

# Senior High School

SALEM, OREGON

J. C. NELSON, PRINCIPAL EMERITUS  
AND HEAD OF HISTORY DEPT.

104 East Wilson St.  
July 2, 1935

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Dear Mr. Salles:

I cannot tell you with what delight I have read your courteous and charming letter of June 6. No greater honor has ever been conferred upon me. I had hoped against hope that I would some day hear from you: Father Rosa kept assuring me that you would some day write to me; but I hardly dared to believe it possible. But I regret deeply to hear of Father Rosa's illness; please convey to him my sincere hopes for a speedy recovery, and tell him that I am always happy to hear from him; he is a man of real culture and fine artistic sensibilities, whom I am proud to claim as a friend.

Your judgment on "Aves de Arribação" is of course far too modest. I want to repeat what I say to all my Brazilian correspondents, that it is undoubtedly the finest novel that has yet been produced in Brazil, and has earned you a place at the very summit of the national Pantheon. Perhaps you will not understand me when I say that it has a maturity that is rarely present in Brazilian literature. So many of your writers, though with undoubted talent and wide culture, still seem amateurish when they come to write; in their anxiety to be cosmopolitan they overshoot the mark and lose sight of the canons of good taste. There is too much striving after effect in the modern literature; the Greek motto "Nothing in excess" is sadly neglected. They do not seem willing to expend the effort necessary to produce an enduring work of art; they forget that "Rome was not built in a day". Your book towers above the mass of Brazilian literature with a majestic serenity that suggests the Great Pyramid in contrast with the native huts at its base. No one has known better than you how to make the most of the magnificent literary instrument which the Portuguese language may become in the hands of a master. I agree that there is much of the poet in you; those concluding pages of "Aves de Arribação" are a tone-poem such as no Brazilian has ever written. Your closest rival is perhaps Alberto Rangel; his "Inferno Verde" shows the same amazing skill in producing the maximum effect; but unfortunately he has not applied it to a novel, where psychological insight has to be added to skillful manipulation of language.

Perhaps the best way to appreciate your book is to compare it with that other masterpiece of the literature of Ceará, Dr. Rodolpho Theophilo's "A Fome". No one can deny to Dr. Theophilo an importunate literary conscience, or keen powers of observation; but he has been unable to build his materials into a serene and balanced work of art. In his anxiety to have his readers share his moral indignation, he has piled horror upon horror until all sense of proportion is lost, and the book becomes merely a polemic against slavery—very much like our own "Uncle Tom's Cabin".

In fact, the writer who seems to have most nearly caught your spirit and imitated your manner is our mutual friend Rachel de Queiroz. She has produced a couple of masterpieces that will live forever, in despite of all that the critics may bring against them; and when the history of Brazilian letters comes to be definitely and finally written, she will take rank next to you.

Will you give her my sincere regards, and assure her that it would be a



real delight to me to be honored with another of her charming letters? I am pleased to know that she is continuing to write; I had feared that in marriage and motherhood she had perhaps found another outlet for her "joie de vivre".

Just at present I am occupied with the books of Mr. Gastão Cruls, who had been kind enough to send me six of his productions. His last book, "Vertigem", shows a decided advance over his earlier work; he gives promise of becoming a writer of real eminence, though much of his earlier work is little more than a literary tour de force.

May I take the liberty of asking about an idiom in the "Aves" which no one has been able to explain to me? I do not have the book at hand, so I cannot cite the page; but the words are "dar ás dedicas". Just what does this mean?

For a time I had a good deal of trouble with the word "bandeiriola", as part of a door; but I have at last discovered that it means the upper part of a door where the wood is replaced by glass. We call this a "transom", but with this difference, that the transom is separated from the lower part of the door and turns on an axis operated by a lever, so it can be opened for purposes of ventilation. I am indebted for a pen-drawing of the "bandeiriola" to Mr. Monteiro Lobato.

I am glad to know that you are so familiar with our literature. May I ask if you have read Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter"? This remains our greatest work of fiction. If you know Mark Twain, I hope you have read "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"; as a faithful portrayal of the life in our "sertão" it is unexcelled--though the dialect would make it very difficult for a foreigner. Not many of the "moderns" are worth reading. I wish you might know Edith Wharton, whose work in many ways approaches yours; and perhaps it would be worth your while to read some of Sinclair Lewis--preferably "Main Street" and "Babbitt". Have you read both the books of Willa Cather that I sent to Pe. Rosa? And if you have not already done so, will you ask him to let you read Booth Tarkington's "Gentleman from Indiana" which I sent him some time ago? If there is anything that I could send you, it would be a great pleasure to me to do so.

But I must not afflict you further. Let me say again how deeply I appreciate your kind letter. I should be most happy to hear from you again. In the meantime I have the honor to be, with deep respect,

Yours very sincerely,

*J. C. Nelson*