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Literary translation in Canada is largely restricted to works in the two official languages. Despite the fact the country has become increasingly multicultural and multilingual, there is remarkably little cultural engagement with the world in languages other than French and English. Thus it comes as a most pleasant surprise that *ellipse* has decided to devote a double issue to contemporary Brazilian writing. No less significant, as befits a bilingual journal committed to promoting translation and cultural awareness, *ellipse* presents the Brazilian texts

not only in the original Portuguese but also in either French or English translation, and sometimes in both.

Guest edited by two prominent Brazilian scholars, Sonia Torres and Eloína Prati dos Santos, and coordinated by an equally accomplished Canadian one, Hugh Hazelton, *ellipse's* Brazilian issue is divided into three parts. The first section consists of a foreword by the late (and great) Moacyr Scliar and an introduction by Torres; both texts appear in all three languages. The second section is devoted to poetry, and includes seven poems by four poets—Reynaldo Valinho Álvarez, Paulo Henriques Britto, Ivan Junqueira, and Zulmira Ribeiro Tavares—with translations in either French or English. The third section, in turn, focuses on fiction, and comprises seven short stories, by seven writers—Charles Kiefer, Carlos Herculano Lopes, Cíntia Moscovich, Adélice Souza, Márcio Souza, Antônio Torres, and Jane Tutikian—again with translations in either French or English. Last but not least, the journal's cover is illustrated with a colourful detail from Gilce Velasco's painting *Pássaro tropical (Tropical Bird)*, a most suitable introduction to contemporary Brazilian cultural life.

Considering that the organizers of the issue were limited to about 150

pages, it is not surprising that most contributions are short. However, brevity is not always a limitation, as Scliar illustrates. In under two pages, he manages to provide an excellent framework for situating the texts included in the volume. Scliar, who died earlier this year, states that since the 1950s, it has become extremely difficult to speak of literary generations. Yet he maintains that there is a new generation of Brazilian writers. This group differentiates itself from previous ones by being more diverse demographically and by disseminating its work, not only through books, magazines, and newspapers, but also through the Internet, especially the blog, a form that he considers most promising. Interestingly, Scliar contends that, despite their embrace of technology, the new writers “continuum fiéis aos gêneros clássicos, o conto, o romance, a novella, a poesia” (6). That is, while the media through which writers circulate their work may have changed substantially, the form has not.

Actually, another point that Scliar makes is that the new Brazilian writers are not particularly interested in formal experimentation—something that incidentally has also been said about contemporary Canadian writers. His thesis is supported by the texts in *Brasil-Canada*, which formally tend to be relatively conservative. If anything unifies them, it would

seem to be a concern with the power of literature in general and narrative in particular. Admittedly, in a poem like “Ontologia sumariíssima,” Paulo Henriques Britto writes that there are at most “quatro ou cinco coisas” in the world that are real: “Fora essas quatro ou cinco/ não há nada,/ nem tu, leitor,/ nem eu” (36), which Álvaro Faleiros, in “Ontologie brèveissime,” translates as: “Et à part ces quatre ou cinq/ il n’y a rien,/ ni toi, lecteur,/ ni moi” (37). Since Britto lists neither literature nor narrative among his few “real” things, perhaps one should question their centrality. Yet the fact that the most pessimistic of authors continue to write suggests that they must believe in the ability of literature to somehow reach the other. Indeed, even in the poetry, we can discern an engagement with the world, as we can see in the opening stanza of Zulmira Ribeiro Tavares’s “Abaixo da linha de pobreza”: “ora vejo a linha de pobreza no contorno irregular/ dos prédios, altos, baixos, ou das pequenas casas de/ auto- construção na encosta dos morros” (46), which Darcy Dunton, in “Below the Poverty Line,” renders as: “I see the poverty line in the irregular contour/ of the buildings, high, low, or of the self-built houses/ on the sides of the city’s hills” (47).

Of course the centrality

of narrative is especially evident in the short stories, even if at times they seem to be laments for the end of art as a living force. For example, in “A atriz que não sabia morrer,” translated by Alice Tavares Mascarenhas as “L’actrice qui ne savait pas mourir,” Adeline Souza writes that people no longer believe in the theatre and the only reason they still attend plays is that, in the interior of the country, “il n’y avait rien de plus intéressant à faire pour passer le temps” (71). Thus, when one of the two actors in the story at last sheds “des larmes véritables” on stage (79), the spectators feel that they are not being entertained and become so disappointed that they wish they could die. In contrast, in “Maria Rita,” translated by Neil Besner under the same title, Charles Kiefer has his narrator question whether he is able to capture the eponymous protagonist’s reality in jail, despite his “transcribing everything, even the gutter talk the defendant uses” (57). Yet Kiefer closes his story with the prisoner justifying her “am[o]r de morte” for her husband who, despite being a pimp, has adopted her young daughter by one of her clients as his own and is now raising the girl while Maria Rita is in jail. In short, even in such a precarious universe, connection is possible.

Several of the stories draw attention to their own unreliability, creating the impression that they bear little relation to the world they describe; indeed, that there may not be much outside the narratives themselves. At the same time, they intimate that the power of narrative is precisely that it can give some cohesiveness to people’s lives. This is most discernible in the longest text in the volume, Márcio Souza’s “Aquele pobre diabo,” translated by Hugh Hazelton as “That Poor Devil.” Set in the Amazon, like much of the author’s work, the story centres on one Jean Pierre Pagnol. A native of Paris who has had a professionally successful career first in the French foreign service and then working for multinationals, Pagnol experiences an intellectual and spiritual crisis when he is sent to the Amazon to do “public relations while a group of geologists was prospecting in a region populated by indigenous people” (111). Since Pagnol has never felt at home in French society and is tremendously attracted to the slower-paced life he encounters in the Amazon, he decides to stay. However, the local people who cannot fathom why anyone would abandon his life abroad, “where everything [is] better” than in Brazil, think he must be insane and transform him into “a crazy

Englishman. An American looking for ore. A demented German” (83). Ironically, these fictions about the displaced Frenchman appear to become real even for Pagnol who, by the end of the narrative, has become “a legend” (117).

Needless to say, it is difficult, and possibly dangerous, to speak of a national literature in a continent-sized country like Brazil—or Canada. As Torres cites the short story writer Nelson de Oliveira in her introduction, today people talk less of a “literatura brasileira” than of a “literatura do sul, do sudeste, do centro-oeste, do norte e do nordeste, cada qual com suas próprias características e seus autores canonizados” (12). To these geographical divisions, one could further add social-group affiliations, such as feminist, gay, black, or Indigenous literature. Still, whether the works included in *Brasil-Canada* represent one literature or a series of them, there is no question that they enable Canadians (and others) to get a better idea of how contemporary Brazilian writers see themselves and the world, and for that we owe a great debt of gratitude to Sonia Torres, Eloína Prati dos Santos, Hugh Hazelton, *ellipse*, and their team of translators.