



SILVIANO SANTIAGO IN CONVERSATION

edited by
Macdonald Daly
and
Else R P Vieira

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Edited by Macdonald Daly
and Else R. P. Vieira

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FOREWORD Macdonald Daly



This book will have served its purpose if, in introducing the work of Silviano Santiago to an English-speaking audience, it extends interest in, stimulates greater familiarity with, or encourages wider translation of his multifaceted and transgeneric corpus of texts. It aims to represent three different aspects of Santiago's work.

Else R. P. Vieira's introductory essay, as well as providing a general background, emphasizes Santiago's seminal concepts of in-betweenness and hybridity, and relates them to his specific contribution as a postmodern translator and theorist of translation.

K. David Jackson's essay, which focuses on Santiago's fiction and poetics of simulation, has been published in Randal Johnson (ed.), *Tropical Paths: Essays on Modern Brazilian Literature* (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 199-219 and, in translation, as 'O Cárcere da Memória: *Em liberdade*, de Silviano Santiago', in Wander Melo Miranda and Eneida Maria de Souza (eds.), *Navegar é preciso, viver: escritos para Silviano Santiago* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, Salvador: EDUFBA; Niterói: EDUFF, 1997), pp. 89-110.

Wander Melo Miranda's contribution is a version of an essay first published in pamphlet form as *Silviano Santiago: Duplo Estilete* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 1993), and offers a survey of Santiago's critical work.

The conversation with Silviano Santiago took place at the Transcultural(C)ities Colloquium, University of Nottingham, on 15 September 1998. The colloquium was sponsored by the project *The Interface of Critical and Cultural Studies* of the Federal University of Minas Gerais and the Postgraduate School of Critical Theory and Cultural Studies, University of Nottingham, funded by CAPES and the British Council, and co-ordinated by Bernard McGuirk and Else Vieira.

We acknowledge our thanks to Wander Melo Miranda and Eneida Maria de Souza for their permission to reproduce in this volume items from the bibliography of Silviano Santiago in *Navegar é preciso, viver: escritos para Silviano Santiago*. Finally, the editors are very grateful for the inestimable help of Trudie McGuirk and Richard Spurr with aspects of translation and transcription respectively.

**Macdonald Daly
Nottingham
September 1999**



'THE WHITE WALL': PRE-FACING
SILVIANO SANTIAGO
Else R P Vieira



Lucid, eclectic, up-to-date, rebellious, tenacious, scholarly — these are recurrent adjectives in writings on Silvano Santiago. As a critic, he is best known for three collections of essays: *Uma literatura nos trópicos: Ensaios sobre dependência cultural* [A Literature in the Tropics: Essays on Cultural Dependence] (1978), *Vale quanto pesa: ensaios sobre questões político-culturais* [It is Worth its Weight: Essays on Political and Cultural Questions] (1982), and *Nas malhas da letra: ensaios* [In the Weavings [Fabric/Mesh] of the Letter: Essays] (1989). In *Uma literatura nos trópicos*, he advanced two seminal concepts that have since illuminated many studies and reflections on Brazilian and Latin American literatures and cultures: in-betweenness and hybridity. Not a dichotomy but a duality, in-betweenness has been seen as his groundbreaking concept, one that was conceived initially as a way of describing the role of the Latin American artist away from parameters of cultural dependence: a relation grounded not on binary oppositions but operating at the threshold of fusion and distinction, assimilation and expropriation. Silvano Santiago is further known for having opened Brazilian fiction to postmodernity and for his mastery of pastiche and the dimensions of fake biographies. His most widely read fictional productions, in Brazil and abroad, are *Em liberdade* [In Liberty] (1981), *Stella Manhattan* (1994), and *Viagem ao México* [A Trip to Mexico] (1995). As a translator, he started with Samuel Beckett's *Fin de partie* (1959), having also translated Jacques Prévert's poems (1985) and Robbe-Grillet's *Pour quoi j'aime Barthes?* (1995) into Portuguese. His main theoretical contribution to translation theory has been the development of the notion of double plagiarism, a project that conceives of translation as a matter of bilateral absorption and which, in another context, bears affinities with Deleuze's 'double capture', in that both describe a relation whereby both terms take on qualities of the other, while maintaining an independent identity. As will be seen, double plagiarism implies, more specifically, the taking on of properties from both the original literature and the receiving literature. The translated text thus emerges as a *locus* of encounter of two traditions, authorships and authorities.

Roots, Routes, Reflections: an echo of the 1998 Conference, held 'offshore' in Portugal, upon the quincentenary of Vasco da Gama's voyage, and of which Santiago was the distinguished opening plenarist, further provides me with three metaphors to introduce to an English-speaking audience his multifaceted career as a critic, novelist, professor

and translation theorist.¹ In each of these trajectories, he is acclaimed for having unveiled spaces of liminality, by blurring the distinction between history and fiction in his novels; by exploring multiple *loci* of enunciation; or by stressing the encounter of literatures and redistributing concepts of authorship in his reflections on translation.

Some of Santiago's critics perceive Belo Horizonte, the capital of the centrally located state of Minas Gerais, to be his roots, even though he was born in the nearby town of Formiga, in 1936.² It was in Belo Horizonte that Santiago made the first *entrées* into a literary career. He took a bachelor's degree in Romance languages from the University of Minas Gerais, where he helped to set up and publish the journal *Complementa*, which was an outlet for his early short stories; it was also for the stages of Belo Horizonte that he translated Beckett. If there are those who claim his roots, Santiago himself will ever trace routes, which finds an echo in Hoisel's view of his life as one that constructs itself through trajectories. Man is constantly in movement, he says, and the wealth of his multiple *loci* of enunciation can be seen then to derive more from such routes:

[Santiago] does not opt for a fixed point, one centre from which to articulate his voice. If knowledge is mobile, Santiago stresses its mobility in these processes of successive migrations. (Hoisel in Miranda and de Souza, 1997: 44).

In 1960 Santiago moved to Rio de Janeiro to pursue a course of studies on French Literature, and there he stayed until given an award by the French government to pursue a Ph.D degree at the Sorbonne, where he wrote a thesis on André Gide. From France he moved to North America, where he embarked upon a University career, beginning in New Mexico, then at Rutgers, at the University of Toronto, and at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He also taught in Paris at the Sorbonne Nouvelle.

1974 was a year of reflections and redirections. He decided to return to his home country, Brazil. But the previous routes accompanied him in this renewed encounter with his first *locus* of enunciation. Upon his

¹ *Roots, Routes, Reflections: 1498-1998*, conference of The Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal, September 1998.

² For the biographical information throughout this preface, I acknowledge my debt to the 'Chronology of Silviano Santiago' (Miranda and de Souza, 1997: 322-36).

return, he lectured at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, then at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and at the Federal Fluminense University in Niterói. It was in the period of work at the Catholic University that he started disseminating Jacques Derrida in Brazil, a role akin to that of Gayatri Spivak in the United States, as the translator of Derrida into English; he co-ordinated the compilation of a glossary on Derrida, published in 1976.

Yet Brazil was more than a place of residence and work. In his renewed reflections, Brazil becomes the stuff of his writing, a metaphor: the blank wall on which to write. Santiago's metaphors, like his personality, his criticism, his fiction, his scholarship, will often startle his reader. Always at the tip of his tongue, these metaphors are just waiting for the ear of the other to interpret them at will. One might expect the white wall Santiago sees in front of him upon his return to Brazil, after 12 years abroad, to mean nothingness, which remains a possibility. Yet, Santiago himself was to provide another interpretation. The white wall is one on which he could write about Brazil and Latin America. This perception grew in definition after he had been teaching French literature in Buffalo for three years. Having not spoken Portuguese all this time, he went through the strange experience of being, in a way, an outsider, losing his own language. As becomes apparent in the discussion reproduced as the final item in this collection, Santiago, of Italian descent, and having lived abroad for so many years, has the experience of foreignness before becoming aware of his Brazilianness. In this context, the white wall takes on another meaning; it is an inscription that pre-faced him, that pre-figured his own way of thinking Brazilian and Latin American traditions, but of which he had not been aware. Upon his return, he begins to decipher, to write about what was already there on that white wall. This meant not quite creating a place, but a situation that he calls '*o entre-lugar*', in-betweenness. What was a personal experience develops into a seminal critical concept for Latin America. In-betweenness, that liminal *locus* of the Latin American artist, is thus cast by Santiago:

Between sacrifice and play, between prison and transgression, between submission and aggression to the code, between obedience and rebellion, between assimilation and expression -- there, in this seemingly empty place, its temple and its site of clandestinity, the anthropophagous ritual of Latin America is performed. (Santiago, 1978: 28)

In Conversation

As a critic and essay writer on cultural dependence, again moving beyond binaries and further stressing the dimensions of power, he proposes a related concept, that of hybridity, which describes the condition of liminality of postcolonial cultures. The context is the moment at which he brings to visibility the contribution of Latin America in breaking with the Western view of purity and unity as a claim to superiority. He thus stresses deviation from the norm and contamination as the role of Latin America:

Colonial Renaissance engenders [...] a new society, that of the *mestizos*, whose main characteristic is that the notion of unity is overturned, it is contaminated in favour of a subtle and complex mixture between the European and the autochthonous element. In this new and untiring movement of opposition, of racial staining, of sabotage of the cultural and social values imposed by the Conquerors, a greater transformation takes place on the surface but which definitely affects the correction of the main systems that contributed to the propagation of Western culture between us: the linguistic and the religious codes. These codes lose their status of purity and little by little allow themselves to be enriched by new acquisitions, by minute metamorphoses, by strange corruptions, that transform the integrity of the European Holy Book and of the Dictionary and the Grammar. The hybrid element reigns. (Santiago, 1978: 17-18)

It remains to consider Santiago's use of pastiche in fiction in connection with his development, as a postmodern translator and translation theorist, of the notion of double plagiarism, devised as he theorized upon his translation of Prévert into Portuguese.

What is a translator? What is a postmodern translator? Three decades have passed since the world was confronted with the problematization of authorship, subjectivity and so on, as has been the case, for example, with Foucault's 'What is an author?'. Over a decade has passed since the world was confronted with the problematization of copyrights in translation, as has been the case with Derrida's *Des tours de Babel*. Yet the responses to these challenges in translation theory have been at least patchy. How do Santiago's prefaces as a postmodern translator and novelist shed light on the issue? How do they accommodate the view of the text as a weave of voices? How are the voices of the translator and fiction writer to be understood as a supplement to earlier voices?

For Santiago, origin and unity are no longer the reference, and his

prefaces, as a matter of fact, shake the notions of one individual as the one possessor of his writing. Reminiscing Foucault's questionings, 'work' for Santiago becomes problematic if thought of as a unit. The names Silviano Santiago and Graciliano Ramos, or, as we shall see in relation to translation, Silviano Santiago and Jacques Prévert, interrelate rather than authenticate authorship, which thus emerges as a plurality of 'I's. His attribution of the memoirs of *Em liberdade* [*In Liberty*] to Graciliano Ramos, the author actually of *Memórias do cárcere* [*Prison Memoirs*], does not parallel the attribution of a discourse to him; the discourse remains Santiago's. Graciliano Ramos is, in fact, supplemented when Silviano Santiago writes the diary he might have written after serving his term in jail. Introducing himself as the editor of the manuscripts that were sent to him to be published anonymously twenty-five years after Ramos's death, Santiago thus establishes a politics of proper names that effaces the distinction between primary and secondary models, and also auto- and hetero-biography. It is not the author who becomes the source of authority. As Barthes would say, 'to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text' (Barthes, 1977: 147). It is form that indeed becomes the limit, the prison that further establishes a contrast with the liberty of creating which, in turn, stands as a contrast to the real experience of the earlier writer in jail. Santiago thus presents the manuscript as fake writing, after having spent months training himself in the style of this great deceased author and developing what K. David Jackson has highlighted in *Em liberdade* as the aesthetics of simulation (Jackson, in this volume).

Shedding another perspective on authorship away from individuality, further problematising ownership in writing, Santiago subtitles his novel 'A Fiction by Silviano Santiago'. It is to be noticed that rather than establishing a pact of authorial truth, he highlights the fictionality of authorship. His epigraph from Otto Maria Carpeaux, 'I shall construct my Graciliano Ramos', further highlights the role of the author as a weaver of voices, the new text emerging as a transformation of the other, transformation here understood as complementation and supplementation of the work. A continued existence is through Santiago's fiction stressed by the note of the editor (also Silviano Santiago), who begins with a description of Ramos's arrest and of the circumstances in which he was set free, how he 'wrote his diary' and gave it to a friend for burning; the friend, however, kept the originals and one month after Ramos's death in Rio de Janeiro, having the chance to meet Santiago, gave them to him. Santiago kept it in secret before publishing them. All the concrete details of Ramos and his diary that apparently build a pact of truth are demythified as the 'editor' finally

closes the preface stating that 'all the responsibility of this publication lies with this signatory', Silviano Santiago. Again calling attention to the elusiveness of authorship, Santiago re-establishes a pact of veracity, writing a note on this edition, remarking on minor corrections to Ramos's typing, on the typically circumstantial style of the diary. And there is an explanation for Ramos's wish to have the originals burned that stresses the multiplicity of 'I's in writing: *In Liberty* and *Prison Memoirs* do not match, 'they could not coexist simultaneously in his mind'. Authorship disperses, multiplicity is emphasized through fiction, explanations move away from origin towards continuation.

What of translation? The technique of pastiche that undermines the concept of model re-emerges in his theorization of translation. The dichotomies true and false, original and copy, are further questioned in Santiago's view of translation. The text to be translated is Prévert's but the form and diction used are those of Brazilian poets. Santiago analyses the prominent aspects of Prévert's poetry and concludes that his diction, colloquial style, and striking humour bear resemblances to the Brazilian poets of the 1930s, who, having abandoned the aggressive and avant-garde tone of poetry in the 1920s, still keep a colloquial syntax and lexicon. Hence his reconceptualising of the notion of model in translation:

It was after 'models' such as Manuel Bandeira, Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Murilo Mendes that we attempted to transpose Prévert's verses into Portuguese (...). It was the translator's task not to impose on the text to be translated a poetic diction that would explain the poem, but to search in the repertoire of possible dictions in the national literature an equivalent that would be just. (Santiago in Prévert, 1988: 11)

Using Santiago's own words as a critic and essayist on hybridity, one could say that Brazilian literature comes to contaminate Prévert; or even within the Benjaminian metaphor elaborated by Derrida, one could say that Santiago wraps Prévert with the robe of Manuel Bandeira and Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Santiago does not translate only into a language, he translates into a literature. He thus advances the notion of double plagiarism:

In this sense, this translator is an exegete with clipped wings, certainly a double plagiarist. He plagiarizes the text to be translated and plagiarizes the national poets that he selected as models of translation. (Santiago in Prévert, 1988: 11)

Faking identities, exposing multiplicity rather than unity, one voice complementing and supplementing the other is what becomes apparent in Santiago's translation of Prévert and in his fiction *In Liberty*. Echoing Foucault, it could be said that, rather than original authors, Prévert's and Ramos's discourses are founders of discursivity, in that they produce the possibility and the rule of formation of other texts, establishing an infinite possibility of discourses (Foucault, 1992: 58). They open the room for something different from them and that, nonetheless, belongs with what they have founded. Rather than a 'copy' of the other, a relationship of becoming is established. The last version thus holds a plurality of 'I's; attribution then does not point to one individual but gives way to various 'I's simultaneously; authorship is disseminated.

It is finally worth noting the ambiguity of the metaphor for freedom in his translation project, in that it already contains a form of imprisonment: the wings allow for movement but, because clipped, restricted movement. This metaphor interweaves with a subtle allusion to Oswald de Andrade, associated with the movement of Cannibalism in Brazil, which reverberates in Santiago's definition of translation as 'transgression with a plea for forgiveness, ownership without copyrights'. As K. David Jackson says in relation to *Em liberdade*, freedom only leads to its opposite — other forms of prison — be they language or literary genre.

Like a white wall pre-figuring writing....

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