

REVIEW ESSAYS

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Exile Island and Global Conversation: *Ilha do Desterro* Bridges Languages and Cultures

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Abstract

This is a concise overview of the publication history of *Ilha do Desterro*, which shows some changes in format, but a consistent and ever-widening interest in language broadly defined, from linguistics to literature to film, as it manifests itself in different languages, places, and times. The journal publishes in English and Portuguese, but this overview, aware of the impossibility of covering the entire array of essays that appeared in its extended history, limits itself to notes on articles dealing with Anglophone expression by itself and in comparison to its counterparts in the Lusophone world.

Keywords: *Ilha do Desterro*; Anglophone Literature

Along its now fairly extended history, *Ilha do Desterro*, edited since the 1990s by Anelise Corseuil and published at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, has covered a wide array of topics in literature, language, film, linguistics, and literary theory; a long stretch of time, from the Renaissance to the present, and works from all continents. It publishes in English and Portuguese. The present survey, aware of the enormity of the task of covering the entire array of works that have appeared in the journal, limits itself to articles—rather than surveys or book reviews—dealing with more recent Anglophone literature and concentrates on the last ten years. Such a

survey will also, willy-, as well as -nilly, trace the emergence and development of trends in creation and analysis, that, whether noted or not, are the foundation of a history of literature that this publication catches in the making.

Yet, I will start by stepping outside the boundaries established in the preceding paragraph, with an early (1979), short, review by Michael Hoffman Franz, of John Bennett's *Vagabond Anthology* (1978), a gathering of poems and photos from the legendary *Vagabond* magazine. It brings news and samples to readers of American poetry from the rebellious and innovative 1960s and 1970s, and identifies trends that continue to mark the genre: populism, everyday diction, and a bent toward existentialism, pointing to Charles Bukowski as a strong influence on poets whose names one now remembers more readily than his: Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

In 1981, *Ilha do Desterro* publishes a series of short reviews of American experimental work, including a report by Maria do Socorro Reis Amorin, on *The Blue Hangar, A Space Novel* by [Sheila] Ascher/[Dennis] Straus (who wrote and edited as a team, refusing to indicate which portion of any of their works was created by either), a kind of poem-novel-installation constructed around two women friends and a hangar, the space of which is part of the plot. And in the same volume (1981), in "Kant, Ascher/Straus and a Step further in the Search for Artistic Creation," Sandra Sirangelo Maggio examines, by the same geminated authors, Ascher/Straus's *Between Two Walls*, another of their attempts to break down any construct that might want to distinguish artistic creation from what is carelessly referred to as "reality." The entire volume provides an entry, for a Brazilian readership, to developments in other literatures parallel to, if different from, those taking place in those readers' own, local, environment.

As one might expect, *Ilha* changed both format and organization along the years, adopting the norms governing international professional publications while preserving its focus on the literary and other relations between Anglophone literatures, then adding film, and Brazilian culture.

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In 1991, exemplifying the focus on cultural relations, *Ilha* publishes Sérgio Bellei's "American Culture in Brazil: The Search for Strategies of Reading". Bellei examines two diametrically opposed approaches to the subject: one, by a conservative, Catholic, critic on one hand, addressing, as the author argues, the "elite and ruling classes," who, after two years in the US as Director of the Cultural Department of the Pan-American Association, and later as a professor of Brazilian Studies at NYU, writes *The American Reality*. The other term of the comparison is Henfil, a young firebrand contributor to the satirical magazine *Pasquim* (something like a tropical cousin to "Mad Magazine") who, after his own two-year sojourn in the US, publishes his impressions in "*The Diary of a Cockroach*." The article argues that the two approaches: Lima's view of the two cultures as complementary—Brazil poetic, theoretic, close to European culture; the US pragmatic, an alternative to its European origins, and Henfil's—the US devouring and powerful against the powerless but beloved Brazil to which he returns after trying to live American, are paradigmatic ways to frame the relation between the two, which is so much more important to the one (Brazil) than to the other (the US).

With full focus on an important and, as the essay argues, often neglected chapter in the history of American literary criticism—and incidentally, a corrective to the view of the US as unvaryingly right-leaning, politically—Joseph Raab's "Leftist Liberators: American Literary Criticism in the Thirties" (1990) offers a counterargument to Russell Reising's *The Unusable Past* (1986), which states that American Marxist criticism is a product of the 1980s; Raab points to the roots of this approach to literature and culture in the vigorous growth of social-centered literary analysis of the 1930s: Robert Kazin, Granville Hicks, Michael Gold, and especially V. F. Calverton. Thus, in Raab's account, the 1980s are part of a tradition, and the dismissal of its earlier manifestations can only weaken that branch of literary analysis. The essay is completed, in a way, by Laura Skandera's 1990 review of *The Thirties: A Reconsideration in the Light of the American Political Tradition* (1968), which gathers eight lectures delivered at a seminar on "The American Political Tradition," held at Claremont College in 1966,

by Irving Kristol, Howard Zinn, Leslie A. Fiedler, Upton Sinclair, and other luminaries.

Thus the earlier issues break a trail for the later ones by addressing, analyzing, and publicizing new movements and approaches, by broaching different fields of endeavor, and by showing ways in which the Anglophone cultural field intersects with that of the place from where it sees and speaks.

One good example of the attention to this intersection is Gisele Manganelli Fernandes's "Don DeLillo's Novels and a 'McDonaldized' Society" (2000), which focuses on cultural relations between the US and Brazil. In this instance, however, the former is seen as not just presenting a model against which the latter reacts, but as a force helping to shape it. The consumerist, post-capitalist, TV-and-advertisement-driven US, the best emblem of which is the MacDonald fast food chain, analyzed and criticized in Don DeLillo's work, imposes itself on all levels of US culture, from language to government, and from there, on Brazilian culture, which depends on it economically and in many other ways (just think of how Brazilians are adopting the 24/7 opening hours of supermarkets). And this is the argument for why and how his work matters to Brazilians.

One of the 2002 issues is dedicated to women's writing; it continues on the journal's path to examine Anglophone literature from and for an outsider's perspective. In that spirit, one finds in it Peonia Viana Guedes's "Rewriting Paradigms of Social and Cultural Identity: the New Indian Immigrant in Bharati Mukerjee's Fiction," which focuses on immigrants from India to the United States, questioning and examining the meaning of immigration and of a clash of cultures in a globalized world: what are the bounds of identity in such a world? Where can the boundaries of "multiculturalism" be drawn then?

Sandra Regina Goulart de Almeida (2002) examines the work of another Indian writer, Arundhati Roy, in *The God of Small Things* (1997), which was on the one hand awarded the Booker prize and on the other condemned by both conservative and Marxist critics. As she invokes Roy's contribution to a literature that questions age-old

(and, she implies, cross-cultural) attitudes toward women's bodies and what is permissible to those who inhabit them, Almeida also connects the Indian novel, so firmly rooted in the context and history where it arises, with the conditions and context within which it and its analysis will be read, even if, or especially as, Roy's "narrative [...] moves beyond the visible politics of exclusion in a postcolonial context and open [*sic*] venues to possible destabilizing readings of gender and race."

We notice, further on, that this exploration of the close contact between cultures continues, as it is characteristic of nations whose population includes a significant number of immigrants and their descendants—the case in both the US and Brazil, when in "A Thousand and One Voices: Re-reading Scheherazade in Contemporary Arab-American Fiction" (2014), Gláucia Renate Gonçalves and Cláudio Braga examine Arab-American writing in the United States (with a note to the effect that Arab immigration spreads all along the Americas). The turn toward multiculturalism provides the impulse to write, read, and study these works, and the essay uses as examples mostly works by women featuring women, but the main point is how this population redefines itself and its relation to the home culture when "home" is relocated to a very different landscape, doubling the word's referent.

Still in the volume dedicated to women's writing, Renata Wasserman shows how Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, generally read as dealing mostly with the condition of women, builds its critique of commonly accepted views of that condition by means of a language of business and commerce, a mirror of views current in the social class and time where the novel is set. The connection becomes apparent, once underscored, in the commerce-and-finance inflected language in which the novel is written.

José Roberto O'Shea's "Brooks/Jackson's Level Cleopatra" (2000) however steps aside from the dual focus on US and Brazilian culture, and from the novel genre, to present an analysis of the work of a British film-maker without explicit comparative cross-cultural reference, concentrating instead on differences across time of one theatre director's representation of a central female character.

On the other hand, in the 2005 introduction to the issue of *Ilha* dedicated to Shakespeare and performances and adaptations of his plays José Roberto O'Shea, with Daniela Lapoli Guimarães, and Stephan Baumgärtel point out that the articles they chose to include, taken as a group, trace the ways in which cultural production, translated (in its broadest sense) from one language, one culture, one medium to another in a process they call appropriation (also in its broadest sense) at the same time change and preserve meaning and impact. Shakespeare speaks of the shackles of tradition, but also of freedom during or after dictatorships; translations are exercises in disciplined closeness to the original or daringly free commentaries on the contemporary situation of readers or theater audiences. And that does not even take into account appropriations into film or dance or TV. In effect, however, some approaches do take into account ways in which works resonate in conditions, cultural and historical or even linguistic, that are very different from those in which they were produced; others, however, focus on the work. In juxtaposing them, O'Shea and his co-authors acknowledge not only the importance of the approaches, but also that of the works that support them all, even if the conclusion of the article argues against the less expansive view.

The 2012 volume considering the Gothic is another instance of *Ilha* bringing together scholars, literary works, and concepts from the most varied origins and showing their kinship through rigorous analysis. For instance, in "The Monk (1796): A Hispanist's Reading" Abigail Lee Six traces the paternity of Matthew Lewis's novel to the Spanish honor plays of Calderón and Lope de Vega, theme by theme and plot device by plot device: secrecy, supernatural intervention, and an implied concept of honor not in the British definition of personal integrity, but in the Spanish one of reputation. The import (and importance) of the article lies, of course, in the research that shows, for instance, how Lewis would have become familiar with the Spanish works, but also, and signally, in the demonstration of an interconnection between English and Spanish cultures that shows how barriers of language, history, even prejudice, are much more permeable than commonly imagined.

By the end of the eighteenth century, as Genilda Azeredo (2012) argues in the same volume, with “Jane Austen e a recodificação paródica do gótico em *Northanger Abbey*” the gothic had become sufficiently acclimated in England that Austen could write a parody and be sure that the references would be picked up by the general public. And in “Gothic Roots: Brockden Brown’s *Wieland*, American Identity, and American Literature” Renata Wasserman (2012) follows the genre to the New World where the genre, whether or not it is a by then perfectly naturalized Spanish import to England, is put to an entirely new use: that of examining the new nation’s relation with—and separation from—the English colonial power, or, more precisely, the cultural power of Europe in general.

Coming at the problem of the relation between what is deemed the European “civilized” and the non-European “savage,” Anna Reid (2012) reads Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as expressing a European fear of finding that “other” savagery in its own self: the darkness at the heart of the Congo is the darkness at the heart of colonial Europe itself.

However, as we learn in Marni Gauthier’s 2010 “Telling the Truth: Don DeLillo in an Age of Amnesia and Redress,” darkness is not confined to one continent, or to one political and economic system. Gauthier makes the case that De Lillo’s *Americana*, *Libra*, and *Underworld* are noteworthy, among other things, for their insertion into the very contemporary preoccupation—historical, ethical, political, and fictional—of navigating the opposing tendencies toward amnesia and redress that arise as reactions to a series of state-initiated and endorsed horrors. She points out that in his focus on these subjects, of undeniably general concern in a globalized world, DeLillo moves away from post-modern orthodoxies about how to deal with history and grants legitimacy to attempts at finding historical truth, however elusive, however repressed either in “official” or in “vernacular” memory. Though she focuses on recent US and European history, the topic resonates in Latin America, a large portion of which lived under brutal dictatorships for long stretches of the twentieth and current centuries, as well as in other parts of the world where horrors, perpetrated by states and by would-be states,

threaten what one can call civilization now, and what is left us of civilizations from the remote past.

The above is simply a sample; its purpose is to sketch out a view of what *Ilha do Desterro*, this lively, intelligent, engaged and engaging publication has been able to offer readers with broad interests and healthy curiosity.

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