

Ferreira-Pinto, Cristina (Org). *Urban voices: contemporary short stories from Brazil*. New York: University Press of America, 1999. 288p.

Nothing is more pleasant than to see this excellent collection of short stories translated into English by a distinguished group of experts in contemporary Brazilian narrative. Deftly organized and introduced by Cristina Ferreira-Pinto, the collection makes Brazilian tales accessible to a larger number of readers around the world. As the title indicates, *Urban voices: contemporary short stories from Brazil* brings together stories that relate to life in Brazilian cities. We are introduced to both new and well-known authors who collectively present us with different views of what constitutes a Brazilian community, thereby expanding our understanding of Brazilian society.

In the preface and introduction Ferreira-Pinto informs us that in addition to paying attention to thematic considerations, she chose eighteen stories that had not yet been translated into English. The introduction also provides us with a brief overview of the Brazilian short story, which enables readers less familiar with Brazil's literary tradition to place the tales included in *Urban voices* in a larger literary context.

The book is divided into six parts: "Walls," "Windows," "Streets," "Encounters," "Cities," and "Exit," giving a view of the urban as visually structured, similar to an architectural plan. "Life next door," by Marina Colasanti, "Great neighbors," by Tânia Jamardo Faillace, and "Glittering nothing," by Hilda Hilst, are included in the first section, "Walls." Together, these texts remind us of the barriers that separate people whose lives are at the same time close to and apart from each other. They also, as

we see in "Great neighbors," tell us that a cynical lack of social commitment leads to violence and, as "Glittering nothingness" reveals, that homosexuals are often victimized by physical and spiritual violence.

"Windows," the second section, encompasses "Last summer in Copacabana," by Sônia Coutinho, "Dôia at the window," by Roberto Drummond, and "The German submarine," by Sérgio Sant'Anna. As the title suggests, the tales in "Windows" acknowledge an interface where the interior and the exterior worlds meet, be it respectively in the despair felt by the protagonist in trying to reconcile her inner being and the world that surrounded her, the blurring between sobriety and insanity or, finally, the agonizing correlation that might exist between the world of dreams and the real world.

"Street," the third section, includes "The art of walking in the streets of Rio de Janeiro," by Rubem Fonseca, "Copacabana from 5 to 7," by Regina Célia Colônia, "Chilly night," by Fernando Bonassi, and "The traffic light," by Helena Parente Cunha. These short stories narrate the cities as living and pulsating entities, and reveal the cruelty and mechanization of the metropolis. In the first tale, the reader wanders with the protagonist August through a world of beggars, prostitutes and delinquents. In "Copacabana from 5 to 7," and in "Chilly night" the city emerges as an agent disclosing itself as a never sleeping giant, through the routine of workers in the early morning hours, and through the violent and inevitable reality that surrounds us. In the last story in this group, "Traffic light," the restraint or liberation of the impulse that energizes sexual abuse is trivialized both by the rhythm of a traffic light and the absolute ignorance of the passersby.

The section "Encounters" portrays human beings in search of each other. In "The sailor," by Caio Fernando Abreu, eschewing the superfluous propels the protagonist toward self-discovery. In "Chocolate mousse," by Edgard Telles Ribeiro, a love triangle of passion, betrayal and mistrust instills uncertainty in the life of the protagonist. In "Oral passion," by Moacyr Scliar, we see that youth's burning, mixing love and pain, only ends in oblivion. Finally, in "Last tango in Jacobina," by Márcia

Denser, the female protagonist, desperately searching for company and, at the same time, trying to escape her past, is injured in a car accident, therefore substituting an antiseptic hospital bed for the chaos of the cabarets.

"Cities," the fifth section, presents diverse urban spaces. "Canguçu," by Dinorah do Valle, the first short story, discloses the illusion of innocence in small cities. Here one finds gratuitous violence bearing new acts of cruelty that reach even the retarded and the children, a cycle in which the victim becomes the perpetrator. "The other side of paradise," by Luiz Fernando Emediato, questions the validity of dreaming of an ideal space, especially when the presence of a father figure denies us that dream, in the context of the harsh reality of the military dictatorship in the 60s. In "You don't know what love is/Muezzin," by Silviano Santiago, one encounters traces of globalization, with characters that mix not only languages (English, Portuguese and Spanish), but also fuse their national pasts. The escape is, at once, from both past and present, but also from harassment of homosexuals and political repression.

Having opened with a story by Marina Colasanti, the volume now closes with "Shooting star," by the same author. As the only short story selected for the "Exit," the last section, "Shooting star" synthesizes the closed space of apartments, the isolation of people, the uselessness of windows. In all cases, it points to the intensity of blood on the asphalt, of someone who had attempted to walk among the clouds, therefore marking the inevitable annihilation of dreamers in an impious city.

This book will be mostly of interest to the readers in the fields of Latin American Studies, Cultural Studies and Brazilian Literature, but it will also appeal to readers interested in learning more about contemporary Brazil. *Urban voices* offers snapshots of passion, search, scorn, oppression, and violence, all of which are common to every contemporary society. By making first-rate Brazilian short stories available in English translation, *Urban voices* gives non-Portuguese speakers access to a dynamic new world not available to them otherwise.

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