

INTRODUCTION

Author of twenty novels, six plays, and numerous newspaper articles and speeches, José de Alencar is considered the father of Brazilian literature. He was born in the northern state of Ceará in 1829 and died of tuberculosis in Rio de Janeiro in 1877. A graduate of the law school of São Paulo, he became a journalist and later a senator, rising to Minister of Justice under Emperor Dom Pedro II. His writings signal the beginning of a literature that is unmistakably Brazilian in genre, in themes, and in language. They reflect the different intellectual, political, social, and cultural currents found in Brazil during the reign of Dom Pedro II, a period known as the Second Empire (1840–1889).

During the Romantic period (roughly corresponding to the mid-nineteenth century), Brazilian literature, in search of its national identity, focused on local color and on the new nation's geography and social make-up, exalting its representative population, be it the Indian, the gaúcho, the slave, or the middle-class man and woman, along with their values. José de Alencar's works span all of these aspects. His novels deal with most of the historical moments of Brazil, evincing the variety of its cultural heritage and bringing to the fore its most relevant issues.

However, this wide-angle picture of nineteenth-century Brazil is not Alencar's only contribution to Brazilian literature. He invested greatly in the

creation of a vernacular, borrowing from a variety of models. But mainly he was always attuned to the popular Brazilian diction with its differences from the language imported from Portugal (the position of pronouns, for example). He was fascinated by and tried to adapt the agglutinations of Tupi, an Indian language, and was interested in the etymology of words as sources for his metaphors. He was praised and criticized for his innovations, attacked for trying to create a new language different from Portugal's. But having always been conscious of his craft and well versed in matters of language and style, he was able to refute these accusations, and in so doing brought these issues to the national intellectual consciousness, proving to his opponents that the development of a national vernacular was indeed unavoidable.

As he explains in *Como e Porque Sou Romancista*, from an early age he envied the admiration bestowed upon novelists, and aspired to emulate them. First he was taken by the tearful, emotional response of his mother and relatives whenever he read to them; later, he appreciated the homage his law school colleagues paid to Joaquim Manuel de Macedo who had just published the first significant Brazilian romantic novel, *A Moreninha*. He set out to find his models, to prepare himself to attempt a "poem of real life," as he envisioned the novel at the time. The writers who influenced him most were Chateaubriand, Balzac, Sir Walter Scott and Cooper—but, as he cautions, the Cooper of the sea novels, not of the Leatherstocking Tales; he denies having written his Indianist novels based on Cooper.¹

Alencar's vast production may be classified in various ways. The writer himself revealed a scheme to his work, albeit after having written extensively. He explained that his novels dealt with three historical phases: the native—that of legends (prior to the European invasion); the historical—the interaction of two cultures, including the question of miscegenation; and the national—"the childhood of our literature" (emphasizing what was characteristic of the new nation and its struggles against foreign influences). In more general terms, we may divide his works into Indianist (*Iracema*, *O Guarani*), historical (*A Guerra dos Mascates*, *As Minas de Prata*), regional (*O Gaúcho*, *O Sertanejo*), and urban (*Senhora*, *Lucíola*). Antônio Cândido refers to "three Alencars": one who appeals to a male audience, describing heroism and gallantry, creating some of the myths of the new culture, like the Indian Peri; one who addresses a young female audience, presenting sentimental stories, always centered around a woman and leading to a happy ending; and an adult one (which includes *Senhora* and *Lucíola*) concerned with darker psychological, moral, and sociological issues, with a depth that distinguishes these novels from the sentimental, weaker ones, such as *Diva* or *A Pata da Gazela*.² Alencar's best known books are *O Guarani* (1857), *Iracema* (1865), *Lucíola* (1862), and *Senhora* (1875).

From its social revolutionary beginnings, Romanticism derived a dissatisfaction with both the old order of things, primarily the dominance of the aristocracy, and with the present one, the still inept and provincial bourgeoisie. Not always highly cultured, the bourgeoisie had become materialistic either as a means of survival or in a search for power. Unable to solve these conflicts, the romantic *I* tends toward evasion, valuing and glorifying things that remain at a distance, either in space or in time, infusing them with the imaginary. Hence the appeal of the chivalrous Middle Ages and of picturesque, faraway regions. Alencar wavered between the elegance and gracefulness of aristocratic customs, the sweet simplicity and solid values of the middle class, the heroic endurance of the Indian, the gaúcho, the *sertanejo* (northern backwoodsman), and the drama inherent in some less desirable forms of behavior like violence, seduction, and prostitution. He was a romantic influenced by Balzac's realism; his was a Brazilian consciousness following French revolutionary models. Hence the prevailing dichotomy in his works between realistic social criticism and romantic ideology, and the consequent inconsistencies and unevenness. As a journalist, he presents an admirably objective portrait of the times, offering in well-tuned diction details of life in the wilderness as well as of Rio's bourgeoisie during the second half of the century. But the reader senses, intermingled with these objective descriptions, the romantic imagination responsible for the delightful, but occasionally rather unseemly plots—the emphasis on the power of love, the nobility of the soul, the significant position of women in society. In *Senhora*, for instance, he criticizes the custom of the marriage of convenience and the institution of the dowry. However, in spite of the materialistic, sadistic, or self-interested mesh of motivations, in the end it is money earned through responsible work coupled with romantic love that redeems the characters.

Historically, it should be noted, the middle of the nineteenth century marks the decline of the custom of endowing daughters. Women were left freer to choose a marriage for love; in fact, by that time, the judge officiating at a wedding had to certify the bride's free will and consent. The elimination of the custom put an end to dowry hunters, as well. Moreover, the lack of a dowry meant that, even though men still incorporated their wives' property and inheritance through marriage, they came into the family as partners and/or had to support their families through hard work.³

It was the centrality of a feminine protagonist that drew me to Alencar when I first compared mid-nineteenth-century Brazilian and American novels. Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville seldom give their fictional women any relevance or historical significance; theirs is mainly a world of men, in which women appear as intruders, often to disturb their enjoyment of life and nature. Hawthorne, of course, is the exception, having created several strong-

minded female characters. Hester Prynne, in *The Scarlet Letter*, is an example of a self-determining individual, who resists the oppression of the Puritan, patriarchal social order. But her power remains rather subdued, and she survives by being silent and performing typically feminine tasks: sewing and caring for the sick. In the end her strength yields wisdom, but also loneliness. Joyce Warren points out in *The American Narcissus* that “All of the studies of the American character are analyzing men in America, for it is the man who has been encouraged to achieve, who has sought the expansion and development of the self.” She thus laments the nonexistence of female role models for women readers: “Women are associated with the pressures of society and seen as entrappers, unattractive adversaries of the ‘American’ experience. For the woman reader to identify with the men in the novel is to identify against herself.”⁴ Not so in Brazil. Mindful of the sight of his mother and aunts crying as he read novels to them, Alencar surely had a feminine audience in mind as he wrote his own novels. Besides, women, mainly those of the higher classes, enjoyed a powerful social position in Brazil in those days. Antônio Cândido reminds us that behind the sentimental complications of the romantic novels published in the mid-nineteenth century “There is an infrastructure determined by the position of women, in this shy society of salesmen, public officers, and farmers. Women were one of the most important transmitters of property, a means of acquiring fortune or qualification.”⁵ As does the fictional Seixas, the critic Afrânio Coutinho explains that marriage was a means toward social classification: “A factor in social categorization, [women] represent and transmit family assets and confer to the intelligent, but poor, man the opportunity to fulfill his aspirations.”⁶

Many of Alencar’s novels have female protagonists. In *Iracema*, as in *Senhora* and *Lucíola*, man and woman engage in meaningful dialogue, facing each other at an equal level. Highly significant in comparing Brazilian and American mid-nineteenth-century fiction is the Indianist novel *Iracema*. The protagonist, for whom the book is entitled, is a beautiful honey-lipped Indian woman, portrayed as self-sufficient, intelligent, and knowledgeable of the forest’s ways and secrets, much like Cooper’s Uncas or Chingachgook. However, her life suffers a decline as a consequence of having fallen in love and eloped with a Portuguese settler. Unlike the tendency in American literature, here it is the man who entraps the woman.

Senhora features a female protagonist who took control of her life and steered it according to her own wishes, first evading, then overcoming male supremacy whenever it stood in her way. *Senhora* in the title means not only a lady, a married woman, but also mistress, the feminine of *senhor*, master; Aurélia is the owner, the proprietress, the power-holding figure. She embodies the image of individualism preached by some American writers: intelli-

gent, self-assured, and self-reliant, in charge of her life. And she maintains this position against a patriarchal social context, represented by her guardian who time and again tries to veer her decisions to his own advantage, and by suitors after her beauty and, later, after her wealth.

All this, however, would not suffice to make Aurélia the intriguing character that she is. Her depth lies in the antagonistic forces that drive her, her internal dichotomy. Her behavior in society does not coincide with her nature. Her aggressiveness, her ironic tone, and her air of superiority, deriding all who seek her for her social status, are only a façade. To herself, she is sweet, melancholy, torn by the events in her life. When the character assumes her businesslike, haughty self, the author describes it as “. . . an upheaval taking place. The woman's vital core abandoned its natural focus, the heart, to concentrate itself in the brain, where a man's speculative faculties reside.” On these occasions, Aurélia resembled a statue, “cold, paused, inflexible.” This mineralization of the heroine, as some critics have expressed it, betokens a conflict “between the so-called masculine qualities, required to survive in the money-dominated world outside, and the more typically feminine, domestic attributes of love, warmth, and purity of thought. This polarity often presents itself, not only to the author, but to the character herself.”⁷ The insoluble polarity lends inner dimension to the heroine.

Aurélia harbors yet another kind of dualism. Antônio Cândido refers to “disharmony” as the dynamic factor in Alencar's plots. Usually this disharmony is a conflict between good and evil. However, as he sees it, sometimes it appears in a more “refined” form—“a certain preoccupation with a deviation from physiological or psychic balance.” In *Senhora*, “due to the unusual and compelling situation it determines, a strange sado-masochistic repression emerges from beneath the greatness of Aurélia's soul and her gentility, which lends sinew and relief to a plot which, without it, might not go beyond *Diva* or *Sonhos d'Ouro*.”⁸ But this rather unusual trait in Aurélia's personality only enhances her power of resolution, her freedom of thought and action and her radical desire to follow the path of happiness. Roberto Schwarz suggests that “Aurélia belongs to the ironclad and absolute family of avengers, alchemists, loan sharks, and the ambitious, etc., of *The Human Comedy*; like them she heads a quest—one of those that had captivated the century's imagination—without which life for them appeared to be empty.”⁹ She may be compared with Zenobia of *The Blithedale Romance*, with whom she shares beauty, intelligence, and a prominent social position; both authors cause an irreconcilable dichotomy between reason and feelings to transform these characters into marbleized, statue-like forms. But there is a cultural difference in the way the novels end: Alencar granted his heroine a happy ending whereas Hawthorne murdered his.¹⁰

It should be underscored, however, that even though the striking protagonist of *Senhora* had always despised the "matrimonial market" and shown a disdainful attitude, her scornful, sadistic treatment of her suitors and the circumstance that allowed her to humiliate Seixas came only as a result of her inheritance. The picture of her poorer days is bleak and is comparable to the descriptions of the way Seixas's mother and sisters spent their days. Ironically, or surprisingly, the placid attitude of these other women toward their fate contrasts with the bitter criticism behind Aurélia's behavior. These secondary characters and the subplots lack the ideological impulse that provides the power behind the main story line, creating a certain thematic imbalance in the novel. As Roberto Schwarz points out in "Criando o Romance Brasileiro," the descriptions of the landowner's farm or the shameful position of Aurélia's mother do not embody any vehement social attack or justification; they appear as mere aspects of life, typical Brazilian life, that escaped the impact of the revolutionary ideology that brought forth the realistic movement in fiction. In an amazing turn, Schwarz's article concludes by suggesting that the mineralization of the protagonist implies paganism and refusal of sensual satisfaction; "In short," he writes, "the object of economic criticism has 'sexual prestige.'" Quoting from *Senhora*—"Such is the world; the satanic fire of that woman's beauty was her greatest seduction. In the embittered ardor of her rebellious soul, one could fathom abysses of passion that foretold tempests of sensuality promised by the love of the virginal bacchante"—he draws his conclusion: "Explicit subject matter: money represses natural feelings; latent subject matter: money, scorn, and refusal make up an eroticized context which opens more exciting perspectives than conventional life. In other words, money is detrimental because it separates sensuality from the existing familial context, and it is interesting for the same reason. Hence the convergence, in Alencar, between wealth, feminine independence, sensual intensity, and the sphere of prostitution."¹¹

Money of course stands at the center of Alencar's preoccupations. Yet his concern with the ugliness that stems from materialism troubles the writer only in certain instances. His romantic eye for the colorful and the picturesque renders him blind to the inconsistencies that result from the unevenness of his treatment of the theme. He does criticize the "mercantile mentality of the end of the Empire," as Alfredo Bosi indicates, "but only when the crude villainy of self-interest surfaces, not when it is clouded by the fumes of aristocratic refinements: the glory of the salons, the luxury of the alcoves, the pomp of the costumes."¹² Alencar showers the reader with touches of elegance—magnificent gowns, men's suits, and pieces of furniture are described in detail, with mention of specific kinds of wood, inlays, metal adornments. Seixas's confession (that he was brought up in a society that pro-

moted marriage as a means of gaining wealth) appears to be a sign of his awareness of wrongdoing; but his taste is condoned when the narrator explains that Seixas was “rather of an aristocratic nature” and only admired beauty, “the supreme feminine grace, the humanization of love . . . in a woman crowned by the halo of elegance.” Even Seixas’s foot is described, certainly without criticism, as having “the firm arch of an aristocrat.”

The emphasis on the visual, on appearance, often serves as a means to suggest inner truths. The meticulous rendering of objects has an artistic, literary function, often signaling states of mind and internal conflicts. Seixas and Aurélia’s evening walks, when they stroke flowers and feed birds and fish, are choreographed to reflect their emotional movements as well. Similarly, the reference to Seixas’s change in type of clothing from dandy to a more subdued elegance, and Aurélia’s simple attire in contrast to Adelaide’s adorned luxury on their evening together at the theater denote mental states. The “staging” of the wedding night and the final scene in the same apartment, with Aurélia wearing the same green robe, reveals Alencar’s concern with form, with setting, and with detail. On the whole, these minutiae add up to a vivid picture of Rio’s life in the mid-1800s. As one critic remarked, if you want to know how the rich lived, read the description of Aurélia’s mansion; for a simpler, poorer kind of dwelling, look for the details about Seixas’s house.¹³

My purpose in translating *Senhora* was to familiarize American readers with this powerful novel that features a heroine very different from those found in American works of the same period, and thus to develop an appreciation for the literary production of other nations of the Americas.

THE TRANSLATION

Had I known the problems that Alencar’s text poses to a contemporary translator, I think I would not have started this project. On the other hand, discovering the hidden treasures of Alencar’s novel in details of both plot and style was thrilling. “Discovering” indeed it was, because the meticulous reading required for the translation yielded elements I had previously overlooked. Like every Brazilian student, I had read *Senhora* at least three times in the past; how could I then not have realized the extent of the paganism and sensuality of the vocabulary? How many sentences did I read, or skim, not perceiving the serious misprints? How could I have overlooked so many nineteenth-century idioms whose meanings totally escaped me? The translation forced me to face them. Here are two examples. “*Eu é que não estou pelos autos*,” says Lemos, wondering if Seixas would demand more money. I finally found the expression in Antonio de Moraes Silva’s 1878 dictionary, meaning “I won’t consent.” Clifford Landers discovered “*há viver e morrer*”

in *Tesouro da Fraseologia Brasileira* by Antenor Nascentes; it means “to secure in writing.”

The translation was based primarily on *Senhora*, eighth edition, Editora Ática, 1977. However, in view of the number of misprints or phrases that seemed flawed, I also consulted the Artes e Letras edition of 1964 and the text included in the *Complete Works*, Editora José Aguilar, 1959. Most of the time, the correct version became quite evident based on syntax or common sense. José Olympio prefaces his edition of Alencar's *Complete Works* by acknowledging the existence of “countless editions, many of them truly criminal, such is the number of errors that infest them and the amazing adulteration of texts, omissions, accretions, substitutions” To be certain that I was choosing the phrases closest to Alencar's original text, I verified some of my doubts against the 1875 Garnier edition in the Library of the Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros of the University of São Paulo—variations such as *abordar/abortar*, *segunda/seguinte folha de papel*, *palavras inspiradas pelo moço/palavras inspiradas do moço*, *casca/casta de bípedes*. To my surprise, Alencar himself faced editorial problems. The Garnier edition includes a long errata which points out misprints such as: “salinha térrea de Sta. Tereza, não Lapa”; “Alfredo, não Lúcio,” “embalar o coração, não abalar.”

Alencar was concerned with form and mastered a variety of tones—humorous, realistic, poetic. His diction can be very formal or very colloquial, even slangish. Aurélia's rather formal and eloquent speech is a far cry from Lemos's, as is the narrator's language in referring to one or the other. References to Lemos come always steeped in humor and contemporary idioms which posed several problems. He was “*rolho e bojudo como um vaso chinês*”; his body “*rechonchudo tinha certa vivacidade buliçosa e saltitante que lhe dava petulância de rapaz . . .*” The descriptions are flippant, funny, and extremely visual. In the process of transposing the writer's wonderful choice of words, tone, euphony, and rhythm into the target language, the translator becomes fully aware of Alencar's felicitous expressions. There are also the more typically romantic, mystic, clouded, evanescent metaphors, precise (in their imprecision) and beautiful in the images they evoke. The vocabulary is of a very high register, and the equivalent often difficult to find, especially when one considered the sound quality of these passages. I often read Hawthorne or Cooper before translating to familiarize my ear to diction, images, and tone. The juxtaposition of the texts always yielded results: similar constructions or similar metaphors, and, I hope, fluidity of language.

Another issue was what to do with the currency of the time. *Mil-réis* could be left as such. But then came *contos*; since in English I could use *thousand* without having to repeat *mil mil-réis*, I opted to avoid another untranslated term and, at the same time, clarify the amount. The names of meals had to

be reconsidered as well, for they differ from today's breakfast at seven or eight, lunch at noon, and supper at seven. I translated *almoço* as *breakfast*, having in mind *petit-déjeuner*. It took place around ten in the morning and included steak and seafood. The word *lunch* was eliminated as a possibility because it is used elsewhere in a reference to the English term *lunch*, Lusitanized as *lanche*, meaning a snack early in the afternoon. It was important to keep the difference. *Jantar* remained as dinner, even though it was eaten at five in the evening; *ceia*, served much later, was translated as *supper*.

Alencar has left us a wonderful picture of life during the latter half of the nineteenth century: from food to wardrobes, from means of transportation to different kinds of amusements, from what people saw in the theater, to the books they read, the games they played and the songs they sang, from the ways of life of different social classes to various political or cultural attitudes. The novel includes an amazing number of references to poets and novelists, to novels read at the time, to operas, to customs that have been lost. Occasionally the need arose for cultural or linguistic adaptation. In most instances, however, the names are world famous or the context clarifies the meaning so I decided to leave them as used by Alencar, devoid of extraneous explanations or notes. My main concerns were to maintain the novel's flavor and richness, and to do it justice.

NOTES

1. José de Alencar, *Como e Porque Sou Romancista* (Salvador: Livraria Progresso Editora, 1955), 58. For a comparison of Cooper and Alencar see Renata M. Wasserman, "Re-Inventing the New World: Cooper and Alencar," *Comparative Literature*, Spring 1984: 130–145.
2. Antônio Cândido, *Formação da Literatura Brasileira*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (São Paulo: Livraria Martins Editora, 1964) 2: 218–222.
3. For a study of the dowry in Brazil, see Muriel Nazzari, *Disappearance of the Dowry: Women, Families and Social Change in São Paulo, Brazil, 1600–1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
4. Joyce Warren, *The American Narcissus: Individualism and Women in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 6 and 2. See also Nina Baym, "Portrayal of Women in American Literature, 1790–1870," in *What Manner of Woman: Essays on English and American Life and Literature*, edited by Marlene Springer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 228.
5. Cândido 2: 140. The translations of critical texts are mine.
6. Afrânio Coutinho and Eduardo de Faria Coutinho, eds., *A Literatura no Brasil*, 3d. ed., 6 vols. (Rio de Janeiro and Niterói: José Olympio Editora and Universidade Federal Fluminense, 1986) 3: 261.
7. Catarina Edinger, "Machismo and Androgyny in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Brazilian and American Novels," *Comparative Literature Studies* 27.2 (1990): 135.
8. Cândido 2: 227–228.

9. Roberto Schwarz, "Criando o Romance Brasileiro," *Argumento* 1.4 (February 1974): 31.
10. For a comparison of Alencar's and Hawthorne's works see Catarina Edinger, "Hawthorne and Alencar Romancing the Marble," *Brasil/Brazil* 4.3 (1990): 69–84.
11. Schwarz 46.
12. Alfredo Bosi, *História Concisa da Literatura Brasileira* (São Paulo: Ed. Cultrix, 1975), 154.
13. M. Cavalcanti Proença, "José de Alencar na Literatura Brasileira." Introduction, *José de Alencar: Obra Completa* (Rio de Janeiro: Aguilar, 1959), 1: 73.

SENHORA

Profile of a Woman

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