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Senior High School

SALEM, OREGON

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104 E. Wilson St.
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Dear Mr. Salles:

I have received and read with great delight your charming letter of May 22--it is most regrettable that the mails are so slow--and I am deeply grateful for your kindness in giving me the very valuable sketch of Brazilian literature, in which the hand of the master is clearly evident. So in order to get myself oriented, I think I will devote the major part of this letter to a list of what I have read in your literature; you will then be better able to decide what I should read in order to arrive at an adequate judgment.

And first the authors whom you mention; here is the list of what I have read of each one:

Alencar: O Guarany, Iracema, O Gaucho, Luciola, and the two plays O Jesuita and As Azas de um Anjo.

Machado de Assis: Memorias de Braz Cubas, Esau e Jacob

Aluizio Azevedo: O Mulato

Coelho Netto: O Sertão (contos), Rei Negro

Afranio Peixoto: A Esfinge

Then I have read the following, all of which I venture to hope have some significance:

Visconde de Taunay: Innocencia, No Declínio, A Retirada da Laguna

J. M. de Macedo: A Moreninha

M. A. de Almeida: As Memorias de um Sargento de Milicias. (It is my opinion that if this young man had lived, he would have been the greatest name in Brazilian literature. The book is full of faults; but to have produced such a piece of realism in the full tide of the Romantic movement shows a very marked originality and power)

B. J. de Silva Guimarães: A Escrava Isaura

Franklin Tavora: O Cabelleira

Graça Aranha: Chanaan

Euclides da Cunha: Os Sertões (This book is in the field of history what your Aves is in fiction--an undoubted masterpiece)

Raul Pompeia: O Atheneu

João do Rio: Dentro da Noite (contos)

Julio Ribeiro: A Carne ("livro defeituoso", but the best attempt I have seen to follow in the footsteps of Zola)

Rudolpho Theophilo: A Fome

Alberto Rangel: Inferno Verde (next to yourself the greatest stylist in Brazil)

Arthur Azevedo: Contos Ephemeros (your greatest humorist)

And then of the "moderns", without specifying titles, I have read something of each of the following:

José Lins do Rego, Monteiro Lobato, Gustavo Barroso, Menotti del Picchia, Gastão Cruls, Gilberto Freyre, Agrippino Grieco, Mario Guedes, Origines Lessa, Alcides Maya, Lauro Palhano, Jorge Amado, Marques Rebello,

AS-CP-174

-5-

Mario Mello, Cornelio Penna, Tasso Fragoso, Ruy Barbosa, João Adolpho dos Santos, Viriato Correa, Mario Marroquin, Jayme de Altavilla, Olympio Guilherme, Paulo Setubal, M. Bomfim, Maria Sabina, and last but not least Rachel de Queiroz, whose "José Miguel" I have read as well as "O Quinze".

Then in the literature of Portugal I have read Os Lusíadas, nearly all of Eça de Queiroz, and something of each of the following: Camillo Castello Branco, Almeida Garrett, Abel Botelho, Guerra Junqueiro, Julio Diniz, Herculano, João Grave, Ferreira de Castro, and Theophilo Braga.

In the matter of poetry you will note I have read almost nothing. Only the very highest type of poetry appeals to me; prose rhythm affects me much more powerfully than verse.

In the way of histories of literature, I have read Isaac Goldberg's "Brazilian Literature" in English, and Agrippino Grieco's "Evolução da Prosa Brasileira". I try to keep up with current literature by reading the "Boletim de Ariel"; and my friend Mr. Arthur Coelho is indefatigable in trying to keep me en rapport with the new books.

For a dictionary I am forced to depend on Michaelis, which is all right for Portugal, but very unsatisfactory for the language of Brazil. I should like to have your advice on this matter of a dictionary. Last summer, when I visited the Brazilian Consul in San Francisco (Mr. Mario Santos) I noticed that he used the dictionary of Seguíer; would this be better for me than a Portuguese-English dictionary?

Now I suspect you will smile at my very desultory reading. You must remember that Taunay's "Innocencia" is the only Portuguese ^{book} that is used in our schools, and so I have had no guide in the matter of constructing a course of reading. But I hope you will conclude that I have read enough of Brazilian literature to justify me in the judgment I have formed of your own work--a judgment that remains unshaken, to-wit: that in the "Aves de Arribação" you have produced the greatest masterpiece of the native literature--a book that will bear comparison with the very best work of France and Portugal, and that will come to be regarded as time goes on as entitling you to a secure place at the summit of the Brazilian Parnassus.

Your expression "gyneco-psychologista" as you apply it to Peixoto could with equal propriety be applied to yourself; no one has ever penetrated ^{the} more profoundly ^{the} intricacies of the feminine psyché. Most of the "regionalists" have contented themselves with building an external picture of their "milieu"--where ^{the} psychological analysis has been subordinated to their study of local conditions; they have not realized that the human soul can rise above its environment. The Tragedy of Florzinha is ^{not} made a tragedy because of her environment; it descends to the very roots of being, and makes of her a "universal" who deserves to take place alongside of Ophelia and Cordelia.

And in the matter of style, it is simply impossible for me to adequately express my profound admiration. Those six concluding pages remain for me the finest piece of Portuguese prose in existence--and in poetry they are only surpassed by the roar and thunder of those sublime strophes of "Os Lusíadas". It is only once in a great while and for single instants that any Brazilian prose-writer has attained this style--Taunay has it for one single sentence--the one beginning "Riscava-se o oriente de dubias linhas vermelhas"; but that is landscape, not the human soul; Rachel de Queiroz reaches it in the sentence "seria um elo partido na imensa cadeia da humanidade"; and Alberto Rangel approaches it in several passages of the "Inferno Verde"; but these are only fleeting glimpses of what you have made habitual. The language in your hands is made to produce music like that of a great organ, while your contemporaries have to content themselves with ren-

dering the same air on the flute or the violin. Are you familiar with Zola's "La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret"? With a language of much less sonority and solemnity than the Portuguese, he has produced effects in his pictures of the enchanted garden that are not unlike yours. The profound melancholy and dignified stateliness—to which Portuguese is better suited than any other foreign language—are conveyed in those closing pages such as no Brazilian can ever hope to surpass. Tell me now, from your own knowledge of the literature of Brazil, who has ever written such prose as this? Perhaps you will say Alencar, in Iracema; but that is pure imagination—a prose poem, not a study of real human beings; he has sprouted wings and soared into the empyrean, but he has not interpreted human life.

So I hope you will forgive me if I persist in hailing you as the most significant figure in your literature; and I have no fear that in what I have not read I shall find anything that will compel me to modify this judgment. The miracle of creative genius has been performed before our eyes—so simply, so ^{ostentatiously}, that we have not realized what has happened; and no doubt you yourself least of all can explain how you did it. But if ^{you} can throw any light on the genesis of the novel, or what literary influences affected you, I should be deeply interested to have you tell me. I suspect you are familiar with the work of Paul Bourget and Marcel Prévost, both of whom have some of your insight into the feminine soul, though in style they fall far below you. And where did you make your studies of the small town of the sertão? Are you, like Father Rosa, a son of the interior? There is one other picture of the small town to which I would like to call your attention—Odilon Azevedo's "A Mulher do Promotor"—have you ever read it? His small town is made very life-like—of course in other respects the book will not bear comparison with yours.

Now I wonder if I can persuade ^{you} to indulge in a little autobiography?—some slight picture of your earlier life and a list of your other writings would be of deep interest to me, if the request is not impertinent. I shall never be sufficiently grateful to Destiny for bringing us together; and to use the homely American phrase, "I must make hay while the sun shines".

And I hope you will also tell me something of your reading in English—with which you seem to be perfectly familiar. If there is anything you have not read that I could send you, it will be a great pleasure and honor if I may do so. .. Now I think I have sufficiently exhausted your patience for this time; but let me hope I may soon again have the honor of hearing from you. I have the honor to be, with deep respect,

Affectionately yours,

J. C. Nelson