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**A Postcard to an Anonymous Reader:  
Lima Barreto's Brazilian Diction in the Magazine *Careta***

Felipe Botelho Correa<sup>1</sup>

In May 1929, Manuel Bandeira celebrated José de Alencar's birth centenary writing the piece "Alencar e a linguagem brasileira" which was published in the daily newspaper *A Província*, based in Recife and directed by Gilberto Freyre. In this article, Bandeira points out that Alencar was one of the first authors who fought for the right to use the Brazilian Portuguese diction which was developed in a different environment, and expressed different manners and needs than the ones of the European Portuguese (Bandeira, 1929a). To Bandeira, people in Brazil had created different "language pacts" throughout three centuries of colonisation, and these pacts developed into a very different syntax, specially in terms of vocabulary and sentence construction. According to Bandeira, this did not mean a different language, but a different diction. Nonetheless, instead of discussing some examples of works by Alencar's diction, Bandeira opted for a different author to epitomise his argument: Lima Barreto.

A nós, brasileiros de hoje, a quem importa mais uma cena de costumes dos subúrbios do Rio do que todas as florestas de exemplos fradalhões quinhetistas; mais nos interessa a linguagem de um prosador como Lima Barreto, tido embora como incorreto segundo o critério purista de inspiração portuguesa, do que o esplendor verbal de Rui [Barbosa], absolutamente exótico no seio da selva gostosa dos nossos barbarismos. O gosto da vida (da nossa vida) está com o primeiro (Bandeira, 1929a).

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The incorrectness attributed to Lima Barreto was partly due to his frequent uses of “formas e dicções da nossa gente”, “formas correntes na linguagem falada da boa sociedade”, as Bandeira (1929b) argues in another piece published in the same newspaper a couple of months later, which originally appeared with the title “O verdadeiro idioma nacional”, and published later in *Crônicas da província do Brasil* (1937) as “Fala brasileira”. Indeed, the main theme of these pieces is the difference between the written and the spoken Portuguese language in Brazil. Specifically, he is interested in the divorce between the “linguagem falada natural” and the “afetação literária da sociedade brasileira culta” (Bandeira, 1929b). In his own words: “A linguagem literária entre nós divorciou-se da vida. Falamos com singeleza e escrevemos com afetação” (Bandeira, 1929b).

According to Bandeira, Lima Barreto was one of the few writers whose literary production was not divorced from the Brazilian environment. In this sense, Bandeira identifies a Brazilian diction while reading Lima Barreto's scenes of everyday life in Rio de Janeiro and points out how these scenes were more relevant to Brazilians than any classic Portuguese canonical text or grammar convention. This local diction was expressed by Lima Barreto's choices and uses of words and phrases which were more concerned with the language spoken in the streets of Rio. In this sense, Lima Barreto's writing approach can be regarded as cured from the “moléstia de Nabuco”, the literary disease pointed out by Mário de Andrade in letters to Carlos Drummond de Andrade. According to Mário de Andrade, the literary disease consisted in “falar de um jeito e escrever covardemente colocando o pronome carolinamichaelismente”<sup>2</sup> and “senti[r] saudade do cais do Sena em plena Quinta da Boa Vista” (Andrade, 1963?:71). Mário de

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<sup>2</sup> Reference to the Portuguese language philologist Carolina Michaëlis.

Andrade's prescription for Drummond de Andrade's illness is simple: "Estilize a sua fala, sinta a Quinta da Boa Vista pelo que é e foi" (Andrade, 1963?:71).

What Mário de Andrade defined as "moléstia de Nabuco", Lima Barreto called bovarysme: a constant denial of one's everyday reality. The concept was taken from Jules Gautier's homonymous book (1921) in which he defines bovarysme as the ability of individuals to create images of themselves which are different from what they actually are. It is a relentless pursuit of trying to be or look like a different person, regarding oneself in a distorted or imaginary way (Gautier, 1921). Lima Barreto mentioned Gautier's concept many times in his pieces, and employed it to define certain characteristics of the elite behaviour in Rio, which was epitomised by the neighbourhood of Botafogo:

Botafogano [...] é o brasileiro que não quer ver o Brasil tal qual ele é, que foge à verdade do meio, e faz figurino de um outro cortado em outras terras. [...] Mesmo indo para o Saco do Alferes, [...] quer fugir à nossa grosseria, à nossa fealdade, à nossa pobreza agrícola, comercial e industrial [...]. Botafogano é o brasileiro exilado no Brasil; é o homem que anda, come, dorme, sonha em Paris (Barreto, 1956, v. XVI: 233-34).

Putting historiographical categories such as modernism or "pre-modernism" aside, it is clear that Lima Barreto and the modernist group, including Mário de Andrade and Manuel Bandeira himself, were concerned with how to break with the literary tradition not only divorced from modern spoken language, but mostly divorced from the environment where it was practiced. In Mário de Andrade's words: "Sempre considerei o problema máximo dos intelectuais brasileiros a procura de um instrumento de trabalho que os aproximasse do povo. Esta noção proletária da arte [...] foi que me

levou, desde o início, às pesquisas de uma maneira de exprimir-me em brasileiro” (Andrade apud Barbosa, 1954:13-14). These authors were looking forward to creating modern forms of expression which could enable them to expand their readerships and connect with the readers using an appealing language -- they wanted to become popular in the very sense of a “proletarian art” mentioned by Mário de Andrade.

According to Jorge Amado, the only Brazilian writer who had achieved the status of a truly popular writer by the 1930s was Lima Barreto. In 1935, six years after Bandeira published his texts in Recife, Jorge Amado wrote the piece “Lima Barreto, escritor popular”, published in *A Manhã*, a newspaper based in Rio de Janeiro and funded by the Aliança Nacional Libertadora. The author of *Jubiabá* (1935) was struck by a newspaper story about the suburban and amateur “Lima Barreto Futebol Clube”. Ironically or not, Amado points out that the greatest consolation that he had in his lifetime as a writer was to know that the suburban amateur football club chose the name of Lima Barreto to be supported and defended. The article’s title is very clear about the point Amado was trying to make. To him, Lima Barreto was a special case in the history of the Brazilian literature because he enjoyed “[uma] popularidade verdadeira, a ‘batata’” (Amado, 1935). This was a two-fold popular appeal: Lima Barreto was praised both by the general public and by intellectuals at the same time; two features that rarely appeared combined in one author. Amado then concludes that “Lima Barreto foi mais que lido e admirado: foi compreendido. [...] Ele é um escritor do povo e o povo sabe disso” (Amado, 1935).

The argument proposed by Amado is certainly disputable but has the merit of highlighting that the name of Lima Barreto went beyond the literary circles after his death and before the publication of his complete works in the 1950s. Before entering in the canon of the history of Brazilian literature, the writer from Todos os Santos was already praised by people who were not necessarily discussing literary matters, as was

the case of the football club which inspired Amado's piece. In this vein, if Lima Barreto enjoyed (and still enjoys)<sup>3</sup> such a popularity beyond restricted literary circles, it is necessary to investigate what was the working tool -- to use Mário de Andrade's words -- he employed to get closer to the people and become a symbol of this Brazilian diction which approximated the literary language to Brazilian everyday life.

Lima Barreto had five prose fiction books published throughout his lifetime and two just after his death in 1922.<sup>4</sup> Between 1923 and 1940s, the second edition of *Bruzundangas* (1930) was the only of his books to have a new edition, and perhaps the only which was available in book shops when Bandeira and Amado wrote their pieces mentioned above. Furthermore, it is known that the circulation of Lima Barreto's books was restricted, which leads one to think that he could hardly become the popular writer described by Jorge Amado only through his novels.<sup>5</sup> A more plausible "working tool" to reach such level of popularity was likely to be something else.

Despite the fact that he is often associated with novels, especially after the book editions published in the 1950s, the popularity Lima Barreto enjoyed beyond men of letters in the first half of the twentieth century is also connected with his journalistic

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3 People in Brazil keep doing the same kind of homages a century later, remembering Lima Barreto with statues, clubs, carnival bands and tributes. A statue was put in Rio's city centre in 2011; the society Casa de Lima Barreto started a carnival band called "Lima é tio meu" in 2012. The literary event FLUPP (Festa Literária Internacional das Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora), held in November 2012 in Rio, is particularly relevant to understand the meaning of the name Lima Barreto among Brazilians nowadays. FLUP is an alternative to FLIP (Paraty International Literary Festival). While the latter is the most prominent literary festival in Brazil, the former is an effort to bring literary events to favelas that were once dominated by drug dealers and now have been pacified by units of pacifying police (UPPs). It is not by chance that FLIP never celebrated Lima Barreto's name throughout its more than ten years of existence. FLUP, on the other hand, chose Lima Barreto as the writer to be celebrated in its very first edition, with roundtables and lectures held in tents called "Bruzundangas" and "Policarpo Quaresma".

4 *Recordações do escrивão Isaiás Caminha* (1909); *Triste fim de Policarpo Quaresma* (1915); *Numa e a Ninfa* (1915); *Vida e morte de M. J. Gonzaga de Sá* (1919); *Histórias e sonhos* (1920). *Os Bruzundangas* and *Bagatelas* were published respectively in 1922 and 1923, after Lima Barreto died.

5 In a letter to Monteiro Lobato in 4/1/1919 Lima Barreto states that 2000 copies were printed for the edition of *O triste fim de Policarpo Quaresma* in 1916, and in 1919 these copies were "longe de esgotar-se" (Barreto, 1956, v. XVI: 57.).

activities. In this field, he is often described as writer who published mainly in non-commercial publications (unions, associations, small magazines) to put forward his militant literature. However, such description neglects the fact that the vast majority of Lima Barreto's pieces were published in two magazines of nationwide circulation: *A.B.C.* and *Careta*. Both were prominent publications from Rio in the 1910s and 1920s, but *A.B.C.* can hardly be compared to *Careta* in terms of circulation and popularity. In the 1920s, while *A.B.C.* reached a few other states apart from the Federal District, where it was printed, *Careta* was already regularly read not only by Brazilians in most of the states of the republic, but also in Argentina and other countries. Indeed, it was one of the most popular publications of the First Republic in Brazil, and there Lima Barreto probably found the largest audience he enjoyed throughout his lifetime as a writer.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, his aim to reach large readerships was an intrinsic part of his intellectual project. As he states in his manifesto *Amplius!* (1916) and repeated with some variations in many parts of his oeuvre, he wanted to become part of the “patrimônio comum do espírito dos contemporâneos” carrying out this plan by using “uma língua inteligível a todos” (Barreto, 1916). This motto represents one of the pillars of Lima Barreto's intellectual project: to use the appropriate methods of written communication to achieve a large popular appeal. He deliberately aimed to be read by people from all social strata, and to become a truly nationwide writer, delivering his ideas to the largest possible number of readers (Barreto, 1917). To carry out this task, he was concerned with two main issues: to write in a clear and accessible language, and to reach a nationwide dissemination.

In terms of dissemination, he did not dismiss the power of popular magazines to engage readers of various kinds. Before radio and television, popular magazines were

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<sup>6</sup> See more information about *Careta* in Correa, 2012.

the most efficient media to circulate messages nationwide, and in Brazil as elsewhere nationwide magazines often featured a great deal of photographs and illustrations at the turn of the century. These expressions appeared combined with texts in such a symbiosis that many writers were influenced by pictorial expressions, including Lima Barreto, who started to study and explore the potential of these artefacts as useful tools to communicate ideas to large nationwide readerships.

Along with *Revista da Semana* (1900), *O Malho* (1902), and *Fon-Fon!* (1907), *Careta* (1908) reached the highest circulation numbers as nationwide illustrated media in the first two decades of the twentieth century in Brazil. The fundamental role of these magazines was to deliver contents from the capital to other distant parts of the country or even foreign countries on a regular weekly basis. Therefore, the collaborators had to appeal not only to the cariocas but, more emphatically, to a wide and diverse range of readers who wanted to be in contact with the current events in Rio either visually or through texts.

In this sense, when Manuel Bandeira writes to the readers of Pernambuco stating that the taste of the Brazilian life could be seen in Lima Barreto's works (1929a), he is suggesting that Lima Barreto was representative of a Brazilian diction even when he was depicting the everyday life in Rio, not elsewhere in the country. Indeed, the pieces by Lima Barreto in *Careta* (1915-1922) can be regarded as pictures sent from the capital to the provinces as a way to connect the many parts of the country. According to Lima Barreto, his writing perspective was to send impressions and pictures of the life in the capital while writers from other states should do the same effort to create a nationwide network of local pictures.

É um grande prazer para quem, como eu, nasceu e vive no Rio, travar conhecimento com a vida da província [...]. Mais do que nenhuma outra



manifestação do pensamento humano, a literatura é própria para nos dar essa impressão de vida e mais do que nenhuma outra arte, ela consegue dar movimento, senão cor, a essa vida. / Infelizmente, os autores dos Estados ainda não viram isto e julgam que a vida que os cerca não se presta ao romance, ao conto ou à novela. / De quando em quando, porém, surge um mais audacioso e nos dá pinturas flagrantes dessa vida, por vezes muito diferente desta nossa do Rio de Janeiro. É um meio de nos ligar, de nos fazer compreender uns aos outros, nesta vastidão de país que é o Brasil (Barreto 1956, v. XVI, 176).

This passage is relevant to understand a key concept in Lima Barreto's project of addressing a mass of readers (Barreto, 1921; Barreto, 1917). He is interested in the literary production beyond the limits of the capital and its bellettrism. In such a large country, the literary production should not reflect bovarisms which aspire a reproduction of European culture in Brazil, but literary works which assert the very context and diversity that could be found in every corner of the country. By adopting a perspective more connected to the empiricism of the everyday life in each region (and less connected to the centrality of the tradition of the Portuguese language and rhetoric), Lima Barreto highlights the need to decolonize the literary expression in Brazil, claiming a post-colonial approach among Brazilian men of letters and their literary diction.

That is precisely what Lima Barreto is asking from the writers in the provinces. He wants to read flagrant paintings of the everyday life that surrounds them. Salient here is the emphasis Lima Barreto puts on the pictorial aspect of these local impressions of life in Brazil. Indeed, this is not an isolated feature if one examines Lima Barreto's oeuvre. Broadly speaking, what Manuel Bandeira defined as a Brazilian diction is deeply connected with Lima Barreto's concern in breaking up with a literary tradition

not through an avant-garde experimentalism but through a literary expression appealing to a mass number of readers. That is the perspective that appears in the text “As origens” published in Revista Souza Cruz in 1921 as part of the incomplete *Cemitério dos Vivos*, the last of his autobiographical novels.

Veio-me a reflexão de que não era mau que andasse eu a escrever aquelas tolices [artigos de revista]. Seriam como que exercícios para bem escrever, com fluidez, claro, simples, atraente, de modo a dirigir-me à massa comum dos leitores, quando tentasse a grande obra, sem nenhum aparelho rebarbativo e pedante de fraseologia especial ou um falar abstrato que faria afastar de mim o grosso dos legentes. [...] Seria muito melhor que me dirigisse ao maior número possível, com auxílio de livros singelos, ao alcance das inteligências médias com uma instrução geral, do que gastar tempo com obras só capazes de serem entendidas por sabichões enfatuados, abarrotados de títulos e tiranizados na sua inteligência pelas tradições de escolas e academias e por preconceitos livrescos e de autoridades. Devia tratar de questões particulares com o espírito geral e expô-las com esse espírito (Barreto, 1921).

Lima Barreto's position as a regular collaborator to *Careta* provided him with one of the largest nationwide readerships during the First Republic period. However, this popular appeal was based on the mass visual culture which emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century. In this sense, the Brazilian diction pointed out by Bandeira can be seen beyond the subversive collocations and grammar structures employed by Lima Barreto. His Brazilian diction was an attempt to be read in a nationwide dimension, imagining the nation through local pictures, but always with a general spirit. In order to

“dirigir-[se] à massa comum dos leitores” (Barreto, 1921), he not only got involved with but also incorporated this new mass visual culture into his works, especially in his pieces published in *Careta*. In this vein, what he called “exercícios para bem escrever, com fluidez, claro, simples, atraente” (Barreto, 1921) can be seen as attempts to react to the proliferation of visual culture in that watershed period in the history of the modern Brazilian literature, which I shall discuss in the next section.

### **In search of the picturesque**

The era of photographic print technologies on a large scale was just beginning in Brazil at the turn of the century. In the first decades of the twentieth century even a postcard was something entirely new: a photographic impression of a moment which could travel across the world. The impact of these new technologies in the literary field was inevitable, but the reactions of the writers varied. Flora Süssekind (1987) argues that this impact generated by the popularisation of images fostered two main reactions among the men of letters. Conservatives rejected the incorporation of pictorial expressions within the literary text, and started a reaction, “daí a obsessão por um vocabulário rico, por uma redação enfática, ornamental, pela dramatização retórica do narrado. Como uma espécie de resistência pela ênfase, pela superornamentação e pelo preciosismo verbal frente ao privilégio crescente da ilustração” (1987, p.37). Süssekind points out that advocates of the sovereignty of the text were many. Like Silva Marques, they reacted against “O domínio da gravura”, the title of an article by this critic and jurist published in the largely illustrated *Kósmos*.

Vejam o que sucede à literatura e ao jornalismo moderno. A gravura passou a substituir o texto, a substituir é bem a verdade, porque embora

ele subsista ao lado da ilustração, não é a ele que cabe a supremacia. A obra do pensamento meditado, poetizado e condensado [...] já não ocupa o primeiro plano que é privilégio da ilustração, e tende mesmo a ser substituída, anulada pela gravura que acabará provavelmente por lhe proclamar a completa inutilidade. [...] A gravura é ambiciosa como um caudilho americano; não se contenta de reinar como senhora absoluta sobre a época contemporânea, vai invadindo todas as idades sobrepujando tudo, recuando até as primeiras civilizações e impondo aos seus monumentos a soberania da ilustração (Marques, 1909).

On the other extreme, Sússekind (1987, p.36) points out that in most illustrated publications of the beginning of twentieth century there was a subservience of texts to images. It is indeed remarkable the presence of images in these magazines, either as photographs or illustrations, but such generalisations lack more empirical evidences. Perhaps the right word to describe this moment is not subservience, but coexistence. And it goes without saying that the coexistence of images and texts in an unprecedented context of mass readership impacted both the way writers communicated with readers and literature was produced. Text, illustration and photography were together explored in their specificities and intersections in the pages of these magazines, an example of a positive reaction to the coexistence between text and image.

In both perspectives, the underpinning of this debate is that images tend to change the relationship between writers and readers, as image communicates in a more direct manner with readers. Silva Marques feared that in the future there would not be the need to describe a person, it would be just a matter of inserting a picture. Apocalyptically, he forecasted the end of literature because it would be useless to compete with images (Marques, 1909). A century later we know that this forecast was

not quite right. If illustrations tend to facilitate and expand the communication with more kinds of readers, on the other hand the ornament and the preciousness tend to "save literature" from this world of mass imagery, by focusing not on the communicative aspect of the language but in aspects of belletrism, emphasising elements such as ornamentation, preciousness, mannerism, excess.

This is a fundamental issue regarding that period, and Lima Barreto faced it with an intellectual project that embraced the inevitable advance of images over the Republic of Letters. He is clearly a progressivist if this point is to be discussed in a binary way. However, between the extremes of belletrism and subservience there were many ways to deal with the growing circulation of mechanical images in the early twentieth century in Brazil. In *Careta*, Lima Barreto participated in the emergence of visual culture without necessarily abstaining from critical commentaries and provocative reflections. Rather than fearing images, he ostensibly incorporates pictorial expressions to his texts, prioritising communication before the preciousness of mannered literary traditions; popular appeal before belletrism; activism before conventionalism; simplicity and clarity before ornamentation.

These literary values were regarded by many critics at the time as flaws which restrained Lima Barreto's literature to be fully praised among Brazilian men of belletrism. The two main points of this argument were a supposed lack of refined language (the European Portuguese diction), and a strong use of satire with real and easy to uncover targets. Nonetheless, later critics and linguists, like Antonio Houaiss (1956), have clarified that Lima Barreto's writing style did not lack the use of refined or proper language. In fact, what he proposed was to express modern ideas and concepts in a language understood by most Brazilians, making an effort to express complex ideas in accessible ways not only to intellectuals, but to a wider audience; he wanted to

become “facílmo na língua”, as Monteiro Lobato pointed out (apud Barreto, 1956, v. XVI: 48).

This “easiness” in reading Lima Barreto is a consequence of his search of a more coherent diction crafted for the ordinary reader to understand. He does not take as reference the classic literary models of beauty, but the reality that surrounds him and the expressive forms available to communicate with the general public. In this sense, the observation of the public space becomes one of the cornerstones of his pieces. He was not searching for beauty, love or metaphysical themes, but only the picturesque: something that had a visual and empirical appeal at the same time. The experience of observing the everyday life details was crucial because to him there was no such thing as universal or pure literature. “Arte, por ser particular e destinar-se a pintar as ações de fora sobre a alma e vice-versa, não pode desprezar o meio, nas suas mínimas particularidades” (Barreto, 1953:22).

Here he opposes two different literary perspectives: one that finds its source mainly in imagination and other literary works; and one that finds its source in the circumstances of the surrounding reality. Lima Barreto located the former in conservative writers who were reacting against the emergence of the mass visual culture. He defined these writers in various moments of his oeuvre as inspired by a distant classic Greek beauty or/and the ancient European Portuguese writing style like the one by the late fifteenth century Portuguese chronicler Rui de Pina, frequently cited by Lima Barreto as an example of an old rhetoric. These references show a writing perspective that either dismisses the personal experience and presence in Rio while narrating a story, or focuses on a place never visited by the author or because the language does not correspond to the one used by the author in his everyday life in the early twentieth century in Brazil.

On the other hand, Lima Barreto's pieces seem to be firmly grounded on an empirical literary perspective, the one that uses mainly observation skills, pointing out details of experience, especially the visual experience of everyday life. This search for the picturesque is one of the most common strategies he employed in *Careta* to address its mass audience. He looks at what is around him and describes what he sees. This is precisely what happens in one of the texts which appeared in *Careta* but still remains unpublished in book form.<sup>7</sup>

Moro há quase vinte anos em Todos os Santos, subúrbio pacífico e conselheiral, cujos botequins frequento e tenho crédito. Os leitores hão de me desculpar esta confissão; mas, se atenderem que tudo o que escrevo são páginas das minhas memórias, terão que considerar como justa a confiança que faço. / Pela manhã saio de casa e vou ao botequim mais próximo. Compro um jornal e ponho-me a lê-lo. Dentro em pouco passa um enterro. Olho a rua. Quem é? É uma criança. / O forro é encarnado. Carregam-no meninas de todas as cores. Tiro o chapéu e gosto que a Morte -- a sagrada Deusa de nós todos -- tenha feito a comunhão de tanta gente diversa. / Continuo, depois de passar o enterro, a ler placidamente meu jornal (Barreto, 1920).

In this piece, Lima Barreto explicitly states what critics like Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda have pointed out elsewhere: his literature is more about memoirs and experience than

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7 In Feiras e mafuás, Francisco Barbosa published an homonymous text by Lima Barreto which is not the one that appears in *Careta*. Although different, the two versions focus on the same subject, but using different words, as if one were a version of the other.

imaginary events.<sup>8</sup> He was committed to experience and observation and in this sense his works cannot be analysed only in strict terms of pure fiction. Against the writers who were “fazedores de bonecos”, as he defined the technique of Machado de Assis and Anatole France, Lima Barreto was in search of characters that were real, that could be found, that could be seen as portraits of the Capital for their picturesque appeal (Sandroni, 1998:174). Hence, the street was the place to be in order to observe and create real-life characters and scenes.

In another version of “Os enterros de Inhaúma”, published in book form in the anthology *Feiras e mafuás* (1953) organised by Francisco Barbosa, Lima Barreto also describes the same scene of a passing funeral while he is reading the newspaper, but he takes more paragraphs to develop the piece, adding a curious story of a funeral in which the deceased was left outside a bar by his friends on the way to the cemetery. They got drunk inside and forgot about the coffin and the dead man outside. Lima Barreto, then, adds a reflexion which deserves some comment: “Tristes enterros de Inhaúma! Não fossem essas tintas pinturescas e pitorescas de que vos revestis de quando em quando de quanta reflexão acabrunhadora não havíeis de sugerir aos que vos vêem passar; e como não convenceríeis também a eles que a maior dor desta vida não é morrer...” (Barreto 1953:302).

In this passage, the difference between “pinturesco” and “pitoresco” is stressed, something that dictionaries qualify as synonymous or even as the same term. That does not seem to be the case here. “Pitoresco” seems to be employed to define something pretty in an undeveloped or old-fashioned way; charming, quaint, unspoilt sometimes in a depreciative or ironic manner, as the Oxford English Dictionary defines the term

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8 “Não sei se é lícito escrever sobre os livros de Lima Barreto sem incorrer um pouco no pecado do biografismo, que tanto se tem denunciado em alguns críticos. [...] / A obra deste escritor é, em grande parte, uma confissão mal escondida, confissão de amarguras íntimas, de ressentimentos, de malogros pessoais, que nos seus melhores momentos ele soube transfigurar em arte” (Holanda, 1956, v. V: 15).



picturesque.<sup>9</sup> With this expression Lima Barreto is ironically referring to the “prettiness” of the scene. “Pinturesco”, however, seems to be something different. In this sense, like many illustrators, he was concerned with the picturesque, what was visually attractive, what had the qualities of a painting.

This type of description is one of the most salient features of Lima Barreto's pieces in *Careta*. It is a gaze that is always scrutinising in search of the two-fold picturesque dimension of the everyday experience. The text describes a picture but the picture highlights the presence of the narrator in most of the situations in the form of comments, questions and thoughts. It works like a postcard which is sent to someone who does not know the place where the picture was taken. It comes with a pictorial description and comments which indicate the presence of the writer in the place described. It is a brief image for a distant reader.

However, in this case he draws images with words focusing on the visual aspect and adds comments to this pictorial text. But these text-postcards are not addressed to anyone in particular. When these short pictorial texts are published in a magazine like *Careta*, they become a public message which is received by tens of thousands of faraway people who will read the presence of Lima Barreto in descriptions of the everyday life in the Capital. In this vein, Lima Barreto's search of the picturesque is necessarily connected with the presence and unique point of view of the narrator.

This search for pictorial elements of the everyday life can certainly be related to other realistic writing styles and it could be argued that Lima Barreto was influenced by the nineteenth-century French Realism. However, I would like to point out another possible influence which can suggest how he was deliberately making efforts to incorporate pictorial expressiveness into his literature of popular appeal. He was

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<sup>9</sup> See the online version at [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)

influenced by several illustrators whose work became popularised in the magazine boom of the nineteenth century in Europe. Periodical illustrators such as John Tenniel, Jean-Louis Forain, Adolphe-Léon Willette, and Charles Leandre were mentioned and discussed by Lima Barreto in certain pieces (Barreto, 1911). However, one of these graphic artists in particular caused a great impact on him, as he himself affirms in a text published in 1921 in the newspaper *Gazeta de Notícias*:

Nas mãos de um amigo e em casa dele, certa ocasião vi um álbum de desenhos de Daumier, que me encheram de um pasmo artístico perdurável até hoje. Confesso que, naquela época, e isto vai para mais de quinze anos, eu não conhecia semelhante desenhista. Dos do seu tempo, só tinha notícias de Gavarni, isto mesmo por citações de jornais a respeito de Ângelo Agostini. Foi uma descoberta; e sempre tive tenção, da qual ainda não me desprendi inteiramente, de mandar buscar esse álbum; mas... / Dos desenhos, aquele que mais me feriu e impressionou, foi o que representa um carro de segunda classe, ou daqueles que, em França, equivalem à nossa segunda. / Aquelas caras tristes, tangidas pela miséria, oprimidas pelo exaustivo trabalho diário; aquele cachimbar de melancolias; aquelas mulheres com xales à cabeça, e magras crianças ao colo – tudo aquilo me ficou; mas não foram só os detalhes que aí deixo e cuja exatidão não garanto inteiramente, que me calaram fundamente n'alma. O que me impressionou mais, foi a ambiência que envolve todas as figuras e a estampa registra, ambiência de resignação perante a miséria, o sofrimento e a opressão que o trabalho árduo e pouco remunerador traz às almas Barreto, 1921b).

The drawings by Honoré Daumier to which Lima Barreto refers make up a series called “Un wagon de troisième classe”.



Honoré Daumier, Un wagon de troisième classe<sup>10</sup>



Honoré Daumier, Un wagon de troisième classe<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from the online Daumier Register ([www.daumier-register.org](http://www.daumier-register.org)); DR Number 8059.

In this group of illustrations executed in the 1860s, which also includes versions of the second and first class carriages, Daumier paints the manners of his time, with its clear socioeconomic distinctions traveling through the railways of the newly modernised urban environment of Paris. The perspectives chosen for these drawings are the ones of a direct observation, with the point of view of someone who is seated on the same coach, traveling under the same conditions of the ones he is depicting. Like most of the illustrations by Daumier, this series reflects not an imaginary scene. It is deliberately suggesting the presence of the artist as an important feature of the representation which results from an urban fieldwork. In this sense, it is an illustration that is drawn having the ordinary as its main motive.

It was probably in this series of illustrations, specially in the first picture, that Lima Barreto saw Daumier elevating the everyday life experience of the working class to aesthetic existence. The illustrations focus on an empirical attitude, giving to readers from other cities or countries a taste of the train travel experience in the mid-nineteenth century in France. Lima Barreto was most impressed by the ambience which enveloped all the characters in these paintings, and in many pieces he deliberately employed the same perspective to describe the train in Rio, sometimes going further and adding other elements, making the text looks like a panoramic travel. One good example is a scene of very similar characteristics described in “De Cascadura ao Garnier”.

Embarco em Cascadura. É de manhã. O bonde se enche de moças de todas as cores com os vestuários de todas as cores. Vou ocupar o banco da frente, junto ao motorneiro. Quem é ele? É o mais popular da linha. É

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11 Retrieved from the online Daumier Register ([www.daumier-register.org](http://www.daumier-register.org)); DR Number 9118.

o “titio Arrelia” – um crioulo forte, espadaúdo, feio, mas simpático. Ele vai manobrando com as manivelas e deitando pilhérias, para um lado e para outro (Barreto, 1922).

In Cascadura, a working class suburb of Rio de Janeiro, Lima Barreto does what Daumier did in a banlieue in Paris: he describes a working class train coach and the people who use it. He seems to be painting a picture of the everyday life, drawing from what he sees and observes around him. But he does not do this at random; sometimes he takes the second class coach on purpose just to write about these people. “Habitualmente não viajo em segunda classe; mas tenho viajado, não só, às vezes, por necessidade, como também, em certas outras, por puro prazer” (Barreto, 1921c). Throughout the journey, he emphasises the visual aspects of it, as if the city were a moving panorama that could be experienced:

Eu vejo delinear-se uma nova e irregular cidade por aqueles capinzais que já foram canaviais; contemplo aquelas velhas casas de fazenda que se erguem no cimo das meias-laranjas; e penso no passado. / No passado! Mas... o passado é um veneno. Fujo dele, de pensar nele e o bonde entra com toda a força na embocadura do Mangue. A usina de gás fica ali e olho aquelas chaminés, aqueles guindastes, aquele amontoado de carvão de pedra. Mais adiante, meus olhos tocam com medas de manganês... [...] Estamos no Largo de São Francisco. Desço. Penetro pela Rua do Ouvidor. Onde ficou a Estrada Real, com os seus bácoros, as suas cabras, os seus galos e os seus capinzais? Não sei ou esqueci-me (Barreto, 1922).

The journey-piece reaches the end when the narrator enters in the most prominent book store of the Capital, Garnier, where he finds a poet declaiming a poem which starts with the line: “Minh'alma é triste como a rola aflita”. The narrator, then, concludes the text by saying: “Então de novo me lembro da Estrada Real, dos seus porcos, das suas cabras, dos seus galos, dos capinzais...”. Lima Barreto used to attend meetings at Garnier bookshop, but personally he had his own opinions about those men of letters: “eles não têm nenhum ideal de Arte. São muito inteligentes, escrevem e falam como Rui de Pina, mas ideal em Arte não tem nenhum. Não me entendem ao certo e procuram nos meus livros bandalheiras, apelos sexuais, coisa que nunca foi da minha tenção procurar ou esconder” (Barreto, 1956, v. XIV). This statement is helpful to understand what is being suggested in the conclusion of the piece about the streetcar journey through the streets of Rio.

Although the authorship of the poem is not identified in the text, Lima Barreto is referring to Casimiro de Abreu's “Minh'alma é triste”, published in the book *Primaveras* in 1859. The poem focuses on the lost illusions of the old poet, relating the past of the narrator and how sad was his old soul (despite the fact that the poet died aged twenty-one). “Dizem que há gozos no correr dos anos!... / Só eu não sei em que o prazer consiste. / -- Pobre ludíbrio de cruéis enganos, / Perdi os risos — a minh'alma é triste!” (Abreu, 2009:111).

Lima Barreto is not interested in the perspective that focuses exclusively on the past, like the one proposed by the Romantic Casimiro de Abreu. Although in many pieces Lima Barreto refers to his memories and the past, he does so in order to give a context or to introduce the main topic to be addressed, which is related to the present. That is perhaps the reason why he states that “the past is poison” in this piece. He does not “relê as folhas que já foram lidas”, as Casimiro de Abreu does in one of the lines of

the poem. Instead, Lima Barreto engages himself in a constant encounter with the present life either of his neighbourhood, his city or his country.

Interestingly, when the poem reminds him of the past, Lima Barreto recalls not the unreachable past, but the past that is mixed with the present; the past that can still be seen empirically. When the streetcar passes through the Estrada Real de Santa Cruz, he points out the picturesque of that part of the city, a combination of modern urban and old rural aspects at the same time:

[ O bonde de Cascadura] percorre uma parte da cidade que até agora era completamente desconhecida. Em grande trecho, perlustra a velha Estrada Real de Santa Cruz que até bem pouco vivia esquecida. / [...] A Light, porém, com o seu bonde de “Cascadura” descobriu-a de novo e hoje, por ela toda, há um sopro de renascimento, uma palpitação de vida urbana, embora os bacorinhos, a fossar a lama, e as cabras, a pastar pelas suas margens, ainda lhes dêem muito do seu primitivo ar rural de antanho (Barreto, 1922).

Like Daumier, Lima Barreto embarks on a train to depict an ordinary moment, drawing attention to habits and costumes that are in contrast with the modern urban life put forward by the reforms in the city centre in the beginning of the century. It was in scenes like this that Manuel Bandeira read “o gosto da nossa vida” in which the Brazilian diction emerges to depict a landscape full of contrasts which the official belletrist city centre could not obliterate. The official picturesque aspect of Rio with its natural beauty and modern buildings printed in postcards to be sent abroad is replaced by a two-fold picturesque postcard that depicts to the anonymous mass readership what is

“pitoresco” and “pinturesco” in the “selva gostosa dos nossos barbarismos” (Bandeira, 1929a).

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