



Ministério da Educação  
Universidade Federal dos Vales do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri – UFVJM  
Minas Gerais – Brasil  
Revista Vozes dos Vales: Publicações Acadêmicas  
Reg.: 120.2.095 - 2011 – UFVJM  
ISSN: 2238-6424  
QUALIS/CAPES – LATINDEX  
Nº. 04 – Ano II – 10/2013  
<http://www.ufvjm.edu.br/vozes>

## **Brazilian Literature: Contemporary Urban Fiction**

Prof. PhD. David William Foster  
Regents Professor of Spanish and Women and Gender Studies  
School of International Letters and Cultures  
Arizona State University  
Tempe - Arizona – USA  
<http://www.public.asu.edu/~atdwf/>  
E-mail: [david.foster@asu.edu](mailto:david.foster@asu.edu)

### **NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

#### **Intellectual Rational**

Brazil is the home of one of the great literary traditions of the world. Indeed, Brazil publishes more literature annually than the other major Latin American countries put together. While it is true that a respectable amount of Brazilian literature has been translated into English, few Brazilian authors receive scholarly attention by any other than

a relatively small circle of the academic critics of Brazilian literature and culture. Machado de Assis is unquestionably well known to those who have an interest in the history of the Latin American novel on the cusp of the twentieth century, as he is considered the finest novelist—often compared with Balzac—to have emerged up until that time in Latin America. Clarice Lispector, after Machado, the most translated author from Brazil (the University of Texas Press has kept her works in print for approximately fifty years), is crucial to any examination of literary feminism in Latin America, and the French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous has done much to promote her reputation as the one author who most adheres to Cixous's conception of an *écriture féminine*.

But beyond these two authors, so much of Brazilian literature escapes the attention of scholars and professional critics for whom Latin America means texts written in Spanish and names like Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez or Carlos Fuentes, with scant interest in the writing on the other side of the Spanish/Portuguese linguistic divide. Yet much that is unique about Brazilian writing should make it of compelling interest for Latin American and even all literary scholars. There is, first of all, the overarching phenomenon of urban identity. While Brazil is a vast country, much of it, for geographical reasons, remains significantly underpopulated. By contrast, over half of the nation's citizens are concentrated in cities of over a million, and the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo axis dominates national life in immeasurable ways, particular as far as commerce, financial institutions, political life and culture are concerned. The dominant Brazilian imaginary, although important traces of provincial life remain, is that of an urban inhabitant. Brazil has a strong tradition of racial and ethnic identity, of which Machado himself is one subtle and ambiguous interpreter. And there is also a long tradition of complex issues regarding immigration (especially, Jewish, Italian, and Japanese): Brazil, like other Latin American societies, was developed on the basis of not always easily assimilated "foreign" groups. Brazil has also had, particularly in the twentieth century, a rich history of feminist and gender issues, as Lispector so eloquently represents. Also of considerable interest, in the context of the return to constitutional democracy in 1985, are the indigenous populations

and Brazil's rich anthropological traditions. Brazil was, after all, where Claude Lévi-Strauss undertook his first anthropological research. Indigenous peoples have heavily influenced poetry and narrative, as have also, in a seamless web, questions of race/ethnicity and questions of immigration. Literary modalities such as critical realism, social realism, dirty realism, and even a much questioned magical realism, have all been explored in complex ways by Brazilian writers. However, in the context of the overwhelming weight of Spanish in the United States (and one might note that the United States is the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world), few find the systematic opportunity to enter into the formidable world of literature written in Brazilian Portuguese.

### **Content of the Project**

Building on the applicant's prior experience directing NEH seminars, *Brazilian Literature* will run four weeks for sixteen participants, between June 17 and July 12, 2013 in São Paulo, Brazil and will provide an introduction to urban narrative in the twentieth century. There are many perspectives one could use to introduce Brazilian literature. The choice of an urban focus is the consequence of a major shift in cultural perspectives that took place in Latin America in the latter half of the twentieth century. Brazilian culture, along with Latin American culture as a whole, has become, since the early part of the twentieth century, more and more urban in its focus. The internationalization of Latin America and the enormous internal displacement of its population from the countryside to the city have resulted in recent decades in a cultural production that is predominantly urban. While an urban-centered writing dates from the earliest days of the conquest and while there continues to be a fiction that is focused on a rural setting, the simple fact is that late modern culture in Latin America and an urban focus have become virtually two sides of the same coin. There is, therefore, the need not only to attend to the enormous current importance of the cultural interpretations of the society of Latin America's metropolitan centers like Mexico City, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Caracas, and Bogotá.

But the rereading of earlier literature that is now part of a firmly established national tradition is equally important. Since one of the fundamental dimensions of culture is a principled interpretation of lived human experience, the analysis of major works of urban fiction must be of interest to any student of Latin American society concerned with understanding how urban life has become so central to the national history of a country like Brazil. Literature —the specific cultural production of concern to this seminar—is a crucial source of social, historical, and political knowledge, which explains why works of fiction routinely figure in scholarly sources of Latin American social scientists. Concomitantly, the processes of urbanization that are fictionalized in Brazilian narratives represent developments in Latin America's largest national society and the one, at the current moment, that enjoys the greatest social stability and most dynamic economic growth.

In accord with the spirit of the NEH Summer Seminars, the five novels chosen are major and canonical texts of Brazilian literature, and the seminar involves the in-depth examination of these texts in the company of a recognized academic expert. All of the novels chosen are relatively short (approximately 150 pages) and therefore easily read during the period of the seminar. We will begin with an examination of Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century writer considered the founder of contemporary Brazilian fiction. Machado founded the Brazilian Academy of Letters and was one of the first Brazilian authors to "write the city"; we will study his great masterpiece, *Dom Casmurro* (1899). Machado's texts are complex examinations of the emergence of an urban middle class in what was then the country's capital, Rio de Janeiro. The other four writers to be considered exemplify major features of Brazilian literature as it emerges in the twentieth century under the aegis of Machado's national and international fame. Patricia Galvão signals the importance of recording the experiences of the industrial proletariat, and *Parque industrial (Industrial Park, 1933)* foreshadows the extensive interest in contemporary Brazilian writing on the so-called lower depths of Brazil's sprawling megalopolises. Clarice Lispector, perhaps the most widely read contemporary

Brazilian author in translation, was mainly concerned in her writing with modern urban women's lives. In this she follows the lead of Patrícia Galvão, but Galvão never went on after *Parque industrial* to write the sort of complex narrative universe Lispector achieved, as exemplified in her short stories in *Laços de família (Family Ties; 1960)*. Bourgeois gentility is also at issue in Dalton Trevisan's fiction, set in the reputed garden city of Curitiba. Although also ethnically diverse, Curitiba has achieved a middle-class stability that is the envy of other areas of Brazil. Yet a writer like Trevisan is fascinated by aspects of urban life hidden away by the glossy images of official Curitiba. Trevisan charts, in a word, a return of the urban repressed. In this he is fundamental to an urban writing concerned with what the project of social modernity elides or suppresses from view, as we will see in the discussion of his collection of interrelated short stories, *O vampiro de Curitiba (The Vampire of Curitiba and Other Stories; 1965)*. Finally, Moacyr Scliar's fiction, with its insistence on telling the story of Jewish immigrants in his native Porto Alegre (a story that parallels that of other writers from São Paulo, which is Brazil's major Jewish center), also is significant to Brazilian literary history in responding critically to the often touted notion of the Brazilian "melting pot"; we will study his *O centauro no jardim (The Centaur in the Garden; 1980)*. In sum, these five works are nodes in a network of twentieth-century Brazilian fiction, and in one way or another they relate to most of the major literary activity in Brazil in that century.<sup>1</sup>

Because these are all significant urban novels, they are linked by the common concern for contemporary lives. Questions of ethnic and class identity also run through these five works of fiction, and taken as a whole, they provide a mosaic of some of the major social issues in Brazil that have been treated, with notable distinction, by the literary

---

<sup>1</sup>Two major urban centers of Brazil are missing in this account. One is Belo Horizonte, the center of the early mining industry west of Rio de Janeiro and today one of Brazil's major urban centers. Unfortunately, the major novelist from Belo Horizonte, Roberto Drummond, has yet to be translated into English. Salvador de Bahia, Brazil's colonial capital, is also not included. Jorge Amado, the major Brazilian novelist associated with this area and one of Brazil's most internationally read writers, is mostly known for potboilers with highly stereotyped characters in terms of race and sexuality. He sparks little enthusiasm among serious literary and academic critics, who are apt to see him as selling a particular image of his

record. The works extend from 1899 to 1980, and highlight major moments in Brazilian fiction. Of course, there are many important works of urban fiction during the past twenty-five years, but the point here is to consider those works that are now a solid part of the canon—and those readily available in English translation. Occasion, however, will be found to provide a survey of the most important recent fiction to stimulate participants reading after the seminar is over.

The urban focus of the seminar is a consequence of major sociohistorical differences between Brazil and the rest of Latin America, where close to 75% of the populace now lives in cities of more than a million inhabitants. But unlike other Latin American societies—typically Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, or Venezuela—Brazil is no longer a country in which the major cultural production is concentrated in a metropolitan capital. Indeed, the national capital Brasília, established in 1960, has yet to develop a uniquely characteristic culture, and Brazilians think of it as only an administrative center. What this means is that there has emerged a significant diversity of culture in a range of distinctive population centers. Each of these demographic centers has its own history. There are unquestionably issues that relate to all urban centers of the world and Latin America, such as crime, poverty, and the marginalization of social classes. Yet these cities also reveal much that is singular about Brazil in terms of its imperial history and its contemporary reflexes, class issues that are the consequence of an institution of slavery at least five times greater than that of the United States, cultural conflicts relating to immigrant populations, and even geocultural issues that have to do with the terrain and the layout of the cities: much of Spanish-language narrative was slow to confront the growing importance of the urban experience, and the 1960s is where one looks for such writing to emerge in Mexico City and Buenos Aires, for example. Yet at least as early as Machado de Assis, whose works date from the final decades of the nineteenth century, Brazilian literature includes masterpieces that have a big-city emphasis.

The literate population of Latin American societies is, from one end of the region to

---

region suitable for the tourist industry and certain unexamined nationalistic fantasies.

the other, concentrated in metropolitan settings, and has been so since the first decades of the Spanish and Portuguese conquest. Brazil, in addition to being an urban society like most of Latin America, is characterized by being a country of multiple, competing, and significantly different settings: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, Salvador da Bahia, Curitiba, and now the new capital of Brasília. Writing is often quite distinctive from one city to another, as the lived experience is often distinctive, within, still, the parameters of a contemporary urban existence that can lead to productive generalizations. Brazil is a society of immigrant populations, which are mainly concentrated in the metropolitan areas: the descendants of the African slave population, a forced immigration whose legacy deeply marked Brazil, Italians, Germans, Japanese and other Asians (it has often been remarked that there are more people in Brazil who speak Japanese than all of the surviving indigenous languages combined), Poles (Curitiba is the largest Polish city in the world outside Warsaw and Chicago), Jews (prominent in all of the urban centers mentioned as a consequence of the sort of diasporic emigration that brought them to the United States), and even Americans (the legendary Americana colony of post-Civil War southern exiles). This array of populations of foreign extraction and their interaction with the diverse urban settings of Brazil are factors that contribute to the diversity of Brazilian cultural production and constitute thematic constants of the country's narrative.

The program fits within the scope of the Bridging Cultures initiative, not only because of the significant continuities of culture throughout the Americas (especially as regards urban and immigrant experiences), but also as a consequence of the presence of Brazilian culture within the U.S., especially in state like Massachusetts, New York, Florida, and California.

In line with the spirit of the NEH programs, our focus will be on major/canonical literary texts, which necessarily excludes some of the vibrant contemporary urban writing on São Paulo that has not yet been sorted out, so to speak, by established literary criticism. Yet, it will be important to include contact with some of these contemporary

writers, and arrangements will be made to hold readings and discussion forums through the auspices of the Centro Cultural Itau, an important private foundation in downtown São Paulo that functions in a gracious old mansion, the Casa da Rosa. The three events of this nature held during the 2010 program were enthusiastically received by the participants.

## **Design**

Discussion of one major text will be devoted to each of the three cities of São Paulo, Curitiba, and Porto Alegre; discussion of two texts will be devoted to Rio de Janeiro in recognition of its traditional role as the center of Brazilian national culture. The seminar will meet Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. Sessions will be equally divided between 1) the introduction to history and the city as a center of cultural production, including background information on the writer chosen to represent that city, and 2) the examination in detail of the work chosen for reading and commentary. Each session will last three hours, 10AM-1PM. Afternoons will be devoted to research and to optional language instruction. The Director will meet with each participant individually on Wednesdays. The language of the seminar session will be English. The works to be examined, and the cities to which they will be tied, are as follows:

**Rio de Janeiro:** Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, *Dom Casmurro* (1899). In addition to the simple, crucial fact that Machado is the founding voice of modern Brazilian narrative fiction, *Dom Casmurro* is considered by many critics to be his masterpiece, a novel of consummate subtle irony in which the consciousness of an upper-middle class male is dissected in terms of the social and cultural pretensions it embodies. In addition to how Machado's ironic narrative is central to the development of a distinguished narrative tradition in Brazil, the novel, which focuses on the male protagonist's jealous doubts as to the fidelity of his wife, is now also important for issues of feminism and gender identity. As the Brazilian mulatto who founded the Brazilian Academy of Letters, Machado in his

writing—although sometimes rather obliquely—also allows for ethnic perspectives, in the sense that it is intriguing to consider how the son of a mulatto house painter not only came to enter Rio de Janeiro's white middle class, but how he came to be its greatest fictional commentator.

**São Paulo:** Patrícia Galvão's *Parque industrial* (1933; published under the pseudonym of Mara Lobo) is one of the most interesting Brazilian urban novels, and it has only recently begun to figure in the Brazilian literary canon. It is the only novel written by a Brazilian woman to gain recognition for its commitment to a social realist interpretation of the growing industrialization of the city and its conflicts with traditional pre-modern life. Galvão participated extensively in the artistic movements of the 1920s in São Paulo and was one of the most prominent female voices of her day. Galvão was also a controversial social activist, and she became the first female political prisoner in Brazilian history. Turning her back on her comfortable middle-class family, she joined the Communist Party and went to work in the textile factories. Her novel describes the difficult lives of factory workers, especially women, for whom there were scant workplace protections at the time. Whereas Machado's novel still describes the seigniorial city and the emerging bourgeois elite, Galvão's novel is anchored in the working class of the early twentieth century. It is important to note that *Parque industrial* does not yet enjoy an uncontested place in the Brazilian literary canon, consequently providing us with the opportunity to discuss canon formation in Brazil, the role of women writers in Brazil, and differences between American and Brazilian feminist criticism.

**Curitiba:** Dalton Trevisan, *O vampiro de Curitiba* (1965). Curitiba often bills itself, in addition to being the environmentally friendly "ecological capital" of Latin America, as the "Brazil that functions." The self-image of the city is as an ethnic and racial melting pot, where diverse societal elements blend together in creating an industrious, progressive, and sophisticated middle-class Garden City. This is, to be sure, the official image of Curitiba. Social reality is quite something else again, beginning with the fact that Curitiba's economic prosperity has provoked an intense in-migration of the impoverished and

marginal, hoping to make a go of it in ways perhaps no longer possible in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. Concomitantly, there has been a considerable amount of writing in Curitiba that analyzes the official version of the city and underscores ironically what that version elides from the "real" social history of Curitiba. Trevisan's nocturnal Vampire is a denizen of the unacknowledged underworld of the city, the brothels and other dens of iniquity that are as much a part of a bohemian life that contrasts with bourgeois values as they are unassimilated provincials and immigrants who belie the facade of genteel decorum.

**Porto Alegre:** Moacyr Scliar, *Centauro no jardim* (1980). Scliar is an excellent example of an "immigrant-conscious" writing in Brazil. Like Clarice Lispector (see below), Scliar comes out of a Jewish background. He was, however, born in Brazil, while Lispector was born in the Ukraine. Jewish ethnic and cultural issues are foregrounded in Scliar's writing, in opposition to Lispector's, where they can, perhaps, be seen as a deep substratum. His novel is a picaresque and yet also magical realist account of a Russian immigrant family that settles in Brazil. Moving between city and rural settings, the novel underscores how Porto Alegre's Jewish community is fundamentally metropolitan, and the novel's dimensions of existentialist allegory are part of the analysis of the nationalistic and macho Gaúcho society of Southern Brazil.

**Rio de Janeiro (reprise):** We will conclude the seminar by returning to Rio with an examination of the short stories of Clarice Lispector, *Laços de família* (*Family Ties*; 1960), one of the first internationally important works of Brazilian fiction after Machado's novels. Yet Lispector's Rio is very different from Machado's. Lispector remains Brazil's most prominent female writer, and one who is often cited in international feminist studies. She is, moreover, one of the Brazilian writers most translated into English and other languages, and the most translated Latin American woman writer (as already noted, the University of Texas Press has kept translations of her work in print for almost a half century). The work chosen showcases versions of the family from a woman's point of view and the attempts of women to survive in a primarily male-oriented society. The narrative

frame of the novel is biting irony in demonstrating women's attitudes toward male dominance and the strategies men use to marginalize and silence women. Lispector is placed strategically as, so to speak, the last act of the seminar because experience has shown that she is the one contemporary Brazilian writer who most excites foreign readers, and it is important to conclude the program with the most favorable reaction possible towards Brazilian literature and culture.

Since the seminar is designed for individuals who are already faculty members, it is important to contribute to their professional agenda. Wednesday (except for the first week) will be devoted to meeting with seminar participants and to the discussion of their professional projects, whether this involves revising already written material, undertaking a new research project, or developing curricular material. To supplement scholarly activities with cultural events, the formal part of the program will be complemented by organized cultural events on the weekends, in order to take advantage of the enormous wealth of cultural activities offered by a major metropolitan area such as São Paulo in terms of museums, libraries, theater, exhibits, film, and bookstores. We will have one formal excursion a week to some cultural venue. The seminar director has been conducting research on culture in São Paulo for the past ten years and has particular competence in genres such as film, theater, and photography. Part of the cultural activities will be to engage in various organized walks in the city: on-foot tours that will enable the participants to have an actual sense of the city and its physical layout.

Finally, the seminar will include a language component in the form of a Portuguese language center that will allow participants to develop their written and spoken Portuguese. This component will be optional, and will be available three afternoons a week. Participation in the center, which will be directed by an experienced advanced-level person who has worked with foreign learners of Portuguese, will involve preparing in advance short written essays in Portuguese on topics of discussion in the formal sessions, and the individuals who have recourse to the center will have the opportunity to review their essays with participating staff and to do rewrites toward improving their skills. An

arrangement will also be made for conversation groups in Portuguese: these groups will deal both with the readings of the seminar, including the films viewed, and informal topics concerning Brazilian society and culture. Evaluations of the 2006 seminar held at Arizona State University were enthusiastic about the opportunity to develop Portuguese language skills and 2010 participants were enthusiastic about having sustained contact in Brazil with the Portuguese language, which is not readily accessible in the United States (certainly not when compared to Spanish).

### **Project Faculty and Staff**

The seminar will be directed by David William Foster, former Chair of the Department of Languages and Literatures and Regents' Professor of Spanish and Gender and Women's Studies at Arizona State University. His research interests focus on urban culture in Latin America, and he has held Fulbright teaching appointments in Argentina on three occasions and also in Brazil and Uruguay. Foster has recently published a monograph (University Press of Florida) on culture and the city of São Paulo; he has recently completed a monograph on Latin American documentary filmmaking, which includes important Brazilian material. In addition to conducting NEH Summer Seminars in 1984 and 1986 for secondary-school teachers, Foster conducted a version of this program at Arizona State University in 2006, and in 2007 he conducted an NEH seminar on Jewish Buenos Aires in Buenos Aires. He has had extensive experience in leading cultural tours to Latin America for students and other academic groups.

A research assistant will accompany the program and will serve as on-site local coordinator, charged with organization of language workshop, excursions, and material distribution. This person will have a working knowledge of Portuguese and prior Latin American experience.

As stated above, a Brazilian specialist in the teaching of Portuguese to foreign students will be in charge of the Portuguese language writing center. The writing center

will provide those participants interested in improving their written skills with the opportunity for individualized instruction. The instructor will review manuscripts, offer grammatical corrections and suggestions for stylistic improvement, and review successive drafts. The center will also provide those interested with the opportunity to converse with a native speaker. Finally, for those who choose to read the texts in Portuguese, the instructor will be available as a resource in the event that they wish to discuss the subtleties of literary Brazilian Portuguese.

### **Participant Selection**

The sixteen participants will be selected by a committee of consisting of David William Foster; Isis Costa McElroy, Assistant Professor of Portuguese at Arizona State; and Melissa A. Fitch, Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese, University of Arizona.

The opportunity of the seminar will be announced through appropriate list servers and by a mailing to the Spanish American literature members of the Modern Language Association and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, as well as other appropriate venues.

The seminar will be open to sixteen participants who are college or university faculty members (and up to two advanced doctoral students) in the area of Latin American Studies, which includes, but is not limited exclusively to, fields such as Anthropology, Art History, History, Language, Literature, Musicology, Political Science, Religious Studies, and Sociology. Selection criteria will include applicant's commitment to an inclusive concept of Latin American studies, demonstrated interest in the area of cultural studies, previous study of the Portuguese language and Brazilian literature, or the intention to include such study in a program of professional growth. Although designed to appeal primarily to faculty in literary and cultural studies, outstanding participants from other appropriate academic disciplines will be given full consideration.

## **Institutional Context**

The seminar will be held in São Paulo, Brazil, the largest city on the Southern American continent. São Paulo is rapidly displacing Rio de Janeiro as the cultural center of Brazil, particularly in publishing, and São Paulo is the financial center of Latin America. While it is true that the city is, to put it bluntly, a metropolitan monster, it is nevertheless quite possible for individuals to find their own niche in the city, especially as regards the intense academic, intellectual, and artistic life of the city. There are many lovely residential areas in São Paulo, and a vibrant public life belies the oft-repeated clichés of big-city violence. The seminar will be held in a hotel in the Jardins area of central São Paulo, one of the most attractive areas of the city. Along with the Avenida Paulista strip, the Jardins area hosts some of the most significant cultural venues of the city, and participants will find that most of their personal and academic needs can be met within the confines of this area in which a high level of security is maintained. Just off the Avenida Paulista is the Museu da Língua Portuguesa (Portuguese Language Museum), the only museum in the world devoted to language and literature as its exhibit base. The Museu is located in a former central train station, and the facilities are phenomenal, with an array of permanent and changing exhibits. A recent exhibit was devoted to Clarice Lispector's contributions to the Portuguese language.

The actual sessions of the seminar will be held in the conference room of the hotel where the participants will be lodged. Such an arrangement is preferable to making use of space on the campus of the Universidade de São Paulo because of bureaucratic problems involved in securing access to intensely used classroom space, but principally because the campus is inconveniently located outside the central metropolitan area. Logistically speaking, it is simply a better utilization of participants' time to hold the seminar at the hotel, rather than to ask them to spend an hour travel time each way to the university by public transport. Nevertheless, arrangements will be made to conduct several meetings on the campus of the Universidade de São Paulo with representative academic specialists in Brazilian literature. Since most Brazilian academics have a

working knowledge of English, language will not be a problem. Thus, we will have the opportunity to visit one of the largest university campuses in Latin America, see the academic facilities, including the library, and have lunch at the faculty dining facility located in the forested heart of the campus. Sessions will be held during the late morning period. Participants in the 2010 program felt that meeting in the early evening prevented them from attending theater, musical, and other cultural events, and this change in schedule is an important accommodation of that fact. Concomitantly, group attendance at events will be scheduled, which will enhance intellectual exchange among the participants.

### **Dissemination and Evaluation**

The seminar director will meet weekly, on Wednesday, with each of the seminar participants to discuss individual research projects; this will also be an opportunity to discuss the participation of each individual in the three weekly group meetings. At the end of the seminar, the director, along with two members of the selection committee, will evaluate the final research projects of each participant and prepare a written evaluation. Participants will evaluate the seminar in writing after two weeks, and the NEH will conduct an online evaluation immediately upon completion of the seminar.

Submission will be encouraged of research work resulting from the seminar that meets the standards for research publication to *Chasqui; revista de literatura latinoamericana* or other similar publications. One of the mentoring goals of the seminar will be to work individually with participants on their professional research. This might involve revising already written work, such as a dissertation, seminar papers, or drafts of new work; for others it may mean assisting them in beginning to put together a research project. For those who already have a background in Brazilian studies and/or Latin American literature, this will mean working with them on their already established research interests. In the case of participants who come from other areas of Latin American studies

such as anthropology, history, sociology, art history, and the like, it will mean exploring a dimension of Brazilian culture that could be incorporated into their work. In every case, the urban emphasis of the seminar will predominate. Participants in the 2006 seminar have reported on on-going projects, such as the translation of the novels of Roberto Drummond; completion of an essay on Patrícia Galvão; revision of course syllabi to enhance the presence of Brazilian literature in a truly Latin American literature focus; institutional efforts toward making Portuguese a permanent part of a Latin American Studies program; and an essay on the São Paulo novelist, Marcelino Freire, recently published in a volume on Latin American urban cultural production. Participants in the 2010 program report research on so-called urban dirty realism, Afro-Brazilian writing, and immigrant history. As a courtesy to those participants who choose to submit completed research after the close of the seminar, a professional evaluation will be provided of their essays.

Finally, we will create an e-mail listserv and a web site to encourage subsequent communication among members of the seminar and to provide a forum for a wider-audience discussion of Brazilian pedagogical and research approaches to urban cultural issues (it may be possible to attach this function to the regular website of BRASA, the Brazilian American Studies Association). The listserv from the 2006, 2007, and 2010 seminars have proved to be valuable channels of communication between the Director and former participants, who are sent periodically information regarding their research interests, and for the communication between participants and their shared cultural and research interests. Participants will be provided information through these two forums toward participation in appropriate scholarly meetings such as BRASA, the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, the Modern Language Association, the Latin American Studies Association, and various regional affiliates (e.g., in the geographical region of Arizona, the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association). Moreover, a web site will be created prior to the seminar that will contain essential cultural information about Brazil. Prior to the inauguration of the seminar, participants will be sent

a packet of essential critical and theoretical readings regarding urban cultural production in Brazil. Although this material will not be extensive, it will provide the participants with some common ground as we begin the weekly discussions. As a result of supplemental funding, an extensive website for the 2010 seminar was developed, and it will now be systematically updated with new material for 2013.

Because participants will not have access to appropriate research collections in Brazil, an essential library of critical material on Brazilian literature, the authors to be examined, and urban cultural issues will be transported from the United States. This reference material will include books still available in print and photocopies of articles and out-of-print books. At least one of the 2010 participants felt that this library included too much material, but it should be emphasized that the goal was to provide resources for research beyond the specific time period of the seminar. However, a new addition to the 2013 program will be extensive study sheets that will highlight for participants the most important critical sources that can be profitably consulted for the time period we will be devoting to each text. Specific readings are also indicated for each text in the weekly schedule below. This information will be provided in the response to each inquiry so that applicants may know in advance what the reading load for the seminar will be.

## **APPENDIX: Weekly Schedule**

**(Note: Lest that it appear that the required reading is a bit daunting for four weeks, it is important to note that, in modern editions, none of the texts runs longer than 150 pages.)**

**Week I:** Tuesday/Wednesday: an introduction to the seminar. Wednesday/Thursday: Rio de Janeiro as the traditional capital of Brazil; Machado de Assis will be analyzed as witness to the development of a modern Brazilian society and modern Brazilian fiction.

Reading of selected material from Sidney Chalhoub, *Dependents Play Chess: Political Dialogues in Machado de Assis* (U of Texas P, 1999); João Adolfo Hansen, *Dom Casmurro: Simulacrum and Allegory* (U of Texas P, 1999); Roberto Schwarz, *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism: Machado de Assis* (Duke UP, 2001).

Visit to the Museu da Língua Portuguesa.

**Week II:** Monday: an introduction to São Paulo as the financial center of Brazil. On Monday/Tuesday: Patrícia Galvão's *Parque industrial* and the role of women as industrial workers. Thursday will be devoted to Dalton Trevisan as a voice raised against bourgeois decency. Wednesday will also inaugurate a discussion of Jewish culture in Brazil and the importance of immigrant communities and ruptures with the nationalistic theme of a "melting pot" Brazil and the hypotheses regarding a unified social identity.

Reading of David William Foster, "The Feminization of Social Space in Patrícia Galvão's *Parque industrial*" (*Brasil/Brazil* 19.33 [2005-06]: 23-46); Jayne H. Bloch, "Patrícia Galvão: The Struggle Against Conformity" (*Latin American Literary Review* 27 [1986]: 188-201); and Andrew Gordus, "The Vampiric and the Urban Space in Dalton Trevisan's *O vampiro de Curitiba*" (*Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 52.1 [1998]: 13-26); Linda Ledford Miller, "Shoes for Little Peter: Narrative Technique in Trevisan's *Not At All Exemplary Novella, Pedrinho*" (*Revista de literatura brasileira* 4 [1990]: 37-50). Also material selected from Lowe, Elizabeth. *The City in Brazilian Literature*. (Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1982), and Earl E. Fitz, *Brazilian Narrative Traditions in a Comparative Context* (Modern Language Association, 2004).

Visit to the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (São Paulo Museum of Modern Art) and FNAQ, Brazil's major cultural bookstore.

**Week III.** Monday: continue examination of the works of Trevisan. Tuesday/Thursday: Moacyr Scliar and postmodernist narrative strategies for marking difference in a Latin American sociopolitical context. The image of a modern, progressive Curitiba and the concept of countercultural writing will provide the principal focus.

Readings will include Laura Pirott Quintero, "Centaur in the Text: Negotiating Cultural Multiplicity in Moacyr Scliar's Novel" (*Hispania* 83.4 [2000]: 768-78) and selections from Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables; Brazil and the Jewish Question* (U of California P, 1995), and Randal Johnson, *Literature, Culture and Authoritarianism in Brazil, 1930-1945* (Latin American Program, The Wilson Center, 1989).

Visit to the Universidade de São Paulo.

**Week IV.** Monday/Tuesday: return to Rio de Janeiro to discuss the depiction of urban women in Clarice Lispector's *Laços de família*. Thursday: summary of the issues raised by the seminar, including a discussion of projects undertaken by the participants. Friday will include an assessment of the seminar, and there will be a concluding social banquet Friday evening.

Readings will include selected material from Earl E. Fitz, *Clarice Lispector* (Twayne Publishers, 1985); Earl E. Fitz, *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector: The Différance of Desire* (U of Texas P, 2001); and Diane E. Marting, *The Sexual Woman in Latin American Literature: Dangerous Desires* (UP of Florida, 2001).

Attendance at a performance at the Teatro Municipal (Municipal Theater), one of the cultural monuments of the city.

### **Brazilian Literature: Contemporary Urban Fiction (FS-50307-12)**

**David William Foster**

**Arizona State University**

## **FINAL REPORT**

Chosen from among 52 applicants (there were more than 80 inquiries), the 16 seminar designees met in São Paulo, Brazil for four weeks between June 17 and July 12, 2013. Sessions were held at a meeting room in the Massis Five Star Hotel in downtown São Paulo (one block from the main financial district), with meetings three times a week (MTTh) between 7-10 pm. Five major works of urban Brazilian fiction were discussed, from four different Brazilian cities (Rio de Janeiro [represented by two authors because of its historical importance], São Paulo, Curitiba, and Porto Alegre). Seminar discussions were lively and productive, and all of the participants took part in a sustained and intellectually enriching fashion. Of the six NEH seminars (for college and university teachers), this was perhaps the most diverse group; it certainly was the most intellectually committed one, which translated into absolutely first-rate intellectual conversations.

The principal goal of the seminar was to examine in depth five Brazilian works of narrative fiction dealing with urban life. In some cases, the material aspects of urban life are directly represented; in others it subtends ways of experiencing society and the psychological and discourse structures of those who live it. The purpose of holding the seminar in São Paulo, one of the great urban centers of Latin America, was for participants to develop, in a direct fashion, a sense of the city, its quotidian aspects, its customs, its institutions. Of special importance was to have contact with Brazilian Portuguese in its real-life setting. Most of the participants had had some contact with Spanish-speaking America and a few had had some measure of contact with Brazil. The exchange between them over their shared lived intervention in Brazilian urban life was meant to afford them greater understanding of the cultural texts the seminar set out to examine in detail.

Because São Paulo is now the cultural and intellectual capital of Brazil, several programs were planned that enabled participants to share together major museums and cultural venues. These included the Museu da Língua Portuguesa, the Museu de São

Paulo, the Museu da Repressão and the Museu Afro-Brasileiro, the Memorial da América Latina; participants on their own also visited other museums in São Paulo. We also did a walking tour through Liberdade, the major Japanese neighborhood of downtown São Paulo, led by a former ASU Fulbright instructor who grew up in the neighborhood. Several participants subsequently returned repeatedly on their own to examine in particular the Japanese and Korean immigrant presence in the neighborhood, as part of their understanding of the importance of São Paulo as an immigrant city (in turn, urban Jewish immigrants was the theme of one of the five texts studied). In order to take advantage of the stay in São Paulo to have contact with contemporary Brazilian authors, programs were organized at cultural institutions like Casa das Rosas, the Centro Cultural Itaú, and a private cultural center that included a presentation and discussion with the writers Ivana Arruda Leite, David Araújo, Cynthia Moscovich, Cuti, Milton Hatoun, and Marcelino Freire. The meeting with Cuti, a major spokesperson for contemporary Afro-Cuban writing, was organized by Isis Costa McElroy, a colleague of the seminar Director at Arizona State University. Participants expressed their delight in being able to meeting with these authors and to have open and energetic conversations with them, and the decision to add supplemental funds to the grant application to make this possible was a very productive one. Finally, Piers Armstrong, an adjunct faculty member of the University of Southern California, who had been chosen for the seminar but had to withdraw due to scheduling conflicts, offered to speak for free to the group on his research on emerging contemporary voices when he passed though São Paulo briefly on other business.

As a group, we attended a dramatic performance of a feminist play by a major Brazilian writer, Hilda Hilst, held at one of the major cultural centers in the city, and a small part of the group went to a concert at one of the major local musical venues.

It was not possible to meet with faculty from the Universidade de São Paulo because of a winter recess. Various participants, thanks to prior contacts they had made

or contacts they were able to develop during their stay in São Paulo, met individually with research scholars and writers in pursuit of their individual projects.

Since foreign scholars do not have library access rights to university collections, we provided participants with an electronic virtual library of important criticism related to the topics of the seminar in .pdf format. Study guides were also prepared for each one of the literary works discussed.

Several participants visited on their own Santos (the port city for São Paulo) and Rio de Janeiro, the nineteenth-century capital of the Brazilian empire and the capital, during the first half of the twentieth century, of the Brazilian republic.

In order to take advantage of a four-week stay in São Paulo and to address the way in which U.S. scholars may have some knowledge of Spanish, but virtually none of Portuguese, formal classes in Portuguese were organized. These classes were offered on three different levels (beginning intermediate conversation, and intermediate/advanced writing), and participants could move freely between the different groups; 12 of the 18 participants availed themselves of these classes. We were able to contract the services of the same instructor who worked with us in the 2010 seminar, and participations seemed in universal agreement that she was outstanding. The program assistant attended all of the language classes to facilitate technology and materials distribution and sat in on all seminar sessions, tracking major points of discussion for follow-up materials distribution. He also served to fact-check electronically on the spot historical, social, and literary history questions that arose during our discussion.

In general, the participants were quite comfortable in São Paulo, despite its size and the constant threat of security issues. Fortunately, no one had any security problems and most soon learned that they could move around the central area with considerable ease and tranquility. The decision to meet in the financial area was a deliberate choice: because so many foreign banks and enterprises have their offices here, police presence is prominent and effective. São Paulo is not a city of tourists;

foreigners in São Paulo are typically business people accustomed to comfort and security, and the municipal administration, anxious not to alienate this important group, ensures their safety. Thus, the financial district of São Paulo where we stayed is well-lit at night, vehicular traffic is closely monitored for pedestrian safety, the police presence to ensure protection from assault is intense in both street patrols and police stands every block, streets are kept free of unauthorized sales, the subways are clean and tightly monitored, and health standards vigorously enforced in eating establishments. By staying in the financial core, despite the somewhat pricier, we were able to offer participants a high level of comfort and security that would enhance their ability to devote themselves fully to their readings and research.

A collateral advantage of the hotel chosen as the basic site of the seminar was the presence, within easy walking distance, of two of the city's most important book stores. One of the side streets of the hotel, moreover, was a major site for the distribution of videos and CDs via street stands. Moreover, various video outlets and secondhand bookstores were within a few blocks radius, and four separate film multiplex installations were within a two-block radius of the hotel.

Violent street protests had begun right before our initial meetings of the seminar, and they did provide cause for some concern, especially when participants who were not staying in the hotel (the majority) had to maneuver the streets after the seminar was over at 10pm. Fortunately no one was harassed by with the police or protestors and by the middle of the second week, the protests were essentially over. The first night, two participants were delayed in reaching their hotels, which was a cause of concern at the moment, but involved no security threat, and it turned out to be an isolated inconvenience for the one night. No one reported any further inconvenience.

The new structure of the college and university seminars, such that two advanced doctoral students are included, turned out to be one of the most positive dimensions of the seminar. Both were very actively involved in gathering materials for their dissertation and were on top of many of the issues involved in the seminar. One of the doctoral

students was one of the most active participants in the seminar sessions, and she seemed to derive particular profit from the readings. Another seminar participant, one who was not a professional Latin Americanist, was also a top participant and brought much to bear to the conversation as a scholar in European modernism. Another non-Latin Americanist was an Afro-American scholar, who brought much to the discussion of race issues in the Americas. Several of the participants have already been in sustained contact as regards their research projects, and several are continuing the formal study of Portuguese at their home institutions.

All of the seminar sessions were conducted with eminent professional commitment by the participants. There were no interpersonal conflicts, and, with few exceptions, the vast majority engaged in spirited exchanges on each of the texts studied.

## **Problems**

By staying in the financial center, our hotel was a bit more expensive than smaller installations on the periphery. Some participants, more experienced with the city, opted for these installations. We did negotiate room rates with the Massis that were half the regular rate. This was not easily accomplished, as hotels in the central core cater to business people and are not concerned about long-stay guests. Most (but not all!) of the participants understood how difficult it had been to secure the Massis at the rate offered, which included two-room suites and a full buffet breakfast, free internet (the hotel usually charges for internet use), and other amenities. Meeting room rates at the downtown hotels run \$300-500 per day. By agreeing to meet after regular business hours—i.e., 7-10 pm—the hotel was willing to provide space in the configuration of our choice free of charge. Although some (myself included) wished we could have met during the mid-morning, we met in what is a traditional seminar time slot for both the US and Latin America. It was simply impossible to arrange for a local university to provide

us with a fully mediated facility, and much less during their semester break. Concomitantly, we used the program assistant's sitting room for the Portuguese language classes. Again, it would have been best for us to have access to a fully mediated classroom, something that could not be had near the hotel (we were offered one venue, an hour's two-bus rides each way from the hotel). I did approach the two major cultural institutions whose facilities we used for the meetings with Brazilian authors mentioned above, but they were not in a position (although I had, of course, offered to pay to use their facilities) to guarantee us nine hours of access for four weeks. Less than optimal facilities is the trade-off for holding the program in Latin America rather than stateside. Convenient classroom facilities might have been arranged had we gone to a smaller city. At one point, when I began to despair of finding a decent hotel with accessible rates, I contemplated moving the program to Curitiba, but the cultural access directly pertinent to the program available in São Paulo was simply too compelling, despite the inevitable trade-offs.

Another significant issue concerned research materials access. Because research libraries are not easily accessed by those outside an institution's community and because of the fact that we knew they would be closed during winter break (we did not know they would also be closed by the strike by university professionals), the decision was made to provide a virtual library to the participants. Approximately two thousand pages of critical material, covering general topics and each of the five authors studied, was scanned and provided to participants as a .pdf file for their consultation, in lieu of having to seek these materials in a university library. What we provided participants was all major printed critical material on all five of the authors. Participants seemed to be grateful for this easy-access resource, although a couple inevitably felt overwhelmed by what they felt was too material. This was not meant to be basic critical references, but rather a virtual library. Strategic reference was made in the seminar to major critical issues and research opinion, but the intent was never to include in the discussions of the seminar all of the material provided. Participants, to be sure, were

free to seek out local libraries on their own. Needless to say, our virtual library was far better than anything any of these libraries would have to offer, as far as secondary material was concerned.

Finally, some participants felt they didn't always understanding the tie to urban issues. We framed the discussions in such a way, however, to exclude urban studies as defined by social science protocols. While the urban parameters are defined for each text in the Project Narrative, any future version will include providing participants, at the time each novel is studied, a series of talking points to insure that the urban dimension of each text is more clearly highlighted. The fact that the hotel provided free internet access to the participants will make the distribution of such study material in advance particularly easy to effect. I felt that two of the participants wanted the program to be conducted as a conventional graduate seminar, with certain formal assignments and activities. Although I stressed that we were not assembled to do a graduate course, but rather to have an informed, highly motivated intellectual conversation, I am now convinced that the Dear Colleagues letter, in any subsequent versions of the seminar, needs to include as pointed a statement as possible that participants should not apply if they are seeking a conventional graduate seminar experience. This was not a major issue, but the fact that it was raised means it needs to be addressed in a more emphatic, up-front fashion in order to avoid "structure frustrations."

## **Web Site**

An extensive array of material for the seminar (but not the critical readings, because of copyright restrictions) on a website:

[http://www.public.asu.edu/~atdwf/neh\\_summer/](http://www.public.asu.edu/~atdwf/neh_summer/)

Thanks to additional funding from the NEH, the period from the end of the seminar to the end of the grant period has been used to enhance that site. Participants were asked to provide input, and their suggestions have been taken into account. The enhanced website includes relevant material generated by the seminar, in addition to collateral material that has been subsequently identified. It also includes a couple of Work in Progress sites that will have material posted to them as it is assembled. For example, we are in the process of preparing a registry of contemporary Brazilian filmmaking, something too vast to complete before the end of the grant period. Additionally, we have opened two categories to which material will be added as we receive it. One is devoted to course syllabi and the other to work in progress. In the latter category, seminar participants, as well as members of the Brazilian studies community at large, will be able to post preliminary versions, abstracts, grant applications of work in progress. This will not be a totally unrestricted site, as all potential submission will be vetted by the Director and, when necessary, by members of the Brazilian studies community. The intent is not to impose the sort of academic rigor of a scholarly journal. Rather, it is to ensure some level of academic relevance and professional format. An announcement of these two categories will be posted to the listserv of the Brazilian American Studies Association. The goal is to keep this website open indefinitely and to add material as it becomes available, toward providing an important site for information regarding Brazilian cultural studies.

Texto Acadêmico recebido em: 11/09/2013

Processo de Avaliação por Pares: (Blind Review – Análise do Texto Anônimo)

Publicado na Revista Vozes dos Vales - [www.ufvjm.edu.br/vozes](http://www.ufvjm.edu.br/vozes) em: 01/10/2013

Revista Multidisciplinar Vozes dos Vales - UFVJM - Brasil

[www.ufvjm.edu.br/vozes](http://www.ufvjm.edu.br/vozes)

UFVJM: 120.2.095-2011 - QUALIS/CAPES - LATINDEX: 22524 - ISSN: 2238-6424