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Literature and Ethics in Contemporary Brazil

Edited by
Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho
and Nicola Gavioli

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When Brazil was honored at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2013, the Brazilian author Luiz Ruffato opened the event with a provocative speech, claiming that literature, through its pervasive depiction and discussion of "otherness," has the potential to effect ethical transformation. This book of essays uses Ruffato's speech as a starting point for the discussion of contemporary Brazilian literature that stands in contrast to the repetition of social and cultural clichés. By illuminating the relevance of humanities and literature as a catalyst for rethinking Brazil, the book offers a resistance to the official discourses that have worked for so long to conceal social tensions, injustices, and secular inequities in Brazilian society. In doing so, it situates Brazilian literature away from the exotic and peripheral spectrum and closer to a universal and more relevant ethical discussion for readers from all parts of the world. The volume brings together fresh contributions on both canonical contemporary authors such as Clarice Lispector, Rubem Fonseca and Dalton Trevisan and traditionally silenced writing subjects such as Afro-Brazilian female authors. Essays deal with specific contemporary literary and social issues while engaging with historically constitutive phenomena in Brazil, including authoritarianism, violence and the systematic violation of human rights. The exploration of diverse literary genres—from novels to graphic novels, from poetry to *crônicas*—and engagement with postcolonial studies, gender studies, queer studies, cultural studies, Brazilian studies, South American literature and world literature carves new space for the emergence of an original Brazilian thought.

Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho is Lecturer at King's Brazil Institute at King's College London, UK.

Nicola Gavioli is Assistant Professor of Portuguese at Florida International University, USA.

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Nicola Gavioli dedicates this collection to Thomas C. Shepard and Stefania Salami, with gratitude and hope.

Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho dedicates this book to all his past and present students in gratitude for everything he has learned with them.

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Contents

List of Figures

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Foreword

Dominic Rainsford

"Literature and ethics" has been a common phrase, denoting a respectable subfield of research, since about 1990, exemplified by books by literary theorists such as Wayne Booth and Geoffrey Galt Harpham and philosophers such as Stanley Cavell and Martha Nussbaum. There are various ways of explaining this so-called "turn." For instance, it has been seen as a reaction against the perceived lack of value and engagement in the poststructuralist approaches that dominated the '70s and '80s. But it is not as simple as that: Jacques Derrida himself formulated his project in ethical terms, especially in the latter part of his career, invoking "responsibility" both to the Other and to the text, and involving himself more and more in public issues of moral concern. The debate (and culture wars) about whether poststructuralism was responsible or trivial, progressive or nihilistic, ethical, unethical or anti-ethical was itself a meta-ethical crisis that testified to the desire to take literature (and the humanities more generally) as a significant force in the world. Of course, this was nothing new. The stakes have been high in the study of literature at least since Plato and Aristotle, with their competing accounts of literature's influence on the individual and the state. The centuries-long history of censorship, in many cultures, testifies to the belief that literature has world-shaping, fear-inducing power. And while austere, exclusively text-focused approaches appeared to flourish in some quarters in the late twentieth century, they did so alongside a spectrum of discourses of identity (race, gender, sexuality, class …) that may have been deeply suspicious of fixed, hegemonic moralities, but were clearly themselves all about rights, justice, liberation, restitution—and therefore ethically driven.

Ethics, or moral philosophy, is its own discipline, conventionally practiced by people with a different training from literary theorists, historians and critics, in different university departments. Some mutual wariness, and questioning of competence, is inevitable. But literature has the disturbing property of potentially being about anything that concerns its authors; and distinguished and influential philosophy, on the other hand, has often looked very like literature, from Plato, through Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, to Wittgenstein. Sometimes, ideas dictate

form and compel aesthetic innovation. Ostensibly literary texts, just as much as ostensibly philosophical ones, may have things to say about their own disciplines, each other's, and those of third parties including politics and law. Literature, philosophy and many other discourses meet in the exploration of the human, which in turn generates concepts of human rights. In order to know what "human rights" means we have to know what the human is, and for that, neither abstractions, generalizations, nor our own experiences, in isolation, will suffice: we need to see what other individuals have made of their own humanity, what they find to be human in others, and how they can express this in ways that somehow bridge their humanity and ours. Rich descriptions are necessary for this; fresh and rigorous testimonies of individual lives, even if they arrive disconcertingly packaged as fiction. Thoughtful, authentic and arresting descriptions of what it is to be human always tend toward the literary. Most of the essays in this volume address literature in contexts where its ethical status is a matter of immediate life-and-death concern. Luiz Ruffato's Frankfurt speech sets the tone wonderfully: rejecting the expected endorsement of literature as entertainment, commercial product and nationalist soft power, and reaffirming its importance as a realm of conscience, responsibility and engagement—all the more so in the context of a history (Brazil's, but also so many other nations') of violence and oppression. Poetry "makes nothing happen" according to W. H. Auden: well, not in the way that a battlefield command or a political decision makes things happen. But Auden knew that literature is part of a meaning-making process that can influence all our fates. It is a blessing for a literary writer that his or her texts will rarely be implicated in physical violence (although there have been exceptions—from Goethe's suicide-inspiring *Werther* to Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*). But art, in the words of another English poet, William Blake, is "mental fight." Literature needs to be fierce, to assert its right to define the human, express views and propagate an ethics in the face of other discourses such as the media and politics, which otherwise claim all the authority and influence, and have free rein to serve the interests and drive the agendas that may indeed take shape in torture and killing.

This is a lot to ask of literature and of ourselves as imaginative and communicating humans. The terrible truth is that for many real people, in many places, at many times, the pen is not mightier than the sword. Sometimes all that literature can do is offer responsible engagement with violent events, long after their victims have gone to their wretched and pitiful graves. One of literature's greatest roles, indeed, is that of active, specific and diversified memory (as distinct from expedient myths or schematic and homogenizing factual records). To find ways of saying what happened is to make something happen in the present, at least in terms of shaping ways of seeing and understanding. And this effect upon the present shapes our capacity to shape the time to come. Literature

has ethical responsibilities toward the future, that is, as well as the past and the present. "I nourish myself on utopias," says Ruffato, but he is also nourishing us, and, in doing so, doing what he can to make a more utopian world slightly less impossible.

The absence of cultural memory, embodied in works of art, just as much as indifference to scientific fact, opens the way both for the secret manipulation of society and for barefaced lying. There is much talk at the moment (inspired, for example, by the Trump candidacy in the United States) of "post-truth" politics. Has it ever been, and can it be, otherwise? We might certainly hope that politicians will appear, sooner or later, who will feel themselves more bound by verifiable fact, and also more humble in the face of the infinite diversity of human experience, whether in Brazil, the United States, Russia, China, or wherever it may be. But the fact is that the loudest, most widely disseminated statements and speeches, addressing the most vital issues, are often driven by deception as much as explanation. In a poststructuralist sense all texts, be they literary, philosophical or political, are unstable and unreliable, so that the generic distinctions and hierarchies of truth and fiction are not quite to be trusted. But beyond this, in real social and historical moments, the less respect the dominant discourses show for truth, the more responsibility paradoxically devolves to the artful, fictional and rhetorical texts that we categorize as literature.

Nowadays there are explicitly "ethical" readings of a great many canonical authors, but while these authors are not necessarily Anglo-American—the South African novelist J. M. Coetzee has been a particular focus of interest—they are still predominantly Anglophone. In this and other respects, Brazilian literature continues to be haunted by the notion of the periphery—despite the stupendous vastness of the country and the actual edgelessness of the globe. The colonial past is obviously at the root of this, but current differences in literacy and educational institutions (in turn dictated by economic inequalities) also play a major part. Recent tendencies in "world literature" show the ethics of literary study trying to mitigate this unfairness. The essays in this collection will no doubt play their part: contributing to the development of "literature and ethics" through "world literature." But while they may have this important transnational and cosmopolitan function, they remain essays about specific texts written at specific times in a specific part of the world. And that is what literature's global moral force consists of, above all: the real experiences and imagined worlds of particular people who have the skill and good fortune to be able to convey their humanness forcefully in words.

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Introduction

On Behalf of the "Here and Now"[1]

Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho
and Nicola Gavioli

1. The First Sparkle: Luiz Ruffato's Frankfurt Speech

Imagine Brazil is the guest of honor at one of the most important book fairs in the world. Inside the convention auditorium, Brazil's intelligentsia and diplomatic representatives gather obligatorily to hear what should be a standard inaugural speech, full of celebratory rhetoric. Before the speech even begins, attendees eye their watches and phones, impatiently waiting for the final handshakes. Now imagine one of the most prominent contemporary Brazilian writers slowly approaching the lectern and, rather than offering a polite homage to his nation's literary history, instead delivers a speech on Brazil's criminal history, from colonial times to the present day. To the shock of many in attendance, this is exactly what happened at the 2013 International Frankfurt Book Fair. The protagonist of this literary commotion is Luiz Ruffato, author of the celebrated novel *Eles eram muitos cavalos* (2001) and of the *Inferno provisório* novelistic series (2005–2011). His speech—included in this volume—was extremely provocative. Ruffato recounted a lucid narrative of the violence and cultural impasses that characterize Brazilian history. His choice to use a literary venue for such a strong critique did more than *épater les diplomats*: it gave visibility to "unmentionable" issues that are rarely raised in ceremonial forums and directed attention to the real complexities and injustices that litter Brazil's troubled past. For Ruffato, the intellectual carries a social responsibility more critical than that of the cultural ambassador. "For me, writing is commitment";[2] these words comprise the backbone of his entire speech.

Ruffato knows the rhetorical power of lists: through a coherent accumulation of facts, his speech depicts an overwhelming fresco of national failures. The core question he raises: "What does it mean to live in this region situated on the periphery of the world, to write in Portuguese for readers who are nearly non-existent, to fight every day in the midst of such adversities, to try and construct a sense of life?" Avoiding naïf generalities, Ruffato's speech draws attention to the role of literature as a complex transformative device. In fact, Ruffato claims that literature, through its pervasive depiction and discussion of otherness, has the

potentiality to effect *social* transformation. Brazilian literature mirrors a multiple, complex, divided and pluralistic country and problematizes the concepts of self and other, showing how, in the words of Ruffato, "we turn our back to the other – the immigrant, the poor, the black, the indigenous, the woman, the homosexual – as an attempt of self-preservation, forgetting that in doing so we implode our own condition of existence." The most recent *Amnesty International Annual Report*[3] confirms these multiple forms of invisibility and exclusion within Brazilian society.

Ruffato's speech is catalytic in engaging a collective literary discourse. And while *Literature and Ethics in Contemporary Brazil* is inspired by it, this volume is meant to expand on Ruffato's claims, offering a rich panorama of contemporary Brazilian literature that addresses violence, injustice, and marginalization while reflecting problematically on the crucial questions of *how* to represent the excluded, the invisible, the forgotten. We like to emphasize the adverb *problematically*. Presenting caricatures, simplifications, and abstractions is a slippery slope we have tried to avoid. The literature examined in this book is not naturalist writing. Nor does it simply provide a mirror of Brazilian society. These texts endeavor to investigate and dismantle forces and mechanisms that subjugate multitudes (as in *Passageiro do fim do dia* by Rubens Figueredo, 2010) and create scapegoats (as in Caio Fernando Abreu's short story "Aqueles dois"). Contemporary Brazilian literature offers a vast array of works preoccupied with the violation of human rights and with the presentation of ethical issues, written especially during and after the military dictatorship period (1964–1975). The primary works analyzed *and* the critical essays of *Literature and Ethics in Contemporary Brazil* share a belief in the relevance of humanities (and of literature, in particular) as a catalyst for rethinking Brazil. They demonstrate a bold resistance to the official discourses that have operated for so long to conceal social tensions, injustices and secular inequities within Brazilian society. By doing so, the book situates Brazilian literature away from the exotic and peripheral spectrum and closer to a universal and more relevant ethical discussion for readers from all parts of the world.

2. Why This Volume Now?

Within an already marginalized spectrum of Latin American literature, Brazilian literature has historically found itself on the periphery of the periphery. What can an international readership expect from a country largely known for its soccer, beaches, sensuality, and exuberant carnival? The typical response is *exoticism*. It's no surprise, then, that for decades the author Jorge Amado has unquestionably worn the moniker of the quintessential Brazilian writer: his poor but happy characters, his colorful scenes with sexy *mulatas* and *capoeiristas*, have populated

the imagination of readers (and viewers of film adaptations of Amado's works) everywhere. But in a nation whose history is fraught with violence rarely in Amado's fictional depictions do we see representations of it. Few questions, if any, are raised about the representations of power or the resistance to tyranny. On the other hand, Brazilian literature (and cinema) has nourished an image of Brazil as a country of natural catastrophes (*Barren Lives* by Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963), political turmoil (*Entranced Earth* by Glauber Rocha, 1967), and social plagues (as in the blockbusters *City of God* by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002; *Carandiru* by Hector Babenco, 2003; and *Elite Squad* by José Padilha, 2007). Either exotic and sexualized or uninhabitable, Brazil has oscillated for centuries–as Ruffato points out–between these two constrained poles in the foreigners' imagination. Readers ask Brazilian artists to dispense either daydreams or simple social critique, often in linear and didactic ways, avoiding nuances and the formulation of complex and theoretical questions, ingredients necessary for true critical thinking.

We believe that naming violence is not enough. Readers and scholars need to find theoretical tools to think about violence and ethical issues. The contributors of this volume—specialists working in European, North-American or Brazilian institutions—read Brazilian literature taking into consideration the global relevance of its issues. Cultural studies, postcolonial studies, queer studies and comparative literature are some of the fields and theoretical frameworks presented in this volume. The contributors dialogue with seminal authors of modernity such as Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno but also with relevant Brazilian thinkers like João Camillo Penna, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Luiz Costa Lima. We believe that paying attention to contemporary Brazilian theoretical production is key to understanding Brazil, contrary to critical readings that focus uniquely on theories developed elsewhere and then "applied" to the Brazilian context.

The relevance of the project *Literature and Ethics in Contemporary Brazil* relies heavily on inscribing Brazilian literature within a global discourse. Many contemporary Brazilian authors show a sensibility toward ethics shared by writers active in other literary traditions. For instance, eminent twentieth- and twenty-first-century Spanish American authors show strong preoccupations with the interrelated issues of trauma, ethics of memory, urban violence, social and racial discrimination and homophobia, among others.

For the broad perspectives and questions raised in these essays, *Literature and Ethics in Contemporary Brazil* is a useful companion to scholars in Latin American Studies, Brazilian Studies and Comparative Literature. The book provides fresh theoretical and pedagogical material for Brazilian Studies courses, an area much in need of a bibliographical update. Although much critical material intersecting violence, ethics, human rights and Brazilian literature is available in

Portuguese—it is imperative to mention at least the volumes *História, Memória, Literatura. O testemunho na era das catástrofes,* organized by Márcio Seligmann-Silva (2003); *Literatura brasileira contemporânea. Um território contestado,* by Regina Dalcastagnè (2012); *Crítica em tempos de violência,* by Jaime Ginzburg (2013); one special issue of *Brasiliana—Journal for Brazilian Studies* (vol. 3, No. 1 2014); and several issues of the academic journal *Estudos de literatura brasileira contemporânea*, published by the University of Brasilia—the bibliography in English is very limited. This scarcity of critical texts on contemporary Brazilian literature available in book form seems particularly detrimental to Brazilian Studies and Brazilian Literature, fields that are growing and in need of a fresh and engaging bibliography. Considering that violence, human rights and ethics are elements present in the majority of academic courses offered today on Brazil, it is urgent to address this gap.[4] People interested in Brazilian culture will also find a valuable and stimulating collection of essays that contrast and dismantle preconceived ideas and stereotypes about Brazilian literature.

3. Ethics and Brazilian Literature

In 2017, to speak about comparative literature and contemporary 'World literature' and not address ethical concerns (from bioethics to eco-ethics, from human rights to animal rights) seems ideologically conservative, academically retrograde and politically authoritarian. If there is one conviction that unifies all these essays: literature is not produced in a void. Rather, it engages in complex, direct or indirect, nuanced and problematic ways with its context, especially when context appears contradictory. We need to pay attention to the historical, societal, economic, political, educational, national and global contexts in which we find ourselves to better understand the literature we read. All these contextual aspects present ethical dimensions and dilemmas.

But what about the aesthetic values of these novels, poems and stories? Are these values sacrificed? Is there a hidden agenda shared by all these critics? And hermeneutics? What about the infinite hermeneutics? The pleasure of literature, the diverging paths of interpretation, the exercise of questioning and making sense of a fictional world made of words? Aesthetics and ethics are not mutually exclusive fields of comparison (the body of work by Nobel recipients in literature such as Toni Morrison, J. M. Coetzee, Harold Pinter, Elfriede Jelinek, Herta Müller and Svetlana Aleksievich are only a few examples of ethical impetus allied to aesthetic values). This volume does not have a *hidden* agenda (save for a general agreement that human rights must be respected everywhere). We do not want to straightjacket any literary text into a single interpretation. Nevertheless, some books would not be read at all if we forget to pay attention to their ethical—in Wayne Booth's words—"ever-present

penetrating thought" (such as the reflection on the multiple forms of violence in the relation between white and black people in a novel like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*).[5] In the case of the novel *Um defeito de cor* (2006) by Ana Maria Gonçalves, can critics and readers really ignore the ethical dimensions of this work (i.e., the choice of having a traditionally silenced subject—a black female slave—narrate a journey of physical and psychological violence and marginalization due to skin color, ethnic and gender-based abuse)?

The ethical impetus present in this *corpus* of works is collectively understood as an attempt to counteract indifference toward social issues. More precisely, and in direct or indirect dialogue with Luiz Ruffato's Frankfurt Speech, each literary text shares awareness about and critically reflects upon social oppression, on the manufacturing of "others," and on the violation of basic human rights. Are there ethical rules that should guide the artistic representation of the other? How can we recognize misrepresentation, falsification, or literary exploitation of subaltern figures? When historically marginalized communities "speak"—through writing—how does this act affect form? In which sense can a historical/protest document become literature? How can writing and other arts memorialize social catastrophes? How can literature destabilize Brazil's make-believe obscurantist myths? How can literary criticism help subvert and shake up stagnant ideas about a cultural context?

A brief summary helps to illuminate the echoes between Luiz Ruffato's Frankfurt Speech (given here as an "opening") and the themes of these critical essays. Regina Dalcastagnè, Roberto Vecchi, and Edimilson de Almeida Pereira offer incisive historical overviews and theoretical reflections on the representation of the figures of the poor, the victim, and the Afro-Brazilian subject, respectively.

Regina Dalcastagnè recently described the panorama of contemporary Brazilian literature as a "contested territory."[6] Her contribution to the volume reflects dilemmas of a society as it passes through hurried and radical transformations. How are today's writers representing experiences of the poor or miserable subjects in a Brazil that is increasingly inclined toward unfettered capitalism and consumerism? Dalcastagnè considers the works by canonic authors (namely Rubem Fonseca and Dalton Trevisan) in which poor people are often portrayed in cynical, if not grotesque, ways, irremediably "other"; by João Antônio, more sympathetic to his poor characters but still too abstract in his depiction; and Luiz Ruffato who offers a "counterexample" of sensitivity and lucidity in his representation of working-class struggles and anxieties. The analysis of Dalcastagnè, then, establishes a fundamental difference between representations from an outside perspective and those "from within." In the latter category, the critic demonstrates the importance of authors such as Carolina Maria de Jesus, Paulo Lins and Férrez.

All these authors knew and wrote firsthand about poverty and marginalization. As Dalcastagnè explains, a "discursive authenticity" encompasses their works.

The construction of the "other" and the relationship between self and other in Brazilian culture and society are key points in Ruffato's speech. Where to locate and how to describe literary strategies that act against the trivialization of the "victim" figure, situating it in a more theoretically fecund level of reflection, is at the heart of Roberto Vecchi's essay. In dialogue with Esther Benbassa, Philippe Mesnard, Daniele Giglioli, Alain Badiou, and João Camillo Penna, among others, Vecchi weaves a nuanced and provocative text that investigates multifaceted variations of the relationship between authors and victims from Brazilian canonical literature to Rubens Figueiredo's novel *Passageiro do fim do dia* (2010).

Representing marginalized, disenfranchised subjects is often the realm of recycled ideas and clichés in Brazilian literature. According to Edimilson de Almeida Pereira, a good interpreter must recognize and problematize images, strategies and models that forge long-lasting stereotypes about Brazil and, particularly, about its African social component. After tracing an overview of common strategies adopted for centuries by national writers in depicting Brazilian society, Pereira dismantles the ossified "contrast/synthesis" representational paradigm: Brazil as a chaotic land gradually fixed by a Eurocentric gaze that resolves the tensions perceived in the landscape and in social interactions, concealing the physical and psychological sufferings of the excluded. Breaking this representational paradigm is possible, for Pereira, through an authorial gesture: making language the place of rupture to describe the horror of slavery and racism and to focus on the experience of the diasporic Afro-Brazilian subjects who feel "homeless" – if not besieged – in their own country. Sara Brandellero's chapter is dedicated to one of the most prominent Afro-Brazilian writers: Conceição Evaristo. Through a detailed analysis of several poems in the collection *Poemas da recordação e outros movimentos* (2008), Brandellero demonstrates Evaristo's commitment to making themes traditionally left unspoken (the black experience, the female gaze, the socially marginalized subject's perspective) visible, shared, and relevant in society. Walter Benjamin's "brush history against the grain"[7] echoes through Brandellero's text as the imperative that Conceição Evaristo's poetics seems to follow to deconstruct stereotypes about the black and female experiences.

Together with Conceição Evaristo, Ana Maria Gonçalves occupies a central place in contemporary Afro-Brazilian writing. Her major literary achievement so far is the historical novel *Um defeito de cor* (2006), recipient of the prestigious Casa de Las Americas award. Leila Lehnen reads this novel as a postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, a text in which the Middle Passage is the first stage of a gradual and painful process of apprenticeship. The protagonist of this hybrid historical, epistolary,

postcolonial novel is the black woman Kehinde, a figure of multiple displacements. Informed by the recent bibliography on literature and human rights (in particular by the works of Joseph Slaughter and James Dawes), Lehnen demonstrates how Ana Maria Gonçalves endeavors to represent the consequences of a traumatic displacement, the ambiguities derived by a violent apprenticeship and the gradual constitution of a "subject of rights."

The traumatic experience of slavery is also told in Jasmin Wrobel's chapter, dedicated to *sequential art*. After offering an overview on the success of comic strips and graphic novels in Brazil and in other cultural contexts (namely the US and Argentina), Wrobel focuses on Marcelo D'Salete and the graphic novel's capacity to reflect on human rights.

For centuries, Brazil consciously forged myopic myths about itself: one of the most dishonest and pernicious was, in the words of Ruffato, "the myth that there was no decimation but rather an assimilation of the original inhabitants." Indigenous people of Brazil, whose identities form complex and irreducible realities, have struggled for centuries to preserve their rights and traditions. Still to this day, their ability to survive economically and culturally, but also biologically, is under constant threat. To dispossess native people of their lands and to deprive them of essential material resources undermines a profound sense of belonging, rooted in a deep spiritual connection with nature and ancestry. Claire Williams discusses Paulo Scott's *Habitante irreal* (2011) as a response to José de Alencar's classic Indianist novel *Iracema* (1865), illuminating the works' points of contact and meaningful divergence: the dialectical encounter between indigenous people and European, the treatment of the female protagonist, and the role of the *mestiço* child who ceases to be a mere symbol, emerging as a disquieted activist in contemporary society.

Marília Librandi-Rocha's essay is a groundbreaking contribution on indigenous writing in Brazil. She discusses how the collective Guaraní Kaiowá Letter is not only "one of the most powerful counter-conquest texts in contemporary Latin America," but also non-fictional prose that transcends historical and testimonial classifications. Putting the letter in context, and illuminating historical and cultural aspects of the struggle for land rights by the Pyelito Kue/Mbarakay community, the chapter shows the *literary* features at work in this text. Librandi-Rocha's reflections on the Guaraní Kaiowá Letter provoke readers to rethink and redefine what "Brazil" and "Brazilian literature" are in more complex and inclusive ways: not only the right to land, but also the "right to literature" is at stake.

Moving into an urban setting, Felipe Botelho Corrêa focuses on Rio de Janeiro's periphery portrayed in *Guia afetivo da periferia* (2009) by memorialist and social activist Marcus Vinicius Faustini. For Corrêa,

Faustini's writing blurs the periphery and its inhabitants from stigmas and simplification, becoming "a homeland, a sentimental place, a lyrical centre." Corrêa argues that in Faustini, similarly to what Lima Barreto did a century ago, Rio de Janeiro is narrated as a polycentric city in which the image of the economically and socially divided city is replaced by a more nuanced perspective, in which the confrontation between center and periphery does not replicate the trite and superficial exclusive prominence of the former but valorizes the social variety and cultural strength of the latter.

The "perpetuation of ignorance as a tool for domination"—in Ruffato's words—has had long-lasting consequences in influencing the perception of "different" identities and sensibilities, including the LGBTQ community. Although the seeds of hate against citizens who refuse to conform to heteronormative imperatives are ancient, the dictatorship period—a time of state persecution, torture, and murder, and also a time in which hyper-masculinity, patriarchal dominance, and homophobia were proudly on display—further and perniciously legitimized the discrimination against LGBTQ citizens. In his provocative essay, Denilson Lopes reflects on *Stella Manhattan* (1985)—a major Brazilian novel about gay and exile experiences during the military dictatorship—and on theoretical writings by Silviano Santiago, considered by Lopes the most eminent contributor to the foundation of queer studies in Brazilian academia. Stemming from Santiago's theorization, Lopes problematizes the effectiveness of North American strategies of gay activism within the Latin American context, going against the grain, offering new questions about the value of a forced queer "visibility" and asking for a renovation of the debate around queer identities and queer studies.

Through the analysis of short stories by three provocative writers—Fernando Gabeira, Caio Fernando Abreu and João Gilberto Noll—Idelber Avelar illuminates different strategies that question, dismantle and disperse common tropes on masculinity and monolithic male power. Homo-sociality and homo-affectivity are often ambiguous territories. For Avelar, it is precisely within the treatment of uncertain sexual identities and relationships, in the *chiaroscuro* between normative and dissident sexualities, that stories share something about pernicious mentalities and the fear of the "other."

Brazilian dictatorship is also present in the essay by Márcio Seligmann-Silva. The critic asks us to reflect on the role of the arts in counteracting falsely conciliatory demands that lead to forgetfulness of collective traumas. The anonymous workers who built Brasilia under exhausting conditions and who fell victim to violence; the tortured and "disappeared" individuals during the years of Brazilian military dictatorship; and recent victims of manslaughter by the police haunt internationally acclaimed Brazilian artists. The works by sculptor, installation artist and writer Nuno Ramos; photographer Claudia Andujar; and plastic artists

Rosângela Rennó and Adriana Varejão are just a few examples of what Seligmann-Silva considers powerful responses against the "black hole" of forgetfulness. In analyzing the works of these artists, Seligmann-Silva considers the responsibility of the creators of new aesthetics, including writers, in preserving the testimonies of turbulent times alive. Extrapolating elements of literary criticism to other art expressions, Seligmann-Silva shows how literary criticism can play an important role in thinking about the links between aesthetics and ethics more broadly.

The last section of the volume is dedicated to poets who counteract authoritarian power and provide utopian visions. Focusing on Nicolas Behr's poetry, Steven F. Butterman offers a synthesis of the trajectory and stylistic peculiarities of the "marginal" poet of Brasilia par excellence. With humor and a colorful style that seems to pay homage to Behr's aesthetic, Butterman demonstrates how Behr's poetry counteracts architectural and ideological meanings imbued in the project of Brasilia. A concrete city is confronted by a utopic *braxília*, a broader space of social inclusiveness and respect for human rights. Butterman shows us how Behr's poetry—resignifying images and verses of the national poetic tradition—works irreverently to resist official political rhetoric.

Gustavo Silveira Ribeiro reflects on the poetic "emanations" derived by the social protests that spread through Brazil in June 2013, before the controversial FIFA World Cup. Ribeiro offers a close reading of the collection of poetry *Vinagre: uma antologia de poetas neobarracos* aimed to inscribe that collective experience in politically provoking and transformative literature. The galaxy of diverse voices and experiences that characterized the movements and marches of June 2013 is reflected in the diversity of authors' backgrounds and aesthetics aims. June 2013 represented an internationally visible collective act of discontent and resistance against multiple enemies: political conservatism and authoritarianism, police abuse, social inequality and unemployment.

The voices of *Literature and Ethics in Contemporary Brazil* unapologetically open space for reflection while giving voice to literature as a viable catalyst to counter indifference toward social issues in Brazil. In doing so, the volume pushes readers to wrestle with major ethical and existential questions of relevance not only in Brazil but throughout the globe.

Notes

1 "Here and now" are the urgent and hopeful words that conclude Luiz Ruffato's speech.
2 All translations from Luiz Ruffato's speech are by Rex P. Nielson.
3 The *Amnesty International Annual Report 2015–2016* is available on-line at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2016/02/annual-report-201516/>. Last access: June 29 2016.
4 The volumes *Citizenship and Crisis in Contemporary Brazilian Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) by Leila Lehnen, *Brazil under*

Construction: Fiction and Public Works (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) by Sophia Beal and *Memory's Turn: Reckoning with Dictatorship in Brazil* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014) by Rebecca Atencio, are three recent examples of solid scholarship published in English on ethical issues and Brazilian culture.

5 The quote and the example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* are taken from Wayne Booth's essay "Why Ethical Criticism Can Never Be Simple" (31) in *Ethics, Literature, and Theory: An Introductory Reader*, edited by Stephen K. George (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

6 Regina Dalcastagnè, *Literatura brasileira contemporânea: um território contestado* (Vinhedo/Rio de Janeiro: Horizonte Uerj, 2012).

7 This famous expression appears in Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History."

1 2013 Frankfurt Book Fair's Speech

Luiz Ruffato

What does it mean to be a writer in a country located on the periphery of the world, a place where the term *savage capitalism* definitely is not a metaphor? For me, writing is commitment. I cannot renounce the fact that I live on the threshold of the twenty-first century, that I write in Portuguese, that I live in a territory called Brazil. One speaks of globalization, but national borders have disappeared only for merchandise and not for the movements of people. To proclaim our singularity is a form of resisting the authoritarian attempt to level our differences.

The greatest challenge humans have faced throughout time has been exactly this: dealing with the self-other dichotomy. Our subjectivity may be confirmed by recognizing the other—it is alterity that grants us the feeling of existence—yet the other is also the one who can annihilate us. And if Humanity builds itself through this pendulum movement between aggregation and dispersion, the history of Brazil has been built almost exclusively through the explicit negation of the other, through violence and indifference.

We were born under the aegis of genocide. Of the four million indigenous peoples who existed in 1500, there remain today around 900,000, many of whom live in miserable conditions in settlements along highways or even in favelas in large cities. Our so-called Brazilian racial democracy is constantly heralded under the sign of national tolerance. It is the myth that there was no decimation but rather an assimilation of the original inhabitants. This euphemism, however, serves only to cover an indisputable fact: if our population is mixed race, this is due to the relationships between European men with indigenous or African women—that is to say that assimilation occurred through the rape of native and black women by white colonizers.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, five million black Africans were imprisoned and forcefully carried to Brazil. When in 1888 slavery was abolished, no efforts were made in the sense of providing decent living conditions for the former slaves. Thus, until today, 125 years later, the great majority of afro-descendants remain confined to the bottom of the social pyramid: they are rarely found among doctors, dentists, lawyers, engineers, executives, journalists, visual artists, filmmakers and writers.

Invisible, held down by low salaries and deprived of the basic rights of citizenship: housing, transportation, leisure, education and healthcare—the majority of Brazilians have always constituted a disposable piece of the machinery driving the economy. Seventy-five percent of the national wealth lies in the hands of 10% of the white population. A mere 46,000 people own half the land of the entire country. Historically accustomed to holding only responsibilities and never rights, we have succumbed to the strange sensation of non-belonging: in Brazil, what belongs to all belongs to no one.

Living with a terrible sensation of impunity, given that prisons only function for those who have money to pay for good lawyers, intolerance emerges. Abandoned in the bleakness of life on the margins, individuals who are denied the status of being human react to the other who denies them this status. Because we cannot see clearly the other, the other does not see us. And thus our hatreds build—our neighbor becomes the enemy.

The homicide rate in Brazil has reached 20 deaths per 100,000 people, which totals 37,000 homicides per year, a number three times greater than the world average. And those most exposed to the violence are not the rich, who are enclosed behind the high walls of private condominiums, protected by electric fences, private security guards and electronic surveillance, but the poor confined to favelas and neighborhoods on the periphery, living at the mercy of drug traffickers and corrupt police officers.

Male chauvinists: we occupy the embarrassing seventh place among countries with the highest number of victims of domestic violence, with a total in the past decade of 45,000 murdered women.

Cowards: in 2012, we accumulated more than 120,000 accusations of abuse toward children and adolescents. And it is known that regarding both women and children, these numbers are always underestimated.

Hypocrites: cases of intolerance toward sexual orientation reveal, exemplarily, our nature. The location of the most important gay parade in the world, which brings together more than three million participants, the Avenida Paulista in São Paulo, is the same place with the highest number of homophobic attacks in the city.

And here we touch a nerve: it is not a coincidence that the Brazilian prison population, around 550,000 people, is made up primarily by youths aged 18 to 35, poor, black and with little education.

Over the course of our history, the education system has been one of the most efficient mechanisms in maintaining the abyss between rich and poor. We occupy one of the last positions among rankings that evaluate educational performance worldwide: around 9% of the population remains illiterate and 20% of the population is classified as functionally illiterate—that is, one in three Brazilian adults do not have the capacity to read and interpret the most simple texts.

The perpetuation of ignorance as a tool for domination, which has been the defining characteristic of an elite that has remained in power until very recently, can be measured. The Brazilian publishing market is currently worth around 2.2 billion dollars, and 35% of this total represents purchases by the federal government on behalf of public libraries and schools. Nevertheless, we continue to read very little, on average less than four books per year, and in the entire country, for every 63,000 people, there is only one bookstore, primarily found in large cities.

But we have advanced.

The greatest victory of my generation has been the reestablishment of democracy during the past 28 years—a short period it is true, but this has been the most extensive period of the protection of rights in all of Brazil's history. With political and economic stability, we have continued to garner social victories since the end of the military dictatorship. Without question, the most significant of these accomplishments has been the express reduction of misery: an impressive number of 42 million people have climbed socially during the last decade. Also undeniable is the importance of implementing programs like "Bolsa Familia," which provides cash to low-income families, or the establishment of racial quotas for enrollment in public universities.

Unfortunately, however, in spite of these efforts, the weight of our 500-year history of abuses is immense. We continue to be a country where housing, education, healthcare, culture and leisure are not universal rights but the privileges of a few. Where the ability to come and go, at any time, cannot be freely exercised because of the absence of public security conditions. Where the minimum wage equals US$300 per month and exacerbates basic difficulties like the lack of adequate public transportation. Where respect for the environment is non-existent. Where everyone has become accustomed to circumventing the law of the country.

We are a paradoxical country.

Brazil appears on the one hand as an exotic region, a place of paradisiacal beaches, edenic forests, carnival, capoeira and soccer and on the other hand as a dreadful place of urban violence, child prostitution, disregard for basic human rights and disdain for nature. Brazil is celebrated as one of the countries best prepared to assume a leading role on the world stage with ample natural resources, agriculture, cattle production and diversified industries with enormous potential for production and consumer growth. Yet it also seems destined to an eternal supporting role as a provider of raw materials and products fabricated with cheap manual labor because of incompetence at generating its own wealth.

We now represent the seventh largest economy in the world. And we remain in third place among the highest inequality among all nations.

I return, then, to the initial question: What does it mean to live in this region situated on the periphery of the world, to write in Portuguese for