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**MĀNOA: How did you come to translate Flávio de Araújo's poetry?**

Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren: I stumbled across Flávio de Araújo's poem “*Quinhão*” (“*Portion*”) in a Brazilian literary journal called *Jornal de Poesia* during my first year of grad school, when I was taking a literary translation workshop as part of my MFA studies in poetry. I was immediately hooked by what I know now are the trademarks of Araújo's work: buoyant imagery, wordplay, caustic wit, and masterful storytelling, all conveyed with language as simple and sharp as the squid jig for which his groundbreaking debut collection, *Zangareio*, is named. I had never read anything—in Portuguese or in English—quite like it. I emailed him and asked for permission to translate the poem for my class; he not only enthusiastically agreed, but gave me his blessing to translate the whole collection.

When the slim, bright red book with a photo of a young fisherman arrived at my apartment in New York, and I read “*Portion*” within the context of the entire sequence, I realized how deceptive the humor of that first poem had been, and how high the stakes actually were for the speaker.

In his introduction, Ovídio Poli Junior, the editor of Off Flip Press, compares the vivid imagery and social conscience of *Zangareio* to Derek Walcott's epic poem, *Omeros*. *Zangareio* explores the world of the Caiçaras—a traditional community with Indigenous, African, and Portuguese roots that inhabits the southeastern coast of Brazil. Araújo (b. 1975 in Paraty) captures the daily and seasonal rhythms of his family's ancestral home, Praia do Sono, and explores how modernity, globalization, and development have impacted its way of life. The poems have an undeniable political undercurrent—addressing the effects of environmental degradation on artisanal fishing, and the economic pull of big cities on rural youth—yet they focus on individual people and

intimate moments, and there is never any doubt that the source of Araújo's power is his lyricism and musicality.

I picked a couple more poems I liked and started sending him questions in earnest. His emails came back full of fishing nets and traps, phases of the moon, black flies and poisoned rivers, grandfathers and younger sisters, real estate speculators, winds and currents, revolutions and floating bodies, fork-tailed birds and mesh-chewing crab. Sometimes he wrote back the same day, and sometimes weeks later, but his messages were always worth the wait. Slowly, poem by poem, *Zangareio* began traveling into English.

**MĀNOA: In the course of translating, did you discover anything surprising about the author or the work?**

RMC: One of the surprising things I discovered in the course of translating *Zangareio* was how the poems build on each other, the Caiçara dialect becoming familiar as the same words reappear in different contexts. A testament to Araújo's skill, these words may be used literally in one poem and metaphorically in the next. For instance, *cerco* (defined by the poet as an encircling net; checking it requires a group of fishermen, usually in two canoes) is one of the book's five section titles, and also appears in the poems "Zeca's Sorrow" and "Cerco." In the first poem, an old man reflects on how drastically life has changed in his village, where fishing was a daily, communal activity: "I remember the abundance of fish / after a trip to the *cerco* / and the horn in the evening breeze / calling us to the nets." In the second poem, shorter and more visceral, where the line between a fisherman and the fish he's caught blurs in their struggle to escape their respective 'nets', *cerco* is only alluded to by the title: "He was lost. / The sea is always an encounter."

Araújo's glossary at the back of the book explains the regional terms and phrases, which would be unfamiliar even to Brazilians from other parts of the country. This distinct vocabulary stems from the influence of the Tupi-Guarani languages on the Portuguese, and the Caiçaras' many fishing-related words. One of my favorite discoveries was that

“caiçara” itself refers to the coastal peoples of Rio de Janeiro state, São Paulo state, and Paraná, as well as a specific type of fish trap.

**MÃNOA: Flávio’s work was originally published as “marginal” literature in Brazil. For those unfamiliar, what is the distinction between “marginal” and “mainstream” literary culture? Given how popular his work has become, what space does his poetry now occupy?**

RMC: As Araújo tells it, he was working as a *motoboy* during the early years of FLIP (Paraty International Literature Festival, started 2003) and thought, how is it that my favorite writers are participating in Latin America's biggest literary festival at the corner of my street and I'm not part of it? He showed some poems to Ovídio Poli Junior and they became the first book the editor's new literary press, Off Flip Press, published: *Zangareio* (2008). From there, Araújo quickly developed a reputation as a poet and educator throughout Brazil, giving readings and talks at literary festivals in places as far flung as Cuba and Mexico, while becoming a fixture on the poetry scene in his hometown of Paraty. For several years now, he has been a key organizer of Off Flip, developing programming with local writers, artists and readers in conjunction with FLIP. And during last year's FLIP, Araújo was honored with his own exhibition at the Casa da Cultura Paraty (Paraty House of Culture). Moving from “marginal” to “mainstream” is the difference between making deliveries during a literary festival and having your impact as a poet honored with your own exhibition at that same festival.

**MÃNOA: What led you to becoming a translator, especially of Brazilian literature?**

RMC: I learned Portuguese in my early 20s because I fell in love with Brazilian music and wanted to live in the place where most of my favorite musicians were from: Bahia. During my junior year of college, I spent a semester as an exchange student at the Universidade Católica do Salvador, studying studio art and history. My attachment to Brazilian literature only developed later, largely as a way to *matar as saudades*—not

knowing if I would ever have a chance to live there again, and wanting to stay connected to Brazil from a distance.

I jumped at the chance to take literary translation workshops at Columbia as part of my graduate studies. Translation became a way, like music, to keep the sound of Portuguese in my ears. From the beginning, I was interested in translating contemporary poetry because I liked the idea of bringing a Portuguese work into English for the first time, as well as being able to collaborate with a living Brazilian writer. I've been lucky to become friends with several of the poets and authors I've translated, including Araújo.

**MĀNOA: What advice do you have for aspiring translators?**

RMC: Translation, like any kind of writing, is a solitary activity, so my advice would be to seek out community, whether that means going to the annual American Literary Translators Association (ALTA) conference, participating in a literary translation residency like the Banff International Literary Translation Centre (BILTC), taking a literary translation workshop, or even just finding one good reader of your work who knows the source and target languages well. Support your fellow translators and translation presses by buying and promoting their books. And when you pick something to translate yourself, choose work that you feel deeply connected to, and passionate about sharing, because the translation process itself can be slow and painstaking, and if you don't love what you're doing, your future readers won't either.

**MĀNOA: What theories or principles guide your translation process? How would you describe your process?**

RMC: I moved to Montreal to be with my partner, the French translator Éric Fontaine, in January 2015, and although I grew up in the American Midwest, I had never experienced anything like a Quebecois winter before. It's month after month of walking slow and deliberate across icy streets and around huge piles of snow in heavy boots; a sunny day or two where everything starts to thaw followed by an unexpected cold spell that lasts a

week; and just when you've lost all hope of summer ever arriving, you leave the house one morning wrapped up in a parka and by that afternoon the whole city is sitting out on a *terrasse* wearing sandals and not much else. When a translation suddenly emerges from Portuguese into English—able to stand alone as a new poem altogether, unencumbered by the research and drafts that brought it there—it feels like that first rush of sunshine on bare skin.

In general, my translation process is guided by instinct over academic theory. With regards to *Zangareio* specifically, it was important to me to maintain the accessibility of the originals without simplifying or eliminating the Caiçara elements that make Araújo's poetry so unique. I wanted to honor the sophisticated subtlety by only including definitions that the poet himself wrote in the original glossary, and by preserving the mystery and the music.

I always work near a window, and always while listening to Brazilian music. As I translate *Zangareio*, I usually have Tropicália, Tulipa Ruiz, Marcelo Camelo, Sylvio Fraga, or (Cape Verdean) Mayra Andrade playing in the background.

**MÃNOA: Among Brazilian writers you've read, whose work has not yet been translated but should be and why? Why do you think it hasn't been translated yet?**

RMC: Although a handful of Brazilian writers—with the assistance of good translators and publishers—has managed to enter the international literary conversation, most remain unknown because they work in a less-common language and in a country that had only recently begun to rise in economic and political stature before entering yet another period of instability. Even the writers that have been translated, and translated well, generally receive far less critical attention abroad than their Spanish-language Latin American counterparts. And, overwhelmingly, poetry receives less attention than prose, and female writers receive less attention than males.

Thankfully, there has been a push in recent years to bring more (and more varied)

international literature into English, especially by independent publishers like New Vessel Press, Transit Books, Restless Books, and New Directions.

There are still so many amazing Brazilian writers who haven't had their books translated into English, but two of my favorites are Luciana Hidalgo and Maria Valéria Rezende. Hidalgo is a writer and journalist who divides her time between Rio, Teresópolis and Paris, where she is a much sought-after lecturer on the topics of “auto-fiction” (stories at the limit of the real and fictional or, in her own words, “useful narcissism”) and “literature of urgency” (written to escape an extreme circumstance such as madness, terminal illness, or incarceration). Rezende is a renegade geriatric social justice nun and rising literary star who has published novels, non-fiction, short stories, children's books, and poetry. Although their styles and literary obsessions are very different, both Jabuti Prize winners explore race, gender, class, and internal and external migrations in their work, as well as the legacy of the country's military dictatorship. With far right leader Jair Bolsonaro's victory during the 2018 election, and growing nostalgia for the military dictatorship, these concerns are, unfortunately, very timely.