone to serve as a plate. On it, his meal: half a dozen seeds, two small dried and withered fruits, a root. On the floor, next to the stone serving as a table, Isidoro places a small clay jug with a crushed tin mug on top.

He remains kneeling for some time, contemplating the set table. Commotion sets over his face until he bursts into convulsive tears. Isidoro covers his face with his hands, as if concentrated there, before him and for him, were the very goodness of the Lord.

As quickly as he has started, he has now stopped crying. He takes the first grain without wiping his tears away. In a premonition, he feels the presence of Bento. He turns his face and stares at him fixedly for a while, making up his mind. He takes the food and water and approaches Bento, placing everything on the floor in front of him and carefully separating the meal in half. After a slight hesitation, he places the root in Bento's portion. He thinks better of it and leaves everything to Bento. He enters the hole and covers himself with the stone.

Bento squats and takes a sip of water. He lies down with his head on a rock. Night falls. Bento starts to doze off; soon, he opens his eyes back up. A distant little song reaches his ears. Distant voices mix with it, too, like the conversation of two radio amateurs. Propping himself up on his elbow, Bento looks around and sees nothing. The sounds disappear, replaced by childish giggles. A small group of half-naked children watches him from afar. Bento goes back to bed.

The giggles are menacing; we can hear a stampede of people running after each other. Screaming, whipping noises. Suddenly, the children run away. . .

Bento is exhausted. He shuts his eyes and finally falls asleep.

32. *Bento is captured.*

Day breaks in the Chapada.

Bento is still sleeping, but the hermits are already busy at work. One of them passes by, dragging a long bundle of *buriti* leaves. Others concentrate on solitary and silent prayers, kneeling on stones or prostrating with their faces facing the ground. Two others pass by on a donkey, which they ride together, bareback. They head towards the waters, each carrying an empty clay pitcher. Some hermits sit in isolation, braiding baskets of straw or *buriti* fiber. One moves with his back bent under the weight of a large stone he carries on his shoulder. Atop a tall, thin needle rock, a stylite hermit gazes motionlessly at the horizon. The noise of an approaching helicopter grows—the same military helicopter that recovered Mauro's body the day before. The helicopter is soon directly above them and flies at a low altitude. It is packed with soldiers in uniform, but this time, Larroque is not among them.

Awakening to the noise and to the wind, Bento makes a desperate escape. The helicopter lands amid clouds of dust. Several soldiers give chase after Bento. They run around swearing, knocking things down every which way. Bewildered, the hermits do not move.

Amid the commotion, an officer fires shots into the air. One of the bullets whistles past the hermit, who remains unperturbed. Another bullet knocks him down.

Penetrating into the swamp where Macário is, Bento is finally caught in front of the holy man who remains impassive, his face swollen and completely deformed by various insect bites. Overpowered and now handcuffed, Bento fiercely resists but is dragged away by his captors.

35. *Taís searches for Bento in the hospital.*

Taís, standing in the entryway to the hospital, sees Bento appear. She walks towards him. Bento is in everyday clothing, with nothing in his

hands. He tenses up even more upon seeing Taís approach him. Taís kisses his cheek, grabs him by the arm, and drags him to Mauro’s car (which she has been borrowing). Taís opens the door; Bento takes a seat without saying a word. Taís grabs the steering wheel and sets off. They remain in silence for quite some time as they pull away from the hospital.

TAÍS: Did they mistreat you?

Bento doesn’t respond.

TAÍS: I know they tortured you. Larroque told me.

Bento stays silent, staring straight ahead.

TAÍS: Bento, are you no longer fond of me?

Bento continues to not speak. A beat—he looks at Taís. It takes him a second to make sense of what he’s feeling. He redirects his gaze straight ahead on the road.

BENTO: Where are you going?

TAÍS: I don’t know. I wanted to stay with you for a bit. May I?

BENTO: Take me home.

Taís, her face tensed up, changes direction.

TAÍS: You don’t want to speak to me?

Bento doesn’t respond.

TAÍS: Bento, my life has changed. The paper is being completely redesigned. They’ll give me the social column, and they’ll pay me better. I’m leaving that apartment. I haven’t gone back. I’m living in a hotel, Bento, but I want to live with you. I love you. I want to be with you, Bento, I can’t bear not seeing you. These days have been such an ordeal. My only defense was thinking of you. The only thing I’ve truly done is wait for you. I waited for you so much that I couldn’t think of anything else! I don’t want to think about anything else but you. If you want, I’ll leave the paper, I’ll drop everything. The only thing I want is to be with you. We can get out of here and go to a place where I can take care of you, spend the whole day and night with you. Let’s go? I can turn the car around and we can go now, just like that, without taking anything. Stay together for a week, away from everything. Let’s go?

BENTO: No. I want to be alone. Leave me at home.

[. . .]

36. *Bento returns to the Chapada.*

Dressed in the same clothes he left the hospital in, but already filthy, Bento finds himself at the hermits' settlement. He goes to Isidoro's hole, only recognizable by the stone that serves as its covering. Bento hesitates. He knocks on the stone with his fingers. He looks around. He takes a small stone and gently hits Isidoro's covering with it. Since nothing happens, he strikes it again, with more force. The rock slides over laterally, pushed over by the holy man who emerges from the hole in a terrible mood. Standing in the hole, Isidoro is only visible from the chest up.

BENTO: Can I stay with you all?

Isidoro looks at Bento without responding. He eventually climbs out of the hole, refusing the help that Bento offers him. He begins walking with decided, determined steps. Bento remains where he has been, all the more perplexed. At a certain distance, Isidoro stops walking. He turns to Bento and, realizing that he has not been following him, gestures with his head for him to follow. Isidoro resumes walking with determination, now followed by Bento at a respectful distance. Bento is full of hope. On the way, the two come across the donkey, tied to a tree, this time without riders on its back.

41. *Taís' new office party.*

There is great unrest in Taís' new office, which is set to be inaugurated. [. . .]

The party is an event of mundanity. Overdressed women are excited by the champagne, and soon they are fighting over machines and typists in a festive uproar. . . OB, the editor-in-chief of the *Correio*, watches everything with a certain irritation.

In a bathroom full of beautiful women and a handful of gay men, someone lays out several rows of blow that are immediately consumed, while another fills champagne glasses with a giant bottle. Taís enters the bathroom and, despite her worries about the proximity of the authorities present, still snorts her line. The conversation, now very excited, turns to Bento. They all think that he's cute; they make fun of Taís' qualms about getting close to him.

Taís explains that she learned from the commander that Bento returned to the company of some crazy hermits and now lives in isolation with them, far from Brasília. The women perk up; they want to know everything. A young lady—a particularly dreamy one—recalls that “holy” men have an amazing erotic capacity when they are unable to resist the temptation of the flesh.

The idea, therefore, is to go there. To try these men, to test them.

48. *Sinners in the sky.*

Incubi and *succubi*, delicious and beautiful women among whom are Taís and her new friends, young homosexual boys, all dressed either in clothes as elegant as they are provocative or completely naked, descend from a luxurious tourist bus parked in the desert of the *cerrado*.

Chatting animatedly—and laughing a good deal—the group braves the red, arid land on foot, heading towards the stronghold of the saints. Between makeup checks, glances in pocket mirrors and beauty bags, they exchange comments about the saints they intend to seduce.

Macarius, Serapião, Isidoro, Bento himself, Malaquias, the horny old man—all are objects of greed and dispute in which their most desirable attributes are extolled.

49. *Invasion of the sky.*

Everyone prepares themselves: Isidoro retreats into his hole, Macário dives into his swamp, and so on. Bento trembles with fear. He takes a whip and begins to flagellate himself.

Outside: noises, shouting, running.

Suddenly, Bento has a terrible vision. On the floor of his tiny cell is the torso of a naked body with stupendously white flesh. The torso has no head and only the very beginning of arms or legs. But even so, she can open her legs and her pussy, showing her rose-colored insides.

TALKING PUSSY: Bento, women like affection. Bring your mouth closer to me, Bento. . . Come.

Horrified, Bento lets out a great scream. He opens the barricaded door of his cell, takes the female torso and sweeps it away. In his right hand, a little bit of goo. Bento leaves in a panic, searching for a place to wash his hands.

A naked woman zooms by, running a 200-meter hurdle race.

Another woman pisses on a row of wildflowers and laughs madly.

Another pedals by on a bicycle in pursuit of a saint fleeing in panic. Close-up shot of her pussy on the seat of the bicycle.

A guillotined head rolls across the floor, cursing.

HEAD: I was such a fool! I stopped fucking when I was 45!

An unnamed character flashes their ass to the camera.

A woman drags a holy monk by his cock as he wails.

MONK: No, for the love of Christ, no!

Various women crowd over a monk, tearing apart his clothes and pulling out his beard.

A naked woman blows air with a bellows on a saint's ass. Another woman sneaks a look under a monk's habit.

A saint runs past with a naked woman on his back.

Another saint hides under a bridge where women and devils run past.

55. *First levitation.*

Bento now takes the opposite route to the one that first took him to the Chapada dos Guimarães.

Successive shots of Bento strolling through various places on his way to Brasília, with the light also changing as this day of travel progresses.

At dusk, still approaching the distinct cityscape of Brasília, Bento abandons his staff, climbs three invisible steps into the air, and begins to move in a uniform rectilinear translation, half a meter above the ground and at a moderate speed. The camera follows him laterally.

56. *Bento in Taís' apartment building.*

Still levitating, Bento takes Taís' business card from his pocket, confirms the address, and climbs the steps that lead to her apartment building. He levitates up the stairs, keeping the distance of his feet

constant in relation to a line that passes through the tops of the steps.

The doorman, perplexed, sees Bento levitating past him and entering the elevator. The door starts to close. The camera, inside the elevator, focuses on Bento's feet that remain unsupported in the air. We witness the door finish closing; the elevator rises, reaches Bento's feet, and transports him in a state of non-levitation.

64. *In search of the crioulo.*

OB, Armandão, and Grisalha from the *Correio* roam around Gama, Ceilândia, or some other satellite city of Brasília in a dilapidated car driven by Armandão. He drives with complete disregard for the safety of pedestrians. Grisalha sits in the back, the other two in front.

ARMANDÃO: I don't know where this *crioulo* went! He's always here. I think he's perfect for what you want.

OB: Hmm, we'll see. He's gotta be a real man of the people. The opposite of that Bento, a cocky, bourgeois, scumbag elitist. A saint who only levitates in private and won't even give interviews. The public needs a miracle and this guy's locked up in an apartment. With a woman, no less! With a good *crioulo* I can solve this.

GRISALHA: But will the *crioulo* even fly, boss?

OB: Grisalha, how many times a month do you brush those teeth of yours? Jesus, man, your breath stinks. Do you have a toothbrush on you?

GRISALHA: It fell in the toilet earlier.

OB (*pulling out cash from his pocket*): Here. Buy a toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss, whatever. One more thing: stay back. The minimum distance for you to talk to me is now one meter. And of course the *crioulo* won't fly. We'll throw him in the air or throw him out the window and photograph him. The whole idea is making it *look* like he's flying. Armandão had the idea.

ARMANDÃO: Leave it to me, boss. This *crioulo* will start flying just by seeing our money. (*Still looking around*) What a joke. He's always here. Take this sugarcane there, to Pereba's bar. We'll take a look.

OB: Hold on, take it easy. No witnesses. Everything with the utmost secrecy. If this thing gets out, we're all fucked.

ARMANDÃO: Come on, boss. . . I'm a professional. I wouldn't bring you into anything that wasn't a clean operation. Fuck! He's not there either. Where did this rascal go?

GRISALHA: Oh, there he is. With a tailless donkey.

ARMANDÃO: Great. He's in good shape. Let's go, Grisalha.

OB: Hey, there will be no chitchat in the bar. Go in there and explain the deal, but don't give anything away, got it? He doesn't need to know for what reason or for whom he's doing it. Only that he'll earn money to do what you say and keep quiet. I'll get him out of here. If it doesn't work, I'll send you a notice and you're fired.

ARMANDÃO: Yep. Take it easy, boss. The *crioulo* may be a dud, but he's trustworthy. I always give him dirty work and I've never had a bad time.

Armandão and Grisalha hop out of the car and set after the *crioulo*. OB puts on sunglasses. The *crioulo* drags a tailless donkey carrying anything that is sellable: old newspaper, cardboard, empty bottles, a broken chair. Walking briskly towards him and with Grisalha at his side, Armandão calls out.

ARMANDÃO: Hey! Tição!

The *crioulo* stops. OB observes him. He's a perfect fit.

69. *Double levitation.*

Taís arrives home devastated, with a black eye and torn dress that has dried onto her body.

Bento assumes his usual position, his erect body leaning backwards forming an angle of about 45 degrees with the floor, without any support. He reads and meditates contrary to the laws of gravity.

Taís crouches in fetal despair.

A noise, almost imperceptible, catches Bento's attention, who immediately stands upright, gets down, and comes to her. He holds her hands, lifts her face. A tear flows from the black eye. Bento crouches down next to Taís, takes her by the shoulders, stands up with her, and leads her with an embrace to a kneeler where the two kneel, facing each other.

TAÍS: It's no use, Bento. They'll pursue us until the very end. You have to leave. They'll torture you again, they'll kill both of us, Bento.

I'm ashamed, so ashamed. . . don't look at me! Just go, for the love of God. . .

BENTO: Taís, sometimes the night illuminates me. A storm breaks out inside me and rays of darkness blacker than the night fall on me. They are revelations, Taís, secrets that illuminate so much that just one of them makes up for everything bad you've known in life! It's a real discovery, Taís, you get so excited that you want to suffer more, much more, and then, on the flipside, you begin not to suffer at all. An immense happiness, an eagerness, an inflammation of love. Taís, I want to set fire to your heart, I want to remove all fear from you, I want you to go through the night, the dawn, and beyond with me. . .

As Bento speaks in an intense euphoria that infects and illuminates the woman, he begins to levitate, bringing Taís up with him, holding hands and now kneeling in the air in front of one another.

BENTO: . . . we'll arrive at the highest, best hidden caves in the mountains, Taís. We'll step into the darkness, we'll fly higher than the angels, climb beyond the cherubs—soar. On the wings of the wind, Taís. . .

In his enthusiasm, Bento drops Taís' hands and widens his arms to glide across the room. Taís plummets to the ground.

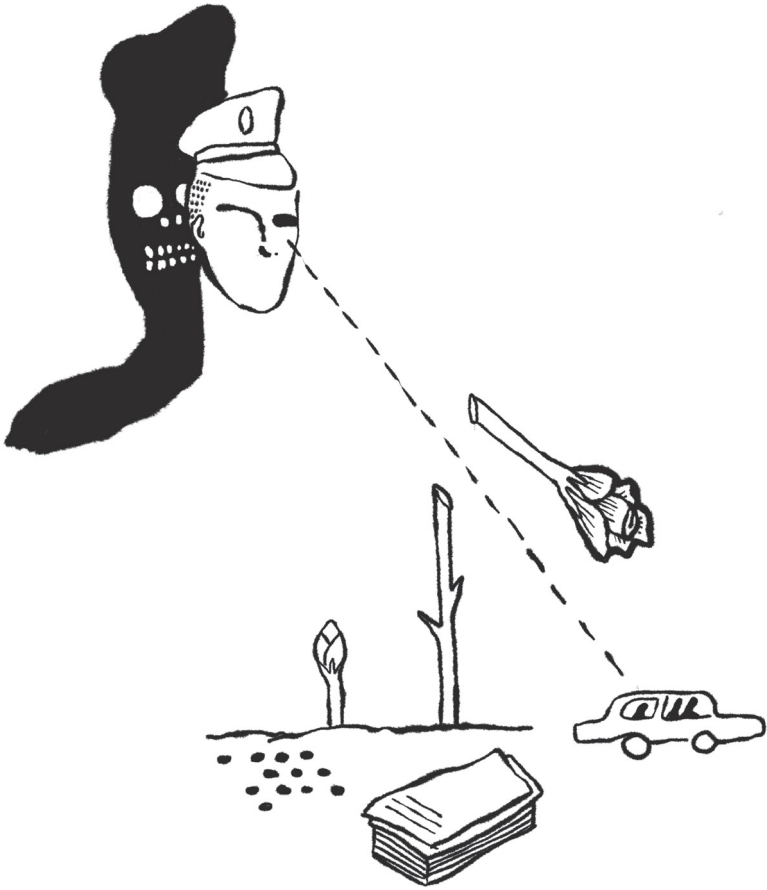
70. *The crioulo flies.*

Grisalha's car, looking increasingly battered, followed by a shinier one, arrives at a deserted marsh on the shore of Lake Paranoá.

Grisalha gets out first with his worn photographer's bag. Then Armandão, an effeminate gay man, and finally a Black man, Tição, dressed in character, that is, as the Flying *Crioulo*, a model inspired by Superman, concocted by Armandão's imagination, and executed by an apprentice seamstress from Ceilândia, a friend of Grisalha. Tição, donning a cape, boots, everything, stands there, uncomfortably stepping in the mud.

Armandão opens the trunk of Grisalha's car and takes out a small folding seat, which he places under the light of the headlights of OB's fancy car, which is accompanied by two stocky, rough-looking, stone-faced dog handlers.

ARMANDÃO (*to the gay man*): Hey, Mirandinha, put some makeup on the *crioulo*.



MIRANDINHA: You want to take the picture *here*, in this swamp?

ARMANDÃO: Where else would you want Tição to fall? On the ground? There's water here, a little hill to jump off of, and no one can spot us.

MIRANDINHA: All of this, without the mud and mosquitoes, can be found in the penthouse of Terezinha Pecô or any mansion on the Península dos Ministros. Instead of this filthy lake, we'd have a clean pool and a trampoline, not some tiny hill.

ARMANDÃO: Here you go with that fresh snobbery. Do you not get the spirit of this whole thing? The Flying *Crioulo* is a proletarian, a hero of the people—got it? The deal is: a hill, mud, and making sure he doesn't get covered in it, dammit. Now would you please put some makeup on this guy?

MIRANDINHA: How should I do his makeup? I only know how to do white guys. If he just puts the mask on, he'll be ready to jump.

ARMANDÃO: Go on, then, Tição. Put the mask on and jump.

TIÇÃO (*putting on a cat-like mask made of cyclamen glitter*): But I don't know how to swim!

GRISALHA (*panicking*): Tição, jump and don't make a fuss about it. It should be shallow there and if it's not, you'll just have to deal with it. Especially for the amount of money you're getting.

ARMANDÃO: I got it. (*Grabbing Tição and taking him by the arm up the hill*) Tição, jump, there's no problem, just fall into the water and we'll catch you right away. What's this about, man? You're trying to make me feel bad? A bunch of Black kids out there would go crazy for an opportunity like this. I recommended you for this and now you want to shit all over it? Go on, then. Do you remember the position? (*Armandão imitates the position of Superman flying; Tição follows him*) So, Grisalha, are you ready? Don't mess up the focus.

GRISALHA: Have you ever seen me mess up the focus, asshole?

ARMANDÃO: Yeah, I have. So this time, don't screw it up. Let's go. One, two. . .

71. Rotatives.

Newspaper rotary presses print the first page of the *Correio de Brasília*, on which is displayed a photograph taken in Taís' apartment

of Bento flying. Next to him, in equal dimensions, is a photograph of the Flying *Crioulo*.

The photographs are surmounted by a scandalous headline: “Saint Snob against Flying *Crioulo*—War in the Skies!”

72. *Paper sells.*

At a busy street corner in Brasília, the *Correio* sells like water.

78. *The crioulo provokes.*

Taís arrives home in a rage. She throws the newspaper down wherever, goes to the phone, and begins dialing.

[. . .]

As Taís speaks, Bento turns red as he scans the photos and reads the newspaper article.

At that moment, something unusual happens. From a window in the room appears the Flying *Crioulo* from above. Knocking on the glass from the outside and making signals, he beckons Bento to fight. The *crioulo* hangs from a rope held ineptly by some people above; he’s visibly torn between panic and acting out the role with which he has been entrusted.

Bento, possessed by anger, rushes to the window, but Taís, realizing the situation in time, manages to interpose herself between Bento and the window as the *crioulo*, with desperate pleas, is hoisted up, still dangling and kicking.

TAÍS (*throwing herself in front of the window with arms apart*): No, Bento. Don’t accept his provocations!

83. *The hummingbird.*

Taís, beaming and content, is set to unveil the new decoration of her apartment, in a neomonastic style, and welcomes a few of her girlfriends for a baby shower. Taís is especially stunning, though her dress, designed by herself for the occasion, is extremely modest: long with a high collar, with two zippers, one longitudinal from the neck to the pubis, and the other horizontal at the height of the breast, forming the design of a crucifix. At the scheduled time, her friends appear, voluptuous and provocative as always, yet wearing dresses inspired by religious habits.

The women all bring gifts of domestic use in some way appropriate to the monastic environment in which they are to be used.

Bento, wearing a new and elegant cloak created by Taís, looks singularly seductive. The devastating effect he causes is reflected in the looks and disturbance of the women when they are greeted by him. Whether sitting at the table, sipping on a conventual tea, or simply standing around the room, everyone is amazed at Bento's manners, who appears surprisingly conversational and captivating.

A few small animals of an appearance unknown to nature occasionally pass by and create a certain uneasiness in the women, who follow the example of Taís and Bento and pretend not to see them. When the animals inch closer, however, Bento caresses them discreetly.

Once the tea has finished and the excitement has increased greatly, the women insist that Bento perform a small levitation demonstration. The small animals, almost contaminated by this growing tension, hide and change places in little circles to better observe the scene. Some of them even appear to whisper to each other.

Despite Taís' increasing concern, Bento's eyes get bigger and brighter and he complies with the requests. He asks the women to kneel in a circle around him. He concentrates and gradually takes off, vibrating intensely, up to about half a meter high. Stabilizing himself at this altitude, still vibrating, he begins to rotate on his vertical axis, successively facing each of the women, devouring them with his shining eyes, until in one sudden movement, accompanied by a joyous roar, his back to the camera, he lifts his cloak to show the beaming women his virile member with a formidable erection and then turns to show himself off to everyone else.

The entire group erupts into shouts. Bento moves up and down on the women like a hummingbird does with flowers, penetrating them briefly though successively with indiscriminate gluttony.

The women go crazy and try to keep him in their arms' reach, but Bento keeps turning back around, "serving" them all and increasing each time the frequency and speed of his "ups" and "downs."

At that moment, Taís, who has remained immobile and distant from the group, unzips the cross of zippers on her tunic in a movement of irresistible pride and emerges wonderfully naked from the cloth that now falls at her feet.

Bento, in mid-flight, catches sight of this splendid vision that paralyzes him for a moment. He then throws himself at Taís in a blistering nosedive. Amid the commotion that ensues, with the half-naked ladies trying to force him back from Taís' arms, the apartment is invaded by hooded and heavily armed men who grab Bento and violently sequester him.

84. *End.*

Military transport plane on a nighttime flight. The middle door to the plane is open. Bento and the Flying *Crioulo* are lying face down on the metal floor, their hands handcuffed behind their backs. Strong men in paratrooper uniforms, unpleasant-looking and armed, watch over the prisoners and amuse themselves with silly games.

One of them steps on Bento's skull and presses his face against the floor.

Commander Larroque emerges from the pilots' cabin in casual sportswear.

LARROQUE: Throw these pieces of shit out. Now we'll see if they fly.

The soldiers take off Bento and the *crioulo's* handcuffs. The commander grabs them by the neck and throws them out the door of the flying plane. The *crioulo* goes first; Bento follows.

LARROQUE: Fly, you son of a bitch!

The camera fixates on Bento who, once out of the plane, finds himself in his element. He calmly opens his arms and positions himself to glide. He then realizes, horrified, that he is not gliding at all, but rather in free fall.

That is when, miraculously, the *crioulo* welcomes him into his arms mid-air. The ability to fly has inexplicably transferred itself from Bento to the *crioulo*.

CRIOULO: Hey, white boy, can't fly anymore?

BENTO (*clutching completely onto the crioulo*): *Neguinho!* And to think that I wanted to destroy you. . .

Their faces glued together, cheek to cheek, they smile at each other as they float, indifferent to the artillery above trying to reach them. A beautiful companionship has followed the rivalry between these two men.

Fin.

Selections from *Os tais
caquinhos* (2021) by
Natércia Pontes

Selections from *Máquina
de pinball* (2002) by
Clarah Averbuck

Translated by Júlia Irion Martins

Translator's Preface

I have a memory that I may have made up: I'm at my grandmother's house in Fortaleza, Ceará. It's nighttime—late enough that I might be the only person awake, but not late enough to be interesting. I get up from my station at the desktop computer in the living room, where I post on forums or play on Style Dollz until it is late enough to be interesting, and go to the kitchen for a popsicle. I open the freezer, reaching for one of those rectangular fruit bar style popsicles—lime—and when I pull my hand out of the box, a roach scuttles up my hand. I don't think roaches can survive in a freezer, but the fear of seeing a roach consumed me so entirely when visiting my family in Ceará that when I read Natércia Pontes' *Os tais caquinhos* (Those little shreds, Companhia das Letras, 2021), I began to believe my memory once more.

Os tais is a slim novel, composed not of chapters but of mounting vignettes that tell the story of apartment 402 where hoarder and father Lúcio lives with his two teenage daughters: Abigail and Berta. These vignettes, written as diary entries from Abigail's perspective, stack on top of each other less like diary entries signaling the passing of time and more like the precariously stacked cardboard boxes in 402.

For this issue of *Absinthe*, I've selected three vignettes: "402, Alcove of Loose Tiles," "Hunger Feels So Good," and "Mother." In the first of these vignettes, and one of the novel's opening vignettes, Abigail details the ownership the roaches have over every last centimeter of 402. They're in mugs, they're in shoes, they leave their traces and amputated bug legs in the drawers. But Abigail describes these disgusting creatures with such tenderness that you begin to accept them as sharing space, as beings that have been here long before us and will be long after us. This softness of prose to describe abject, harsh, or sad conditions is characteristic of Pontes' writing. In the same way that the vignettes stack, Pontes' syntax stacks too. The other two vignettes I've translated, "Hunger Feels So Good" and "Mother," both take the form of lists. "Hunger" enumerates an accumulation of lessons Abigail learns from Lúcio. But "Mother" is a list of lack—a claustrophobic and precarious stacking of what Abigail *doesn't* have cluttering her mind.

On an episode of the Brazilian literature podcast *Rumor*, Pontes comments that it's actually quite rare for novels to be set in Fortaleza and that she wanted to explore her memories of being in "the [music] scene" 1990s Fortaleza.¹ Despite this explicit aim, Pontes never actually reveals that the novel takes place in Fortaleza. One of the podcast hosts, Pedro, comments that for him and his co-host Lucas—both Fortalezenses and in "the scene"—it's quite obvious that *Os tais* takes place in Fortaleza. Yet for those unfamiliar with its particular 1990s terrain, it's the book jacket copy that does us the favor of stating that the story takes place in a "likely Fortaleza of the 1990s." As such, Pontes presents an ambivalent relationship to location and regionalism, inviting non-Fortalezense readers to consider for whom regional representation is meant.

This next memory I'm sure is true: A cousin of mine had a burned CD playing in her car, on it hits from the likes of Green Day, Blink-182, Evanescence, Eminem, and—most memorably—the Russian pop duo t.A.T.u. That summer, I dragged my mom from mall to mall in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, until I found a copy of *200 km/h in the Wrong Lane*. I didn't know this at the time, but my relentless hunt for a foreign CD (and this one, in particular) is probably the most Brazilian thing about me.

Clarah Averbuck's *Máquina de pinball* (Pinball machine, 2002) expands on and captures this aforementioned Brazilian lust for foreign music. Narrated in the first person, *Máquina* chronicles the life of rock music-obsessed Camila Chirivino, a 22-year-old gaúcha who has just dropped out of her degree in journalism, gotten dumped, relocated to São Paulo to become a writer, and frequently laments how difficult it once was to get ahold of new American musical releases.

Máquina is filled with references to American and British rock music. Each chapter begins with an epigraph from American and British musicians (save for one from *Fight Club*) such as Lou Reed, Rivers Cuomo, and PJ Harvey, among others. And, what's more,

¹ "Familiares estranhos e estranhos familiares: o selvagem e doméstico mundo de Natércia Pontes," *Rumor*, podcast, April 26, 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/4yhOpaoYuI3szLRksD3z6g>.

Averbuck dedicates the entire novel to the Strokes (Camila's cat is named Julian, after frontman Julian Casablancas). Beyond the epigraphs, Camila frequently cites from her favorite artists. The English lyrics are kept in English, with no italics demarcating this text as "different" from Portuguese. In a disclaimer located at the end of the novel, Averbuck explains that her work contains several untranslated expressions in English and that readers must simply deal with it—"sem chororô nem discurso" (without whining or lecturing) about the Portuguese language and Americanization and "yadda yadda."² Her flippant attitude about Brazilian preciousness about language and culture brings into question what we lose—and gain—by not translating. This remark, she clarifies, is especially pertinent to translating lyrics—a practice that is a "bummer." And Averbuck isn't wrong: You can explain Chico Buarque's "Cálice" but you can't translate it.

Though widely regarded as inspired or even directly lifted from her popular blog *brazileira!preta*, Averbuck denies *Máquina's* connections to the blog through form.³ That is to say, the book contains no formal elements of a blog: It is organized as a traditional novel with chapters, characters, and a plot. To make the case for *Máquina* as autofictional, the reader must be familiar with Averbuck's biography. Like Camila, Averbuck is a gaúcha who dropped out of her journalism degree at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS) to move to São Paulo and pursue writing. Averbuck delights in this space of autobiographical catch and release, leaking hints that she might be Camila but also. . . that she really might not be, or might be, but just a little bit. In a disclaimer printed on the last page of the first edition of *Máquina*, Averbuck writes the following regarding her text: "É mentira, mas é tudo verdade. Qualquer semelhança com a realidade não terá sido mera coincidência. Dúvidas, consulte um advogado." (It's all lies, but it's all true. Any similarities to reality are not merely coincidental. Any questions, consult a

² Clarah Averbuck, *Máquina de pinball* (Conrad Livros, 2002), 77.

³ Some scholars consider *Máquina* to be the result of a "bricolagem de textos escritos originalmente na internet" (A bricolage of texts originally written on the internet). Bruno Lima Oliveira, "Estratégias de Inserção na Literatura 2.0," *Cadernos de Letras da UFF* 25, no. 50 (2015): 204.

lawyer.)⁴ This disclaimer parodies the typical disclaimer included on the copyright page of many fictional works, which are meant to protect an author from libel by confirming the fictionality of the work.⁵ However, in writing that any similarity to reality is *not* coincidental, Averbuck still confirms (or at the very least strongly suggests) that *Máquina* is, in fact, fictional. It is fiction with pointed *similarities* to reality. But at the same time, this statement reminds readers that she has, in fact, pulled from her real life (or “reality”) to write her fictions.

These anxieties surrounding fact or fiction in Averbuck’s work, particularly given its online nature, seem to me incredibly prescient of the ways in which we often read contemporary women’s fiction. As I argue in my dissertation, contemporary readers fixate on fact-checking and cross-referencing author biographies with their output—a practice I speculate as derived from Web 2.0 verification culture (e.g., linking phone numbers and email accounts). Pontes, too, suffers accusations of autofiction—yes, her father was a hoarder and the Fortaleza she writes is inspired by the one she lived in. But, as she says, she likes writing that “flirts with the real” but that departs from the real, allowing it to “bloom” and become weird—an ambivalence towards “the real” that echoes her approach to location. But I digress—rockers and taunters of autofiction alike, enjoy these translations.

⁴ Averbuck, *Máquina de pinball*, 79.

⁵ “This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and events are products of the author’s imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.”

Selections from *Os tais caquinhos*

by Natércia Pontes

402, Alcove of Loose Tiles

My apartment wasn't ventilated or clean like Neca's. It wasn't aseptic and lavender scented like the bathroom stalls at school. In their lair the roaches weren't under siege. Even if, on a bad day, one or another was crushed by the existential wrath of the tenants (my family), one could very well consider our home a safe space for these docile insects with serrated legs. The insects loved to slumber in the mugs, explore the recesses of our sneakers, dive into the remaining water of the giant jug, tickle our toothbrushes. There was a sweet roach smell that incensed our lives. There, too, was an intimate agreement. I turned a blind eye to the insects' infestation and, in turn, expected that there be a modicum of respect from them. Not climbing across my face while I slept, for example. For the most part, the roaches complied with our tacit agreement, allowing life to be more bearable. I often forgot about them and slept wrapped in a thin sheet that smelled like sebum. Sooner or later, I'd encounter a lost leg in the cutlery drawer, silverware greasy from the kitchen, and life would once again return to an indecipherable state, not unlike our dark apartment, where light didn't reach the living room—especially because there was no such room. There was, instead, a deposit of cardboard boxes filled with books that crumbled with time. Some boxes had to occupy the veranda for lack of space. Then it would rain, and the boxes would get soaked and then dry out with the sun and the wind. As years passed, they became a dunghill of mold and termite nests. The thought of opening the glass door with its rusted frame was so terrifying that we decided to never open it ever again.

Hunger Feels So Good

Perhaps the greatest of Lúcio's lessons. The second being that we cultivate free thinking, without many certainties. Although I

understood in an intuitive and intangible way what Lúcio meant to tell us with this, I got used to exercising doubt about everything. For example: (a) closed doors don't always signify intransigence or contempt for your family. They could very well point to a healthy need to be alone or of keeping your belongings safe from minor domestic accidents and theft. And if these belongings were juice boxes or creme-filled cookies, there was nothing more understandable; (b) boxes and more boxes of corrugated cardboard piled atop one another, bulging from an excess of content and humidity, full of moths and their grey cocoons glued to their exterior like miniature sconces eaten away by time did not denote sloppiness, lack of hygiene or absence of cleanliness in the home, on the contrary the debris of that thick brown paper gave the environment an intellectual charm, particularly when colorful tomes of the most diverse titles emerged from the worn corners; (c) the sweet odor of roaches was not diluted exclusively with the habit of cleaning the house, the alternative always at hand was to squirt the juice from an orange peel into the eyes of an unsuspecting Berta; (d) the lack of a blender in our kitchen contrasting with the embarrassing presence of a grimy hand mixer which only reached two speeds was in no way, shape, or form a reason for public shame but, much the opposite, for joy since its lack could be easily remedied with the cruel drowning of Ken-doll in the toilet; (e) not having a Hello Kitty lunchbox, but in its place an acidic, hollow stomach during the 20 minutes of recess (and during the interminable minutes after class) also meant long, wet kisses with eight classmates of both sexes hidden by nervous giggles in the bathroom stall; (f) going deeper and deeper into the sea until losing your footing did not essentially express a loose and sad desire to vanish from the face of the Earth, but rather the romantic desire to be a solitary mermaid gliding from wave to wave in search of a human prince with a shiny forelock; (g) maintaining the desk with obsessive order as the only place in the house where one can actually exert control and authority is not a symptom that the owner of the desk does not feel respected in the rest of the house, but rather that the owner is a clean and admirable girl; (h) suffering from a phobia of cats does not suggest a phobia of something besides cats, but that yes, these agile little demons are indeed scary; (i) cups

that remain dirty after washing do not attest to the filth of the inhabitants of a specific home, they merely represent a silly lack of care on the part of its residents; (j) static from an old television isn't always a torment, it can very well work as a fun reading light in the middle of the night assuming you mute it; (k) spending entire afternoons immersed in a book that will appear on the literature exam tomorrow and getting stuck on the same sentence because no amount of concentration can beat the Ping-Pong ball bouncing on your upstairs neighbor's floor does not mean you are going to get a laughable grade, but that you will find a sneaky way of swindling the teacher with difficult words such as Pantagruelian, vicissitude, and gnu; (l) doormats emblazoned with warm welcomes express order, cleanliness, and candor, though they are not mandatory items in all house entrances; (m) garlic cloves sprouting in the fridge are not as disgusting as they seem, they can very well be interpreted as the manifestation of the exciting mystery of the continuity of life in adverse circumstances; (n) eating a whole jar of sweet potato jam in 12 hours (replacing breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner) should not in any way be criticized as an inadequate eating habit for a growing teen, but rather as an exotic practice given to those spirits free from the rules imposed by sociocultural dictates; (o) hiding the first menstruation from everything and everyone using thick layers of toilet paper as a pad, rather than being a symptom that trust in others is confused and shaken, points to a precocious maturity and independence, in other words, it is a cause for unquestionable pride of the young lady in question and for everybody involved; (p) comforters aren't always obligatory and cozy items for a dwelling, as they are more appropriate for cold climates you can do without them. Similar logic can be applied to bedding sets that are not moth eaten and with all pieces intact (top sheet, fitted sheet, and pillowcases) and delicately matched with each other, because, hot or cold, all sleep with closed eyes—except for Lúcio, who always sleeps with one eye open and the other closed, crocodile-like at his post, in case anyone wants to trick him or even attack him; (q) waxing isn't always a cosmetic recourse, however it is considered a dumb and painful practice that my friends' mothers invented for their daughters; (r) vaccination cards don't need to be safeguarded in an accordion folder

(with each slot labeled with the name of a specific daughter, arranged in order of birth) because nobody contracts old diseases long eradicated in the country (aside from tetanus, Hepatitis B, and whooping cough); (s) microwaves are beautiful, fun, and practical but above all unnecessary—particularly when they explode out of nowhere in the comfort of one’s home, resulting in giant, abrasive cuts on the face of feisty eight-year-old kids; (t) dogs are also deadly and should never be petted. When one of these beasts is present, the first precaution to take is to immediately climb atop the nearest table and yell at its owner, calling him a criminal and a lunatic, after all, how can one, with impunity, bandy about with a monster capable of biting the face of a defenseless and introspective eight-year-old child whose father died of a massive stroke?; (u) if someone obsessively draws mazes in the eyes of looney-goosey little girls—as if they were missing their skeletons or made up entirely of rubber—and accommodate themselves between the narrow spaces pressed between the spirals of a notebook, in separate notepads, in medicine boxes, in multicolored brochures for the pizzeria on the corner, in the space between one number and another of emergency dispatches (the police, poison control, the suicide hotline, etc.) listed in the phonebook, or even fragmented in the fat and yellowed tomes that are phonebooks and TV guides, it doesn’t mean that they’re crazy; (v) your house isn’t that kooky, even though it can be faithfully described as scrap metal from a cable box descrambler; (x) using plastic bags from the supermarket to store everything—and I mean absolutely everything (food, watches without batteries, birth certificates, flip-flops, plates, porcelain tchotchkes, lighters, remnants of used deodorants, glasses cases, loose lids, empty pill packs, frames, cups, toothbrushes, overdue electric bills, silverware, erasers, forgotten fruits, dry-erase markers, unpaid water bills, combs, report cards, travel cards from a distant relative, etc.)—isn’t as horrible as it seems. On the contrary, it’s ecological, hygienic (it protects things from contact with roaches), and very practical (if the bag disintegrates over time, just switch it for a new one); (w) the noise that plastic bags make when handled isn’t necessarily unpleasant, but relaxing, as it emulates the sound of the sea; (y) disobeying all the rules (do not enter, do not touch, do not read), leaving

footprints and fingerprints in the dust that covers the floor and all the precarious objects and furniture in the apartment, courageously ceding to curiosity and boredom which were once again more powerful than fear, is far from being the greatest affront to a paternal figure already assigned to a daughter; (z) continuously hearing, in the face of any type of frustration or deviation from expectations, your father roaring *I want death!* and asking God insistently and furiously *Why won't death come for me?*, hearing this sequence of sentences repeated time and time again until you memorize the interval of time between one sentence and the next such that you can repeat it with your dad and declaim in unison each syllable of the refrain, *I wa-nt dea-th!*, silencing your voice and pretending to be an insolent ventriloquist, *Why won't dea-th co-me for me?*, is nothing more than a banal scene that happens in the best of families and does not provoke any type of hurt or pain.

Mother

Dear diary, I haven't had a mother for a long time. I don't have a hand. I don't have anyone to suck the snot out of my nose. I don't have a breast. I don't have anyone to fix the doorknobs. I don't have a mouth. I don't have anyone to defend me in a long letter. I don't have feet. I don't have anyone to pluck the wax out of my ear with tweezers. I don't have eyes. I don't have anyone to drive me to ballet. I don't have ears. I don't have anyone to delicately trace the contours of my eyebrows. I don't have eyebrows. I don't have anyone to hang my doodles on the fridge. I don't have nails. I don't have anyone to comb my hair with conditioner. I don't have legs. I don't have anyone to solve my banking problems in another country. I don't have elbows. I don't have anyone to wake me up early in the morning with a hoarse voice. I don't have kidneys. I don't have anyone to hold my hand to cross the street. I don't have eyelashes. I don't have anyone to make me noodles. I don't have knees. I don't have anyone to send me a fish in the mail. I don't have a belly button. I don't have anyone to tell me whether or not I was breastfed. I don't have ribs. I don't have anyone to pack my bags. I don't have a butt.

I don't have anyone to keep track of my medical records. I don't have heels. I don't have anyone to teach me to darn. I don't have a tibia. I don't have anyone to look at me sweetly. I don't have cheeks. I don't have anyone to rub ointment on my back. I don't have a back. I don't have anyone to send me a colorful postcard with marker drawings. I don't have a chin. I don't have anyone to save my first lost milk-tooth. I don't have a pharynx. I don't have anyone to cover my book covers. I don't have a flank. I don't have anyone to sew me curtains. I don't have a tongue. I don't have anyone to hold me while I blow out my birthday candles. I don't have hair. I don't have anyone to sing me a lullaby. I don't have eyelids. I don't have anyone to explain traffic signs to me. I don't have gums. I don't have anyone to teach me how to fold shirts. I don't have shoulder blades. I don't have anyone to put a coat on me. I don't have a body. I don't have anyone who knows all of me. I don't have a pulse. I haven't had a mother for a long time. I don't have a mother.



Selections from *Máquina de pinball*

by Clarah Averbuck

Chapter 1

Let the truth be known / I've got to walk around in my own tennis shoes / Let the truth be known / I have to learn to live in this world on my own / Let the truth be known / Nobody showed me how it's supposed to go.
Bob Forrest – *The Bicycle Thief*

Planet: Earth. City: São Paulo. Like all metropolises, São Paulo finds itself today at a disadvantage in its fight against man's greatest enemy: pollution. Fuck, what a dirty city.

My skin is disgusting. I didn't have any acne as a teen, save for one zit or another during that wretched time of month, always at the extremities of my face. Now I have three right in the middle of my cheek. But don't get it twisted—I didn't discover them in a mirror because here there simply isn't enough light for that. My hair is also horrendous because of this ridiculous water. Remember that fluorescent fish with three eyes from that episode of *The Simpsons*? Well, he'd be way more fluorescent and would have, like, five or six eyes spread across his body if he depended on this stupid water. Yeah, I'm a girly-girl. I wear makeup, stilettos, a belly button ring, and glittery nail polish. I'm happy this way. Girly. But with balls.

Balls. "Camila, you've lost weight!" Bless Dr. Boleta, who gives me slips and slips of receita azul. She who has blue has everything. But I don't want everything—just amphetamines. Hydrochloride amfepramone, alias Inibex or Hipofagin, a gift in the lives of those who don't like sleeping, the neurotic depressives without money to eat. All of the alternatives are correct.

One month ago I had cable TV, a fridge, a microwave, a contour pillow, a blender, a VCR, a dishwasher, a cable modem, a balcony, and a boyfriend. Now I live in a room that doesn't fit an adult man lying on the floor. Believe me—I tried. I sleep on a little mattress on the living room floor with Julian, the cat I found on my third city day. I love cats. The other two stayed in my ex-house. Three, to tell

the truth, but in the division of goods the boyfriend kept one of them and with the Beatles figurines—the only reason we’d fought up to this point besides the cheating that led us to our tragic end. Mine, to be clear. Because I need to fall in love all the time, or I can’t produce for shit. That’s why my ex-boyfriend, who I truly liked, didn’t want anything to do with me anymore: I’m incapable of being with just one person. I can love just one person, and he was this person, but I need constant novelty. After two years he didn’t want to deal with it anymore and kicked me out. What was I supposed to do? Try to explain? It’s useless—nobody would understand, not even me. Now the love of my life for this week only refers to me as “The Jester” and collects the fortune I owe him. Yearning. *Love is suicide*.

I have two options: I suffer like an abandoned dog, crying, crying, crying, and hoping for it to pass or I get out there having as much fun as possible and eating. No cannibalism here: I’m talking about sex—feeling something that isn’t pain is good during these times.

I constantly have “I want to go home” panics, but they are completely useless and what I can do is get wasted and embody Vicente Celestino or Lupicino Rodrigues or both—which could be even more depressing when you consider that they suffered better—and return, stumbling to my little maid’s room without a window. Me and Julian slept peacefully. Once again, that little cat saved my life. In moments of extreme depression—when I’d think about flying out of the 11th floor window, turning into a slimy pancake on the asphalt—Julian would walk over to me and stare. I’m sure he knew what I was thinking about and asked me to stay. Who would take care of this poor little cat if I turned into lasagna? The freaks who lived with me? Never. So I would give up and keep staring at my feet.

With time, I got used to spending the mornings with the damned sun in my face. The living room windows didn’t have curtains. But truthfully it wouldn’t have made the slightest difference.

To hell with all of that. It’s behind me, and in front of me there’s an entire city with its legs open. The fact that I don’t have a fucking cent to my name doesn’t worry me. I always find a way to get money. I make do with my pills, my CDs, my computer, and any telephone line. Yep, because not getting emails is inconceivable. I can’t even

begin to imagine how somebody could stand to wait for a letter that came by carriage or ship or motorcycle or a mailman's bag. The possibilities of failure were enormous. I think I'd rather spend my whole life traveling than waiting for letters from loved ones far away. I'd probably fall head over heels for some guy who I caught a glimpse of at a Scandi pier and spend the rest of my life trying to find him. Easy things aren't any fun. And difficulty doesn't mean slow—slowness corrodes me. I want everything immediately. That's what you get for being the only child of rocker parents. Or hippies. Or zen, depending on the era. Now they do meditation and send me books about the movement of Pluto and the Age of Aquarius.

I might be fucked and broke, but rock is free. Lately I only listen to the Strokes, a band that some non-believers with no vision doubted would blow up. To me, it was obvious. I became a fan as soon as I heard the first single, "The Modern Age"—which was simply brilliant—months before anyone here had any idea that they would be the Thing. Now they're hype. That's alright—they deserve it. So anyway, for the fucked, rock is ramen. But ramen lite. I don't want to become pear-shaped. It's enough to be poor—fat and poor would be too fucked. A tip: Never cook with glasses on. I don't know about you, but I have this habit of sticking my head in the pot to see how things are going in there and my glasses get all foggy. This also happens with steaming dishes and cups of tea. Humiliating.

Camila Chirivino; 22 years old; dropped out of a half-finished degree in Journalism and Letters; likes cats, chocolate, vodka, skinny hairless men, dark eyes, jazz, and rock. For now, that's all you need to know.



Chapter 11

*Leaving just in time / Stayed there for a while / Rolling in the ocean /
Trying to catch her eye / Work hard and say it's easy / Do it just to please me
/ Tomorrow will be different / So this is why I'm leaving.
Julian Casablancas – The Strokes*

Routines are always shit, unless you find a way to lose track of time. I'm not talking about days, but rather hours. Losing track of days is simple: You just have to be completely normal. Normal people get on my nerves. "Normal" is the strangest thing I can imagine. Is it weird to do drugs to have fun? Is it weird to sleep until you're not sleepy? Is it weird to not want to lock yourself into norms invented by half a dozen idiots at the top of the food chain? I don't think so. What's weird is a guy leaving with a briefcase at 6:47 a.m. every day, taking the bus to the train and the train to a small insurance company, working until six on the dot and the going back home to eat beef and rice in front of the TV without speaking to the wife (who made the beef and rice) and avoiding eye contact with the kids (who hardly know who this bearded dude they call "dad" is) and sleeping (in blue pajamas) shortly after the evening news because he's tired, too tired, and tomorrow he'll have to do it all over again and again and later he'll retire and look back and find that his life was dignified, honest, and just and that he lived a stupid routine in which he was unable to differentiate one day from the other. These people are insane.

I did it differently: I'd go two, three days without sleeping due to my happy pills which I'd finally acquired, and then I'd go to the store in a state of disarray in that stage where you heard non-existent cell phones ringing and you capture radio signals with your earrings and see figures. I love that. After the languor of the first day always comes hyperactivity. Something had to compensate for the fact that I had to leave the house every day at nine in the morning, walk to the train, buy the ticket with change to spare the ticket girl from a sour mood, take the train, get off the train, take the train again, get off again, get on again, arrive at the station and walk to the store, being forced to put up with those people who think they have the right

to speak to you—an innocent passerby—who is simply trying to go to work and has to now put up with these dirty, ugly hippies. Then I had to open the store and the rolling security grille had problems. That's fine, we all have problems, but *honestly*, the security grille didn't have to fall on my feet every day. Damn iron door. So I'd turn on the lights and the alarm and the computer and pick a CD and sit at the counter and order a Diet Coke from the conjoined store and eat a pão de queijo and someone would come in and look and ask about a sale and leave. Then a thousand people would come and go and some were afraid of talking to girls and others weren't afraid and talked too much and others were interesting and others weren't interesting and others were obviously posers trying to fit into something. Tsk. Regardless, it was cool. When it was time to leave, I'd leave. I walked to the metro and confronted the same NPCs. I'd go through the turnstile, down the stairs, and wait. These people are all insane. At the end of the day, they were all desperate to get on that stupid train. They were thousands and they were ugly and sweaty and dirty and poor just like me and they all wanted to pass in front of one another. Every day. And every day I muttered “fuck this” and let all those tired workers pass in front of me. They behaved as though it was the last train to escape the devil. The subway cars left packed with people, who looked more like maggots coming out the eyes of a decomposing skull, all squished up under the ground. Man. In five minutes, another train would arrive, empty and with oxygen. The hurried always stay losing.

It was a Friday night and I didn't have work on Saturday. Thank God, because I had an unprecedented hangover and I'd had a night of mediocre sex with an old hookup who I'd met up with at a bar. For some reason, I decided not to take the train. It was too hot, too humid, too polluted, too everything. The bus would take longer, but it had windows and I needed to feel a breeze on my face. When I was a child, I thought those ads for soundproof windows with a chic girl with an up-do and gloves shushing were weird. Now I get them. I felt at home for a few seconds. It was the city with Parque da Mônica with the Jotalhão bouncy house and Avenida Paulista and the Municipal Theatre and the Italian-filled Bixiga. It was my home. At least now it was. I decided to get off at Paulista, one of the places

that made me want to live in São Paulo. If you walk on Paulista at night and you feel a little chill on your belly, then you know that you need to live in São Paulo for a little while.

I walked. I walked along Paulista, observing the people who were worried about getting somewhere quickly, noticing nothing around them. I walked slowly, smoking my last cig and thinking and listening to my new discovery, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club—the Jesus and Mary Chain of the '90s. Big cities can be very sad. But not for me, obviously. For the people who desperately needed to get home and make beans and rice and beef and watch the novela. How do you even miss the novela? Brrr. Drink, drink. To walk home is to stop at that friendly bodega. Vodka with guaraná, to mix things up a bit. I don't know how it's listed on the menu, but I'm going to call it "Paulista." I lean on the counter and when I come to the sad conclusion that my first paycheck is already gone, I hear a comment behind my back.

"They say they're going to be the next big thing."

I was wearing my Strokes shirt and there was all this discourse about the salvation of rock put on them. Rock doesn't need to be saved, rock is a lost soul, a drunk, a druggie with a poorly kept beard and an unbuttoned shirt. He who tries to save rock transforms it into something else. The Strokes? The Strokes are rock. And rock doesn't need to be saved from anything.

Selections from *Fatal Error*
(2021) by Michel de Oliveira

Translated by Sam McCracken

Translator's Preface

Michel de Oliveira (1988–) is a writer, photographer, visual artist, cultural critic, and professor of Social Communication at the Universidade Federal de Sergipe. The fiction to follow first appeared in de Oliveira's *Fatal Error* (Editora Moinhos, 2021), a collection of decidedly post-digital short stories that share—among other things—a sustained preoccupation with the nature of contemporary life in the age of the network and mobile communication technologies. In *Fatal Error*, that is to say, Oliveira presents his reader with a world marked at every turn by smartphones, search engines, and screens, as well as drones, ride-sharing, and even an imagined cyborgean prosthetic or two. Though Oliveira's work in *Fatal Error* drips with the digital, it is likewise steeped in questions of human desire, embodiment, and the realm of the sensuous, often situated along many of the (quite literal) interfaces between the two.

Born in Tobias Barreto, Sergipe—the smallest of Brazil's 26 states—Oliveira has long been interested in the promises and problems of digital mediation, both academically and in his creative practice. His undergraduate degree in journalism at the Universidade Federal de Sergipe culminated in the development of *Revista Crivo*, a digital magazine of art, criticism, and culture that took advantage of the interactive affordances of digital media and combined text with image, audio, and sound, all of which were accessible “without needing to be connected to the internet.”¹ As he began graduate study, Oliveira adjusted his lens: The writer-cum-photographer turned his focus more squarely toward photography, seeking to expand Brazilian theoretical conceptions of the medium, which were, by his account, largely limited to the critical perspectives available in those precious few works of Western philosophy dedicated to the form that had been translated into Portuguese: namely, Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and Susan Sontag's *On Photography*.²

¹ “Revista Crivo será lançada nesta sexta,” *Infonet*, December 16, 2010, <https://infonet.com.br/noticias/cultura/revista-crivo-sera-lancada-nesta-sexta/>.

² Paulo César Boni, “Prefácio,” in *Saudades eternas: fotografia entre a morte e a sobrevida*, by Michel de Oliveira (Eduel, 2018), 1.

Oliveira's master's thesis, completed at the Universidade Estadual de Londrina, and doctoral dissertation, undertaken at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, would result, respectively, in two book-length studies of photography. The former, *Saudades eternas: fotografia entre a morte e a sobrevivida* (Eternal longing: Photography between death and survival, Eduel, 2018), thinks through the questions of grief and remembrance by foregrounding a certain tension between the physical permanence of the photographic record and the embodied, felt heartache harbored by those with memories of the photographically captured but no longer present. The latter, *Seduzidos pela luz: ou bases antropológicas da fotografia* (Seduced by the light: Or, the anthropological bases of photography, Imaginalis, 2021), by contrast, argues against the notion of "post-photography"—a critical buzzword born out of the digital turn—and advocates instead for "hyperphotography," drawing upon the writer's training in (social) communication and information studies in order to historicize the nature and form of contemporary photography within view of its antecedents.

Running parallel to his intellectual formation, Oliveira has maintained a steady creative output over the past decade, both as a photographer and as a writer. To date, he has written four book-length creative works in addition to *Fatal Error*, all of which vary in genre and central preoccupation but are nevertheless colored by Oliveira's wit, wordplay, and recurrent interest in gender, sexuality, the body, and the digital. His debut, *Cólicas, câimbras & outras dores* (Colics, cramps, and other pains, Oito e Meio, 2017), assembles 58 stories, each of which is structured around a given physical or mental illness. In his follow-up, *O sagrado coração do homem* (The sacred heart of man, Moinhos, 2018), Oliveira retells—in the form of poems, flash-fiction, and short stories—iconic scenes from the Bible, recasting them with science-fictional flair and with choice nods to our contemporary mediascape. In his version of the temptation of woman, for example, the "woman" in question ultimately proves to be the direction-giving, feminine voice of a car's GPS system.

In his first volume of poetry, *O amor são tontas coisas* (Love are stupid things, Moinhos, 2021)—a grammatically broken title that plays on the slippage between *tonta* (stupid) and *tanta*

(many)—Oliveira presents a collection of poems that, on their surface, appear as timeless as any other series of love poems. Directed toward a nameless, apostrophic you, Oliveira’s erotic verses trace the contours of love won and love lost, but also to the contents of lost “pendrives”³ or to the pain of an unanswered phone call,⁴ reminding the reader that before us is a poetic account of a distinctly modern type of love. Oliveira’s most recent book—the author’s first novel—*Meus dedos sentem falta do seu cheiro* (My fingers miss your smell, Moinhos, 2024), follows in a similar vein in its depiction of a young man’s coming out and subsequent attempt to navigate same-sex desire in the era of hookup apps, a tension which also surfaces in several of *Fatal Error*’s stories. “I could have been contemporary and gone hunting on the smartphone apps,” remarks the speaker of *Meus dedos* at one moment, “but the logic of the display case disquieted me, bodies in pieces, with chests and biceps for sale.”⁵

* * *

The *Fatal Error* stories I have selected are rife with apps and influencers, streaming platforms and delivery services, romances, and falling-outs. But make no mistake, in Oliveira’s hands, things tend to skew more *Black Mirror* than *Her*.⁶ Consistent with the traditions of science and speculative fiction from which it follows, *Fatal Error* meets the digital with a healthy dose of tongue-in-cheek skepticism, at times commenting directly on existing technologies, apps, or platforms and other times imagining what might develop from them in the not-so-distant future. Whether they may prove horrifying or utterly banal, both the technologies and ends toward which they are put in *Fatal Error* lie wedged between the foreground and background of Oliveira’s fiction. These technologies are at once inextricable from the stories yet ultimately secondary to the inquiry into contemporary social life the author advances through them. *What*

³ Michel de Oliveria, *O amor são tontas coisas* (Editora Moinhos, 2021), 65.

⁴ Oliveria, *O amor*, 49.

⁵ Michel de Oliveria, *Meus dedos sentem falta do seu cheiro* (Moinhos, 2024), 32.

⁶ *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker (2011–), on Channel 4 and Netflix; and *Her*, directed by Spike Jonze (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013).

new pressures does social-mediation place on romantic connection? What relationships do we consent to when we accept an app's terms and conditions? Who are we without Google?

Furnishing, as fiction does best, a variety of elliptical, imaginative answers to the above, *Fatal Error* confronts the ever-extending shadow of the digital in our cultural moment, but it does so, too, without descending into universals or utopias. Oliveira's fiction, as rich as it may be with remediated, all-too-common screen interfaces, also places its reader firmly in the Brazilian context, giving credence in its hybridity to Scott Weintraub's claim that "the non-place of Latin American digital or technopoetics evinces a positionality that departs *from* a specific cultural, linguistic, and geographic cartography that is marked and transected by 'the Latin American' in a particular manner."⁷ In short, in a world where people from the United States can ask with total sincerity if "there's Wi-Fi in Brazil"—the nation that boasts the ninth largest economy on the planet—Oliveira's fiction would seem to reply, "Yes, too much of it, in fact."

DO YOU WISH TO CONTINUE?

Y / N

⁷ Scott Weintraub, "Situating the Digital in Latin American Technopoetics," *Latin American Digital Poetics*, ed. Scott Weintraub and Luis Correa-Díaz (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 9.

Selections from *Fatal Error*

by Michel de Oliveira

Unfollow

@marvinho liked three of @enzoo's photos; @enzoo responded with a "Like" on the most recent picture @marvinho posted to his feed, a pretty conceptual shot of, like, paint flaking off a wall. @marvinho liked five more of @enzoo's photos, including one posted four weeks earlier of him shirtless on the beach after flexing and doing some crunches to make his muscles pop. @enzoo started following @marvinho, who followed back days later in order to feign casual disinterest despite having already liked old pictures.

They continued liking recent pictures and viewing each other's stories until @marvinho had the initiative to send the first message—in reality a reply to a story @enzoo posted at a water park, holding his breath to minimize his gut in the photo. Handsomeeee, @marvinho wrote. @enzoo responded with a heart. The conversation ended at that.

They only spoke again days later when @marvinho went to the mall and posted a selfie to his story, something he—always with abstract photos, unusual angles, and conceptual themes—didn't often do.

Flawlesssssss

:)

I'm embarrassed

Embarrassed by what?

Omg, it's just that you're so hot

I totally admire you

Your stories and selfies are really motivating

The reply couldn't have been more perfect to conquer @enzoo, who on that night sent @marvinho a picture of himself in just his underwear, adjusting his bulge before clicking so that it would be

positioned in a strategic way. @marvinho reciprocated with a photo in his boxers, out of focus and dark, but @enzoo lied:

Hotttttttttt

On Saturday, they decided to meet up in the mall food court in front of McDonald's. @marvinho arrived first: jean shorts, marine blue T-shirt, sneakers with Shox, and white socks. @enzoo appeared 17 minutes later: khaki shorts, boat shoes, no socks, short-sleeved shirt with a llama print. When they hugged, @enzoo's imported perfume penetrated @marvinho's shirt.

They ate lunch at the Japanese restaurant. The daily combo: temaki + six sushis + six salmon sashimis. They cracked up while they ate, @enzoo didn't know how to use chopsticks, @marvinho tried to teach him, but @enzoo always dropped his sushi in the shoyu dish, splashing dark droplets across the beige formica table. In the end, @enzoo managed to eat the last two pieces without dropping them. A round of applause from @marvinho.

Dessert was a milkshake from Bob's. They sat in front of the mall's interior garden, close together. And they drew closer and closer with straws in their mouths, @enzoo's perfume growing stronger. So close that the outcome was inevitable: @enzoo pulled his iPhone from his pocket and took a selfie with @marvinho. Their heads joined, perfume, straws, caption: cool saturday with @marvinho.

After that, the kiss. @enzoo, chocolate-flavored; @marvinho, vanilla. The perfect combination of flavors, mouth sizes, tongue textures, hands on necks, and @enzoo's perfume, which smelled even better with a nose hovering above the skin.

It was an unexpected encounter for both of them. It was just a lunch and a selfie on stories, but that kiss—such a perfect fit—was the sign of something more, of, who knows, maybe other things: traveling, photos on the beach, creating a joint profile, or even better, tagging each other as boyfriends on each other's posts, receiving likes, and even, what happened afterwards. Sex.

Their encounter without clothing merits a brief description: @enzoo a Barbie, totally waxed, even his armpits; @marvinho *au*

natural, dark hairs emphasizing his light skin. But that wasn't even the main course, like the kiss, the fit was precise. Air-conditioning as high as it would go, but still they sweated and gasped and, after showering, more kissing.

Everything was good. Even without perfume, @enzoo's scent ignited @marvinho. He wanted to do it all over again the next day, and again on Monday after work, even if he was tired, because @enzoo made @marvinho feel more alive; inside, his veins dilated to the point of his muscles becoming taut, because when the body is filled with desire, there is no means of escape. It makes the flesh pulse until it empties out in spasms.

@marvinho was becoming addicted to that sensation and he wanted more. Going crazy to the point of losing his senses, becoming alive in bed with his heart racing, all while @enzoo posted to his story: #AfterSexSelfie.

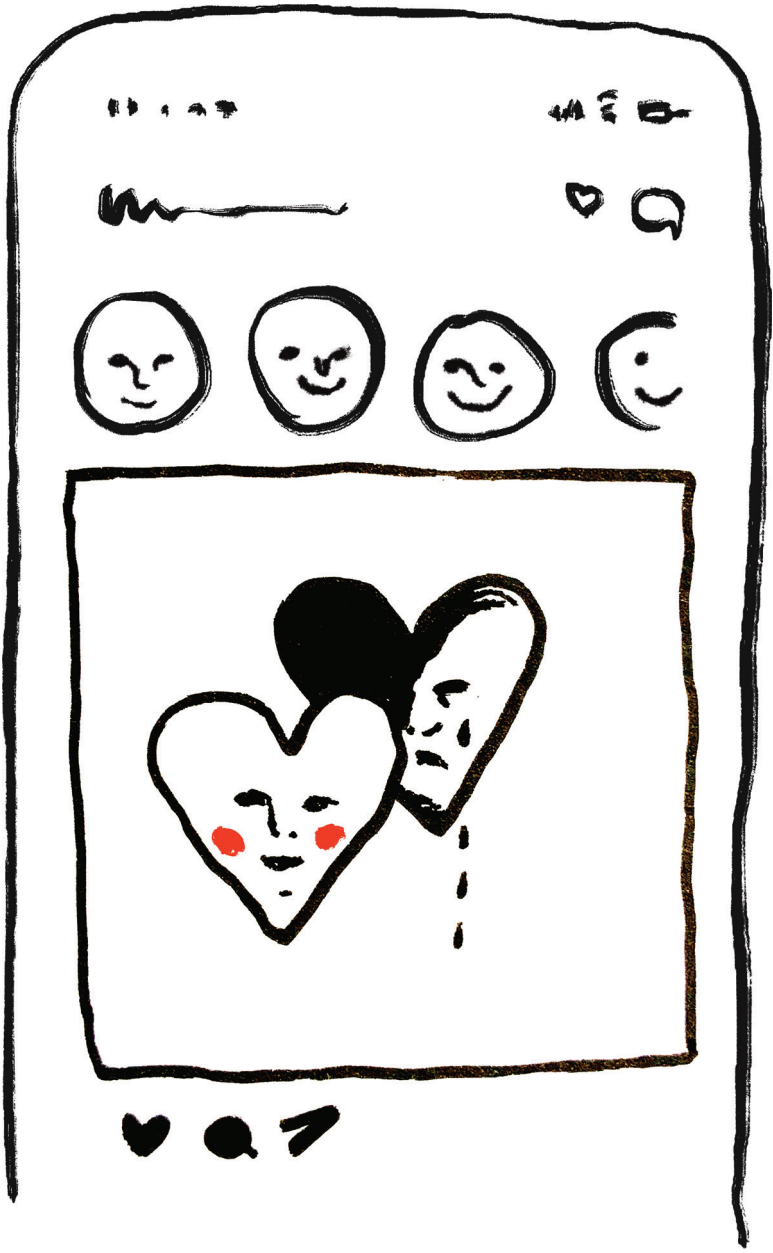
Three months later, the first trip: Gramado in the middle of winter. That dreamy landscape, with fog and hydrangeas, scarves and red noses. They walked hand-in-hand down Rua Coberta, kissed in the bay of Lago Negro, did an open-air city bus tour for tourists.

While @marvinho wanted to photograph the surroundings—the fallen leaves and textures of moss-covered walls—@enzoo busied himself with selfies, alone and as a couple, plates of food, videos of the fondue courses and of the woolen blankets draped over chairs at the restaurants.

They were three beautiful days, with sex every night, @marvinho each time more addicted to @enzoo's scent. He even posted to his feed a photo of golden leaves on the ground, moist from fog, with the caption:

@enzoo, you make me sure that after the winter, spring
breaks through

@enzoo merely liked it, didn't comment anything, and during their vacation posted only selfies of himself. @marvinho didn't find it weird—he was just bothered by the silence on the plane ride home. @enzoo said it was no big deal, that he was just tired. Instead of



cuddling on @marvinho's shoulder to sleep, he propped his head against the plane window.

After all those hours stuck together on the plane, @enzoo's scent was gone. Everything ended with poorly written messages on WhatsApp:

I'm not ready for a relationship	21:43
Maybe someday we'll talk again	21:43
For now it just won't work	21:43

@marvinho didn't understand anything and would have understood even less if @enzoo had been sincere and said that he ended the relationship because @marvinho wasn't photogenic: he always came out ugly in selfies and @enzoo's likes fell after they'd gotten together.

Even without understanding, @marvinho cried. He tried to talk to @enzoo, but his Instagram profile disappeared, his WhatsApp photo too. He tried DMing on Twitter, he even sent an email. When he ran out of options, he remembered that iPhones make calls, clicked on @enzoo's number, but it didn't ring.

No Signal

Match. Marcelle and Thomás began to chat. Without authorization, he sent a dick pic. She liked it and reciprocated with a discreet photo of her breasts. He sent more. In this way he came to know her plump lips even before she opened her mouth.

Their online chat went on for nearly three weeks, with full-on sentences, pictures of food, and more nudes. When they met up for the first time, Marcelle found his voice annoying, his smile, nevertheless, magnetic, the corner of his mouth a little crooked, charming. Thomás didn't like her floral perfume, a bit nauseating, but her breasts, however, were more inviting beyond the two-dimensional limits of photography.

That same night, his hands experienced the three-dimensionality of Marcelle's body. And they came, both of them. They didn't expect the size would fit.

On the second hookup, two days later, she invited Thomás to stay over. Their spooning also fit.

Google Search
how to know if i'm in love

She was gripped with a certain tingling when a text from him arrived on WhatsApp. She pretended as hard as she could, she didn't want to scare him, to be blocked and lose contact with him.

When she met Thomás, Marcelle's heart beat fast, her hands went cold. She disguised her feelings, she couldn't be rushed.

What a surprise when she opened TikTok that Sunday. Thomás had posted a video declaring that he was in love. Do you want to be my girlfriend, Celle? He asked with a bouquet of red roses in hand. More than 70 followers had already seen the video. In the comments:

Yes, Celle!
Accept! Accept!
He's the love of your life!
If she doesn't want him, I do!

Without thinking, Marcelle posted a video screaming YESSS.
Then, tears.

Google Search
restaurant for two

Google Search
natural makeup tutorial

At night, they went out for dinner at a Thai restaurant.

I don't know if it was the spicy seasoning, the shrimp, the likes, the crooked smile, the voluminous breasts, I do know that after dinner, they fucked as if trying to tear each other apart, a meteor burning up upon penetrating the atmosphere. They did everything, in every room, kitchen table, rug, bed, the shower.

– I love you – Thomás said.

Marcelle wrapped herself around him, hard. A tear ran down. He kissed it. They were even, her overflow was inside of Thomás.

Google Search
cheap apartment downtown

Google Search
shipping and moving

Google Search
plumbing

Google Search
how to use a coffee maker

Google Search
easy recipes for two

Google Search
my husband snores

Google Search
drive your woman crazy with oral sex

Google Search
pregnancy symptoms

Thomás came home with the test. He waited impatiently, lying on the sofa, for Marcelle to come back from the agency.

He arose, flustered, when he heard the key in the lock. He met Marcelle with a kiss. He couldn't contain his anxiety and asked that she take the test now, right now.

They went to the bathroom together.

They couldn't contain their cries.

Google Search
lab test to confirm pregnancy

Google Search
prenatal care

Google Search
how to deal with nausea

Google Search
i'm grossed out by my husband

Google Search
how to prevent stretch marks

Google Search
my wife avoids me during pregnancy

Google Search
is it normal to pee all the time during pregnancy

Google Search
baby names

Google Search
how to control weight during pregnancy

Google Search
boy names

Google Search
normal birth or c section

Google Search
doula near me

Enzo Gabriel was born in a plastic pool, in the apartment living room, at 11:45 a.m. on the 15th of March. Pisces with a rising sign in Aquarius, moon in Scorpio and Venus in Taurus.

Google Search
how to treat colic in babies

Google Search
dark and stinky poop

Google Search
Beatles for babies

Google Search
how to treat a belly button

Google Search
pediatrician

The doctor, Cristiano Sobral de Albuquerque, examined Enzo Gabriel without great attention. Normal weight, adequate height for a five-month-old.

– You're ready to introduce solid foods into his diet.

Google Search
homemade baby food

Roughly mashed banana with chunks of apple.

Thomás with his iPhone in hand.

– Enzo's first baby food, sharing this moment with you here on my story. Look at mom and baby.

Marcelle smiles, shows the plate of baby food to the camera.

On the first spoonful, Enzo Gabriel makes a face. His parents laugh. He spits up the baby food on his bib.

A big spoonful, little airplane flown into his pink mouth.

Thomás continues filming. Enzo Gabriel begins to move his head in a strange way. He swings his little hands. He didn't spit up the baby food.

– Babe, I think he's choking.

Marcelle shakes her son.

– Google it real quick.

Google Search
baby choking

– What does it say?

There is no Internet connection

Try:

- Checking the network cables, modem, and router
- Reconnecting to Wi-Fi
- Running Windows Network Diagnostics

ERR_INTERNET_DISCONNECTED

Thomás disconnects from Wi-Fi.

No 4G signal.

Marcelle panics with the baby in her arms. His white skin starts to change color.

Thomás walks to the living room, raising his iPhone in every direction.

Marcelle shakes Enzo Gabriel. Purple. His head falls.

Marcelle and Thomás look at each other, they don't know what to do, there's no signal.



Hunting Season I

Girl, have you downloaded the new app? 19:29
Which, bitch? 19:29 ✓✓
Fatality 19:29
It's blowing up 19:29
Nothing but cute boys 19:29
Hold up, let me download 19:31 ✓✓

Fatality is trying to access your Calendar
Allow
Fatality is trying to access your Photos
Allow
Fatality is trying to access your location
Allow
Activate GPS to open Fatality

submissive_23

height: 5'10"
weight: 160lbs
tribes: leather, fetish, toned
position: vers bottom
HIV status: I'm taking PrEP
bio: discreet guy looking to fuck around

Add profile picture

He uploads a picture of his ripped stomach.
He browses the profiles, then he's wracked with frustration:
nothing new, the same old queens as always and the discreet, DL,
married types.

He sends nudes via chat. He receives some back.

sup?
what are you looking for?

sup?
into?

sup?
top or bottom?

sup?
muscle top!

sup?
can you host?

sup?
down for what?

He gives up on trying to interact. He's tired after spending the day feeding Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, his personal accounts and the accounts he runs as a social media manager. The pain in his neck and back muscles is so great that he doesn't even log onto Skype to see if he could get into some cam sex before lying down.

He opens Spotify, puts his Most Played on shuffle, connects to his Bluetooth speaker and dances off to the bathroom.

He dubs a single by Iggy Pop in the mirror, donning his towel like a wig. Out of breath, he stops, studies his abs. They're losing definition. He needs to go to the gym more often; if not he'll lose Instagram likes and the boys he pulls on the apps.

He skips the Anitta feat. Lady Gaga feat. Pabllo Vittar feat. Inês Brasil track. Much too POC for his white-toned-middle-class-fluent-in-English taste.

– Sorry, bitches.

He gets into the shower lip-syncing a remix featuring RuPaul's catchphrases: "sashay away" . . . He uses the detachable shower head as a microphone. "Shantay, you stay" . . . The warm water and music help clear the tension from his back. "Eleganza extravaganza" . . . Feeling even more open, he'll order something to eat on iFood or

Uber Eats when he gets out of the shower, then binge a show on Netflix. “Can I get an amen?”

He interrupts the cover when he hears a strange noise coming from the living room.

Just a feeling. He goes back to his duet with the speaker.

Upon stepping out of the shower:

– Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!

A man dressed in leather from head to toe, including a mask, stands frozen in the bathroom door.

– Who are you? How did you get in here?

– I’m from FATALITY.

– But I didn’t set anything up with anyone.

– You don’t need to set anything up. . .

– So that’s how it works? Like some fetish game.

– Like a game. . .

The man pulls out the stun gun.

– What a big pistol, you naughty thing. What happens now?

From the speaker echoes an old single by Lana Del Rey: “Born to Die.”

Hunting Season II

Ketlyn stares at the sky. Nothing to see there, not even smog clouds. Peteco and Toni are tired of waiting, their bellies rumbling, again, with that stomach-turning pain of emptiness, which grows even without increasing in size. She tells them to remain calm—the plan is going to work.

On the laptop’s cracked screen, Ketlyn watches the red dot approaching. It’s time. She launches the app. Interference in the geolocator makes the drone fly overhead in semicircles. It will be easier than planned—now it’s just a matter of redirecting the route and landing the drone on the roof.

The first step goes well. The drone starts to lose altitude, but the landing attempt activates its security system. Peteco and Toni jump to the neighbor’s roof, their thin and agile legs aiding their pursuit. The drone nearly gets stuck in the clothes hanging on Dona

Corina's clothesline. To curse the kids, a gust of warm wind lifts a sheet and the drone escapes.

– Quickly, the security system is trying to fight the interference. The drone won't stay in low altitude for very long – Ketlyn screams.

Toni quickens her pace and jumps to Mr. Jão's roof. She sees when the drone's yellow light turns on. She picks up momentum and leaps as high as she can. It's not enough to reach it.

– I lost control – Ketlyn screams again.

Toni lowers her shoulders and sighs, thinks that the plan had every reason to work out. Maybe if the laptop were newer, Ketlyn would have been able to hack the system and land the drone on the chalk X they had drawn on the roof.

It should've been just like the scenes they'd seen in movies; instead, they had to run along the roofs in vain, just to get worn out and increase their hunger even more. Toni breathes while watching the drone ascend.

– Damn.

It's all Peteco's fault; he never helps with anything. Toni is filled with rage, and when she turns to yell, she sees her brother lower the slingshot.

Peteco celebrates. The rock was dead-on. The drone falls, whirling. The two run to Dona Zulmira's patio, breathless.

The drone gets stuck in the guava tree. Toni climbs the branches, pricking her thin arms. She grabs the insulated bag attached to the drone and leaves its metal carcass stuck in the guava tree.

– We'd better bring it for Ketlyn to study. Who knows, maybe it would help improve the app – Peteco says.

He's right.

– Hold this then – Toni tosses him the insulated bag.

They return to the roof of their house, satisfied.

– I said it would work out – Ketlyn says.

– It only worked thanks to my aim – Peteco claims.

– Teamwork, bro – Toni retorts, while putting the drone next to the laptop with the cracked screen.

Peteco unzips the insulated bag and almost can't believe it: two complete Happy Meal combos.

“At the End of the World”
from *A face serena* (2019) by
Maria Valéria Rezende

Translated by Thomas Mira y Lopez

Translator's Preface

“At the End of the World” is a story by the Brazilian writer Maria Valéria Rezende (1942–) appearing in her 2019 short story collection, *A face serena* (The serene face). Rezende is one of the country’s most respected and celebrated living authors. Having spent most of her life in the Northeast, specifically in João Pessoa, Paraíba, Rezende represents a literary force operating outside of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Porto Alegre. Rezende’s writing often focuses on the customs and cultures of the Northeast. In works such as *Outros cantos* (2016), the first novel of hers to appear in English (bearing the title *Other Songs* in a forthcoming translation by Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey for Tagus Press), Rezende’s narrator reflects on her time living with a group of textile workers in the remote sertão.

“At the End of the World” is Rezende at her most playful: Nested within an older narrator’s memory of passing afternoons with her grandfather as a child there lies, *Princess Bride*–like, a medieval tale. This tale presents both a light parody of pastoral romance and a chilling explanation of the reasons for that romance. What drew me to this story in particular were several moments when characters perform unusual kinds of reading. When recalling her grandfather’s stories, for example, the narrator describes the way her grandfather read aloud to her: by holding the book forward towards the narrator so that, while the grandfather reads the text upside down, the narrator follows along right side up. Here the grandfather provides an almost literal frame as “At the End of the World” enters another realm. Another instance is a kind of intersemiotic translation, in which Eurico and Aldegundes, the young shepherd and maiden who function as de facto heroes of the grandfather’s story, must journey to the ends of the earth in order to escape an evil duke’s grasp. Like the young granddaughter, Eurico and Aldegundes are also unable to read. When a kindly and ill-fated priest gives them directions, telling them to follow the word “FINISTERRE” until they reach, as the Latin indicates, the world’s end, the couple translates the word into its associated shapes. The “F” becomes a broken trident, the “I” a staff, the “N” a gate, and so on. In this way, they make the abstract literal, just as their destination does: Finisterre is both a

metaphorical end of the world and a real location off the westernmost tip of Galicia.

These moments of translation and interpretation also call attention to how the story shifts audiences. Rezende's narration begins with the granddaughter's perspective then moves to the grandfather's. Simple enough. Yet because the grandfather's tale is told to a child but recalled by an adult, Rezende's story allows us to adopt either perspective: that of the child, who finds the tale one of courtly valor and bravery, or the adult, who recognizes the implications it carries about the world's cruelty. The grandfather's tale itself moves from an innocent, naive perspective, that of Eurico the shepherd, to the more experienced, weary outlooks of Aldegundes and the priest. These shifts also cause changes in register. For example, Eurico and Aldegundes address each other using the colloquial "tu," while the priest addresses them using the formal "vos," a difference that becomes more pronounced when the priest gives them directions in Latin. These differences can be difficult to navigate as a translator since there is less subtlety in English's use of second person. As a solution, I tried to amend other moments of the priest's speech to call attention to its higher register. "At the End of the World" is a story about literacy and the paradoxical ways that texts can function as both an exposure to and a refuge from the world. Eurico and Aldegundes do reach the end of their world, as well as the end of the grandfather's tale, so that the narrator can begin her own story.

At the End of the World

by Maria Valéria Rezende

Where does the world end? I asked my grandfather. His only reason for existence, I was sure, was to answer my questions. He spent the whole day sitting on the porch, puffing on his cigarettes, not doing anything except waiting for me to ask him something.

Where does the world end? He went to his rickety bookcase, exactly as I hoped, and took down one of the old rough-edged books, opening it to a page marked with a faded ribbon. He had his ideas about what a girl should or shouldn't know, and he didn't listen to anyone else's opinions.

I settled into my little rocking chair at his feet and traveled to another world, a strange far-off one, just as I desired. He began reading that way only he knew how, first turning the book towards me, then peeking over its top edge and reading the words upside down, so that I could see the figures:

Eurico the shepherd sprawled on the grass, expecting the day to pass as uneventfully as all the others in his life. Not a bleat, just silence and slumber. He'd already begun a lazy dream when he noticed a shadow covering his face; he opened his eyes, half-dazed by the midday light, saw an ample red wool skirt above him, and guessed what was underneath. It wasn't uncommon for Aldegundes to hike up to those spots where he spent the day watching sheep. He bet she was once again there to tease him. She would refuse him any favors, leaving him flushed, sweaty, and agitated for the rest of the day, revisiting his desires and his fear of sin over and over again.

"Come here, Eurico," Aldegundes said. "Draw your sword and stick it in me before the duke does."

Eurico didn't understand, confused as he was by her long legs and arms, and slipped as he tried to lift himself from the wet grass that covered the steep slope where he lay.

"What sword? If I only had a sword. . ."

"I'm talking about what you were born with between your legs, stupid."

“That? But you never let me touch you, not even a little bit. . . how are you plotting to drive me wild this time?”

Aldegundes lay down on Eurico’s black cape—the one with the tattered edges he inherited from his father—lifted her skirt, and opened her legs. Then she explained:

“My godmother works in the castle, and she heard the duke announce, after too much wine the other day, that a new flower was in bloom and that he planned to pluck it today! It has to be me because there’s no other maiden left that he likes. I’d sooner die than be deflowered by that brute. So you do it. You might be stupid, but at least you’re gentle. Sooner or later you’ll have to, since there’s no other free man alive in the rest of this land to impregnate me.”

And so like that they did it.

Haunted by the crime they committed—not of the flesh, but of sovereign offense against their lord—they abandoned the sheep and ran down the hill to the sacristy of the small church. There they knew they’d find an old priest sitting next to the fire. They confessed what they’d done and asked him to marry them then and there.

“You are married, if you so wish,” the priest said, while drawing some signs resembling the cross over their heads and hands. “But the sacrament can do nothing against the duke’s hatred, which will certainly come to shorten what remains of my painful life, for which I thank him. But you, you must run! Run until you reach the end of the world and you still won’t have traveled far enough to escape the fury of your lord.”

“How will we find the end of the world, dear Father, when we don’t know the first thing about it and haven’t even gone past the stone bridge?”

The priest plucked a fragment of dark and twisted parchment that lay on the table, grabbed a quill, and wrote: FINISTERRE.

“Take this word with you and burn it into your eyes so that you may recognize the signs that lead you along the path to the end of the world. Don’t wait any longer—be off with you!”

The two left for the path, carrying only a few crusts of bread the priest gave them and the small parchment, whose strange symbols they tried to recognize and engrave in their minds: FINISTERRE.

A broken trident, a staff, a gate, another staff, a snake, a gallows, an unbroken trident, two big-bellied monks, another trident. . .

They learned well. Although they were nearly lost many times, they found the path again by recognizing, in the marks of stone along the road, the word that guided them: FINISTERRE.

They ran, full of hope that they'd find shelter and protection at the end of the world. When they were spent and exhausted, they came at last to a great pillar that announced FINISTERRE on the very edge of a cliff jutting out over the sea.

Whoever today has the courage to venture to this inhospitable place will see, gliding over the ocean in the middle of a fog, an enormous bird with one ruby wing and one black.

I shuddered with fear and delight, satisfied by all the story's mysterious words and events. My grandfather, who was already beginning to nod asleep, muttered: Don't tell your mother I told you this story. Like every other day, I grabbed the book from his hands and returned it to the bookcase before my mom appeared and yelled at the old man for telling me dirty tales. The end of the world, happily, is very far away, and I don't think any dukes remain.

Selected poems from *Fotos
ruins muito boas* (2022)
by Moema Vilela

Translated by Raquel Parrine

Translator's Preface

The works in this collection poetically explore the disorder of life in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. Moema Vilela's poetry collection *Fotos ruins muito boas* (Very good bad pictures, 2022) pays witness to the disastrous public handling of the pandemic by Jair Bolsonaro's presidency, with inconsistent policies and anti-vaccine disinformation. In face of this unfolding incomprehensible horror, poetry strives to rise above the level of the public debate. While Bolsonaro seemed to sink lower and lower in his disdain for human life, refusing vaccine offers from Pfizer, mocking asphyxiating people, and denying the public mourning for the deceased, the public debate had to descend to his level and explain basic concepts such as how a vaccine works, how viruses spread, and why human life is important. In this national context, Vilela offers a vulnerable, subtle approach to poetry that recenters human experience. Discourse on public matters operates within the superficial realm, compelled by conservative elements to defend previously matter-of-fact issues, such as human rights and science. This constraint effectively prevents the debate from transcending to a more substantive engagement with the underlying issues affecting the holistic realization of those very rights. Rising above this constraint, Vilela reclaims the power of the words to give shape to the inner subtleties otherwise neglected. As Vilela states,

The urgency to seek and find more capacities to live also came from this closeness to more deaths, to more losses, with the fact that we endured the pandemic in Brazil—so much more brutal and maddening due to the federal misgovernment, the violence, and the political and institutional negligence. Not only because of this but very sharply because of it, there was so much love, loves, expressions of joy.¹

¹ Quoted in Ricardo Romanoff, "As 'Fotos ruins muito boas' de Moema Vilela," *Matinal Jornalismo*, August 25, 2022, <https://www.matinaljornalismo.com.br/rogerlerina/literatura/fotos-ruins-muito-boas-moema-vilela/>.

Reading Vilela's poems reminds us of the small things lost and the loss that inhabits the small things. Reading becomes holding (onto) something delicate, precious, and alive: the preciousness and uniqueness of life. As such, the poem as form assumes its status as nourishing, life giving, contrasting generalizing language we grew accustomed to, such as of "excess deaths" or "herd immunity."

Vilela was born in Campo Grande, the capital of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, and now lives in Porto Alegre, the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Endless soybean fields currently dominate the landscape of Mato Grosso do Sul, a region that began urbanizing in the 1960s. This urbanization accelerated with the construction of Brasília, the new capital. With a culture relatively unknown to the rest of the country, the region received incentives from the military dictatorship (1964–1985) to displace the Indigenous population for highly mechanized monocultures in the 1970s. Vilela exchanged the low vegetation of the soybean fields and the native shrubs of her native region for the pine-like *araucária* trees of the Southern *pampas*. Porto Alegre has been fertile ground for new writers, such as Jabuti Award–winning authors Natália Borges Polesso and Jeferson Tenório.

Vilela's work subtly incorporates themes of migration and displacement, just as these themes subtly infuse her entire writing approach. As such, a language that displaces crosses the text. In the original Portuguese, Vilela uses the second person singular "tu," which is typical of the South Region of Brazil, and "você," more commonly used across the rest of Brazil, interchangeably. Moreover, Vilela references some of the most recognizable Southern regionalisms, the word *guri* or *guria* (from the Guarani language, meaning boy or girl) and the mate beverage (served hot in the South as opposed to cold [*tereré*] in Mato Grosso do Sul), as well as those typical of her home state, such as the fruit *guavira*. Language displaces but also builds a unique form of living, in which these contrasts generate new insights, expanding the idea of home to a constant experimentation, a living-to-be. While some language specificity will be inevitably lost in translation, the instability and vulnerability of Vilela's language will still be present through her attention to the minimal aspects of life.

The most notable characteristic of Vilela's poetry is the strength of the domestic images combined with a deliberately prosaic language. As she argues, "In the end of the day, the bread and butter of thinking about poetry is considering its connection with astonishment, uncanniness, the capacity of seeing playfulness and smallness in everyday life."² This characteristic enlists Vilela in a genealogy of female Brazilian writers inspired by Ukrainian-Brazilian author Clarice Lispector (1920–1977), whose pioneer feminist approach to literature elevated the domestic to a space of ontological questioning. Famously, in her classic novel *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964), Lispector's questions regarding being and existence start through the protagonist's encounter with a cockroach. More than elevating the mundane and banal, Lispector also broke ground in thinking through social reproduction. By raising to literary status domestic work, care work, and the emotional above the rational, Lispector challenges the sexist division between the public and the private. As Nelly Richard argues in *Masculino/femenino* (1993), the feminine language developed by feminist authors sought to deterritorialize the hegemony of the masculine language and its relationship with power, seeking instead another form of articulation of knowledge.³ In that sense, Vilela, following Lispector's footsteps, uses her poetic imagination to claim language back from the perversities of Bolsonaro's public debate, thus carving a space of resistance in the minor and the poetic.

The experience of the pandemic, the loss of loved ones and the threat of losing them, is a shared trauma no one wants to relive. Instead, Vilela reclaims the subtlety of this experience, such as in the opening poem, "in the air," which reads, "It will be months / without / knowing the scent / of anybody's / hair / Without touching the hands / of the ones who give us light." Vilela uses sensorial images (the scent of the hair, the touching of the hands, the seeing of the light) to describe the isolation of the lockdown. The experience closes with hearing, "I hear your voice / getting older," symbolizing the loss of time in the form of loss of life in isolation. The voice gets

² Quoted in Romanoff, "As 'Fotos ruins muito boas' de Moema Vilela."

³ Nelly Richard, *Masculino/femenino: prácticas de la diferencia y cultura democrática* (Francisco Zegers, 1993).

older, trapped inside, without air to allow for sonic reverberation, thus evoking the title of the poem. As such, the air both spreads the disease and the poet's voice. But it is not just the voice of the poet that gets older. The stress and constrictions of the lockdown also erode the relationships inside the enclosure. Despite it all, the erotic grows like grass in the cracks of the concrete: "In the bite, it wants to find something / with another with the same nature" ("seek the bone"). No experience gets flattened. The complexity of the writing carries a sustained life through it all. Like the title of the collection and the poem that names it, Vilela finds meaning in the imperfect flashes of life we take for granted.

Vilela's anthology closes with the question of the purpose of the literary. The ten parts of the last poem, "not writing," show the agonizing experience of trying to find a space for creating in a morbid world: "i don't write because of all the life that scares me / i don't write because where is this going." What kind of world is waiting for us outside if it is life, not death, which scares us? Procrastination appears as the sane response to the disintegration of life as we know it: "this abysmal disorientation / that distracts us from the obvious facts."

I wish I could say that the themes of powerlessness and political dystopia have become a thing of the past since the publication of *Fotos ruins muito boas*. But in June 2024, Porto Alegre, along with most of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, was underwater for several days, displacing over half a million people and killing over 100. Mirroring the COVID-19 pandemic, the flood situation arose from a fatal combination of climate catastrophe and local neoliberal policies by the mayor of Porto Alegre, Sebastião Melo, and the governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Eduardo Leite. While literature cannot protect us from physical harm, Vilela's work lifts the fate of words as subservient to power, shakes the stabilization of the normative, and refuses to reproduce institutional consensus, elevating the space of the minor, from the smallest grain of cassava flour.

Selected poems from *Fotos ruins muito boas*

by Moema Vilela

in the air

You catch it through the air
It falls
On us
like a spell
Avoid
contact
Revoke the step
forward. Pay attention to everything
Commands in the present
that get extended

It will be months
without
knowing the scent
of anybody's
hair
Without touching the hands
of the ones who give us light

I hear your voice
getting older
We talk about the days
but not the after

We must learn
to wait
Withstand
To say months
As to not to say
More
Say today. Believe

Give it time
For the body to integrate the new
awareness:
I had a nightmare last night
I called my love
On the phone

The dreams I collect
are only in my sleep
We don't dare
plan what is to come

We enumerate the imminent
Be swift, don't stay
Try to go on foot
Take your shoes off, take off your rings
Don't touch
anything
Don't lose your mind

Ask the elders what
they want
to do: how many
conversations like this
can you possibly have?

I see your beard
grow, my toenails
The eyebrow growing whiter
Through the screens

We look like a rescued person who returned from the sea
and it is good
I prefer it this way
I'd rather see
Have this truth on my face

It was enough to have had
to sew shrouds in the air
Revoking the future is not even
close
to what we need to do
about the past

two bedrooms

In a bedroom cats nest together
on your lap, that's how I know that it's warm there.
You wear shorts and have been cycling.
That's what your thigh muscles would say
on the video call if you hadn't said it yourself
in the inventory of the hours that we shared, meanwhile.
In the other bedroom, the heater does its job,
pinhão leftovers smudge a plate on the desk
and on the floor there are so many books
that no one is brave enough to try to read
the ones below. Under your coats
I would like you to come to the things
that hide behind the most
palpable facts, like the fact that my legs,
which were born pretty and perfect like my
mother's, are now flabbier than ever.
I talk about time. I talk about death.
I ask what good are legs for,
what drives them and where.
But you know only what you see: I have been drinking
too much mate and this must not be good for you.
This is why I don't sleep, you say.

goma

As the cassava flour falls from the strainer
looking for its pair, it soon forms a trio and then
an incorruptible world, like *tapioca* or *beiju*,
it looks nothing like life, today.

as a whole

As the cassava flour falls from the strainer
looking for its pair, it soon forms a trio and then
an incorruptible world, like *tapioca* or *beiju*,
it looks nothing like life, today.

Dispersed over the same words, the problems
don't show themselves as a whole, they keep burning loose
on the hot skillet, without revealing their meaning, their
roundness.

Like sand in the mouth. You can't eat it. Let's look at another
image:

Like the initially thin snow that accumulates against the garage
door.

With a full tank, the car grows old in waiting. It can't leave.

really good bad pictures

i like
these bad
pictures, in the dark
of the bar
of someone really close
really far
moving

a record that doesn't
capture. memory
you cannot hold
on your hand. the pulsing
of a low note
on a speaker

someone who turns their back
who takes the backpack
moments
of the most banal prodigies

like a foot that holds
the bottle that the new couple
inadvertently knocks down
and almost shatters

a picture that if
you auscultate, it breathes
— we want to scream
like in the accidents
in the movies, in the ambulances
so that everyone can hear
and celebrate together
the glory— it's alive

seek the bone

Seek the bone under
the flannel of the body. Hold
the hips on your hands, gather
the whole knee, with the kneecap,
femur, tibia. Want that which resists
behind the softness. The striking emotion
of being with somebody, before
we melt, calcium phosphate
under the earth. It wants to taste
through the collarbone, the zygomatic,
magnetized by whatever thirst,
whenever it could really touch somebody
— was it this, then, the mania on the hands
finding the metacarpus, the phalanx?
I wanted: to arrive in what sustains the remainder
of the landslide. It was enough
to foresee the structure under the garments
for the mouth to open in surprise
and give space to teeth that,
like that of vampires', grow.
They suppress the gentleness of the lips
to reach for what they finally find

in front of them—from the arms, the one that
builds cities, cultivates food, enlivens
clubs. The one that holds itself up
in protest, an inflatable raft among whalers.
In the bite, it wants to find something
with another with the same nature.

the best cassava, the best guavira

i always say that this is the best sandwich anyone has
ever made

this is the best granola, the best rice and beans
that someone has made in history, please

isn't it a little lousy to say, he says
of such a true thing

i say: this is the best fettuccine i ever had in my life
which one would be the best fettuccine of a whole life and the
universe

if not the marvelous pasta of the present?

the only one you have
what would i say, then, *guri*
tell me what you want me to say

with your mouth full, always complaining
about the exact words of the best woman
that you ever heard saying words in your life

not writing

i
to draw with a pen
over what was written
years ago. it was possible, but
is it still? the pen tracing
the old cursive, truths
of ten notebooks ago

ii

i love to think about the house
instead of writing
tips to grow sage
new curtains for 29.99
tricks to wash pillows in the washing machine
i love to buy shoe racks instead of writing
wash legumes, bags of beans
worrying about baby's temperatures

iii

in order not to write, i research
a lot, every-single-thing, the minutia
i google it all the way down, i call, i chase it
from taxidermy to big data
specialists. i take notes. i edit them
i put together this big collage
with maps, pictures, news on the wall
i'm almost a detective on a crime show

iv

it was so hard for such a long time
keeping up with this, that when something
follows through i can't go on
it's too much emotion. a sentence! complete, look
stop it, turn up the music
i can't help myself
i'm going to scream, throw myself on the floor

v

how do you write? the ones who work with it
sometimes answer. they show their notebooks
the day or the night. the mate. the trick
apps. philip glass in the winter, paulinho da viola in the summer
being stubborn and precise. bird by bird
with a consolation wine after writing so many characters
some sigh by the window when there are no characters

how do you write? without saying anything that matters
completely ruined-in-green-and-yellow, absolutely lost dot com
with the voice of samba, the voice of goodbye, brazilian in medium
height

i write with body expressions: with the heart
falling on my face, stomping my feet, in blood sweat and tears
biting my tongue

vi

i frequently speak about how i'm not able to
do what i used to, what i did
what did i use to do?
before what?
what does it mean to not be able to?
wallowing is a full-time job
i hope that was clear

vii

because i think too much about romance
because death doesn't help
it doesn't pay the bills and nobody wants to read
it's difficult and i can't create anything exciting
there are a lot of things being made that contemplate and fulfill me
i don't write because i love writing
because i have hope and there is so much at stake
i don't write because it doesn't change things
and if it changes, it's awful for the people who write, individually
i don't write because crooked inside
i don't write because of all the life that scares me
i don't write because where is this going
i don't write because i say yes to the text
i don't write, you know how much it costs
i don't write because i'm here but maybe i went to saturn
half an hour looking at pictures of lauren bacall when she was
young, fruit being
shaved et cetera

viii

the house is dirty
we need to make choices

ix

it's your birthday and we need to choose
being present is a different art
available, shining in the parties of being people
its wakes, its fevers, depressions, christenings

x

what else can i count down as
the experience of this not-writing trade
i won't talk about doubt
about the benefit of meaning
the value the pleasure the sacrifice
the struggle to swim against the tide
the planet going extinct, the worst presidents
at the neighbor's, in the family, in the well-spoken people
this abysmal disorientation
that distracts us from the obvious facts
a fever of 100 degrees in the spring
in the teeth—nothing, though,
while the people sleep
exhausted poets
 experiment
 one wrong word
 after another

“Fátima” from *Outros cantos*
(2016) by Maria Valéria
Rezende

Translated by Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey

Translator's Preface

"Fátima" is excerpted from my translation of Maria Valéria Rezende's 2016 *Outros cantos* (Other songs), a first-person novel set in Brazil's impoverished Northeastern sertão, the arid hinterlands covered by scrubby vegetation and subject to extreme, periodic droughts.

Rezende (b. 1942) is a nun and educator. From a young age, she became interested in Brazil's political reality and engaged in the struggle for social justice. In 1965, she joined the Congregation of Our Lady–Canonesses of Saint Augustine and, after leaving the cloister, began working on behalf of the poor. She taught literacy in various regions of Brazil and traveled to China, Cuba, Algeria, Mexico, and other countries. Rezende has received many important literary awards in Brazil and abroad, among them the prestigious Jabuti Award for her novel *Quarenta dias* (Forty days, 2014) and the São Paulo Prize for Literature and Cuba's Casa de las Américas Prize, both for *Outros cantos*.

The author's life experiences and sociopolitical commitment are reflected in her writings, and *Outros cantos* is arguably her book that best illustrates this. Although not an autobiographical novel, it was inspired by the years she lived as a missionary in the sertão, between 1972 and 1976, a period of hardened military rule in the country.

Outros cantos is one of the most compelling contemporary Brazilian novels to depict the reality of Brazil's Northeast and the plight of those who are subjected both to the droughts that regularly devastate the region and to injustices and exploitation by the landowners. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist, Maria, is on a bus traveling to the sertão, where she had lived 40 years before. The narrative alternates between past and present, as Maria recalls her arrival in the small village of Olho d'Água, as well as the many similarities among the people, culture, and landscape of Brazil's sertão and those of the M'Zab Valley in Algeria and of the Mexican Zacatecas desert, all places where she'd lived before.

Maria moves to Olho d'Água under the guise of being a literacy teacher in the Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização (MOBRAL; Brazilian Literacy Movement), created during the military dictatorship. However, her job in fact entails raising the villagers' awareness

of labor and political rights. Nevertheless, she soon realizes that she, the “teacher,” has much to learn from the locals, as she witnesses their daily hardships but also their wisdom, resignation, and simple joys. “Fátima” describes the many life lessons Maria learns, especially from Fátima, a remarkable, strong woman who struggles to support her family alone in a harsh, male-dominated environment.

Outros cantos abounds with vivid, colorful regionalisms typical of the Northeast, such as “macaxeira” (yucca) or “jerimum” (squash), and is striking for its rich visual imagery sustained by a seemingly simple, poetic style. Additionally, Rezende pointedly employs a wide range of Portuguese words of Arabic origin—some easily understood by Brazilian readers (e.g., “algazarra,” or racket, uproar), and others less so (e.g., “almucantar,” also “almucantar” in English or “celestial sphere”)—which strengthens the connections and coincidences the protagonist finds between the cultures and lifestyles of the sertão and of the Saharan desert. I have opted to maintain some of the Arabic-derived words and many regionalisms whenever their use doesn’t hinder the English-language reader’s enjoyment of the story in an effort to highlight the richness and musicality of Brazil’s Northeastern dialect. However, I have not italicized these regionalisms, rather inserting a modifier or phrase to clarify their meaning for the English-language reader, as for example, “uruçu bee.” Likewise, I have chosen not to italicize Portuguese words already used in English, such as “sertão,” or the Spanish term “redondillas,” which is found in English-language dictionaries.

Fátima

by Maria Valéria Rezende

Fátima taught me everything I needed to survive. She didn't teach me everything she knew, just everything that could be taught. My lessons began before daybreak. The first step was to get some light by reviving the embers that lay overnight under the ashes with a fan of woven straw, exactly like the one I had seen Lupita, my Mexican "teacher," use. Once the flames were burning, I had to fill a pan with a precise amount of water and set it on the fire. Next, Fátima taught me how to make a head ring with rags left from a torn hammock, place it on top of my head, and try to balance a water jug on it while keeping my spine erect to walk with the ease and elegance that was expected. Then I had to fetch clean drinking water from the spring: two large jugs for Fátima and her brood and a smaller one for myself. Later, I had to turn the well's windlass, pour two bucketfuls in a can, and bring home the brackish water for all our other needs: washing the pots and pans, the rags, and ourselves. Fátima's gestures were precise; she wasted not a single drop of water or effort. As for me, I was all about wasting—water, sweat, moans, exaggerated gestures, and threats of quitting. Every day, Fátima was patient and persistent in her teaching, while I was proud and stubborn, making only imperceptible progress. By the time the first rays of sunlight touched the top of the hill, we were crossing the threshold of the house, back from the first of the day's endless tasks. We finished at the same time, Fátima going back and forth lively and light on her feet, me, dragging myself around to fetch a single jug of water from the spring or a bucket from the well.

At dawn the day after I met her, when it was still dark outside, Fátima sent one of her kids to get me, as would become her routine for the rest of my mornings in Olho d'Água, since I, with my oblivious city-dweller's ears, didn't wake up to the roosters crowing in the distance.

"Now, time to prepare the couscous. . . What are you going to eat if you don't learn how to make it?" "Couscous," Fátima said

several times. There was no doubt; it was the same word I'd heard on the eve of festivities at my family's home in São Paulo, the very same word that surprised me in that Algerian oasis, in another woman's voice. It'd been Fatouma who taught me to moisten and smooth the semolina until the bottom of a wide bowl was covered with a thick but light grainy white layer that, when steamed, would become our daily couscous. Like today, a word, an image, or a gesture was enough to recall others, random memories like reels of a movie shown out of order but that helped me find familiarity in the unfamiliar.

In Fátima's bowl there was only hard, dry, inedible yellow corn grains. Surprised, I asked why she hadn't left the corn soaking since the day before, as I'd seen Lupita do, adding to it a small handful of pickling lime so it'd be soft and ready to be rolled into a tortilla the next morning. "How long is this going to have to boil till we can chew it?" I asked. Fátima laughed, "You'll see right now who's going to chew this corn. . . Bring the bowl."

I followed her to the shed behind the kitchen; she sat down on a stool next to two heavy discs made of rough stone that lay, one on top of the other, on a stump. The lower disc was slightly concave, with a groove that ran from its center to the rim. Over it, another disc, a bit smaller, fit perfectly. It had one hole in the middle and another close to the rim, into which a short stick of smooth wood, polished over the years by countless hands, was inserted. It was a small manual grinder like I'd never seen before, a fine sculpture, an object as perfect and ancient as the stone metate Lupita used to grind her white corn into masa. The dough, in turn, had to be patted until it became the light tortilla de maíz, which she taught me to watch and flip over in the comal to cook it to perfection.

Fátima grabbed the handle with one hand and began to turn the disc in a steady and continuous rhythm while, with her other hand, she took handfuls of corn from the bowl and let it fall quickly, grain by grain, into the center hole. A grainy bright yellow flour ran through the groove between the stone discs, slowly filling a clay pot on the ground. "Beautiful!" I exclaimed. She laughed, "Do you want to do it?" "Of course I do!" I tried to pour the corn through the middle hole and immediately spilled a bunch of grains because I couldn't get

my aim and rhythm right, making her, the children, and even myself burst into laughter until I managed to get the hang of it. “Now turn the grinding stone, too, because I have other things to do.” At first, I didn’t understand Fátima’s mischievous smile; then I held the handle and tried to keep the stone turning; I couldn’t do it even using both hands. “Will I ever be able to eat my own couscous?!”

Sooner than I expected, I learned to use Fátima’s grinder to grind the corn she bought in small portions with the little money she was able to save on water. I also learned to moisten the dough just right, place it inside an immaculately clean cotton rag, mold it into the shape of couscous, place it just so in the wide conical opening above the round bottom of the *couscousseira*—a clay pot made especially for that purpose and a beautifully designed piece of pottery—and fan the fire, so the couscous would cook over the steam coming from the water boiling inside.

Every day I was excited to try to reproduce the precision and economy of Fátima’s gestures, until my movements became a perfect ritual of praise to daily existence and also to God’s miraculous powers, which were clearly what kept the village of Olho d’Água alive. In the same way, I got to master balancing the water jug on my head, dyeing the yarn, weaving the threads, and even the science of setting up my friend’s loom when its last part finally arrived, a few weeks ahead of her man’s return.

Every day I learned knowledge that was more essential to survive the rough life in that hostile corner of the world than the ABCs I had come to teach them, useful only in the small pockets of privilege scattered across the globe.

From all that, I’ve kept with me the beauty of the forms and of the essential gestures and ignored what it had cost me to learn: my sore muscles, my aching feet, the exhausting heat. In that world of scarcity, the beauty and strength of human labor stood out. I was beginning to learn how to live there, to have my hope restored, and slowly began to let my dead rest in peace, at the same time asking myself when I’d learn how to change injustices and sorrows into new life. I was preparing myself to stay there for a long time.

[...]

In that ancient corner of the world—without cables, lamps, and electricity—nighttime darkened everything down below but lit up a multitude of stars above, as could only be seen from the deserts or open ocean. It took a long time for the day's heat to dissipate; it was impossible for me to just go home and fall asleep. Each nightfall, with the lamps already turned off to save oil, most of the adults sat under the largest mesquite tree, comforted by boiled macaxeira root and some coarse coffee, a mixture of who knows what grains. Stories were told and retold in prose and verse, the day's events sung in redondillas improvised on the spot in perfect meter and rhyme. Around us, we could hear, but not see, the children running and playing. Their chirping, sometimes a cat meowing, barks, mooing, a shout here and there, or a song, enveloped us in a mantle of peace and safety. Everything was fine.

They asked me to tell my stories too. I began without a plan, spontaneously, talking about the Sahara and its people, the semolina couscous eaten with méchoui; Fatouma; their rug-weaving art; the dunes; the shepherds with their sheep and goats; the canteens full of fresh water hung in the middle of the narrow streets in the walled cities, waiting to quench the passersby's thirst. "Just like the jug Dona Zefinha leaves under her cashew tree at the end of the street, for people who arrive so parched they can't wait to get home, right?" they remarked and laughed, never questioning any of my stories about Algeria. They even guessed the festivities held at the time when the valley floods, when the turbulent, overflowing waters run along a millenarian riverbed after it rains in the desert's rocky mountains; the waters cross the dunes and disappear down the centuries-old wells carved in the riverbed rock, feeding the oases. "Like the dry river here that fills only when it rains at its head. If we only had those wells. . . But the ground here is pure gravel and sand. If there's any hard rock, it'll be down deep, all the way down, almost to hell, and the man is never going to build something good out of cement just like that and put an end to selling us the water that brings him profit."

We continued every night. We went to Zacatecas, with its nopales, cactuses, and brambles; I talked to them about Lupita, her white corn, her metate and comal, her light backstrap loom improvised out of simple sticks tied together; I talked to them about other

nations, countrysides, and cities. They wanted more and more, and I wove them stories.

They had heard the official—but not at all convincing—reason I was there from the councilman who distributed gifts and favors around that district, eternally reelected with support from the Owner, the supposed donor of everything.

I had applied after seeing a brief ad in a government bulletin listing all the municipalities that needed teachers for the government's MOBREAL literacy program and was accepted right away because Brasília was pressuring the region's political caciques. Nobody else capable of placing one letter after another was willing to exile themselves to Olho d'Água to teach young and old adults reading and writing. ". . . to read what here? Only if it's the iron brand on a cow's backside." What about a novena or the Office of the Immaculate Conception? "No need to read that, every old woman knows that by heart, and every girl learns it like they learn how to cook and to give birth. . . Even that young woman who'd been here earning a trifle from the government because the councilman fell for her and even ended up taking her to the city, well, she could write, couldn't she, copying everything from the book onto the blackboard in a handwriting that was even pretty, but reading? She didn't know how to read anything, no siree."

They began to ask me every night to put my word loom to work, unravel and spin again the skein of stories about the big wide world. It was the revelation—or designation—of what my real job was, the role I was to play in their lives, my right to stay there: to tell them about other worlds, casually, freely, just because I could. My stories interested them much more than my promises to teach them the ABCs, the apparent reason for my presence in that corner of the world. In exchange, they slowly started to tell me their own stories, and to recall verses from the cordel pamphlets bought at markets, passed from generation to generation and recited in the dark while our eyes rested on the stars. Slowly they even told me things nobody talked about during the long workdays because, over there, they were born already knowing all that.

In this way they offered me their stories, cruelly true or brightly imaginative, interwoven with mine, forming a new chess game made

up of different worlds, and I learned what it really meant to belong to a community. We talked very quietly under the distant clamor of the children playing, as if we were protecting our secrets from mysterious, invisible ears that might be hiding nearby. Listening to them, I remembered the verses of a sonnet by Bilac, certainly read in some schoolbook: “O ye, who in the silence and seclusion / Of the fields, alone talk, when night falls, / Careful! — what you say, like a murmured prayer, / Will be whispered in the skies, carried away by the wind. . .”

The bus braking suddenly jolts me again. The lights come on, the driver gets up and walks to the row behind mine, where a young couple is making out, long kisses and moaning. He glares at them for some seconds until they separate and, without a word, returns to his seat and resumes the journey. I wonder if another passenger had complained about their exhibition. The scene reminds me suddenly of those verses that seemed so appropriate to the evenings in Olho d'Água: they were just a scrap of a silly sonnet that talked about dead virgins turned into stars and exhorted all lovers to not disturb them by making them envious of a love they'd never known. As imaginative as the fabulous narratives of the storytellers from my sertão! I laugh to myself, thinking how a stanza takes on new meanings and stands alone in our memory when removed from the original poem. How many scraps gathered along the way like that feed our imagination? My existence had certainly acquired a new and obstinate purpose since that scrap of life I'd spent among those scrawny people and cactuses.

Little by little, I understood. There at the edge of the world, the sole essential goods that only money could buy were water and a loom.

That end of the world, which I'd imagined as hidden and completely unknown, had an owner, the Owner of the hill where the miraculous, perennial water spring sat. He was the real owner, “with signed papers and all,” they'd said, the man who owned life and death in that land I'd dared invade without knowing what I was

doing. Only he had the resources to bring the machinery, blocks, and cement to have a deep and narrow well drilled where now there was always plenty of the brackish water that was essential for his dyeing shop. Only he had the means to buy the windlass and the chains that lifted and lowered the buckets, the money and power to pay and cover up for his armed thugs and the guns that represented him. And he charged a lot. Each jug of potable water, each bucket of brackish water, cost money. He was the Man who also owned the truck and the yarn, without which the precious looms were worth nothing. He would send the raw cotton yarn and the aniline dye and take back the hammocks, leaving only a few cents to pay for the people's work, a meager amount that would mostly go back to his coffers in exchange for jugs and buckets of water. Just to pay for the minimal liquid ration during the long, dry summer months a family had to have their own loom and work hard their whole lives.

They explained that when they had a good winter, three short months of rain, everything turned green across the sertão, and they could harvest all they had sowed: pumpkin and watermelon, bur cucumber, okra, and especially, manioc, corn, and beans, to be consumed parsimoniously during the summer months. Cavies and doves multiplied across the caatinga; even an occasional fat yellow armadillo could be seen, and fish or shrimp swam up the nearby river that now ran high. Cow milk, cheese, and curds became abundant, as did honey from the urucu bee, and the São João festivities were celebrated heartily, sweetening a bit their captive existences tied to a servitude begun in who knows what remote time. More than anything, what made them happy was the water running down the roof tiles to fill with fresh water, however many jugs, pans, bowls, buckets, and pots they had without costing a penny, water from heaven rebaptizing the people under the roofs' spouts.

If there was no real winter, nothing except for some scarce, insufficient manioc survived in the parched plots outside the private and callously fenced-in lands irrigated by the water trickling from the perennial spring. Then, only the Owner could save them. They were grateful to him, they'd always owe him, even if they'd never seen him in the flesh. As if he were God. Because he was invisible, he was even more fearful and powerful. Anyone who decided to cut

their ties to him, whoever didn't submit to him and sold their loom in exchange for a bus ticket to the big wide world, got lost out there and would never be able to find their way back or have a place to belong when nostalgia started to ache deeply.

What could I say against an invisible power? Even if his gunmen remained invisible, lurking in their hideouts, appearing suddenly on the rare occasions when people's entrenched fear wasn't enough to keep everything working as the Man wanted, what would happen to my plans, to the job I'd accepted as my mission and which, through devious paths, had brought me to that place and its people?

I wish the night would last forever as if I were still there, leaning against the slender trunk of a scrawny tree, looking at the sky through its lacy canopy, sensing rather than seeing the others around me, sitting close together, playing with words, naming stars and constellations—the names they used and names I'd learned in other places—interpreting the celestial bodies' messages, talking about each one's longings, and making wishes on the numerous falling stars.

Now I watch through the window the stars going by, brighter in the sertão than anywhere else in the world, I'm sure. To my eyes they haven't changed one bit, no matter what the astronomers tell us.

One night, as she tried to teach me how to guess the calendar date by the position of the constellations, Fátima told me that five years before, her husband, Tião, had left to find work where there was money. There was no more hope in farming, the only option for those who didn't have loom or cattle. He'd tried. There was land to spare, but no crops thrived enough to sustain so many lives all year long. His two or three cows had died of thirst or from snake bites. He'd just thrown the last shovelful of dirt on their youngest son's shallow grave, rented out the lands down below the wall of the small dam for next to nothing, grabbed the burlap sack where he'd already stuffed his birth certificate, a change of clothes, his new pair of flat leather sandals, an old, patched-up hammock, and took off. He didn't say anything else; it wasn't necessary. As a final goodbye,

the latest rains had knocked down the dam wall erected with enormous sacrifice on the hillside, where the waters flowed down in years of good winters. The other waters lay in lands that were the property of the Man, the Owner.

She, Fátima, stayed behind, shriveled, maybe already a widow. For a very long time. A woman without a loom and without a man, she had to take on manly jobs, dyeing the yarn for some guy or another unable to work because of illness, mourning, a trip, or religious obligation. She worked on other families' looms and wove hammock fringes after hours for a few cents—or for a bowl of corn, or six pieces of macaxeira, or a couple of doves, her kids looking for firewood among the brush, always covered in scabs, their feet bruised—for a few lousy cents. Fátima: poorer than the poorest. Her husband didn't send her a single penny from what he earned; everything went towards paying for the loom. Illiterate, he never sent any news either. His letters were the pieces of jacaranda wood already carved that the yarn truck brought once in a while; her loom arrived in parts.

Fátima showed me the pieces of the rustic, unfinished machine and named each one with precision, caressing them fondly, all piled up in a corner of the practically empty room destined for the loom. Once it was ready, assembled piece by piece, the structure would fill the whole space. Too much empty space was a sign of extreme poverty there—and of obscene wealth in other places. Only a little more than a handful of pegs were still missing. On Sundays, she said, when the week's hustle and bustle let up, she leaned at the window, looking out at the dried-up ground, her own skin parched like their old, useless land title, feeling her hollow womb dry, no scent, no taste in its withered membranes, and in her ears, only the cracking of desiccated branches and the memory of his voice. Tião's face was already fading in her memory, and she knew he'd come back a different man, totally changed. She'd recognize him by his voice, by the way he called the cattle, and for this reason she'd let him get her pregnant again.

Greater than the harsh, inescapable reality, only the power of dreams and fantasies, the strength derived from wonderment and from the encantados, the spirit beings that encouraged the living forward, day after day. Those were things the people in Olho d'Água

liked to talk about, and I could stay there forever listening to Fátima's cheerful conversation, telling the same story again and again. I can still hear her voice now:

“And when the miracle of the cinematograph arrived? It was around the time of the feasts of São João; what a good winter we had that year! Nobody believed all that idle talk from people who'd been to fancy places saying it wasn't a big deal, no miracle, just huge pictures that moved while stuck to the wall. Isn't it the same every time, these well-traveled folks putting down those who stayed behind, boasting like know-it-alls, to try to make the poor country bumpkin feel like a fool? But we all found a way to get the ticket money: breaking the piggy bank, digging into grammy's old trunk, borrowing at the grocery store or at the hammock shop—whatever. But as night fell, right when Mr. Eliel pulled the cord to turn on the generator, which by some miracle was working that evening, the whole town was there in the little building that housed the market to see the novelty. Only babies, old men in hammocks, and women who'd recently given birth didn't attend. Even Arduíno, who's completely blind, came to take a look. Those who hadn't brought a stool sat on the floor and didn't complain one bit, for who cares about comfort when you're about to see a miracle? Since early morning, a fellow had been walking around with a sort of big funnel to his mouth shouting, 'Finally, the cinematograph has arrived in Olho d'Água! For the first time you'll be able to see the greatest miracle of the century! Only 500 réis per person!' They said not even the town of Paulo Afonso had seen it. The man named Cinematograph came in first, carrying under his armpits two wheels, each about three hand spans across. They looked like bobbin reels from a sewing machine but that wasn't it; there was no thread and no sewing machine, and the reels were *this* big. His assistant came in behind him carrying a black box, also some metal pieces and a very long cable, which he plugged into the electric panel next to the generator. The Mr. Cinematograph fellow placed the black box on top of a market stand, messed with it for a while, and stuck two pieces of metal in it, which stood up like the open arms of a pilgrim praying to heaven. Then he fitted the reels that weren't for sewing onto the metal pieces, pulled a little black strip through them, and shouted 'it's about to start!' His

assistant walked to the panel and turned off the light. The building turned pitch black, and we all sat quietly, waiting, waiting, until we heard a ring just like when Mr. Heleno, the notary, slaps the bell to call in the next person in line. But we couldn't see anything in there, and didn't know whose turn it was, or what for. We heard a second ring; nothing happened, everything was silent again, and we continued to wait a very long time in the darkness, everybody quiet. At this point people began to nudge each other and whisper, not understanding what was going on. My sister, Ducéu, was elbowing me on my ribs for me to be quiet as if we were in church, when suddenly Aparecida's Lau, with his booming cowboy voice, asked 'What the hell is this? Pay 500 réis to see such a silly miracle?' The hubbub grew; people stirred about, demanded their money back, and some were about to stand up, when all of a sudden a light flashed out from the black box, and there, on the back wall of the market, appeared the large, colorful image of a red earthen field and the slopes of some high hills that came down, one on each side, onto low lands that sat smack-dab in the middle of the market. Green thickets, palms, and xique-xique cactuses could be seen here and there, under blue skies and a sun so bright we couldn't believe it, because it rained like crazy in that place! I expected to feel the rain splash on me, but it was still all dry inside the market. If not for some letters that kept running across in front of us disrupting our view, we could see everything very well: each white drop of the heavy rain as it fell straight from the clear skies, and bright, luminous flashes here and there that had to be lightning. It was something out of this world, it had to be, because in Olho d'Água there would be lightning only in March or April. So, I thought I was beginning to understand what the miracle was: to open inside the market a door to another world where the winters were severe, with a lot of precipitation and lightning bolts under blue skies, hot sun, and not a single cloud. How wonderful if Olho d'Água were like that; we'd have more than two crops every year! I was already satisfied; that was enough of a miracle to justify my 500 réis. But no! That was only the beginning, because all of a sudden, I saw something appear on the hilltops of the other world, almost touching the market ceiling, near the corner where Tudinha has her stall to sell ash soap. It was a bunch of people on

horses, in a frenzied gallop, rifles and pistols in their raised hands, shooting into the air. All the folks from Olho d'Água were flabbergasted and began to shout, but we could still clearly hear the noise of hooves on the ground of that other world, the shots, and the shouts of the people, long-haired and with feathers on their heads. But there's more! On the other side, near Aristolino's dry fish stall, another group of riders ran down the hillside, wearing wide-brimmed hats and kerchiefs tied around their faces, shooting their guns in the same way as the others. We watched one side, then the other, then it seemed like we'd moved back and were standing farther away, so we could see both sides at the same time, shooting and running towards each other. And we kept moving back and forth, away, and then very close to the scene. At one moment we could see everything at once, and next, only one group up close. We moved afar and saw everything, then, we'd see some men all bunched together, very near us. We kept moving around this way and that as if we were flying, like a flock of scared birds, watching everything that happened. There came the two bands running down the hills so fast I was almost breathless, expecting a big clash to happen down below, right in the middle of the market wall. People were galloping downhill, not worrying about the shooting, the rain, or the lightning, nor concerned about the ones who fell—they were all dead on the ground, men and horses. And we could barely breathe, fearful, holding each other tight. Suddenly, *snap!* We heard something like a whiplash, everything disappeared, and only a wide white spot remained on the wall. Folks, astounded and quiet, started to get up, but the man at the contraption yelled it wasn't over. Mr. Eliel tried to turn on the building lamp again, but it went out with a pop. We watched Mr. Cinematograph and his assistant strike some matches and mess with the reels this and that way while shouting, 'Soon, it's going to start again soon!' It gave us a fright to see everything appear on the wall like before, exactly where it had disappeared, when practically everyone was dead under rain and sun. That's when the real miracle happened! Because the two bands of horse riders that'd been running downhill, like they were going to crash into each other right in the middle of the wall, suddenly began to gallop backwards. All of us screamed loudly at once, so surprised we were, because that was

something never seen before. Not even the best cowboy from around here, or the greatest rodeo champion, could do something like that. Make a horse gallop backwards? One or two steps, OK, but such fierce galloping? ‘Golly, it’s the Devil’s work!’ people said. Do you think this isn’t a big deal? Well, so, an even bigger miracle happened, like only Jesus Christ could’ve done: While the living kept galloping backwards, the dead bodies that had stayed behind on the ground, certainly to avoid dying again trampled by the animals, began to resuscitate. Each bleeding fallen horse sucked its blood from the ground back inside its body, and before you realized it, was already galloping in reverse, carrying the rider that had flown from the ground onto the saddle without even having to step on the stirrup. In this way, they all returned from death to life, and from life, they disappeared off the wall; only the emptiness of that other world remained inside our little market for another minute, the rain falling hard under the blue skies and hot sun. This happened only that one time, because even the electric generator got so astonished with all that it never worked again, and to this day, the Owner hasn’t installed another one. But it was an experience of a lifetime, worth remembering every time.”

Whenever melancholy hits me, because of nostalgia, the lack of a compass to show my life’s north, or the feeling that the world out there was gone, or because it felt as if time had stood still and the day of the great revolution would never arrive, or every time I was tempted to quit amid my daily tasks, I asked Fátima to tell me again about the miracle of the cinematograph. I asked so many times that still today I can hear her voice and her words. She had me in stitches so bad, I could’ve died from laughing. We laughed together, my friend exaggerating parts of the story, making up details, imitating people’s voices and comments, just to make me laugh even harder. She knew that it was up to her and her unfailing sense of humor to lift my spirits, something so essential for me to survive in that aridness.

Laughing at Fátima’s stories led me to more laughter, as I recalled my funny experiences at Monsieur Aoum’s home in the Ghardaïa Oasis. There I was, a guest and a foreigner—European, they said of me, no matter how many times I explained that we Brazilians aren’t

European—sitting lopsided on rugs and cushions and having a meal with men who, out of courtesy to me, spoke only in French even among themselves, shrewd merchants trying to extract from me who knows what kind of information they might find useful. Having been scolded so often during my childhood to watch my manners at the table and hold properly the fork and knife, I felt very tense there, trying to learn the Algerian dining etiquette and grab my portion of *méchoui* using only three fingers of my right hand, without letting a single drop of sauce run down my knuckles or fall outside the bowl. When I was about to give some excuse to get out of that embarrassing situation, I heard giggles, “Psst, psst,” and saw, among the folds of the curtain that screened off the area of the house reserved to women, a narrow portion of Fatouma’s face, which wasn’t covered by the usual veil. She crooked a finger, “Come, hurry up,” and Monsieur Aoum, with a grand, lordly gesture, indicated I should follow his wives. I stood up awkwardly, passed through the curtain, and was dragged away by the women, amid laughter and excited comments in Arabic that were incomprehensible to me. Pulling me along, they threw themselves on big, colorful cushions placed in front of a large TV screen, on which the characters I vaguely knew from some American show—completely incongruous in that environment—spoke pure Arabic. Too bad I couldn’t share with my dear Fátima the other reason for my uncontrollable laughing, for she wouldn’t understand what was so funny, just as I couldn’t imagine what went through the minds of my Algerian women friends as they watched the TV melodrama unfold in yet another world.

Slowly, I adjusted and learned to dance to their tune—a melody made up of the noise of wood against wood, mooing, bleating, the daily singing and verses of the *sertão*. I relished each of the movements that composed those long days, captivated by the exquisite yet laconic beauty of their language, of each sound, each gesture, or object, be they utilitarian or devotional, the use or meaning of which dictated rigorously their forms, textures, and intonations. But nothing matched the awe that filled me at sunset, released as it were by the first sounds announcing the cowboys’ return. After a few days, I could already recognize each of the men who gravely and quietly greeted me with a touch of their fingers to the narrow brims of their

leather hats, and learned their archaic names from hearing them ask each other about the workday's events: Cicero, Severino, José, Pedro, Tobias, Nicodemus, Josué, Archimedes. . .

When the sun began to descend quickly on the west, and long shadows stretched out on the ground, my heart pumped faster and led me to one end of the street, almost always to the steps of the chapel very close to my house. Other times, it led me to the other side, which took more effort because it required a longer walk on the soft sand. Then I'd find a place to sit among the old cashew tree's huge roots. Dona Zefinha always kept a jug full of cool water under the tree, so those arriving from the caatinga could quench their thirst right away; it was a promise she'd made to São José in a year when the rains came late. Just above the jug, she left hanging from a nail on the tree trunk a quenga, a ladle made of coconut shell with a long handle to pour water from the jug. The ladle's edge was carefully cut in a zig-zag pattern, "so those in a hurry don't drink straight from the jug and sully the water with their spittle. . ."

Waiting at either of those places, I'd close my eyes and perk up my ears. The first thing I heard was the enchanting sound of the cattle calls far away, growing louder as the herders approached slowly. The song helped me imagine, before I opened my eyes, the beautiful silhouette of the cowboys and their animals against the light, an image all the more spectacular when outlined against the incandescent skies that loomed over the fields in front of the small chapel. The side by Dona Zefinha's cashew tree offered a narrower view, but the sight of the men aroused my sense of smell when, thirsty, they approached the water jug, emanating odors of leather, manure, and jerky—human and animal sweat transmuted into perfume in that arid landscape.

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Translated by Felipe Fanuel Xavier Rodrigues

Translator's Preface

Cidinha da Silva (b. 1967) is a contemporary Afro-Brazilian writer from Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. As a trained historian, she incorporates her expertise in history into her creative writing. In so doing, her literature historicizes the experiences of Black people in Brazil, offering a novel and wider perspective in her narratives. From a historical standpoint, da Silva has carved a writing career as a chronicler following the artistic tradition established by the 19th-century great Black Brazilian writer Machado de Assis and continued by the Mineiro modernist writers Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Fernando Sabino. Beyond the conventions of a social commentary, da Silva's body of work chronicles an Afro-diasporic, ancestral version of history, positioning herself as the legitimate narrator of her-story. In Benjaminian terms, her short stories “brush history against the grain” with *Os nove pentes d'África* (The nine combs of Africa, 2009)—the title of one of her books—encapsulating the complexities of the intimacy between Black people.¹

In *Um Exu em Nova York* (An Exu in New York, 2018), da Silva weaves her ancestral, African-derived knowledge into contemporary narration, decolonizing perceptions of racialized spaces that transcend national contexts, as Exu is “the God without boundaries” that connects Africa and its diaspora.² By resignifying the narrative of Exu from the Blackest neighborhood in New York, da Silva offers a global and fresh perspective on African heritage. Despite the title of the volume, not all the stories take place in New York, attributing a new meaning to racialized spaces, as if pointing to all the spatial possibilities evident at the crossroads, Exu's territory. As exemplified in five short stories, those spaces include the streets of New York, a dangerous hill, a funeral, an artist's studio, and the crossroads. The encounters between characters in these settings reveal moments of fear and humanity, as a woman navigates an eerie street and meets a mysterious

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al., ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Harvard University Press, 2003), 392.

² Cidinha da Silva, *Um Exu em Nova York* (Pallas, 2019); quotation from Toyin Falola, ed., *Èṣù: Yoruba God, Power, and the Imaginative Frontiers* (Carolina Academic Press, 2013), 3.

man; spiritual retribution, when a nosy drummer faces the consequences for disrespecting a sacred drum; personal empowerment, as a female artist fights against a monstrous preacher's advances; reflections on societal pressures during a funeral, where the narrator recalls a woman's defiance against social norms; and mystical generosity, when a woman offers shoes to a stranger. Thus, in da Silva's fiction, history is a living narrative that shapes and is shaped by the experiences of those who live it, interwoven with the diverse and dynamic cultures of the African diaspora. Here, literature expresses a worldview deeply rooted in ancestral thought, the foundational principle that "interconnects everything that exists in the cosmos."³

If the practice of translation is "a continual act of compromise, a continual search, rejection, renewed search, reluctant acceptance of particular decisions, and particular solutions," then translators should underscore the potential of Black literatures in translation as a means of disrupting structural racism.⁴ John Keene advocates for the need for more translations of non-Anglophone Black authors into English in order to understand the complexities of the African Diaspora.⁵ In her definition of anti-racist translation, Corine Tachtiris proposes "translating into a racialized English that challenges the White mainstream norm" or "selecting texts that undermine racist stereotypes of other cultures, especially racist formulations that are meant to come off as positive."⁶ Giving priority to translating modes of Blackness, my translational approach attends to the negotiation of decisions and strategies by the translators of Black literature, whose agency is a political act.

Da Silva's short stories are a powerful intervention in the discursive expression of Black thought. Assuming that "discourses are

³ Leda Maria Martins, *Performance do tempo espiralar: poéticas do corpo-tela* (Cobogó, 2021), 42.

⁴ Chan Sin-wai, *A Dictionary of Translation Technology* (The Chinese University Press, 2004), 253.

⁵ John Keene, "Translating Poetry, Translating Blackness," Poetry Foundation, April 28, 2016, accessed February 7, 2022, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet-books/2016/04/translating-poetry-translating-blackness>.

⁶ Corine Tachtiris, interview, Project Plume, accessed on January 6, 2021, <https://projectplume.com/portfolio/interview-corine-tachtiris/>.

historically constituted bodies of knowledge and practice that shape people, giving positions of power to some but not to others” and that discourses “can only exist in social interaction in specific situations,” I read da Silva’s narratives as disruptive acts in the face of racism.⁷ Consequently, my translation respects the speech of a Black woman writer who combines activism and creativity with intellectual production, generating “transformational discourses.”⁸

The short stories were rendered into English from Africanized Portuguese, which is “a dominant mark of Brazilian Portuguese.”⁹ According to Lélia Gonzalez, the influence of African languages on Brazilian Portuguese modified the colonizer’s language so significantly that it evolved into what she theorizes as Pretuguês, a portmanteau word that combines Black (*Preto*) and Portuguese (*português*).¹⁰ Da Silva’s elegant and ironic language is couched in Pretuguês phrases such as *mais old fashion que o meu*, *meus dreads*, *Harlem roots*, *a comida do homem*, *tocou o dendê*, *na gringa*, *as irmãs da Mérdia*, *o juremeiro*, *nome de preto*, *ebó-fast-food*, *tambor mineiro*, *povo da rua*, *encruzadas sagradas*, *ngoma*. Her characters are also named with a Pretuguês style, incorporating references to orishas (Exu and his metonymy Boca do Mundo, *filha de Iansã*), but also an ingenious (re)invention of names, exemplified by Mérdia, Marçulena Mirizante, Mortuária, and Múrcia. As these names are fictional and serve as tropes and narratives, I believe that their recreation in English conveys a similar effect to the reader as da Silva achieves in Portuguese. My translation offers

⁷ Mary Talbot, *Language and Gender*, 3rd ed. (Polity, 2020), 119.

⁸ Carole E. Boyce Davies, preface to *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*, by Molar Ogunjipe-Leslie (Africa World Press, 1994), xvi.

⁹ G. Nascimento, *Racismo linguístico: os subterrâneos da linguagem e do racismo* (Letramento, 2019), 22.

¹⁰ Lélia Gonzalez, *Por um feminismo afro-latino-americano* (Zahar, 2020). Gonzalez posits that Pretuguês is evident in tonal and rhythmic aspects and the omission of consonants like “L” and “R,” for example. Other scholars demonstrate that the African influence in Brazilian Portuguese is visible “in the vowel-rich pronunciation of our speech (ri.ti.mo, pi.néu, a.di.vo.ga.do), our syntax (tendency not to mark plural in noun phrases os meni-no(s), as casa(s)), double negation (não quero não), and the preference for proclisis (eu lhe disse, me dê).” Yeda Pessoa de Castro, “Marcas de africania no português brasileiro,” *Africanias.com*, vol. 1 (2011), 1. Nei Lopes notes thousands of African-origin words in Brazilian Portuguese. Nei Lopes, *Novo dicionário banto do Brasil*, 2nd ed. (Pallas, 2012).

versions of the names in English to reflect da Silva's irony when she originally invented them to make cognitive demands on Lusophone readers. In addition to a vivid Afro-diasporic vocabulary—worthy of its own glossary—da Silva deploys creative syntax that resonates with Pretuguês in double negation, such as *não precisava de outros, não*; ritualistic verb phrases such as *preparar a comida do homem, fazer o caminho, clamei pelo Boca do Mundo, Laroiê!*; gerund verb phrases and their pronunciation by inference exemplified in *Eu querendo / ke' rēnu/ ir e a família insistindo /sis' tʃīnu/ para eu ficar, E fui ficando /fi' kē.nu/*; the ubiquitous use of the conjunction *e*; the contraction of the second-person singular pronoun, *Cê*; and the resultative construction illustrated by *Deu errado*.

How to translate the potency of such Black expression into English? Faced with the Portuguese language blackened by da Silva's hands, my translation sought, whenever possible, a comparison with another form of Black language, such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), understood as the US Black communities' signature structured system of meaning and interpretation.¹¹ Assuming that “translation does not happen in a vacuum but in a continuum” and that “it is not an isolated act, it is part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer,” at the very outset, I had to formulate translational strategies aimed at recreating the rhythm, cultural references, and expressive nuances inherent in da Silva's Pretuguês.¹² This approach included maintaining the double negations, ritualistic verb phrases, and unique syntactical elements that mirror certain linguistic patterns found in AAVE. In incorporating choice turns of phrase associated with AAVE, I aim to racialize da Silva's literary discourse in translation, particularly in the vibrancy and specificity of references to Afro-Brazilian culture, ensuring that the translated text resonated with the same depth and richness as the source text. By employing these techniques, my translation strives to honor the original's Black voice and convey its cultural impact to Anglophone audiences.

¹¹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 1989); and Lisa J. Green, *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹² Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2002), 2.

Selections from *Um Exu em Nova York*

by Cidinha da Silva

I have shoes for you

She turned up outta nowhere, like they usually do in my world. She stood half a meter away, head down, wrapped in black clothes so that at first all I saw was her straightened hair. Then I thought it might be a wig. Her shoulders were hunched, her arms thin, and her hands—when she stretched 'em out, I noticed—were small and gloved, hidden in her jacket, which was a little more old school than mine.

The woman raised her head slowly. I came across her blazing eyes. I stared at her teeth, which were spaced wide apart. The upper arch in particular, at least half a centimeter between one tooth and the next. I noticed when she asked in a very sweet voice if I had any spare change. I grinned at her and handed over some coins.

When she looked at my feet and thanked me, she said, I have shoes for you. I wasn't sure I'd heard her right. I asked, What? I have shoes for you. She repeated it in that sweet voice I told you she had. Word. I thanked her and assured her that I was good with my shoes, I didn't need no other shoes. She laughed with her red eyes. She went on her way, and I noticed her crooked gait, thick shoes, and feet that seemed to carry twice her 70 kilos.

There I was, standing on the corner of Martin Luther King Jr. and 29th, waiting for my Dominican friend who never showed up on time, cursing her delay because now the cold was piercing. The woman offered me shoes because she thought I'd get cold. And I was still rockin' that old coat from so many winters ago—it kept me warm but was beat-up. There, in middle-class Harlem, she figured I was from the street, from deep Harlem, like her.

I didn't realize all that until later. The moment the woman walked off, I checked out my feet and got chills when I looked up her way and she was gone. I looked around to see if I could find any doors, any holes she might've slipped into. I saw a private security guard on the block smoking and adjusting his beanie. I wanted to ask him where the lady who offered me them shoes went.

A few more minutes passed, and two older ladies showed up. They pressed the buzzer for the same apartment I was headed to. I greeted them warmly, started chatting, and mentioned my friend who was running late. Told them I'd tag along inside with them.

Like a genie in a bottle, the woman popped up again. Damn, she was real! Flesh and blood. She asked the older ladies for money, and they barely looked her in the face to say they didn't have no money. Her kind voice had an attractive, tuneful chant, and my urge to follow her was nearly uncontrollable. This time, she didn't speak to me no more. She headed off in the opposite direction.

I kept my eyes fixed on her back, as if that would help me follow her all the way home, back to the shoes. Then she turned around, smiled, pulled her hand out of her jacket, and waved at me.

I craned my neck curiously. A memory came to me. The daughter of *Iansā* who won a court battle against powerful men but got her life turned upside down by the reprisals of sorcerers sued by the accused. One time, this woman was crossing from the island of *Itaparica* to the mainland. Intoxicated by the smoke from the spell, a mournful voice beckoned her to throw herself into the sea. Come on, I'm waitin' for you. Come stay with me. Come home. To save herself, she screamed at them to tie her to the boat, otherwise the mermaid would take her. The delicate voice of the woman with the shoes tried to seduce me in the same way.

You comin' in or what? One of the ladies called out to me while holding the door. Yeah, you bet. Why the hell did that homeless lady wanna give me shoes? That question was bugging me. She figured I was a potential buyer, that's what. She wanted to sell 'em to me. If not, as everything's a gift when dealing with *Exu*, I gave her something first.

Those days were cold, 'bout 50 degrees. Nothing that required them powerful boots sitting out in the driveway. But cold, it's all about style and showing off for them who can pick what to wear. I learned that lesson from a harsh winter in London.

While I observed the inside of the apartment—nicely divided, with high ceilings and fancy finishes, presenting a whole different

vibe from the building's exterior—a third theory about the shoe-giver crossed my mind.

Considering my dreadlocks, my dated coat, the autumn shoes worn in winter in parallel with her Harlem roots, maybe the shoes were a code or password for using or smuggling things that might interest me.

Nah. That still ain't it.

Exu killed a bird yesterday with the stone he threw today!

Exu killed a bird yesterday with the stone he threw today!

Exu killed a bird yesterday with the stone he threw today!

While fixin' His food, when my hand touched the *dendê*, I found the answer, the key. I got them shoes as a gift to set foot on the road and make my way.

The midnight man

I was walking down the hill all by myself, crossing cars with their brights on. At the end of the street, this man was resting his leg on the rusty fence of a dimly lit garage.

Across the street, there was this empty lot, all overgrown with bushes and trees. The narrow sidewalk was hidden by the trucks of country frat boys or neo-fascist dudes chillin' in the sun like innocent lizards.

Between me and the Black man with a busted leg, wearin' an orange helmet, a thick orange plastic coat, and a black boot on his good leg, there was fear. And also a hole big enough for two people in a violent situation.

I took a deep breath and called out to the Mouth of the World right as I passed the dazed man tryna to light a cigarette against the wind. Without lookin' at him, I thought: *Laroiê!*

Evenin'! He greeted me. I let out a sigh of relief. Before I could say anything back, he moved like a gazelle, tossed the lit cigarette up, spread his arms like a bird to balance his bad leg, and opened his mouth to catch the cigarette.

Have a night of good winds. I finally replied to his greeting.

Have a night of winds that fan the fire. He shot back, chewin' on the lit cigarette, hobblin' up the hill, with smoke comin' outta his ears.

Mary Bell

I couldn't take all that back and forth no more. I wanted to leave, but the family kept insistin' I stay. My heart, dumb as it was, wouldn't obey me. So I stayed, until it finally stopped. Thank God.

Mary Bell came to say goodbye to me. I saw her as a lil' girl, just like I saw her sisters. I remember when her mama, Miss Nina, passed away. Mary Bell was closin' her eyes, I saw it, nobody had to tell me. And Meanie's daddy asked if it was true Bell studied overseas.

That spirit ain't got no compassion, cold-hearted as ice.

Meanie's sisters were decent folks, unlike her. There was Marcelene, Mizanté, Mortaria, and Murciaiah. The *juremeiro*, or the local clerk, used to joke about their names, 'cause they never gave Black folks' names a break.

Meanie used to lend books to Mary Bell. They were friends 'til Bell got into the best university in the state. Meanie, workin' in a little shop, started sayin' she didn't study 'cause she didn't want to, that gettin' into college wasn't all that hard since Mary Bell got in. Bell wasn't no lil' girl no more. She'd lost her innocence and quickly realized it was just white envy.

I could even say folks were happy at my funeral. Here, in this part of the world, we die young. It's rare to bury someone old who passed away from natural causes. Miss Cece spent all of 2016 waitin' for her chemo meds to come to the hospital.

All my grandchildren are alive, thank God. My children too. Nobody died before me, which is how it should be, but I went to a lot of their friends' funerals.

Dita is lookin' at Mary Bell from afar. I think she's scared she won't be recognized. She's 52 and went to school with Mary Bell but she might look older than me, and I'm already dead.

Suffering wears people down.

She buried both her children, Marlon, 19, and Denzel, 12. Marlon's killer heard Denzel was lookin' to buy a gun and thought it was safer to kill him first.

Mary Bell's black don't crack. She's 50 but don't look a day over 35 and keeps gettin' prettier as time goes by.

A good life keeps you feelin' young.

My time's almost up to take that fire trip. I wanted to become ashes 'cause I ain't got the patience to let no bugs eat me bit by bit.

Folks say I was right on schedule. Here in the hood, everybody dies young.

Valves

I wasn't always like this! When I still believed in love, I didn't need drugs. I replaced that lost spirit with faith in an illusionist. He pretended to clean my soul, but he didn't gather no leaves for the bed, didn't crush no herbs for the bath. He pushed on me a fast-food *ebó*, with friendly fire and darts, all while pretending to be a priest of secrets.

In agony, I bled, dried up. Died slowly.

I was reborn and looked for a preacher. Listened to sermons, swapped my traditional soap for the store-bought kind, and instead of salvation, the savior showed up in my studio. He praised my rock work. Said the sculptures talked, that my despair and pain were still there, especially in the hands. Prophesied human emotions needed feedin' too. That God was magnificent, but He didn't satisfy all the hunger in the world.

He touched my braids, squeezed my shoulders, and whispered that he knew about the fire that burns inside the daughters of Cain. He revealed a distant kinship with Cain, and maybe that's why he felt that connection with me. Said he was the water I needed, pure and thick, reserved only for his wife, but he'd make an exception for me. And he laid me on the table with restrained strength, unbuckled his belt, sweaty and panting like an old, impotent goat.

The stifling air burned my skin. My good ol' friend, the wind, burst the window open and knocked down small, unfinished pieces to the floor. I woke up and stormed out.

The wind swept everything and threw the blade at my feet, which I picked up in shock. I scratched the floor and sent that demon into the deep waters.

I opened my eyes, my head still bowed, and looked around. The world spun and got back on track. I picked up the broken pieces, and peace smiled wide at me. I started to fix what was left of me.

The drum of the mines

Y'all ain't gonna believe this, but that mining drum, it's got four ways of beatin'. It moans with pain, lament, agony, y'know? It's got a beat for celebration, for praising, and for joy. You got a beat of faith. And then you got the warning beat.

The poet told stories he heard 'bout how the owner of the drum was in Esmeraldas. Somebody messed with his drum over in Contagem das Abóboras. He heard it, y'know? Focused his thoughts and made the intruder lose the power to beat the drums.

The nosy drummer thought he was bringin' a party vibe, bringin' joy, but the drum fooled him and gave a danger signal. The owner heard it and took action.

The triflin' dude played at the crossroads, tryna showboat for the girls. Thought he could just call on the folks from the street. It went wrong, y'know? First, his hand started bleedin', and it wasn't from hittin' hard, it was from hittin' wrong, 'cause he struck a splintered piece of wood. He beat it, but his voice didn't match the music.

The drum had its own voice and moaned dangerously. And when the embarrassed fool jumped in his truck and sped off with a car full of women he wanted to impress, two tires blew out at once.

He got the message and, scared of what might still come, he had to put the drum on his head and walk it back to its place, passin' through the sacred crossroads like the river bends and the sandy shores.

“The Orange Tree” from
Contos de mentira (2011)
by Luisa Geisler

“From Your Arms” from
Rachaduras (2019)
by Natalia Timerman

Translated by Meg Weeks

Translator's Preface

The following short stories, written by Luisa Geisler and Natalia Timerman, offer a small sample of the literary prowess of a dynamic cohort of young female writers hailing from Brazil. Luisa Geisler was born in 1991 in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil's southernmost state, just two years after Brazil's first post-dictatorship presidential election. She released her first collection of short stories when she was only 19 years old and has since published a number of other works of fiction. In addition to writing fiction, she is a literary translator and a scholar: Geisler has translated several critically acclaimed novels from English to Portuguese and is currently pursuing a PhD in Latin American literature at Princeton University. Natalia Timerman, born in 1981, is a writer, physician, and literary scholar whose early work explored her experiences working in a prison hospital in São Paulo. She has since published one collection of short stories and two novels and has been a finalist for the Jabuti and Candango literary prizes. Timerman's training as a psychiatrist is apparent in her prose, which, rather than foregrounding plot, explores the recesses of afflicted psyches.

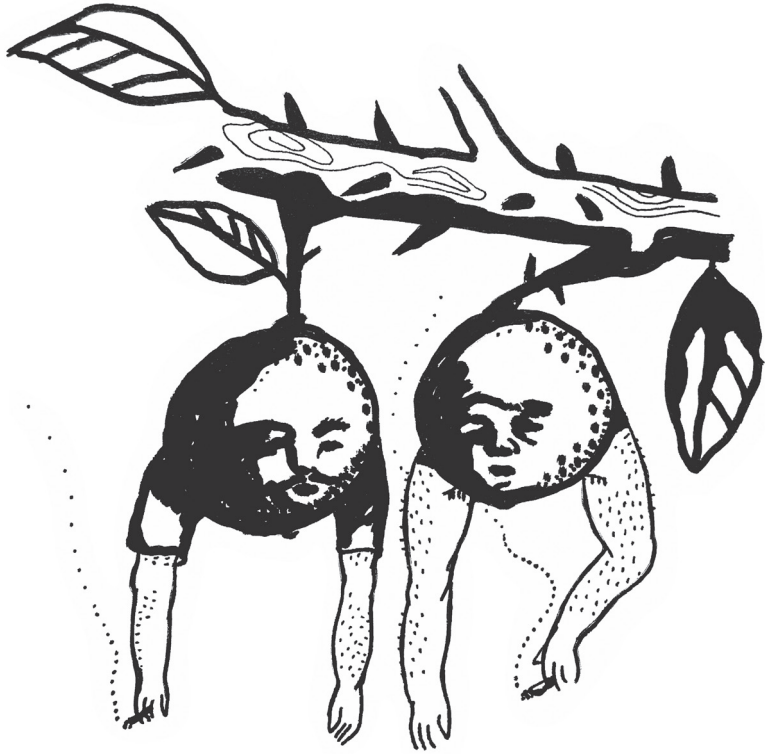
Upon reading Geisler's work for the first time, I was instantly intrigued by her coupling of minimal, stripped-down language and enigmatic plot elements. Geisler and I are around the same age, and I was interested in how a young writer approached the genre of the short story from within a literary canon very different from the one with which I grew up in the United States. "The Orange Tree," from 2011's *Contos de mentira* (Made-up stories), depicts the frustrations and coping mechanisms of two inhabitants of a provincial town, perhaps in Geisler's native southern state, as suggested by a smattering of regional slang: the intimate address *tchê*; *guri*, meaning boy; and the versatile exclamation *bah*. The story portrays a fraught friendship between two middle-aged men, each thwarted in his own way, whose geniality and rapport belies a simmering tension. Geisler offers minimal omniscience and includes dialogue not attributed to a specific character, subtle forms of opacity that were the greatest challenge this text presented to me as a translator. The themes she engages

in the story—family strife, social stagnation, financial hardship, the banality of workaday life, inexplicable violence—are timeless and not geographically specific, rendering it, to my mind, especially well suited to translation.

“From Your Arms,” from Timerman’s 2019 short story collection *Rachaduras* (Cracks, or Fissures), addresses the themes of motherhood, middle-age fantasies, and loneliness with an unsentimental quality that has long characterized her prose. In recent years, reviewers have compared Timerman to the Anglophone literary darlings Sally Rooney, Patricia Lockwood, and Lauren Oyler in her nuanced attention to millennial ennui. As such, she is among Brazil’s most critically acclaimed new voices in the increasingly popular genre of autofiction. In “From Your Arms,” Timerman plumbs the depths of the literary device of introspection, skillfully blurring the boundaries between fantasy and reality. Depicting a frustrated divorcée’s mid-life crisis, or perhaps simply her children’s and ex-husband’s panicked projection of one, this story taps into the persistent anxieties surrounding female sexual autonomy and irresponsible motherhood. In the tradition of such luminaries as Clarice Lispector, Lygia Fagundes Telles, and other canonical Brazilian authors who probed the violence and drudgery—both banal and grotesque—of intimate relationships, Timerman’s story is an intriguing portrait of a woman’s dissatisfaction with the trappings of middle-class life. The greatest difficulty I encountered as I translated this cryptic work was resisting the urge to subtly tie up the loose ends with which Timerman intentionally leaves her readers—to trust that the calculated ambiguity of the text be maintained in translation. Ultimately, I sought to strike a balance between ensuring that the language and plot cohered well in English and preserving the integrity of the author’s decision to eschew conventional narrative resolution.

Regionalism is subtly present in both texts, with Geisler including colloquialisms from her home state and Timerman’s story likely set in a large city that could easily be her native São Paulo. As Geisler’s slang was difficult to translate in a way that would indicate an analogous regionalism to an Anglophone readership, I opted for geographically neutral colloquialisms: “kid” for *guri*, “man” for *tchê*, and the basic “yeah” for *bah*. The limitations of place and feelings

of entrapment pervade both texts, which depict characters hemmed in by circumstances—material, geographic, and familial. Gender is also a major theme in “The Orange Tree” and “From Your Arms,” with their respective male and female protagonists acting recklessly in markedly different ways, one through senseless violence and the other through a shocking transgression—perhaps imagined, perhaps real—of the social norms surrounding family life.



The Orange Tree

by Luisa Geisler

Fausto's bar was located alongside the highway, but his only customers were people from town. On game days, his friends and acquaintances would gather there to watch the action on a 20-inch TV with poor reception. It was always humid inside the bar, regardless of how hot the day was. The chairs and tables were made of steel and adorned with the logos of alcohol brands. The walls and the floor were oak, the former plastered with advertisements for beer and soda. The room exhaled a permanent stink of ethyl alcohol and wet wood. The counter was enveloped in a plastic sheet, and behind it, there were shelves of bottles, a shotgun, jars of preserved food, and a large photographic menu covered in layers of dust.

One night, after everyone had left the bar, Fausto and Severo were making small talk outside. Severo had lingered because he wanted to wait for his wife to fall asleep before he got home; Fausto, because he had few people to talk to. Fausto was older than 50, lived at the bar, was single, and didn't have children. The two men talked.

"I just want you to pay for today. That's it," Fausto said. "Every night you put your drinks on your tab. Tonight I want you to pay for what you drank."

Severo didn't understand. He paid his tab when he could, when he began to feel ashamed to charge yet another drink to his account. Fausto had never before insisted he pay for his booze. Severo couldn't pay that night's bill; his son had a doctor's appointment in the state capital the following day. He had to pay for the expenses of the trip, the food, and the doctor's fee. He and his wife had spent months saving up and trying to secure an appointment with a pulmonologist who had a private practice. Severo had refused to consider getting on the waitlist of the national health service. They had traded a years-long wait for one of several months. Months of fever, cough, and bloody phlegm.

That night, Severo and Fausto had drunk the same old booze, spoken of the same old things, the same old people, the same

happenings in the same old town. The other customers had departed at the usual time, and Severo and Fausto had been left alone in the bar. They were the last two, as usual. This routine had led to a friendship between them, a certainty that they would be there for each other at the end of the night.

“I want you to pay for what you drank tonight,” Fausto repeated, interrupting their routine.

Severo paused, trying to think of how many drinks he had had that night. He had stopped counting at the 11th shot of cachaça.

“But man, I’m telling you,” Severo said, “I have no way of paying you! I barely brought any money with me tonight. If it was tomorrow, that would be a different story. . .”

“You can’t leave without paying me for what you drank.”

“But you’ve never done this to me before! What’s going on with you?”

“I owe some money to people in town. Money from bets I lost. With the money I have in the bar I can pay off almost all of it, but I need you to pay for today.”

“But why didn’t you say something earlier? Now I have no way of helping you out.”

“When you drink at a bar, it’s your duty to pay. Paying your tab isn’t helping out.”

“Don’t talk to me about duty. When have I ever been able to count on you?”

“I run a business here,” Fausto said. “I have been your friend all these years. Today I just want you to be my friend as well.” Severo let out his breath.

“OK, OK. I’ll pay you. But if I’m already in knee-deep, I might as well have a few more.” He extended his shot glass towards Fausto, “Serve me another.”

Fausto filled his friend’s glass and his own. He leaned against the bar and started talking again:

“Man, don’t take this the wrong way, but I’ve got these debts from this betting thing. . .”

“OK, OK,” said Severo. Upon downing the glass, he extended it towards Fausto once again. “One more.” Fausto filled it promptly.

“How is your kid?”

“He’s OK, you know, he still has that cough. Fever too.”

“Yeah, that’s complicated.” Fausto downed another glass.

“But Marta got an appointment in the capital, at the end of the month. That woman is a saint,” Severo said, looking behind the bar. “I’d do anything for those two.”

“Family is everything, for sure,” Fausto filled the two shot glasses again. “To family,” he said while raising his glass. “And to friends, the family you choose.”

“To family,” toasted Severo. He drank the shot in one gulp.

They stayed silent for a while. Then Severo spoke again:

“And your family, how are they?” “They’re great, man, they’re great.”

“How is your sister? It’s been a while since I seen her.”

“She’s pregnant. With twins!”

“For real? What a blessing. I know how much you and your brother love your nephew. But two more children—now that’ll be wild.”

“Her husband was transferred about six months ago,” Fausto said. “Ricardo went to help out with the kids, since the twins’ll be born soon.”

“So it’s just you left here?”

“I stayed ’cause of the bar,” Fausto turned his glass around in his hand. “There wouldn’t be room for me in Rose’s house, too many people. It would’ve been a pain for her.”

“But you could help out. It’d be less of a pain. . .”

“Listen, you ever heard the story of the man who killed himself with a shotgun and a cigarette butt?”

“No way!”

“I swear to you,” Fausto said. “Heard it down in the agricultural zone.”

“But tell me more. How’d it happen?”

“The guy was real bummed out with his life and he wanted to kill himself. He had a shotgun, powder. . . but he didn’t have a bullet. That’s how pathetic he was, he was too dumb to know where to buy a bullet,” Fausto said. Severo laughed. “But he wanted to kill himself. There he was, smoking, with all that sadness but no bullet. He thought, ‘I’ll put some cigarette butts in this gun, pull the trigger and kill myself.’ And he did it.”

“Come on man, that didn’t happen. Impossible.”

“I’m telling you that it did! I heard it from João Lauro.”

“João Lauro is a liar! How do you think a cigarette butt could pass through clothes?” Severo scratched his neck. “How could you even manage to kill yourself with a shotgun?”

“Oh, maybe with a string, or with your thumb on the trigger. Ask João Lauro!”

“I will.”

“Ask away, confirm it with him tomorrow morning. There’s a shotgun right there! We can go outside, shoot at a tree, and see what happens.”

Severo looked at the shotgun behind the bar and then at his friend’s face. He agreed, letting loose an intoxicated grunt. Fausto grabbed the gun and wiped off the dust. He ducked under the bar and then placed upon it a pack of cigarettes, a lighter, a ramrod, and a pouch of gunpowder.

The area behind the building was as much for storage as it was a yard. In one corner, crates of beer and soda were piled atop one another, together with large bottles of wine. A strong smell of grapes and beer mixed with that of wet grass. Grass was visible as far as the horizon line, an open expanse. It was as humid outside the bar as it was inside. But outside, there were no walls to shield them from the chilly air. The stars lit up the open field. A single orange tree stood at the center of the yard.

Fausto carried the powder pouch and the ramrod in one of his hands, the shotgun hanging from his shoulder by a strap. In the other hand, he held the cigarettes and the lighter. With the back of one, he tapped a switch and a light came on in the yard. Fausto pulled two benches nearer to the light and lit a cigarette. He called to Severo, who sat down on the bench beside him.

When they had smoked eight cigarettes, Fausto said:

“What now?”

“Let’s see if it works.”

Fausto reached for the shotgun. Severo put the powder in the barrel. Then he put in a cigarette butt, followed by another, then a third. He filled the 1.5-centimeter circumference of the barrel.

“The orange tree?” Severo asked. Fausto nodded his head.

Severo approached the tree, stopping about seven steps away. He lifted the shotgun. He pointed it at the tree. He aimed.

He shot. A thud. Sparks. The smell of gunpowder.

The two men approached the tree. Severo was still holding the gun. Standing side by side, they examined it slowly, running their hands over the trunk. Intact, except for a few single marks. Severo bellowed, drunk and proud of himself:

“Who was right? That story is a whole lotta nonsense!” Fausto ducked down. He observed the tree and the ground near the roots. “Man, let’s go back inside. It’s time to close the bar.”

“It’s early still.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding! It’s almost three in the morning, time to close up.”

“You can’t leave until you pay me.”

“But I don’t have any money.”

“You can pay me just 70 reals today, that’s all I need. The rest of it we can negotiate. I need that money,” Fausto said. “I’m in trouble with important people. It’s a matter of life and death, don’t you get it?”

“It’s you who isn’t getting it.”

Fausto inhaled and exhaled in silence. He said:

“Don’t you want to try to shoot the tree again? Just to see what happens if we shoot from closer?”

“You can shoot, instead of me, but it’s not going to work.”

“You still don’t believe my story?”

“The cigarette didn’t even reach the tree. No way that story is true.”

“If you’re so sure that it won’t work,” Fausto laughed, “why don’t you shoot at me? The final test.”

Severo looked at his friend. Then he loaded the shotgun with powder and three cigarette butts. One step forward, and he was facing Fausto. The barrel of the gun against Fausto’s chest. Before Fausto could react, Severo fired. Even though the shotgun was aimed at Fausto, Severo looked beyond him, at the orange tree.

A thud. Sparks. The smell of gunpowder. Biceps, ribcage, heart. A man remains on his feet one, two, three seconds, an eternity.

The man falls on the grass, alongside his orange tree. The man has a hole in his shirt. The shirt has a hole now seeping blood.

Severo was still holding the shotgun when he entered the bar. He went behind the counter. He placed the gun on the shelf where it had been before, in the exact place where he had found it.

From Your Arms

by Natalia Timerman

People's lives are always less interesting than I imagine them to be. Call it cliché, but I invent a past for people, a spectacular *why* that explains how they come to stand in front of me, laden with their bags and their gestures. This is not the case with the woman in blue, who sits in front of me at the café. Her story I know for certain.

It is the third consecutive week that I've seen her here, yet each week at a different time. The first two occasions, she sat down at a table pushed up against the wall. Today that table was occupied by an elderly couple, so the woman chose a different one, next to the door. From where I am seated I can see her well.

Even if I had deployed all my creativity to invent anything and everything when it came to her life, I wouldn't have come close to the truth.

I am discreet, I don't want her to see me looking at her bulging cloth bag hung on the chair, a piece of black lace poking out as if it were trying to escape.

Or perhaps it is she who is trying to be discreet.

Her coffee arrives, which she receives without looking at the waiter. From her forearm hangs a delicate gold chain. Resting in the hollow of her collarbone is a small pendant necklace—I can't make out exactly what it is, as I don't want to stare too intently. It looks like a lute. She holds the pendant with the fingers of her left hand and the handle of the coffee cup with her right hand. After taking a small sip—I can tell from her grimace that the coffee is scalding—she looks around her, attentive to everyone but not focusing on anyone in particular. Not even me.

She doesn't seem nervous, just tired, perhaps. Yes. Her tiredness has been with her for a long time, it weighs on her every movement, yet is kept concealed behind obvious efforts to appear youthful, her hair dyed black and her face free of wrinkles. Her careful appearance contrasts with the scar on her left temple, which I notice when she turns her face to search for something in her purse, also hanging from the chair. I learned on a television show about criminal

investigations that a pink scar like hers is young, maybe adolescent. Certainly not old, not yet. Not until it turns white.

She takes one more sip of her coffee. On her wrist, there is another scar of the same color. Some might say that it was a common burn from the stove. But a burn of that shape and size? Other than a certain asymmetry reminiscent of a seahorse, I would call it oval, meaning it is unlikely to be from the stove, which leaves smaller marks, or from the oven, which leaves horizontal ones. She looks at her phone to see if she has received messages, or perhaps to ascertain the time. I know, however, that she isn't in a hurry. And who would be sending her messages?

She had a normal life, up until a year ago. Has it already been a year? Time passes quickly. I think it has been less than a year, actually. Six months, perhaps. She is divorced, with two children who are nearly grown-up. Already grown-up, in fact. She worked, counting the days until her retirement, imagining what she would do in the lull that would come after. I don't know if, in the ordinary days that came before, she was already thinking about what was about to happen, or if she had planned it, or if it happened on an impulse, as I have heard tell. The fact is that one night, after serving dinner to her children (one complained that the sauce for the meat was too salty and that the steak was tough), after both shut themselves in their rooms—who knows if they were already asleep—she went out. Her sons didn't notice at the time. But the next morning, they found it odd that the breakfast table wasn't set. The older son went to his mother's room and saw that the bed was still made from the day before. Before he had time to tell his younger brother, who was in the bathroom, the sound of the living room door alerted him to her arrival. The older son was going to ask her where she had been, where she had spent the night, but something about her presence, perhaps the film of sweat on her skin, the invigorated look on her face, or the happiness she radiated, something stopped him from opening his mouth. The mother waited until the younger son left the bathroom, and without saying a word, went in and took a shower. She exited the bathroom and dressed for work—she had been a teacher in her youth but after having taken leave for health reasons, rumored to be depression, she took on an administrative role in the school district—she lit a burner

on the stove, heated the milk (heating it in the microwave was bad for you, she had once read), put two slices of bread in the toaster, waited for them to pop up, put two more in and ran over to turn the burner off before the milk boiled over. The younger son didn't even notice that their mother hadn't slept at home, and the older son gave up on asking or otherwise commenting on the matter.

It was only after several days in a row of the mother's absence—and by then the younger son had also realized that his mother was spending her nights away from home—that they decided to ask her where she went each evening. At the breakfast table, the older son, seated in front of his coffee with milk, after a bite of bread with cream cheese, gesticulated with his eyebrows, pulling them upwards while sticking out his chin, silently ordering his younger brother to open his mouth and ask their mother the question they had agreed upon.

It is none of your business, she responded, getting up from the table with her plate in hand, the remains of her bread lying among the crumbs. The two boys looked at each other, seeking in the other not a safe haven, but some wisdom to clarify what she had said—yet neither of them had in their repertoires of life any resources to decipher the words of their mother, their mom, who belonged only to them, for as long as they could remember. The older one, feeling the burden of his age upon seeing the bewildered face of his brother, opened his arms, his palms extended upwards as if to say: I don't have the slightest idea what this is or what to do about it.

The thing is that for a long time, they didn't know what to do. Months. They tried to pretend that everything was normal, that the fact that their mother spent her nights away from home (not every night, but almost every night) was nothing, as long as breakfast and dinner continued to be served. The younger son eventually had the idea to ask their father if he knew anything, so on a Wednesday, the day he picked them up from school (even though they were old enough to take the bus on their own), the older son sat in the passenger seat, next to his father, while the younger son, who was sitting in the back, came forward to crouch in the gap between the front and back seats, took a deep breath, and asked: Dad, do you know where Mom spends the night?

The father, who had been remarried for years to a woman whom he had met while still married to his first wife, almost crashed the car

upon swinging his head around to look at his sons, both at the same time. He returned his gaze to the road just in time to swerve out of the way of a van that honked at him, eventually stopping at a yellow light. Your mother isn't sleeping at home?

Forget about it, Dad, the younger son said, leaning back against the backseat and getting his phone out of his bag, giving up on the subject. He looked up from his phone long enough to hear his father say that their mother must be dating someone, good for her, and if she was able to keep up her responsibilities as a mother, what was the harm in that, the kids should understand, their mother was a person, after all. The older son thought that their father must think them to be idiots to not have thought of that hypothesis, but he didn't see their mother's face when she arrived home; if he had he would also suspect that it wasn't merely a new relationship.

In any case, time passed and the two boys didn't have much choice but to accept the mystery of their mother's outings, because at the end of the day, as their father had said, she didn't leave any of her tasks unattended, even though at times she seemed tired in the afternoons.

Yet one Tuesday morning, their mother didn't return home. It was time for the boys to leave for school and the kitchen table remained untouched from the night before, no tablecloth, its smooth glass gleaming and bare. The sons argued about whether it was better just to go to school or to call the police. The younger son called their father, who said: Don't even think about missing school, I'm sure it is no big deal. The boys, hungry, took the bus to school (a single bus took them all the way there, leaving them one block away from their destination).

That same day, news spread that Marco, a classmate of the older son's, had gone to a whorehouse. It was like a nightclub, he said, but the patrons were all men, and the women that worked there were practically naked and danced on the stage and flirted with the men and took them off to smaller rooms or rubbed against them right there in the main room, in front of everyone. And what are the women like? the older son asked. What do you mean, Victor? They're whores, said Marco. There were all kinds: young ones, hot ones, skinny ones, fat ones, old ones, and even busted ones. Whores.

I wonder if my mother has arrived home yet, Victor thought, worried.

Several hours later, in third period, three classrooms down the hall, the younger son, as he completed his English exercises, listened to Carina telling Elaine that her aunt had brought her girlfriend to a family dinner. My father and my grandfather got mad, she said, they even got up and left the table, but I didn't understand why, because my aunt's girlfriend was nice and pretty, everyone thought so. Samuel turned around and asked Carina how old her aunt was. I don't know, I think she is around 45, she responded.

Next week is my mother's birthday, Samuel thought, worried about whether or not she had arrived home yet.

Victor and Samuel returned home in silence, side by side on the bus. At home, each went to his room and closed the door. Their mother still wasn't home. At the end of the afternoon, the phone rang. Samuel ran to pick it up. Victor arrived right behind him. Wrong number, Samuel said, eyeing with confusion the tears that ran down his brother's cheeks, without noticing that tears were running down his cheeks as well.

Without knowing what to do, the two boys hugged each other, crying and forlorn, who knows for how long, until they heard the front door slam. They ran, Samuel followed closely by Victor, to where their mother stood, greedy for her, as if they were going to hug her both at the same time, repeating the same gesture from moments before. Mom, what the hell, where the fuck were you? Who do you think you are to do that to us? I didn't do anything to you, she said before her chest was met not with an embrace but a check from Victor's torso, and then Samuel's closed fist pummeled her face, and Victor's extended hand pushed her shoulder violently, his right foot kicked her stomach, and someone, she couldn't tell who, spit in her eye, and then came another blow, from whom she also couldn't see. She was finally able to turn onto her stomach—she had fallen on her back after the third push—and dragged herself into the bathroom, leaving behind her rage-filled children, disentangling herself from Victor, who had grabbed her left foot, shoeless by that point. She closed the door by putting all her weight against it, locking herself inside.

Panting, she let herself sink to the floor, her back resting against the bathroom door, not noticing the blood dripping onto the white tiles. She closed her eyes, rested her head on the door behind her,

and summoned energy from some remote place to imagine being submerged in water, or in Antônio's bed, where she had slept so well the previous night, so well that she lost track of time; or imagining the blood dripping into the water mixing with sweat from her body onstage, wearing no panties, her tits exposed, dancing and shaking her pelvis with her eyes closed just as they were now, her garter belt tight on her thighs, holding up her three-quarter length stockings along with her whole life; or licking the fresh river water off her lips after going down on Gorete for a long time.

She sighed. If she weren't bleeding, if she weren't in so much pain, the following night would have been different.

She orders a bottle of water and signals to the waiter to bring the bill. She takes a last sip of her coffee which is already cold, puts her cell phone in her purse, grabs the bag hanging from the chair, and leaves. She opens an umbrella—I forgot to mention that it had started to rain more than a half hour ago.

I follow her with my eyes until she turns the corner.

Contributors

Caio Fernando Abreu (1948–1996), known as Caio F. (his signature), was an award-winning journalist, writer, and cultural agitator who portrayed the myriad contradictions of urban Brazil in the 1970s and '80s like no other. The author of 20 books, including 12 story collections and two novels, he has been awarded major literary prizes, including the prestigious Jabuti Award for Fiction a total of three times. During the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985), his homoerotic writing was heavily censored, and he found refuge in the literary counterculture and like-minded writers such as Hilda Hilst and Dalton Trevisan. In 1994, while living in exile in France, he tested HIV positive. He passed away two years later in Porto Alegre, his hometown, at the age of 47. His books, written in a personal and economic style, speak of love, fear, death, and, above all, the anguish of human loneliness. Abreu's magnum opus, *Morangos mofados* (1982), was recently translated into English as *Moldy Strawberries* (2022) by Bruna Dantas Lobato.

Miriam Adelman (b. Milwaukee, 1955) has an academic background in the social sciences, with degrees from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), New York University (NYU), and the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). She taught sociology at the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR) for 27 years. She is also a poet and translator and has published widely both in and between the disciplines, from sociology to cultural and literary studies. In 2020, she published her first collection of poetry, the bilingual volume *Found in Translation* (Nosotros Editorial) and, in 2021, *Mundo Barbie* (Edições Jabuticaba), a translation of US poet Denise Duhamel's *Kinky* (co-translated with Julia Raiz and Emanuela Siqueira). At present, she is affiliated with the Graduate Program in Literary Studies at the UFPR and continues her socio-anthropological work as a CNPq grant recipient.

Cristhiano Aguiar is a Brazilian writer, literary critic, and professor of literature. He holds a master's degree in Literature from the Federal University of Pernambuco and a PhD from Mackenzie Presbyterian University in São Paulo. Currently, he is a professor at Mackenzie Presbyterian University, where he specializes in horror, science fiction, and religion within the Latin American context. In 2023, Aguiar was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Princeton University. As a writer, Aguiar was named one of the best young Brazilian writers by *Granta* magazine in 2012. He has published two noteworthy collections of short stories: *Na outra margem, o Leviatã* (Lote 42, 2018) and *Gótico nordestino* (Companhia das Letras, 2022). The latter solidified his literary presence, and, in 2022, Aguiar received the Clarice Lispector Award for Best Short Story Collection.

Edimilson de Almeida Pereira is an acclaimed poet, novelist, anthropologist, literary critic, and professor of Portuguese and African Literatures at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais. As a researcher of Afro-Brazilian performances, cosmologies, and oral literatures, Pereira has published extensively. Some of his most recent literary publications include *Poesia+: (antologia 1985–2019)* (Editora 34, 2019), *Um corpo à deriva* (Macondo, 2020), *O ausente* (Relicário, 2020), and *Front* (Nós, 2020), which won the São Paulo Prize for Literature.

Joaquim Pedro de Andrade (1932–1988) was a Brazilian filmmaker and writer. Though best known for directing the 1969 adaptation of the modernist epic *Macunaíma*, he directed several other films, such as *Garrincha, alegria do povo* (1962) and *O padre e a moça* (1966), which garnered critical acclaim from national and international audiences. Andrade is recognized as a leading figure of Cinema Novo, a movement which sought to appropriate and reconfigure Italian neorealist and French New Wave aesthetics within a heterogeneous, Latin American context. His never-realized screenplay, *O imponderável Bento contra o crioulo voador*, was written between 1986 and 1988 and published posthumously in 2018 by *Hoje*.

Jason Araújo is a PhD candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. He holds an MA in French and Francophone Studies from San Diego State University and a BA in History from the University of San Diego. His research area focuses on the dynamic relationship between the Mediterranean and the River Plate during the 19th and 20th centuries. He is also passionate about translation, having served as translator for Southern California–based Taller California’s *Rio de Agua Vive* (2024).

Clarah Averbuck is a writer and one of the pioneers of the Brazilian blogosphere. She began her writing career online, writing for the e-zine *CardosOnline* (1998) and her own blog, *brazileira!preta* (2001). She has published seven novels: *Máquina de pinball* (Editora Conrad, 2002), *Das coisas esquecidas atrás da estante* (Editora 7Letras, 2003), *Vida de gato* (Editora Planeta, 2004), *Nossa Senhora da Pequena Morte* (Editora do Bispo, 2009), *Cidade Grande no Escuro* (Editora 7Letras, 2012), *Eu quero ser eu* (Editora Planeta, Editora 7Letras, 2014), and *Toureando o Diabo* (Editora Averbucks, 2016). In 2008, her novel *Vida de gato* was translated into English by Francisco Araujo da Costa (*Cat Life*, Future Fiction London). In the same year, her novel *Máquina de pinball* was adapted into the film *Nome próprio* (dir. Murilo Salles).

Xavier Blackwell-Lipkind, a 2024 Marshall Scholar, has published stories and essays in *The Threepenny Review*, *The Drift*, *Gulf Coast*, *West Branch*, and *Copper Nickel*. He studied Comparative Literature at Yale University, where he served as editor-in-chief of the *Yale Literary Magazine*, wrote a thesis on Proust and music, and received a Critical Language Scholarship for immersive coursework in Brazil.

Paulo Candido is a Brazilian author, poet, and translator. He has translated many American and English novels into Portuguese over the last 10 years. He has also translated fiction and non-fiction Brazilian works into English and Spanish. Paulo holds a PhD in Developmental Psychology.

Tobias Carvalho (b. Porto Alegre, 1995) is the author of two acclaimed short story collections and the novel *Quarto aberto* (2023). He wrote his debut collection, *As coisas* (2018), while still a student in International Relations at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, and it won the Prêmio Sesc de Literatura in 2018. His second work, *Visão noturna* (2021), won the short story category of the Prêmio Açorianos de Literatura, 2022. Carvalho's fiction deals with the day-to-day lives of young LGBTQ people in contemporary Brazil, which has inevitably led to comparisons with Caio Fernando Abreu. His prose style has been praised as clean, organic, and subtly sentimental. Daniel Galera calls him “an author who manages to be sensitive and relentless in every line, sharp in his treatment of action and emotion, etching that rare feeling of truth—which we look for in the best literature—into his stories.”

Maria Clara Escobar is a film director, script writer, and poet. She wrote and directed the films *Desterro* (2019), which debuted at the Rotterdam International Festival Tiger Competition, and the documentary *Os dias com ele* (2013), in which she researches the life of her father, who was tortured by agents of the Brazilian military dictatorship. She has written and directed several short films, including *Onde habito*, *passeio de família*, and *Domingo*, and co-authored the scripts for the films *Ontem havia coisas estranhas no céu* (dir. Bruno Risas, 2020) and *Histórias que só existem quando lembradas* (dir. Julia Murat, 2011). Escobar also works as a consultant in script writing and montage and as a jury member for public calls and film festivals. She has published three volumes of poetry: *Medo, medo, medo* (Nosotros Editorial, 2019), *Um novo mar dentro de mim* (Ed. Quelônio, 2021), and *Zonas de guerra* (Nosotros Editorial, 2022).

Julia Garcia is a Brazilian teacher and scholar. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Comparative Literature at Western University in London, Ontario. She holds an MA in English from Brock University (Canada) and a teaching specialization in Language and Literature from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Her research interests are narratology, science fiction, and adaptation.

She teaches English as an additional language to refugees and newcomers to Canada in London, Ontario.

Luisa Geisler is a Brazilian writer and literary translator. She holds an MA in Creative Process from the National University of Ireland. She is the author of *Luzes de emergência se acenderão automaticamente* (Alfaguara, 2014) and *De espaços abandonados* (Alfaguara, 2018), among others. She is a two-time winner of the Prêmio Sesc de Literatura, in addition to the APCA, Minuano, and Açorianos prizes. She has taken part in artistic-literary actions with the MALBA in Buenos Aires, the Serpentine Gallery in London, and the OMI Ledig House in New York. She has texts and books published in over 15 countries. Born in Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul, in 1991, she completed an MA in Brazilian Literature and Culture at the University of New Mexico. She is currently a PhD candidate in Spanish and Portuguese Literature at Princeton University.

Isaac Giménez is an Assistant Adjunct Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California, Los Angeles. He holds a PhD in Hispanic Language and Literature and an MA in Afro-Luso-Brazilian Literature and Film Studies from the same institution. His research interests, both academic and artistic, include performance poetry, recycling poetics, visual studies, authorship studies, and gender and sexuality. With a background in translation and interpreting, he is a current member of the UCLA Working Group on the Comedia in Translation as well as a collaborator of *Al Otro Lado*, a non-profit that provides legal, linguistic, and humanitarian support to migrants at the US border.

Ana Guimarães is a PhD candidate in Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan. Before her doctoral studies, she earned her master's degree in Latin American Literature from the University of Arizona. Guimarães has secured research grants that have allowed her to conduct extensive fieldwork in Brazil and Argentina, deepening her engagement with the culture and literature of the region. Her dissertation research engages with the concept of

dwelling within the contexts of everyday life as depicted in Latin American fiction, scrutinizing how literature represents, challenges, and theorizes this notion of dwelling. In addition to her research, Guimarães contributes to the academic community as a Graduate Student Instructor of Spanish and Portuguese, sharing her passion for language and Latin American culture with students.

Jon Russell Herring (b. Manchester, 1970) is a writer and early career translator working from Portuguese and Spanish. He was one of the inaugural Queer Digital Residents at the Poetry Translation Centre, South London, in 2022. For his nine-month residency, Herring collaborated with Argentinian poet Osvaldo Bossi, producing the first English versions of around 20 of Bossi's pieces from across his career. He also scripted, shot, and subtitled an experimental autofictional film, *Afinidad inacabada* (2023), about his experience translating one of Bossi's poems. In 2023, Herring jointly won the Stephen Spender Prize for a co-translation of an untitled poem by Brazilian writer Ana Martins Marques. His short story "Quartet" was published in May 2024, and he completed an MA in Literary Translation at the University of East Anglia, Norwich this fall. He now lives in Navarra in northern Spain, where he teaches English and continues to work as a freelance translator.

Emyr Wallace Humphreys translates from Welsh and Portuguese to English and from English to Welsh. A graduate of the MA program in Translation Studies at University College London, he has had literary translations published in journals such as *The White Review*, *New Welsh Review*, and *Joyland* magazine and has collaborated with Parthian Books, HarperCollins, and UCL Press as a literary translator. He won a bursary for the 2022 Bristol Translates Literary Translation Summer School and was the first Celtic-language translator to be awarded the 2022–2023 Visible Communities Mentorship, part of the National Centre for Writing's Emerging Translator Mentorship program. He is a two-time nominee for Deep Vellum's *Best Literary Translations* anthology. He lives in Wales, dividing his time between rural Powys and Aberystwyth.

Jane Kassavin is a Dornsife Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Southern California. She holds a PhD in Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture and a Graduate Certificate in Translation Studies from the same institution. She was also a 2022–2023 Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Abroad Fellow at the University of São Paulo and the State University of Campinas. Her writing and translations have been published or are forthcoming in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, *Latin American Literary Review*, and *Comparative Literature*. Her research focuses on the meetings between Black and Indigenous theories and practices of sound, voice, and performance in modern and contemporary Latin American poetry.

James Langan works in and between English, Portuguese, French, Spanish, and Catalan. He is based in Providence, Rhode Island, where he recently graduated with honors in Comparative Literature from Brown University. He is chipping away at translations of a number of Brazilian and Argentine writers, such as Lúcio Cardoso and Osvaldo Lamborghini, whose transgressive texts remain largely unknown to Anglophone readers.

Lucas Lazzaretti is a Brazilian professor of philosophy, novelist, poet, and translator. His novels *O escritor morre à beira do rio* (7Letras, 2021) and *Saturno translada: um ensaio romanesco* (7Letras, 2022) have been praised by critics for their experimental narrative. His translations from English, Spanish, French, and Danish have been published in Brazil. He recently translated John Williams' novel *Stoner* and is currently translating William Gaddis' novel *The Recognitions*. He is a two-time nominee for the Prêmio Jabuti for his short story collection *Placenta: estudos* (7Letras, 2019) and *Saturno translada: um ensaio romanesco*.

Maria Esther Maciel was born in Patos de Minas and earned a doctorate in Comparative Literature at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). She was for many years a professor at UFMG and is currently on the faculty of the Universidade Estadual de Campinas, having also held positions at New York University, the

École normale supérieure, and Queen Mary University of London. Her many novels and essay collections include *Pequena enciclopédia de seres comuns* (2021), *A memória das coisas* (2017), and *O livro dos nomes* (2008), which received special mention in the 2009 Casa de las Américas Prize and was a finalist for Brazil's Prêmio Jabuti. She is a member of the Academia Mineira de Letras.

Júlia Irion Martins is a Brazilian American translator. She began her translation work as a pro-bono translator for Freedom House Detroit, where she translated testimonies and clerical documents for asylum seekers. In 2022, she translated Bianca Santana's Jabuti Award-winning book, *Quando me descobri negra* (2015), for Fósforo Editora. Martins holds an MA in Comparative Literature from the University of Toronto, and she is currently completing her PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan with a graduate certificate in Digital Studies. Her research focuses on post-internet literature, irony, and autobiography. Martins is based in Washington, DC, where she teaches literature and film courses at American University.

Sam McCracken is a PhD candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, where he is also enrolled in the Graduate Certificate Program in Digital Studies. He received a Critical Language Scholarship (2022) to support his acquisition of Brazilian Portuguese, and he more recently served as an editorial intern at the São Paulo-based publishing house Editora Todavia during the spring of 2024. McCracken also worked closely with Dr. Yopie Prins throughout the fall of 2023 to assist in the development and curriculum design of the University of Michigan's upcoming major in Translation. He works between English, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Thomas Mira y Lopez is the author of *The Book of Resting Places* (Counterpoint Press, 2017). He holds MFAs in both Creative Writing from the University of Arizona and Literary Translation from the University of Iowa. An editor at *DIAGRAM* and *Territory*, he is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Iowa.

Marcelo Mirisola is an acclaimed Brazilian author, with more than 20 novels and short stories collections published since 1998. He has authored four plays. Mirisola is also a regular presence in the most important Brazilian newspapers (such as *Folha de São Paulo* and *O Estado de São Paulo*) and magazines (such as *VIP* and *Cult*). He has maintained columns in some prestigious online outlets (such as the Brazilian branch of Yahoo and the political site *Congresso em Foco*).

Thereza Nardelli was born in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. She has a research background in social communications, specializing in visual analysis and gender studies. She works primarily as an illustrator, graphic designer, and animation director/scriptwriter. Currently, the Instagram profile @Zangadas_tatu showcases her original work across tattooing, painting, muralism, and brand collaborations among other projects. Her art has appeared in *Marie Claire* (Brazil), *Vogue* (Brazil), the Ibero-American Design Biennial (2020), and *Polyester* (UK). She also created the animated series “Poderoses” for MTV Latam and “Zangadas,” a feminist series launched in 2023. Among her most renowned works is the image of two hands holding a rose with the phrase “ninguém solta a mão de ninguém” (no one lets go of anyone’s hand), which became a symbol of antifascist resistance in Brazil in 2018.

Michel de Oliveira is a writer, photographer, visual artist, journalist, and professor of Social Communication at the Federal University of Sergipe. Born in Tobias Barreto, Sergipe, de Oliveira holds a doctoral degree in Communication and Information from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and is the author of two scholarly monographs: *Seduzidos pela luz: ou bases antropológicas da fotografia* (Imaginalis, 2022) and *Saudades eternas: fotografia entre a morte e a sobrevida* (Eduel, 2018). In addition to his academic writing and photography practice, de Oliveira is also the author of five book-length, genre-spanning creative works: *Meus dedos sentem falta do seu cheiro* (Moinhos, 2022), *Fatal Error* (Moinhos, 2021), *O amor são tontas coisas* (Moinhos, 2021), *O sagrado coração do homem* (Moinhos, 2018), and *Cólicas, câimbras e outras dores* (Oito e Meio, 2017).

Raquel Parrine holds a PhD in Romance Languages and Literatures from the University of Michigan and an MA in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature from the University of São Paulo (USP), with a research focus on feminist and queer literature and visual art in Latin America from the 1980s to the present. She is also a translator, having participated in the feminist collective *sycorax* in the translation of Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* and *Re-enchanting the World*, published by Editora Elefante in 2017 and 2022, respectively. Her co-translation of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* was recently published by Ubu Editora (2024). Parrine lives in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey is a writer, scholar, and translator. She holds a PhD from Tulane University and has taught at several universities in the United States and Brazil. Her English-language translations of Brazilian poetry, fiction, and non-fiction works by authors such as Conceição Evaristo, Djamilá Ribeiro, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Marina Colasanti, and others have appeared in *Latin American Literature Today*, *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, *Afro-Hispanic Review*, and other venues. She also translated and wrote the critical introduction to Maria Firmina dos Reis's 1859 abolitionist novel *Ursula* (Tagus, 2021). She is currently translating a selection of short stories by Cristiane Sobral.

Natércia Pontes (b. Fortaleza, Ceará, 1980) is a writer and author of the books *Copacabana dreams* (Cosac Naify, 2012), finalist for the Jabuti Award, and *Os tais caquinhos* (Companhia das Letras, 2021), among others.

Maria Valéria Rezende (b. 1942) is a nun and educator and was a political activist during Brazil's military dictatorship. As a young nun, Rezende taught literacy in various regions of Brazil, especially in the impoverished Northeast, and traveled to Europe, China, Algeria, Cuba, Mexico, and other countries. Her many travels and the teachings of Liberation Theology are reflected in her literary work, which most often focuses on the lives and struggles of the poorest in Brazilian society. Rezende has received many important literary

awards, including the Jabuti, Brazil's most prestigious award, for her novel *Quarenta dias* (2014) and the São Paulo Prize for Literature (2017) and Cuba's Casa de las Américas Prize (2017), both for *Outros cantos* (2016). Her novels have been translated into French, Spanish, and Catalan, and her short fiction has appeared in *Words Without Borders*.

Felipe Fanuel Xavier Rodrigues is an Assistant Professor of English in the Department of Anglo-Germanic Letters at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Rodrigues has published articles on the intersections of race, gender, and religion in Black literatures. He received a PhD in Comparative Literature and a BA in English from UERJ. In 2014–2015, he was a CAPES-Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Dartmouth College. Rodrigues was a 2016–2017 FAPERJ Nota 10 Postdoctoral Fellow in Literature at UERJ. He is an elected executive committee member of the Modern Language Association (MLA) Luso-Brazilian Forum (2022–2027). His recent publications include “Maréia and the Emergence of the Ancestral Novel,” published in the *Journal of Lusophone Studies*, and “The Politics of African Heritage in Black Brazilian Women’s Literature,” published in *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*. He has translated the works of Afro-Brazilian women writers into English, including Conceição Evaristo, Miriam Alves, Eliana Alves Cruz, and Mãe Beata de Yemonjá.

Cidinha da Silva writes literary chronicles and short stories that document the history of contemporary African descendants in Brazil. Focusing primarily on racial and gender relations, religion, sexuality, violence, and poverty, she creates a written art that offers valuable insight into what it means to be a Black woman in current Brazil. She was one of the leaders of the Geledés Institute, an organization of Afro-Brazilian women who fight against racism and sexism and stand up for the empowerment of women of African descent and the Black community at large. She has written about affirmative action and racial relations in Brazil. By the time she published her first literary book in 2006, she was a veteran advocate for racial equality. A critic regarded da Silva’s transition to literature as a move

“from ‘activism’ to ‘artivism,’ and a translation of ‘the consciousness of ethnic-racial belonging and its inherent critical view into literary terms.’”

Natalia Timerman is a Brazilian writer and psychiatrist with a medical degree from the Federal University of São Paulo and a doctorate in literature from the University of São Paulo. She is the author of the non-fiction book *Desterros* (Elefante, 2017), which explores her time working in a prison hospital, the story collection *Rachaduras* (Quelônio, 2019), a finalist for the Jabuti Award in the short story category, and the novel *Copo vazio* (Todavia, 2021), which was a finalist for the Candango Prize and will be adapted into a film.

Moema Vilela is a Brazilian author, poet, and professor of Creative Writing and Literature at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS). She is the author of *Ter saudade era bom* (Dublinense, 2014), *Guernica* (Edições Udumbara, 2017), *Quis dizer* (Edições Udumbara, 2017), *A dupla vida de Dadá* (Penalux, 2019), and *Fotos ruins muito boas* (7Letras, 2022). Vilela has also published short stories, poems, and essays in several literary magazines and anthologies. She holds a doctorate in Literature-Creative Writing from PUCRS, an MA in Linguistics and Semiotics from the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS), and an MA in Creative Writing from PUCRS. Born in Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul, Vilela lives in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul.

Meg Weeks is a writer, translator, and historian. She holds an MA and a PhD in history from Harvard University and is currently an Assistant Professor at the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. Her writing on topics ranging from feminism and reproductive rights to art, literature, and labor has been published in *piauí*, *Artforum*, *The Baffler*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *n+1*, among other outlets. Her translations of Brazilian fiction and non-fiction have appeared in *Two Lines*, *Adi*, and *Asymptote*. In 2024, Duke University Press published her translation of the memoir of Gabriela Leite, the founder of Brazil’s sex-worker movement.