

Brazilian Tales



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BRAZILIAN TALES TRANSLATED FROM THE PORTUGUESE WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ISAAC GOLDBERG Author of Studies in Spanish-American Literature, - CONTENTS
PRELIMINARY REMARKS 7 V THE ATTENDANTS CONFESSION . BY JOAQUIM MARIA MACHADO DE ASSIS 43 V THE FORTUNE-TELLER 65 BY JOAQUIM MARIA MACHADO DE ASSIS LIFE . 87 BY JOAQUIM MARIA MACHADO DE ASSIS THE VENGEANCE OF FELIX ... 107 BY JOSE MEDEIROS E ALBUQUERQUE THE PIGEONS 121 BY COELHO NETTO AUNT ZEZES TEARS 139 BY CARMEN DOLORES TO J. D. M. FORD SMITH PROFESSOR OF THE FRENCH AND SPANISH LANGUAGES, HARVARD UNIVERSITY SOME INFORMAL PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The noted Brazilian critic, Jose Verissimo, in a short but important essay on the deficiencies of his countrys letters, has expressed serious doubt as to whether there exists a genuinely Brazilian literature. I do not know, he writes, whether the existence of an entirely independent literature is possible without an entirely independent language. In this sense Verissimo would deny the existence of a Swiss, or a Belgian, literature. In this sense, too, it was no doubt once possible, with no small measure of justification, to deny the existence of an American, as distinguished from an English, literature. Yet, despite the subtle psychic bonds that link identity of speech to similarity of thought, the environment which helps to shape pronunciation as well as vocabulary and the language itself is, from the standpoint of literature, little removed from language as a determining factor. Looking at the question, however, from the purely linguistic standpoint, it is important to remember that the Spanish of Spanish America is more different from the parent tongue than is the English of this country from that of the mother nation. Similar changes have taken place in the Portuguese spoken in Brazil. Yet who would now pretend, on the basis of linguistic similarity, to say that there is no United States literature as distinguished from English literature. After all, is it not national life, as much as national language, that makes literature. And by an inversion of Verissimos standard may we not come face to face with a state of affairs in which different literatures exist within the same tongue. Indeed, is not such a conception as the great American novel rendered quite futile in the United States by the fact that from the literary standpoint we are several countries rather than one. The question is largely academic. At the same time it is interesting to notice the more assertive standpoint lately adopted by the charming Mexican poet, Luis G. Urbina, in his recent *La Vida Literaria de Mexico*, where, without undue national pride he claims the right to use the adjective Mexican in qualifying the letters of his remarkable country. Urbina shows that different physiological and psychological types have been produced in his part of the New World why, then, should the changes stop there. Nor have they ceased at that point, as Senor Urbinas delightful and informative book reveals. So, too, whatever the merits of the academic question involved, a book like Alencars *Guarany*, for instance, could not have been written outside of Brazil neither could Verissimos own *Scenes from Amazon Life*. II. Brazilian literature has been divided into four main periods. The first extends from the age of discovery and exploration to the middle of the eighteenth century the second includes the second half of the eighteenth century the third comprises the years of the nineteenth century up to 1840, while that date inaugurates the triumph of Romanticism over pseudo-Classicism. Romanticism, as in other countries, gave way in turn to realism and various other movements current in those turbulent decades...

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目录:

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