

The Railways as a Character. Representations of Conviviality in Brazilian Literature¹

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ABSTRACT: Stemming from the early railway system in Brazil, this article builds on conviviality in Latin America. Scholarship traditionally looks at railroads to analyse economy, architecture, and labour. However, the extent to which railroads changed everyday interactions within the smallest contexts remains overlooked. To fill in this gap, it draws from novels, plays, and short stories written between the late-nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century. This timeframe corresponds to the “railway boom” in Brazil and includes renowned authors such as Machado de Assis, Lima Barreto, and Júlia Lopes de Almeida but also glossed over authors as Adolfo Caminha. Literary sources allow the analysis of the impact that trains had on the everyday that would, otherwise, remain unknown. This article brings railways and its surroundings, particularly its outcasts, to the forefront of Brazilian [hi]stories. The connection between railways and socioeconomic development in Brazil is critical in this presentation, alongside women’s pivotal role in the convivial environments that the railway engendered. It aims to demonstrate that the colonial discourse of civilization against barbarism crystallised, adapted, and changed with the implementation of the railway system in such an unequal society as Brazil.

KEYWORDS: railways – Brazil – literature – history – conviviality – 19th and 20th centuries

Introduction

Stemming from the railway system, this paper sets out to deepen our understanding of conviviality in Brazil. I use the term “conviviality” as “interactions observed in the realm of common life” (Costa 27). Scholarship traditionally looks at railroads to analyse economy, architecture, and labour movements. However, the extent to which railroads changed everyday interactions within the smallest contexts remains overlooked. To fill in this gap, I draw from novels, plays, and short stories written between the late-nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century. The key criteria I used to select the texts was adequacy to timeframe rather than explicit mention of railways. In doing so, I bring to the forefront a secondary character that remains glossed over despite its historical importance. Literary sources reveal the impact that railways had on the everyday that would, otherwise, remain unknown. The connection between railways and “progress” in Brazil is on the background of this essay, alongside women’s role in the new convivial environments that railways engendered. The implementation of the railway system in Brazil crystallised, adapted to, and changed the colonial discourse of civilization versus barbarism.

Regarding the theoretical framework, this essay draws from French literary critic Roland Barthes’s theory of “the death of the author” (Barthes 50). How, then, can we read a text against the grain without relating it to its author? We examine everything internal to the text, such as semantics and syntax, not external. In other words, the emphasis is not on “the spirit of the time” or on authors’ biographies as these are an “intentional fallacy” (Winsatt and

Beardsley 647). This essay looks at books, plays, and short stories focusing more on internal elements, such as figures of speech, than on external elements. However, since this is a history essay, not a piece of literary criticism, it situates texts into the broader context of the implementation of the railway in Brazil between late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. There is one major exception to the “death of the author,” because Lima Barreto is analysed in the light of his biography. This exception relates to the fact that, as Schwarcz contends in *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* (183), Lima inserts alter egos in his texts that are crucial to understand his stories. To a lesser extent, this article also offers a short biography of Júlia Lopes de Almeida.

The article is divided into three parts, beginning with a summary of each analysed text. On the following, there is a reflection about how railroads connected cities with their suburbs and the countryside.² These reflections shed light to and challenge the notion that cities were enlightened civilisation clusters while suburbs and the hinterlands remained in the “dark ages.” The third and final part looks at train stations as places of interactions where diversity coexisted, and shaped relations. It throws weight behind the argument that conflict, negotiation, and cooperation build conviviality in unequal contexts (Heil 3; 27). The social role of women is at the intersection of convivial relations that pervaded the railway. In the end, it contributes to the debate about conviviality from a diachronic perspective.

The Plots

Machado de Assis published *Evolução* (Evolution) in 1884. The short story narrates the encounter between Inácio and Benedito in a train from Rio de Janeiro to Vassouras. This meeting changes Benedito's life after Inácio asserts that Brazil was a crawling baby that would walk only after having railroads spread over its territory (Assis 157).³ Inácio and Benedito bump into each other in Rio and Europe, to where Inácio travels to negotiate the construction of a new railway in Brazil. Benedito is then running for deputy. When they meet again in Rio, Benedito (now elected) reads his inaugural speech to Inácio. Inácio is surprised to find out that Benedito appropriated his discourse on material progress and railway development.

Pobre Menino (Poor Boy) is a short story written by Visconde de Taunay in 1901. It is about Alberto, an ill boy that travels from Caxambú to Rio de Janeiro with his family (Taunay). The narrator stops to observe the family because he has nothing else to do and is bored with the newspapers and a book he has brought on board. As the story unfolds, the narrator grows fond of the boy who, despite being rich, has a poor health.

Correio da Roça (Countryside Mail) is one of the most famous novels by Julia Lopes de Almeida. It tells the story of Maria and her daughters, who find themselves in a tough economic situation after the death of her husband and father (Almeida *Correio da Roça*). As it becomes hard to make ends meet in Rio de Janeiro, they move to their virtually abandoned estate. Maria starts corresponding with her friend Fernanda, who continues to live in Rio. At first, Maria complains about everything in the countryside. However, after much insistence from Fernanda, Maria and her daughters slowly start to devote themselves to the development of their farm. They plant flowers, seek to improve the roads, and breed animals. The oldest daughter opens a small school for the neighbours in their back garden.

Julia Lopes de Almeida's *A Intrusa* (1908) tells the story of widower Argemiro, his daughter Glória, and her preceptor, Alice (Almeida *A Intrusa*). After mourning for months, Argemiro decides to bring his daughter back home. The girl has been living in a cottage with her grandmother, the Baroness, since her mother's death. Argemiro is eager to properly educate Glória, because she became a tomboy. For this reason, he must pick up the girl and take her to Rio de Janeiro, where he hires Alice as a preceptor.

In *Cemitério dos Vivos* (Cemetery of the Living), partially published in the early-1920s, the stories of Mascarenhas, the narrator, and of Lima Barreto's intertwine, and not only because both men spent a couple of years in an asylum (Barreto *Diário do Hospício. O Cemitério dos Vivos*).⁴ Their stories also intersect at the discrimination that both experienced because of their African ancestors. Mascarenhas and Barreto sought social recognition and integration through education. It is, thus, to study that Mascarenhas moves to an inn at Marrecas Street, near the promenade in Rio de Janeiro's city centre.⁵ At Marrecas Street, he falls in love with Efigênia,

daughter of Clementina, the pension's owner. However, Clementina falls ill, must sell the inn, and moves to the suburbs with her daughter. After this, Mascarenhas starts visiting them.

A Normalista (Caminha) is a story of violence against women that mainly occurs at *Rua do Trilho* (Rail Street), in Baturité, a village in Ceará. Adolpho Caminha guides the reader through the story of Maria do Carmo, an orphan who lives in the company of her godfather, officeholder João da Matta, and his partner D. Therezinha. Maria do Carmo is a young woman faced with the death of her parents, in need of sharing a house with an abusive godfather and a jealous godmother who turns a blind eye to the sexual abuse inflicted on Maria do Carmo. In addition to being a woman and an orphan, Maria do Carmo studies at a "State Normal School," or *Escola Normal*, hence the title *The Normalist*. Normal Schools were state schools that prepared women to be teachers, one of the only socially acceptable professions that a woman could have at the time. However, there was prejudice against *normalists*, who were usually depicted as immoral and sexually liberated (De Luca).

After being raped, Maria do Carmo gets pregnant. Her godmother grows increasingly suspicious of her and disdains the girl. João da Matta, worried, takes his goddaughter to the countryside to have the baby. On her way, Maria do Carmo feels better as she breathes in the fresh air of the meadows (Caminha 267).⁶ The baby, however, is stillborn. Maria do Carmo's return to Normal School coincides with the Proclamation of the Republic (1889). From this moment on, her life interweaves and benefits from a national event because everybody is busy minding their own business. Maria do Carmo marries a military officer and, since the army played a pivotal role in the Proclamation, she becomes part of one of the most important social groups in the country, contrary to the monarchists.

The next section delves into these and other texts to analyse the role of trains as cultural mediators in Brazil. At the same time, it examines how the railway either consolidated or changed convivial modes in cities, suburbs, and the countryside.

The City, the Suburbs, and the Countryside: trains as cultural mediators

This section explores how trains appear as intermediaries between the city and the suburbs in coeval literature. The association of socioeconomic progress with the railway pervades most of the texts while it reveals writers' perception about the city and the suburbs. These views vary according to characters' social standing, occupation, and gender. The analysis begins with the relationship between urban centres and the countryside as registered by Machado de Assis, Taunay, and Antônio de Oliveira. On the following, it sets up to understand how trains influenced convivial interactions between city centres and their suburbs in the words of Júlia Lopes de Almeida and Lima Barreto.

Public transport creates favourable opportunities for the emergence of conviviality more than others, as they "facilitate mingling"

(Nyamnhjoh 360). In the short story *Evolução* (*Evolution*), renowned Machado de Assis places the railway as one of the leading characters (Assis 157 [1884]). The last sentence of Benedito's speech is the same that Inácio mentioned when they first met on the train going to Vassouras: Brazil is a crawling child and will start walking only when it has railways. To this, Inácio calls for a psychological evolution, as in Hebert Spencer.⁷ In this short story, interactions between people, mediated by a machine, change not only the environment but also individuals. *Evolução* describes a convivial context that reveals the complexity of interactions that took place in a nineteenth-century Brazil that was fighting for its space in the new capitalist world.

A similar viewpoint appears in *Correio da Roça*. According to Fernanda, Brazil's future as an agricultural power depends on the expansion of both roads and railways: "in my opinion, the modern farmer must prepare their roads, not for oxcarts, but to cars destined to overcome locomotives and trains" (Almeida *Correio da Roça* 39, own translation).⁸ She foresees what would happen decades later, in the 1950s, when the Brazilian government opted for automobiles against trains. The improvement of communication should also avoid the *jeitinho brasileiro*. The "Brazilian way" of doing things precariously, for as long as it works is, in Fernanda's opinion, a petty saving that causes a lot of difficulty and unnecessary expense in the future (Almeida *Correio da Roça* 39).⁹ To convince Maria of the profits accruing to the railway development, Fernanda uses the United States as a stellar example: "[...] in the year of 1907 only, these profitable orange trees sent to external markets nothing less than 413.696 tons of fruit, that loaded 81.640 wagons on the railroads!" (Almeida *Correio da Roça* 27, own translation).¹⁰ The Brazilian agricultural "gift" lingers on until today.

In *Correio da Roça*, "conciliatory feminism," or moderate feminism, as De Luca (2011) calls it, combines with positivist patriotism and Spencer's evolutionism. Its writer, Ana Júlia Lopes de Almeida, alas Écila Worms, belongs to the Brazilian women's writing boom that occurred in the turn of the nineteenth century and was associated to "conciliatory feminism" (De Luca). She is one of the main representatives of the second wave of Brazilian feminism, called "moderate feminism" (De Luca). The main characteristics of this movement were: patriotism connected to the everyday; Rousseauian Enlightenment; Utopic Socialism, "social romanticism"; and Spencer's evolutionism (De Luca). Born in Rio Janeiro, Júlia enjoyed unparalleled success as a writer at her time and continues to be one of the most important names in Brazilian women's writing (De Luca).

According to De Luca, *Correio da Roça* marks Júlia's "green cycle," because ecology is a pervading theme in her writings from this period. The "ecological" theme appears in other texts, but *Correio da Roça* is a literary masterpiece of positivist agricultural economy. As an epistolary novel, this book has a dubious tone. On the one hand, it celebrates women's wit, force, industriousness, and adaptability. On the other hand, it crystallises the docile and gentle posi-

tion where society wanted women to remain. Idealisation of women as heroes and crucial to the development of society was inspired in Rousseau's ideas about the role of women in society and influenced numerous nineteenth-century writers (De Luca).

The development of agriculture in Brazil also depended on women's ability to being autodidactic (De Luca). The entire book is, in fact, an ode to it. Fernanda, Maria, and her daughters learn as they put into practice information they read in specialised magazines and share in their letters. This is a practical and positivist education that aims at personal evolution, as in Comte and Spencer. Women's material progress moves in tandem with the progress of the country, shaping positivist female patriotism (De Luca). Technological innovation, such as the railway, improved women's mobility in unforeseen ways.

The train spurs the creation of convivial spaces between the countryside and the city even when its destination is an urban centre, as in *Pobre Menino* (Taunay). The train between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro is one of the leading characters in this short story like it is in *Evolução* (p. 3). *Pobre Menino* reveals the material conditions of travelling on a Brazilian train at the beginning of the twentieth century, at least according to its narrator: dirty and dusky toilets, people's habits inside a train (eating, reading), different types of travellers (chatty, grumpy). It also points to the direction that casual encounters on a train trip – such as that between Inácio and Benedito – change lives. According to Nyamnhjoh (357) conviviality seeks a balance between intimacy and distance to negotiate conflict. The encounter between Inácio and Benedito pays testimony to Nyamnhjoh claims, as Inácio wavers between proud and uncomfortable each time he meets Benedito. So does Alberto in *Pobre Menino*.

Boy's health and the narrator's mood move in tandem with their surroundings while Taunay employs powerful metaphors, personification, and anaphora. When Boy has a fever episode, train sounds are monstrous, agonising, and the landscape is spooky:

"What an endless journey! What time! All so gloomy around us! The rain shall pass; but the damp, weeping darkness condenses in a sulky, callous way, almost tangible. And at each station honks and whistles pierced our ears, or harrowing outcries and a melancholic bell tolls, eerily, tolling the dead."¹¹ (Taunay 18, own translation)

Finally, Taunay transforms the train journey in a euphemism for death, in a frenzy:

"Another train of the suburbs chugged making a raucous din: Listen, listen! There it comes... What fear! And it was as if he was already alone... he saw himself in a shallow grave covered with loads of dirt on his small, ill, knocked down little body..."¹² (Taunay 20-21, own translation)

These excerpts demonstrate how railways connected the countryside with the city, opposing backwardness and progress, idleness, and opportunity. In romantic literature, the train usually is a powerful element that mingles with narrators' feelings and state of mind. The impact of the train upon society went, thus, beyond its economic importance.

Up to this point, analysis has concentrated on the relationship between cities and the countryside, having trains as mediators. From this point on, I will focus on the connection between downtown and the suburbs, beginning with *A Intrusa*. Crowds that catch a train at Rio de Janeiro's central station towards the suburbs are described as hasty and clumsy; they carry parcels while dragging children behind them (Almeida *A Intrusa* 13).¹³ The train that stops at *Central do Brazil* reconnects widower Argemiro with his daughter Glória. On his way to the suburbs with a friend, it is possible to note the same literary recourse that Taunay uses in *Pobre Menino*, as the deafening winches move in parallel with a child's cry, and young, yellowish, toothless men talking about politics (Almeida *A Intrusa* 14).¹⁴

The landscape pays testimony to the paradox that pervaded the suburbs despite their backwardness when compared to urban centres. Their muddy trails, dry grass, and scorching sun contrast with scattered golden orange trees that cheer up the fields.¹⁵ The reader identifies, at this point of the narrative, one of the main elements that stands out in Júlia Lopes de Almeida's production years later: the importance of nature and agricultural education to the development of Brazil.

"Argemiro: This is devastating.... – noted Argemiro, pointing to the fields, where ugly small houses grouped every now and then.

Caldas: And this train could trundle through odoriferous fruits farms. Brazil is the land of odd flowers and delicious fruit. If we had countrymen with a good taste, we would see, Argemiro, beautiful orchids on fruit trees. Look at that! Such a crooked fence can only be the result of bad taste and lack of instinct in the land of bamboo! The beautiful bamboo!"¹⁶ (Almeida *A Intrusa* 15, own translation)

Differently from Júlia Almeida in *A Intrusa*, Lima Barreto sets an optimistic tone about the suburbs in his texts, despite their pervading poverty. In *The Station* (Barreto "A Estação"), he writes about Méier:¹⁷

"There are patisseries, busy bars; there are bakeries that make treasured and wanted bread; there are two cinemas [...]; there is a circus/theatre, rough, but existent; there are casinos beyond suspicion, there are second-hand bohemian, and other urban imperfections, both honest and dishonest."¹⁸ (Barreto "A Estação", par. 7, own translation.)

Irony and nostalgia seem to grow stronger in Barreto's latest writings, particularly in *Cemitério dos Vivos*. Mascarenha's journey on the suburban train interests me most, as it is more realistic and less romantic than the texts analysed so far.¹⁹ The noises on the train do not disturb the narrator, nor does he establish any parallel between his feelings and the landscape. This does not mean, however, that his description lacks affection, since the landscape is the only thing that interrupts his thoughts, as the grotesque and improper architecture of the suburbs seems posh and pretentious. Mascarenhas criticises the absence of gardens and trees, a mimicry of fancy neighbourhoods. It does not resemble the suburbs of a city as rich as Rio de Janeiro, but a series of pedantic hamlets, big cities wannabes. Mascarenhas misses the graciousness and freshness of a "half-countryside" (Barreto *Diário Do Hospício. O Cemitério dos Vivos* 169-70).²⁰ In a previous book, (Barreto *Vida e Morte de M. J. Gonzaga de Sá* 41), the character Gonzaga de Sá makes a similar critique to the suburbs, which he hates because they are neither a city nor a countryside.²¹

Mascarenhas' description of the suburbs does not befit the economic situation of Efigênia and her mother. It befits an area where a Baroness would live, as in *A Intrusa*. However, after disembarking at the station where both women live, Mascarenhas notes that their house is far from the station. Their street is improvised and poorly designed, with scattered houses and wastelands where secondary vegetation grows. The houses near the station are pretentious and look like a mini-Rio de Janeiro, whereas their street resembles a countryside trail (Barreto *Diário do Hospício. O Cemitério dos Vivos* 170).²² It is plausible to contend that Lima Barreto, through the voice of Mascarenhas, considers the suburbs more authentic when they do not try to look like an urban centre.

Lima Barreto's background and ethnical origins may explain his increasingly ironic tone. His grandmother, Geraldina, was a manumitted enslaved woman; his mother, Amália, was probably the result of a relationship with Geraldina's owner (Schwarcz *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 31). His father was also the son of an enslaved woman, probably a natural offspring, too (Schwarcz *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 42). Does this have anything to do with the fact that Lima Barreto lived in the suburbs (Schwarcz "Da Minha Janela Vejo o Mundo Passar: Lima Barreto, o Centro e os Subúrbios")? Is there any connection between Barreto's (and Mascarenhas') desire, or necessity, to change to be socially accepted? An affirmative answer to both questions does not seem far-fetched, as Lima Barreto studied in elite schools and colleges, among the best of Niterói and Rio de Janeiro (Schwarcz *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 98-101; 08-19). However, he did not feel like he belonged, his ethnic background playing a major role in his feeling of rejection (Schwarcz *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 474). What stands out from Barreto's descriptions of the suburbs is the inequality that pervades them, as they are home for the (aspiring) rich and the poor. From Barreto's viewpoint, the suburbs are not homogenous, and he highlights the importance of not generalising his criticism (Barreto "O Trem Dos

Subúrbios" 182; Schwarcz *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário*; Schwarcz "Da Minha Janela Vejo o Mundo Passar: Lima Barreto, o Centro e os Subúrbios").²³

At the time, the population had reasons to believe that the railway was going to bring not only economic but also social development to Brazil. The train that Mascarenhas caught at the central station towards the suburbs was part of the *Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil*. The Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil (EFCB) started in 1858 when Emperor Pedro II inaugurated the *Estrada de Ferro Dom Pedro II* (EFDPII), three years after a concession to British engineer Edward Price (Graham 52-51; Figueira; Transportes 4-38). El-Kareh argues that EFDPII was a capitalist enterprise that benefited from enslaved labour. There were shareholders, stock market, interest payments, and free labour-hire; however, EFDPII also used enslaved men who toiled in railway construction (El-Kareh 36-37; 66-67).

Central do Brazil is a character in numerous texts of Lima Barreto. It is more than a station, a route, and a background: it has a story and twists plots (Schwarcz *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 163). Such prominence makes sense, as all trains to the suburbs necessarily arrived and departed from the Central (Schwarcz *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 172-73). At the Central, people could take a carriage or hop on a tram to move around Rio de Janeiro. Lima Barreto ironically describes the allure of the railway (Barreto "O Trem dos Subúrbios"). According to him, the dream job of poorly educated young men was at the Central do Brazil Railway. Suburban candidates to public service always thought of the Central to save them and provide economic stability.²⁴ Barreto continues, claiming that they felt like generals when they wore small conductor's or ticket inspector's caps.²⁵ Despite Barreto's criticism – that might be linked to his dubious and conflictive belonging to middle class – his youngest brother had a career at Central do Brazil (Schwarcz *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 176).

Conductors and ticket inspectors played an important role in the complex railway structure, although their salaries were among the lowest (El-Kareh 79). They were the face of the company, as they dealt directly with the public. The success of the railway relied on good service, to which the behaviour of conductors and inspectors was key (El-Kareh 80). All employers were, moreover, subject to rigid discipline codes and tight control, and their allegedly pedantry might have unfolded from such demand (El-Kareh 80-81). The railway worked with a reward policy for good employees, who could be promoted to higher positions – although promotion, in many cases, did not correspond to higher wages (El-Kareh 80-83).

The ambiguous image of the suburbs and the countryside shifts from backwardness to innocence or redemption, and it mingles with the submission of women in *A Normalista*. The negativity that pervades the "rail house" culminates with the rape of Maria do Carmo. Caminha's description is so realistic that, in one of the copies I analyse, the corresponding pages have been pulled out. Everything related to their house at *Rua Trilho* has a grim and decadent appearance. It is sooty, poorly lit, and scary. João da Matta is a cock-

eyed, liver-leafed, creepy man, and his house is decadent, albeit aspiring to luxury. It is striking that society looked down at people who lived by the railway, since it was a benchmark of progress. However, people from higher social groups, such as law student Zuza and his father, also frequented the house. Maria do Carmo falls in love and she is, to a certain extent, corresponded. However, once Zuza meets important politicians, he starts to spend long periods outside Baturité and his letters become scarce. In a way, the train takes away Maria do Carmo's hope that Zuza would return to rescue her. She is left at *Rua do Trilho* at the mercy of her godfather.

The outcome of *A Normalista* presents João da Matta, a monarchist, as the impersonation of ancient evil, someone whose future as a public servant is uncertain. Maria do Carmo marries a military officer and foresees a bright future. It is important to note that the proclamation of the Brazilian Republic in 1889 was a military coup d'état. The military officer, thus, represents the future, while civil service was the past. The birth of a new regime represented a new beginning. It brought hope of justice for all, including petty personal tragedies. At least for some and, perhaps, for a while.

Writing during the republican regime, Júlia Lopes de Almeida portrays a more positive view of women than Adolpho Caminha. In Júlia's narrative, women are still restrained but not victimised. She does not describe men as obnoxiously as Caminha does, neither does she expose the sexual violence that women suffered before the republic and continued to suffer after it. Caminha shows individuals from lower social groups, while Júlia writes about middle-upper class groups. As mentioned earlier, Júlia belongs to "social romanticism," according to which women acted upon the public sphere and were no longer secluded to domestic affairs. Caminha, in his turn, represents realism and naturalism, placing women as individuals guided by affections and passions, either torn between pleasure and social duty or degenerated in consequence of society, as Maria do Carmo (De Luca).

Train Stations as Convivial Interactions Hubs

Stations appear in the selected texts as places where interactions between multiple characters take place. Former enslaved people, merchants, women, and politicians shared stations and had to deal with the intimacy of physical proximity. Although those interactions were mostly brief, they reveal conflict between different social groups and unexpected cooperation. Police records about violence at train stations amount. For example, passengers unhappy about warnings from conductors and inspectors sometimes resulted in death threats.²⁶ The presence of destitute individuals in the stations was recurrent, being up to conductors and inspectors to provide first aid, take them to the hospital and warn the police.²⁷ The convivial space of train stations was, thus, violent but also solidary.

Perhaps the best summary of train stations and their importance to its neighbourhoods in the early-nineteenth century has been written by Lima Barreto. He adds up to the characterisation

of stations as works of art (Meeks). A railway station is more than a place where passengers wait for trains, as it must effectively combine ticket selling, waiting rooms, embark and disembark platforms, in addition to arrival and departure tracks (Meeks 28-30). In the 1830s, nobody knew how a station had to look like, and it took years of engineering improvement and architectural polishing to figure it out (Meeks 39). Train stations slowly became hubs and reference points. The reader gets from Lima Barreto a glimpse of what train stations looked like in the early-1920s, not in terms of architecture, but interactions.

Train stations were places for flirting in a time when cinemas and gardens were uncommon or did not exist in the suburbs. As such, it was a convivial space that promoted encounters not only among suburban citizens but also between them and people from various parts, not only Rio de Janeiro:

"In suburban life, the train station plays a key role: it is the centre, its backbone. Once upon a time, when there were no gardens or cinemas in those areas, it was the favourite spot for girls and boys looking for marriage, willingly or not, during Sunday walks."²⁸ (Barreto "A Estação", par. 1, own translation.)

Lima Barreto immortalised what a train station looked like at his time. His description is poetic, albeit not romantic: "nowadays, the suburban 'gare' has not lost this characteristic of being a recreational, meeting, and chatting point (Barreto "A Estação").²⁹ The author reconstructs how various types of food are sold in the warehouses that surround the stations; haberdasheries; pharmacies; butchery shops; and *quitandas* – shops where biscuits and sweets of all sorts are available to make train journeys more enjoyable (Barreto "A Estação").³⁰

Barreto's description is both poetic and sarcastic. He argues that the "true" suburban station reveals itself in the second half of the morning, between nine and eleven o'clock (Barreto "A Estação"). That is when public servants, military officers, and small lawyers go downtown. According to Lima, they are always complaining about God and the government, in a typical attitude of people who, in consequence of their monotonous jobs and domestic problems, lack taste and spirituality.³¹ Hence, in Lima's opinion, the negative characteristic of the suburbs unravels from aspiring middle classes, not from the working class that goes earlier to the city centre. He further adds that Brazilians are vain and love a meaningless title, even if it is not really a title.³² Barreto writes a guide to identify civil servants who, despite their mediocre jobs, behave like big shots.

"A low-rank officer that got his job in consequence of dodgy business behaves as if he was an important director. He pushes others on the queue when buying his ticket – when he buys. He scorns on scruffy people and throws the coins on the counter violently. Such a vain and igno-

rant scum cannot wait for an old black poor lady to buy a second-class ticket. He is in such a hurry that it seems that Brazil will face bankruptcy if he is not served immediately."³³ (Barreto "A Estação", par. 35, own translation)

Barreto also criticises civil servants who think that graduated workers are better than those who are not. Is Barreto's fierce criticism related to the fact that he was a non-graduated civil servant (Schwarcz *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 143-48)?³⁴ If so, could this be a reason for the genius, yet troubled mind of a man who, in order to belong to society and overcome racism, had to attend the same space of those that he despised most?³⁵ According to L. Schwarcz (2017, p. 144), Lima never thought that his job as a notary had been an honoured solution to unemployment. From this perspective, Lima Barreto criticises himself each time that he complains about public servants. Or, perhaps, he felt different, like he did not belong to the same group.

Up to this point, Lima's description is extremely detailed and offers multiple elements that allow us to define the station as a convivial stage where people lived in intimacy and got along, but also experienced power asymmetries and clashes. The following excerpt leaves little doubt about how the advent of the railway was a step towards the integration of poor and black people that stopped at structural prejudice and racism. A girl walks past Lima with a violin box, music sheets, and a Portuguese version of *La Fauvette du Moulin*, by Émile Richenbourg. He observes: "poor girl! Reads Montepin³⁶ and goes to the Institute of Music? For what? At the institute, only rich and well-related girls have talent" (Barreto "A Estação", par. 50-51).³⁷ Poor girls were, then, accepted in the institute. However, it did not matter how talented and educated they were, because they would never have the same opportunities of those who were rich and had contacts. Is it implied that rich girls who succeeded at the institute were not as smart as the poor?

The final paragraph is sublime and melancholic. By resorting to personification, anaphora, and simile, Lima Barreto brilliantly transforms the train into a metaphor of himself:

"It is meant to run miles, fly on the rails, and move distances, [...] it has failed its destiny. It cannot run free; it cannot fly, spreading on the soil as an acacia; it cannot conquer space. It ought to save its energy and speed to be ready to stop at every station, every fifteen minutes, always at the mercy of a timetable. How shall this locomotive endure such a mediocre life?"³⁸ (Barreto "A Estação", own translation)

To Lima Barreto, locomotives and trains are meant to be free. However, just like him, the black and non-graduated civil servant, the black monster is a prisoner of a nine-to-five boring job, that ultimately drains his willingness to live and write.

Concluding Remarks

This essay contributes to the field of historical and literary studies. It brings to light details of the seemingly unimportant ebb and flow of the everyday. By focusing on texts more than on authors, it demonstrates that literature is a representation of reality that helps historians to reconstruct the past.

I look at the railway as an intermediary that changed the course of people's [hi]stories while connecting them between two geographical points (the city and the countryside). The railway also bridged the gap between cities and their suburbs, transforming big cities such as Rio Janeiro in more complex and heterogeneous places in unforeseen ways.

The railway was on women's minds and daily activities. Women talked about and lived on them. In a way, the railway personified the battle between progress and backwardness. It speeded up

the unprecedented patriotic role that women should have in society, upon which they were supposed to act and not just observe. Moderate feminism appears in some texts as conciliatory feminism that, even when advocating for freedom of speech, reinforced the ideal of women as gentle and humble. In some cases, the railway only added up to the numerous spaces of violence against women.

In the selected texts, train stations are more than mere changing points. They are places where interaction leads to daily conflict and cooperation, flirting and gossip. They are observation points for chroniclers and pay testimony to the small things that allow people to continue living despite politics and crisis.

This paper adds up to the idea of conviviality as an analytical tool that focuses on interactions among people and between people and things. In doing so, it reconstructs the history of a character that has lost its importance in Latin America, but still pervades its present: the railway.

NOTES

¹ I wrote this article while working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Maria Sibylla Merian Centre Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean. I thank Dr Barbara Potthast for her suggestions and comments.

² I use the term suburb to identify newly populated areas near city centres. During the nineteenth century, although there were poverty and misery in Brazilian suburbs, middle classes and elites lived there. The idea of suburbs as the most impoverished areas in a city is a twentieth century invention. Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, "Da Minha Janela Vejo o Mundo Passar: Lima Barreto, o Centro e os Subúrbios," *Estudos Avançados* 31 (2017).

³ "Eu comparo o Brasil a uma criança que está engatinhando; só começará a andar quando tiver muitas estradas de ferro." The original orthography of all quotes have been maintained when possible.

⁴ In *A Triste Morte de Policarpo* Quaresma (The Sad Death of Policarpo Quaresma - 1915), Lima Barreto reveals the devastating effects of asylum over a man. Policarpo had also lived in an asylum, and when they let them out, he moved to the suburbs, being a frequent passenger in the suburban train. Lima Barreto's father used to work in the asylum, where Lima spent his weekends. There is a record of mental disorders in Barreto's family. Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2017).

⁵ Lima Barreto lived at Marrecas street when he enrolled at the Polytechnic School. Schwarcz, *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 111.

⁶ "Fazia-lhe bem, como um tônico, o ar fresco da manhã que lhe bafejava o rosto. Sentia-se melhor respirando aquele ar, bebendo toda a selvagem frescura do campo, todo o delicioso, inefável perfume que se levantava dos crotons e das salsas bravas."

⁷ Hebert Spencer was a philosopher who thought about evolution not only in terms of biology, but also psychology, ethics, and sociology. His most famous book is *First Principles*, published in 1862. Spencer read Charles Darwin.

⁸ "Na minha opinião, o fazendeiro moderno deve preparar as suas estradas não para carros de bois, mas para automóveis, destinados a

desbancar as próprias locomotivas e comboios das vias férreas."

⁹ "Nós temos o habito das economias mesquinhas, dando a tudo que fazemos o ar de provisório, sem cogitarmos em que esse sistema nos acarreta dificuldades e grandes despesas futuras, como bem disse o nosso informante e amigo."

¹⁰ "Só no ano de 1907 esses benéficos laranjais mandaram para mercados estrangeiros nada menos de 413.696 toneladas de frutas, que encheram 81.640 vagões das vias férreas!"

¹¹ "Que viagem interminável! Que hora aquela! Tudo tão sombrio em torno de nós! Cessára a chuva; mas as trevas humidas, gotejantes, se condensavam carrancudas, caliginosas, como que paupaveis. E a cada estação eram apitos e assobios a perfurarem os ouvidos, ou então clamores angustiosos e um bater de sino melancólico, lugubre, a dobrar finados."

¹² "Passou mais um trem dos suburbios com assustador estampido:

Ouvisse, ouvisse!... Ahí vinha ella... Que medo! E já estava como que sósinho... via-se na cova estreita com um mundo de terra por cima do seu corpinho tão batido pela moléstia..."

¹³ "O trem dos subúrbios ia partir, quando Adolfo e Argemiro entraram na gare da Central. Adiante deles corria uma multidão pressurosa e atrapalhada, sobraçando embrulhos e arrastando crianças."

¹⁴ "O trem corria de estação em estação, com os seus guinchos ensurdecadores. Uma criança chorava no colo da mãe aflita; um grupo de rapazes amarelos e desdentados falava de eleições do Clube Riachuelo, ao pé de uma senhora de cabelos grisalhos, bem vestida, e que viajava só."

¹⁵ "Lá fora a paisagem estendia-se larga, banhada de sol escaldante. Um véu fino de pó dourava a atmosfera. Laranjeiras pequenas, de grandes frutos dourados, alegravam aqui e acolá um ou outro ponto dos campos mal tratados, onde em gramados secos trilhas barrentas descreviam linhas tortuosas."

¹⁶ "– Isto é desconsolador... – observou Argemiro, apontando para a extensa pradaria, onde em vários trechos se agrupavam casinhas feias.

– E este trem poderia rolar entre pomares cheirosos. O Brasil é a terra

da flor esquisita e da fruta saborosa. De um lado e de outro destas estradas, se tivéssemos camponesas e agricultores de bom gosto, veríamos, Argemiro, lindas orquídeas suspensas na galharia de árvores frutíferas. Olha bem para aquilo! É preciso não ter absolutamente gosto nem instinto, para se fazer uma cerca assim, de paus tortos, aqui no país do bambu. Do lindíssimo bambu!”

¹⁷ Lima was, however, a fierce critic of Meyer, for considering it a pedantic suburb. Schwarcz, *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 177; 79.

¹⁸ “Tem confeitaria decentes, botequins frequentados; tem padarias que fabricam pães, estimados e procurados; tem dois cinemas, um dos quaes funciona em casa edificada adrede; tem um circo-theatro, tosco, mas tem; tem casas de jogo patentadas e garantidas pela virtude, nunca posta em dúvida, do Estado, o tem bohemios, um tanto de segunda mão; e outras perfeições urbanas, quer honestas, quer desonestas.”

¹⁹ According to De Luca (2011), *A Intrusa* belongs to Realism.

²⁰ “Uma tarde, tomei o trem dos subúrbios e fui em demanda da casa das pobres senhoras. Viajei despreocupadamente, sem dar nenhuma importância ao caso. O meu pensamento ia vagando para todos os lados, sem me deter em coisa alguma. A observação mais demorada que fiz, foi da grotesca e imprópria edificação dos subúrbios, com as suas casas pretensivas e palermas, ao jeito dos bairros chics, a falta de jardins e árvores realçada pelos morros pelados, pedroucentos, que, de um lado, correm quase paralelamente ao leito da estrada e quase nele vêm tocar. Não parecia aquilo subúrbios de uma grande e rica cidade; mas uma série de vilarejos pedantes, a querer imitar as grandes cidades do país. Totalmente lhe fazia falta de gracilidade e de frescor de meia roça.”

²¹ “Assim vivendo todo o dia nos mínimos detalhes da cidade, o meu benévolo amigo conseguira amá-la por inteiro, exceto os subúrbios, que ele não admitia como cidade nem como roça, [...]” *Vida e Morte de Gonzaga de Sá* was the last book that Lima Barreto published in life Schwarcz, *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 181, Marcos Vinícius Scheffel, “Estações De Passagem Da Ficção De Lima Barreto,” Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2011.

²² “Destarte, cheguei à estação em que moravam e fui ter à casa de dona Clementina Dias. Ficava longe da estação, numa rua improvisada, mal delineada pelas casas escassas que se erguiam, tendo de permeio terrenos baldios, onde cresciam árvores de capoeira de certo porte. [...] Se os arredores da estação tinham um ar pretensioso, de pretender-se um pequeno Rio de Janeiro, aquela rua longínqua, simplesmente esboçada, ensombrada de grandes árvores, atapetada de capim e arbustos, tinha a aparência de uma estrada, ou antes, de um trilho de roça.”

²³ “Não generaliso, porque, nessas cousas, erra quem quiser generalizar. Registro o aspecto saliente que fere o immodesto; porque o modesto paira na sombra e ninguém o nota.”

²⁴ “De uma instrução descuidada, se não rudimentar, elles não se querem sujeitar às colocações de que são merecedores naturalmente. Querem mais, acima do que sabem e do que podem desempenhar na vida. O alvo delles, em geral, são os diversos departamentos da Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil. O candidato suburbano a emprego publico pensa sempre na central, para salvá-lo e dar-lhe estabilidade na existência.

²⁵ “Um bonezinho de auxiliar (conductor de trem) ou de conferente é a meta dos seus sonhos; e é, para elle, quase como o chapéo armado de general com o seu respectivo penacho.”

²⁶ Arquivo Público Mineiro (APM), Polícia (Pol.) 8, Caixa (Cx.) 36, pacote (pc.) 3, 1898; APM, Pol. 8, Cx. 36, pc. 6, 1903; APM, Pol. 8, Cx. 31, pc. 10, 1889.

²⁷ APM, Pol. 8, Cx. 42, pc. 3, 1896.

²⁸ “Na vida dos subúrbios, a estação da Estrada de ferro representa um grande papel: é o centro, é o eixo da vida. Antigamente, quando ainda não havia por aquelas bandas jardins e cinemas, era o lugar predilecto para os passeios domingueiros das meninas casadouras da localidade e dos rapazes que querem casar, com vontade ou sem ela.”

²⁹ “Hoje mesmo, a ‘gare’ suburbana não perdeu de todo essa feição de ponto de recreio, de encontro e conversa.”

³⁰ “De resto, é em torno da ‘estação’ que se agglomeram as principaes casas de commercio do respectivo subúrbio. Nas suas proximidades abrem-se os armazens de comestíveis mais sortidos, os armarinhos, as farmacias, os açougues e – é preciso não esquecer – a característica e inolvidavel – quitanda.”

³¹ “A ‘estação’ é verdadeira e caracteristicamente suburbana, na segunda metade da manhã. São as horas em que descem os empregados publicos, os militares, os pequenos advogados e gente que tal. § então é de ver e ouvir as palestras e as opiniões daquela gente toda, sempre a lastimar-se; a queixar-se de Deus e dos governos, gente em cuja mente a monotonia do officio e as preocupações domésticas tiraram toda e qualquer manifestação de intelligência, de gosto de intelligencia espiritual, enfim, uma larga visão do mundo.”

³² “O brasileiro é vaidoso e guloso de títulos ôcos e honorarias chôchas.”

³³ [...] “um simples terceiro oficial, que a isso chegou por trapaças de transferencias e artigos capciosos nas reformas [...] impa que nem um director notável quando compra, se o faz, a passagem no ‘guichet’ da estação. Empurra brutalmente os outros, olha com desdem os mal vestidos, bate nervosamente com os nickeis... A sua pessoinha vaidosa e ignorante não pode esperar que uma pobre preta velha compre uma passagem de 2ª classe. Tem tal pressa que pensa que se elle não for atendido logo, o Brasil estoura, chega-lhe mesmo a esperada bancarrota...”

³⁴ Lima Barreto never graduated from the Polytechnic School. Schwarcz, *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário*.

³⁵ The Brazilian Literary Academy (*Academia Brasileira de Letras*) never nominated Lima Barreto, something that the author resented Schwarcz, *Lima Barreto: Triste Visionário* 465-66.

³⁶ Montépin, however, is not the author of *La Fauvette du Moulin*.

³⁷ “Pobre moça! Lê Montepin e vai para o Instituto de Música! Para quê?”

³⁸ “É feita para correr kilometros, voar sobre os trilhos e tragar distancias, [...] falhou o seu destino. Não pôde correr à vontade, não pôde voar, resvalado-se pelo solo como as amas, não pôde rasgar o espaço. Tem que economizar a sua força e a sua velocidade afim de estar sempre pronto a parar nas estações, de quinze em quinze minutos, às ordens do horário. Como há de soffrer aquella locomotiva, com vida tão mediocre!”

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