

*Adolfo Ferreira Caminha*

Navy Officer, Ardent Republican, and Naturalist Novelist

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*While religious fervor inspired the impassioned loyalties of Jacobina Mauer and the Mackers to their community of faith, secular nationalist fervor stirred the hearts of others who strove to reform and unify Brazilian society. Abolitionism and republican nationalism among other intellectual and political movements became fashionable in the 1880s, and they shaped the coming of age of educated youths such as Adolfo Ferreira Caminha and his peers. Many republican sympathizers believed that monarchy, aristocracy, cruel punishments, the Catholic Church, and a lack of more widespread education had retarded Brazil's progress. Caminha was an outspoken abolitionist, but like many of his generation, he also expressed ambivalence about the role that former slaves and their descendants would play in postabolition Brazil. Both his life and his literary work exhibit a series of contradictions that show us how reform-minded Brazilians lived through and made sense of the transition from a constitutional monarchy to a republic, and from an economy dependent on slave labor to one that relied on free labor.*

*Caminha's biography indicates how some young men from middle-class origins made sense of the dramatic changes occurring all around them. His views of institutions, values, and practices were not typical, but his firmly held beliefs reveal much about the dramatic changes and stubborn continuities that characterized his times. Caminha and many of his peers shared a strong faith in science, technology, rational analysis, and North Atlantic civilization that would be shaken by economic depression, political instability, corruption, and war in Brazil in the 1890s. His life and work reveal a young man who was very critical of his society, but who also expressed pride and faith in Brazil's promise.*

*Peter M. Beattie's research focuses on the intersection between the growing influence of public institutions and the lives of Brazil's free poor. One theme of his book, *The Tribute of Blood: Army, Honor, Race, and Nation in Brazil, 1864–1945* (2001), is how coercive recruitment for the military played a central role in the fledgling penal justice system.*

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*Here, he points out that a major theme of Adolfo Caminha's oeuvre is a critique of military impressment (coerced induction) and the flogging of sailors as injustices that survived slavery's abolition. He argues that Caminha associated these and other Brazilian social problems with the legacies of monarchy and slavery that the new republican government needed to address forthrightly.*

Adolfo Ferreira Caminha's life and work made him one of the most controversial, uncompromising, and tragic figures of a youthful generation that embraced republicanism, abolitionism, and modernization. He thrived on controversy and rivalry; his friends commented on his talent for making enemies. His novels explored taboo social subjects in a frank, realistic style, and in this way he unflinchingly challenged Brazilian mores, institutions, and practices that he regarded as misguided or hypocritical. His penchant for tweaking bourgeois moral pretensions earned him admiration from a handful of freethinking literary lights as well as repudiation from more conservative readers and critics. As a result, triumphs and calamities marked his short and sometimes bitter career. Tuberculosis, the poet's disease, brought an untimely end to Caminha's life in Rio at the tender age of twenty-nine.

Caminha was born in 1867 in the small town of Acarati not far from the dazzling coastal dunes of Ceará, a state that rests east of the Amazon Delta and just south of the equator. Ceará's humid coastal zone produced profitable sugarcane for export, and African slaves and their descendants provided most of the plantation labor. But in Ceará's hinterland, the landscape becomes more arid and forbidding. This region is not appropriate for thirsty sugarcane, but it is suitable for less labor-intensive crops and cattle. These backlands are very fertile when rains are plentiful, but when periodic droughts strike, the landscape becomes desolate and its scrub forests desiccated. The sun bakes shallow rivers into mud-caked snaking trails that many migrants trudged along to escape certain death in their search for potable water, food, and shelter on the muggy seaboard.

At a young age, Caminha's life was marked by the most horrific natural disaster in Brazil's history: the Great Drought (1877-1880), which forced tens of thousands of parched Ceará residents to abandon their homes. Most migrants lost their livestock and crops to the harsh elements, so they arrived on the coast destitute with only the few belongings they could carry in bundles on their heads. Government efforts to aid drought victims floundered. Relatives and many charitable individuals helped the refugees, but others took advantage of their vulnerability. Most refugees found little in the way of help, and some resorted to crime. For this reason, those living near the coast, like Caminha's family, often feared

the wretched and desperate backlanders when they arrived in large numbers. It is estimated that some 250,000 perished, but many of those who survived returned when the rains greened the hinterlands again. Others migrated to less arid regions of Brazil in search of a better life. Indeed, the Great Drought helped to establish a pattern of migration by poor northeasterners referred to as *retirantes* (derived from the verb "to retreat") that continues to this day. Caminha witnessed the devastation that nature could wreak on the innocent and immoral alike, and how this misfortune could be compounded by government ineptness, corruption, and indifference.

It is interesting to speculate about how Caminha's youthful memories of this cataclysmic event influenced his life course and the worldview he adopted as a young man. Perhaps this tragedy contributed to the acerbity of his personality and his impatient desire to reform and modernize Brazil. Passages in Caminha's novel *A normalista* (The school girl) relate the Great Drought's devastation, complete with the description of a dried-up corpse at the side of the road whose eyes and intestines had been eaten by buzzards and flies. Caminha's childhood memories of the drought were punctuated by personal tragedy: his mother's death in 1878. As a result, he later went to live with an uncle in the nation's capital, Rio de Janeiro.

In 1882, Caminha won, on the basis of a competitive entrance exam, a government-sponsored education at the Navy Academy in Rio. Despite its vast coastline, Brazil's navy remained a small entity of some 3,000 men. While the larger army had some nonwhite junior officers, the navy's officer corps remained a more exclusive bastion of "whiteness." Unlike army personnel, naval officers often traveled to foreign ports where they met local dignitaries, procured supplies, and explored the sites. In contrast, most common sailors were black or of mixed African and European heritage and were restricted to their ships or dock areas when abroad. Brazil's leaders wanted foreigners, especially Europeans, to see their nation as "white," even though the majority of its population was nonwhite.

This bigotry was given "scientific" impetus in the late 1800s by social Darwinism, a theory that posited the existence of a natural hierarchy of races that placed northern Europeans at the top and Africans and American Indians at the bottom of an imagined scale of evolutionary development. This theory served to explain, justify, and apologize for European imperialism and the dominance of Brazil's mostly white elite.

Caminha drank in the intellectual and political currents that swirled through Rio in the 1880s. Like many cadets of his day, Caminha took a great interest in the humanities. These young men followed the lead of the sons of elite families who attended one of two Brazilian law faculties where rhetoric and a knowledge of literature were touchstones of

educational prestige. As a nationalist, Caminha argued that "the literature and arts of a country are much more serious matters than is commonly thought." He criticized Brazilian writers for their lack of discipline and their fondness for bohemian and shallow praise. Caminha's taste in literature favored the works of naturalist authors such as Emile Zola of France and Eça Queirois of Portugal. Caminha, like the U.S. novelist Stephen Crane (author of *The Red Badge of Courage*), found inspiration in European naturalism.

Naturalism is characterized by a number of conventions. Naturalists believed that nature was indifferent to human affairs, and instead impersonal scientific laws governed the universe and could even determine the actions of human beings. In short, neither nature nor God intervened to reward the deserving or smite wrongdoers. Many readers and critics found naturalist novels to be shockingly amoral because villainous characters often went unpunished while the innocent suffered unjustly. Naturalists, however, did not see themselves as amoral but instead considered themselves social critics who sought to realistically depict social problems and inequities in the light of contemporary science. Perhaps Caminha's traumatic experience with the drought in Ceará made this approach to nature and human affairs even more attractive. Naturalists placed taboo social subjects, including prostitution and marital infidelity, under the microscope of their unblinking prose. Caminha would take these controversial conventions to extremes that made Crane appear tame by comparison.

Beyond naturalism and social Darwinism, other influential schools of thought and political movements influenced Adolfo Caminha and his generation. In the 1880s positivism was the most prevalent school of philosophical thought, particularly among military cadets. Inspired by the French thinker Auguste Comte, positivists had an almost mystical faith in science and human progress. Comte believed that civilization passed through three progressive stages of development: theological, metaphysical, and, finally, scientific or positivistic. These stages roughly correlated to evolving political systems from theocracies to monarchies to representative governments. Positivists believed in the ability of mathematics, science, and technology to unify and modernize a nation and to create rational institutions that would operate in harmony with natural laws to form more just societies. While positivism had broad influence within Brazil, it was far from monolithic. Brazilian positivism appealed to civilians and military officers, and it exhibited a variety of schools of thought that ranged from orthodox Positivist churches to eclectic heterodoxy. Todd Diacon's biography of General Cândido Rondon that follows later in this volume examines Brazilian positivism more fully.

Alongside positivism, abolitionism became trendy in Brazil during the 1880s. As a committed abolitionist, Adolfo likely took pride in his home state's leading role in the nation's abolitionist struggle. Ceará's legislature ended slavery within its borders in 1884, four years before most of Brazil, as the result of a strike in the provincial capital, Fortaleza. Its port was too shallow to accommodate oceangoing ships, and instead, smaller boats, or lighters, transported goods between the docks and vessels anchored offshore. Commerce depended on stewdores and seamen who manned the lighters and who were mostly free men of color. Since 1850, Brazil's government had abolished the international slave trade, but thereafter, an internal trade in bondage developed that followed the same routes of many migrant *retirantes* who had left the northeast for the southeast where coffee production fueled a booming economy. In 1883 one black seaman, Chico da Matilde, was so ashamed of his role in this slave trade that he organized a strike among Fortaleza's sailors, who refused to handle goods on any ship that trafficked in slaves. This humble seaman became a celebrity known as the "Sea Dragon." His actions show how common free Brazilians in the provinces, not just well-educated abolitionist politicians in Rio, worked to undermine slavery. Abolitionists in Rio invited and received the Sea Dragon as a national hero, and his fame emboldened abolitionists across Brazil. It seems probable that Caminha witnessed or was at least aware of the Sea Dragon's triumphant welcome to Rio.

Caminha and many who espoused abolitionism also held republican sympathies, but Brazil's Republican Party had been slow to advocate the end of bondage. Republicanism was strongest in São Paulo, where the internal slave trade had concentrated the dwindling bonded population after 1850. Careful not to offend powerful São Paulo masters, the Republican Party leadership did not speak out vociferously for abolition at first. Indeed, much of the nonwhite population associated abolition with the monarchy and the Conservative Party, which finally passed a national abolition law in 1888. Mostly nonwhite *capoeira* toughs (practitioners of Afro-Brazilian martial arts and often members of urban gangs), sympathetic to Emperor Pedro II and sometimes in the pay of Conservative patrons, disrupted Republican political rallies by instigating street brawls. One colorful Afro-Brazilian leader in Rio, Cândido Fonseca da Galvão, who called himself Dom Obá II, warned about the threat of Republican plots posed to Brazil's imperial monarchy in the 1880s. Most members of the establishment, however, viewed Dom Obá as an eccentric sort and dismissed his editorials as deluded maundering. Many Republicans who came to power in 1889 were fearful and suspicious of Rio's black and brown community and their royalist sympathies. Once in

power, Republican police vigorously repressed Rio's vibrant *caipoeira* organizations.

Most Republicans believed that Pedro II and the monarchy were anachronistic. An official Republican Party had formed in 1870, but it remained a weak third party in a parliamentary system dominated by the Conservative and Liberal parties. Radical Republicans doubted the likelihood of toppling the monarchy by the ballot, and they began to hatch seditious plots. Some Republican leaders made allies within the military officer corps, especially the army. A new generation of military officers became impatient with the monarchy and the civilian political elite. They believed that civilian leaders did not give a high priority to Brazil's military modernization. Naval officers were on the whole more royalist than army officers, but some young ones like Caminha became enamored with republicanism. Caminha gave voice to his republican sympathies at a literary ceremony that marked the death of French author Victor Hugo, a ceremony that the emperor himself attended. Caminha's speech insulted Pedro II by praising Hugo's republican beliefs and lamenting that the author of *Les Misérables* would not witness the triumph of republicanism in Brazil. This disrespect for the monarchy in the presence of the emperor infuriated the Navy Academy's commandant, who wanted to punish Caminha, but the temperate Pedro II insisted that no action be taken. This act of imperial clemency, however, did not win over Caminha; he went on to pen many literary barbs against monarchism.

Caminha did not limit his criticism of Brazil's navy, monarchy, and imperial society to public speeches. While still a cadet, he published a short story, "Chibata," that was serialized in a Rio newspaper. The title referred to the practice of flogging common sailors, barbarous treatment that resembled punishment meted out to slaves. Henceforward, Caminha borrowed from his own experiences to compose a number of naturalist novels that criticized social injustices.

The navy commissioned Caminha in 1886 to voyage on a vessel especially built as Brazil's exhibit at an international exposition in New Orleans. Brazilian engineers designed the steamship equipped with sails, a symbol of national pride because all of its components were made and assembled in Brazil. With this exhibit, Rio's leaders hoped to impress upon North Americans and other foreign delegates that Brazil was a modern nation attuned to industrial progress. In 1895, Caminha published an account of these travels, *No país das Langues* (In the country of the Yankees), which recorded the reactions of astonished North Americans who arrogantly declared that it was impossible for a backward nation like Brazil to build steamships.

Soon after Caminha returned from his duties abroad, Brazil abolished slavery, and in 1889 an army coup unseated Pedro II and promul-

gated the Republic. These events encouraged Caminha, who had expressed outspoken faith in republican ideals and institutions. With slavery and monarchy gone, many now thought that Brazil's march toward its destiny as a wealthy, modern, influential, and ultimately "white" nation was assured. The republican government, influenced by the scientific bigotry of social Darwinism, subsidized European immigration and banned African immigration in order to "whiten" Brazil's population. These mostly European immigrants began to fill many of the more desirable positions that Afro-Brazilian free workers and slaves had once held. Neither the imperial nor the republican Brazilian government made any attempt to smooth the transition from slavery to freedom in a manner similar to the Freedmen's Bureau in the United States. The fate of black and brown Brazilians in the labor market and in the imagination of "white" republican nationalists was one of displacement. Intellectuals rejected the fears that many Europeans expressed about miscegenation and instead claimed that Brazil's heritage of race mixture accelerated the whitening process. They based this argument on the supposition that women would tend to choose lighter-skinned sexual partners as well as the erroneous belief that "white" genes were more powerful than "non-white" ones. While many citizens applauded slavery's abolition, uncertainty about the role of black and brown Brazilians in the new republican order abounded. Most intellectuals believed firmly that people of Indian and African descent were inferior to Europeans. Some even posited that nonwhites were "natural monarchists" stuck at a stage of positivist development that white European civilization had already surpassed. Many questioned whether nonwhites were able to understand and to carry out the duties required of republican citizens. Social Darwinism popularized by writers such as the Englishman Herbert Spencer helped to justify the economic and political exclusion of former slaves in the new Republic.

An illustration of Caminha's doubts about the role of former slaves in "civilized" nations is perhaps nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in his depiction of Annapolis, Maryland, in *No país das Langues*: "Annapolis is like a dissonant note in American civilization. Imagine an African maroon (runaway slave) community, a large village dissected by narrow, uneven, and unaligned streets, with the somber aspect of an old colonial burg, where a population, for the most part black and backward, circulates—and you have the antithesis of the modern city. . . . Insipid, monotonous, and sad like a pagan cemetery, Annapolis is a protest, an anathema against the natural evolution of things, a repugnant blemish on the U.S. map." Caminha's text clearly associates blackness and Africanness with all that is the opposite of modern and progressive in the United States—and by extension in Brazil. He also expresses pessimism about Brazil's "race" and "manhood" when compared to the United States:

"It was not without some sadness that we Brazilians—a degenerated and sluggish race—observed the formation of a strong and happy [U.S.] race with all the characteristics of virility and independence." At other points, however, Caminha had doubts about the influence of genetics on nations and individuals. In an 1894 editorial he noted that a French scholar had demonstrated that environment and education influenced human potential by showing that crimes were more common among the poor and less educated. Like others of his generation, Caminha expressed ambivalence about his nation's racial composition and the role of education and environment in shaping its destiny.

As a naval officer, Caminha had to wrestle with his contradictory views on race and national destiny because the military's enlisted ranks remained dominated by black and brown men. To fill the lower ranks, both the army and the navy continued to rely heavily on impressment, which targeted young men who were in trouble with the law or unemployed. From time to time, police made recruiting sweeps in city taverns, on the streets, and in the countryside. Impressment resembled the methods of African and Indian slavers. Once in the ranks, sailors were legally subject to being flogged in front of the entire crew, a practice that resembled the punishment of slaves at the public whipping post. This practice was even more shocking to many reform-minded men like Caminha because whipping posts in the 1830s had been taken down in favor of more "civilized" floggings of law-breaking slaves behind prison walls. The imperial government even outlawed the flogging of slaves in 1888. After "Chibara," Caminha would be pushed by events to revisit this subject in 1895 in his best novel, *Bom Criminoso*.

In 1889 the new republican government outlawed flogging in the navy, a reform that had been legally granted to army troops in 1873. Soon thereafter, it also banned military impressment. By outlawing these abuses, the army-dominated republican government sought to distinguish its rule from that of Pedro II. Events, however, soon led the government to renege. Insubordination in the navy led authorities to reinstate flogging soon after its abrogation. In 1891 the Republic's first president, Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca, was forced to step down after he illegally ordered army troops to close Congress. In 1892, Vice President Marshal Floriano Peixoto's regime was rocked by a failed barracks putsch, and then from 1893 to 1895 a major rebellion broke out in Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul. As the government cast about to put down this rebellion, disgruntled naval officers turned their guns on Rio in yet another insurrection and carried on the fight around the capital for months in 1893.

To make matters even worse for the new government, the economy bottomed out in 1893 as part of an international depression. Then, in

1896-97 the state mobilized the greater part of the federal army to defeat the irregular troops of a millenarian religious community, which allegedly pined for a return to monarchy, in the dusty backlands town of Canudos in the northeastern state of Bahia. To fill the military's ranks to quell these revolts, the central government violated the Constitution and resorted to military impressment. These dramatic events probably led Caminha to begin thinking of a story that would highlight the injustices of flogging and military impressment. Personal experiences and disillusionment with the military likely gave impetus to his plans.

In 1888 the navy transferred Caminha to Fortaleza for health reasons. He sought an assignment in his home state, but after years of study in Rio and duty abroad, Fortaleza may have seemed somewhat stultifying and provincial. However Caminha felt about life in Ceará, we know that he began a scandalous affair with the wife of an army officer there. Adulterous affairs with married women could end in socially sanctioned murders. Cuckolded husbands, subject to humiliating comments that questioned their manhood, were goaded into seeking revenge to still wagging tongues.

A contemporary of Caminha, Euclýdes da Cunha, became the victim of his own act of revenge. A military officer, journalist, and later a much more famous author than Caminha, da Cunha died in the early 1900s when he tried to kill an army officer who was having an affair with his wife. Da Cunha surprised his rival and shot him several times at close range. The injured officer had only enough strength to grab his own revolver and slay da Cunha in self-defense before passing out. After the bullet-ridden officer recovered from his wounds and the courts dismissed the charges against him, he married da Cunha's former wife. Later, da Cunha's son, who was studying at the Navy Academy, was apparently spurred to action by cadets who demanded to know how "a man" could allow his mother to marry his father's assassin. Like his father, da Cunha's son surprised the army officer and shot him several times. His wounded stepfather then reluctantly raised his own pistol and killed the young man.

While such spectacular cases fueled the sensationalist press, most affairs did not end in such dramatic violence, despite stereotypes that insisted that a betrayed husband could only cleanse his dishonored reputation in his wife's blood. By contrast, Caminha's affair with a married woman shows that not all cases of adultery resulted in murder, but even so, there was often a high price to pay. Caminha's lover left her husband after an argument, and she began to live publicly with Caminha. The army officer reported the situation to his superiors, who ordered Caminha to terminate the affair, but he refused. When the high command ordered Caminha to embark for Europe to separate him from his lover,

Caminha resigned and took a low-paying position as a bureaucrat in Fortaleza. We must remember that there was no legal divorce in Brazil until the 1970s, and though there were ways for a married couple to separate, they could not contract a legal marriage to another unless their spouse died. This affair made Caminha and his "wife" the objects of gossip in Fortaleza, but Caminha had thick skin. He now had more time to dedicate to his writing, and he would swipe back at those in Fortaleza society who snubbed or rebuked him by depicting aspects of their hypocrisy in his novel, *A normalista*.

In 1893, Caminha decided to move to Rio with his partner to pursue a career as a journalist and novelist. To support them and their two children, however, he continued to work as a federal bureaucrat. Even in Brazil's largest city, few writers managed to make a living by their pen alone, an injustice that Caminha complained about in his editorials. After publishing several books, he died a man of modest means despite his education, talent, and literary notoriety.

In his short life, Caminha managed to collect a number of axes to grind as well as principles to advocate. *A normalista* attacked the vicious rumor mill that had made his life difficult in Fortaleza. The novel's plot drew from his own life and, like many naturalists, he often based his characters on individuals whom Caminha knew or observed firsthand. This approach gave naturalist writing its realistic edge, but it could upset those who recognized themselves in supposedly fictional characters. Caminha's novel tells the story of a young woman, Maria do Carmo, raised in Ceará's interior until the Great Drought forces her family to flee to Fortaleza. The harrowing journey ends with the death of Maria's mother. Distraught by his wife's death and disenchanted with his prospects in Ceará, Maria's father decides to seek his fortune in the Amazon and leaves his daughter behind in the care of her godfather, a scrivener employed in a Fortaleza government bureau.

As the schoolgirl Maria matures into an adolescent beauty, she becomes the object of desire for young suitors and, most disturbingly, for her godfather. She begins to flirt with the governor's son, a vain but sentimental ladies' man and law student. When the governor learns that his son has been courting Maria, a woman well below his social station, and that his gallantries have become the subject of gossip, he orders his son to stop seeing her. Maria's godfather, jealous of this relationship, abuses his power as the girl's patriarchal protector to seduce the innocent country lass, and Maria becomes pregnant. When the rumor spreads that Maria is with child, the townspeople assume that the father is the law student, and he hastily flees the state to return to his studies in distant Recife. As the governor's enemies conspire to use the scandal to undermine his administration, he unexpectedly dies.

Meanwhile, Maria's godfather sneaks her off to the country to quietly give birth. After a long and painful labor, the infant is stillborn. Upon recovering, Maria returns to her school in Fortaleza whose curriculum had been modernized to conform to models espoused by, among others, social Darwinist Herbert Spencer. By then, the attention of Fortaleza's citizens has turned to new subjects of real importance in the wake of the army coup that had unseated Pedro II and established the Republic. No one speaks of the scandal that involved Maria and the governor's son. In fact, the novel's last sentence relates that she is engaged to a republican police lieutenant and foresees a "luminous" future for herself.

Caminha could not resist taking a final poke at the monarchy in the novel. The only character who complains about the Republic and its treatment of Pedro II is Maria's godfather. Here, Caminha associates the transition to the Republic with Maria's return to a healthy life free of malicious rumors. Her liberation from her deprived godfather and engagement to a republican police lieutenant coincide with the overthrow of the monarch, the ultimate patriarch. The monarchist stepfather's progeny is stillborn, and Maria is poised to found a healthy, legitimate family with her fiancé under the new Republic. Caminha's bingly realistic depiction based in part on recognizable figures in Fortaleza society may have been a way of avenging himself on those who had shunned him. This approach along with the delicate sexual subject matter of Caminha's novel led some critics to declare it immoral, but the ever-combative Caminha defended *A normalista's* morality in a vitriolic newspaper column. One might expect the author to seek safer ground, but instead Caminha ventured farther onto thin ice.

Caminha's next major novel, *Bom Crioulo*, depicts a tragic romance between a handsome black sailor and a winsome blond, blue-eyed cabin boy, Aleixo. In *Bom Crioulo* the metaphor of slavery and freedom plays a constant refrain in the relations between characters, and it reveals Caminha's preoccupation with this issue in postabolition Brazil. He sets the novel in the late Empire before slavery and monarchy had been abrogated. The black sailor's name is Amaro, but his shipmates dub him Bom Crioulo, which may be translated as "good nigger," but it could also be used as an endearing term of intimacy for a good-natured black man. The protagonist's irresolute nickname preages his portrayal.

The title *Bom Crioulo* was likely intended as an ironic evocation of Bom Selvagem (the noble savage) and the supposed natural goodness of men uncorrupted by civilization. This romantic ideal made popular by philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau inspired Brazilian elites in the mid-1800s to physically incarnate the nation in the form of a Tupi Indian warrior in newspaper cartoons, novels, and official government artwork. Unlike the Indians of the Americas, Africans did not awaken

the same fantasies of natural man and noble savagery in Brazilian minds and literature. Clearly, Caminha was pushing a lot of racial and nationalist buttons in this novel.

Bom Crioulo is a runaway slave apprehended by the authorities, who force him to serve in Brazil's navy probably because they assumed he was a vagrant free man of color. *Bom Crioulo* is one of a small number of nineteenth-century novels whose plot depicts a same-sex romantic relationship. Caminha used this controversial protagonist and subject matter to condemn military impressment and corporal punishment in the navy as well as Brazil's heritage of monarchy, slavery, aristocracy, and "perversion."

Caminha's portrait of the "unnatural" relationship between Aleixo and Bom Crioulo is freighted with racial and gender stereotypes. "Only one thing vexed the cabin-boy—the black man's sexual whims. Because Bom Crioulo was not satisfied merely with possessing him sexually at any hour day or night. . . . He obliged the boy to go to extremes, he made a slave of him, a whore of him. . . . The first night he wanted Aleixo to strip, to strip right down to the buff. . . . Aleixo replied sulkily that that was not something you ask a man to do! Anything but that." Here stereotypes of slavery and freedom are reversed in an effort to shock the sensibilities of bourgeois readers. Most Brazilians of the time would expect the white man to be the dominant partner in sexual intercourse. The active partner would take on a manly identity as the sexual aggressor, and the passive partner, an emasculated femininity or at best that of a "boy." Thus, to stand exposed for another man's sexual pleasure was not "something you ask a man to do."

When men were segregated from women in prisons, barracks, ships, or even elite boarding schools, the unstoppable male sex drive—or so physicians believed—impelled men to dominate other males sexually. Brazilian military tribunals sometimes pursued men accused of homosexual acts, and some told of their liaisons with other soldiers. Tradition-bound officers and common soldiers thought sodomy to be an abominable sin, while reformers such as Adolfo Caminha understood it to be the result of degenerative medical pathology. Others at least partially rejected these conventions and engaged in forbidden sex themselves.

Caminha's story suggests that Bom Crioulo's "inverted" sex drive resulted from the inhumanity of slavery compounded by impressment and flogging. On the contrary, Bom Crioulo believed his desire for young men to be "natural." Here, Caminha appears to suggest that Bom Crioulo's lack of education and the gender segregation common to both slave quarters and military barracks encouraged same-sex liaisons. As a parallel, he presents an esteemed navy captain, a scion of the imperial nobility, who was "known" to be an active sodomite, "an aristocratic

military gentleman . . . completely indifferent to the fair sex, who sought out his innate, ideal model of beauty in male adolescents. . . . The captain . . . preferred to live in his own way, with his own people, with his sailors. And there is always a touch of respectful hypocrisy, of malicious hesitation when the captain was mentioned. [But] no one spoke disrespectfully of him. Everyone wanted him to remain as he was . . . gentle at times, an implacable disciplinarian, a model officer."

In Caminha's ambivalent view of sodomy in the navy, he makes it clear that the captain and Bom Crioulo desired young males to the exclusion of women. Even though sailors furively smirked about the captain and Bom Crioulo, they respected and feared their masculine authority, implying virility and a rugged individuality. Here, Caminha vents his republican animus toward the monarchical Empire by insinuating that slavery, impressment, and aristocratic privilege warped its social and sexual order. The extremes of the old regime's social scale reversed the "natural" desires of the most privileged and most exploited. Abolitionists had similarly argued that slavery debased not only the slave but also the master.

Navy historian Gastão Penalba suggests that the steamship's captain in *Bom Crioulo* was a thinly veiled reference to Admiral Saldanha da Gama, an officer under whom Caminha had served during his voyage to New Orleans. If his contemporaries recognized some of Caminha's scandalous characters as men whom he had met in the navy, then many of them must have been enraged by the novel. Caminha took satisfaction in airing some of the navy's dirty laundry after he was unceremoniously forced out of the ranks for heterosexual impropriety—that is, his affair with a married woman. But *Bom Crioulo* was much more than a political tract; it was a naturalist novel that critiqued social problems.

Caminha was not the only one to suggest a connection between corporal punishment, mental instability, and "sodomy." An 1877 appeals court in Recife settled a dispute over the sale of a slave who, the buyer claimed, had unbeknownst to him suffered from "mental illness" and the "nefarious vice of sodomy." The defense argued that the slave had neither suffered from mental illness nor practiced sodomy before his sale. Rather, they blamed the new owner, whose excessive punishment had so tormented the slave that he was driven to mental illness and sodomy. Though the argument did not sway the court, slaveowners, or at least their lawyers, had appropriated medical assertions that associated excessive flogging with sexual perversion to serve their interests.<sup>1</sup>

Most physicians in the 1800s viewed nonreproductive sex, even masturbation, as deleterious to male health and psychological stability. Caminha suggests that "unnatural" sex is pathological when he relates that as Bom Crioulo carried on his year-long affair with Aleixo, he

inexplicitly began to grow thinner, to tire more easily, and to feel "pains of weakness in his chest." Bom Crioulo becomes even more sick and forlorn when he is transferred away from Aleixo to a steamship whose captain refuses him shore leave and flogs him. During their separation, Aleixo, who has grown ashamed of his sexual domination by the black man, does not seek out Bom Crioulo and proudly begins his own "manly" affair with a Portuguese prostitute, Carolina. When Bom Crioulo's health gives way, he is sent to the hospital. Giving up hope that Aleixo will visit, he is gripped by "a deafening despair, an incredible despair, augmented by pathological accidents, fomented by a type of contagious leprosy." Here the "pathological accidents" appear to refer to Bom Crioulo's "unnatural" sexual relations with Aleixo. Bom Crioulo learns of Aleixo's betrayal from a comrade. In the final scenes, the black sailor leaves the hospital in a demented state and brutally takes Aleixo's life to avenge his honor. The cautionary tale implies that deadly physiological and psychological consequences resulted from this "waste" of a man's "generative juices" in infertile same-sex copulation.

While Caminha treated the affair between Aleixo and Bom Crioulo in a sympathetic light, his novel does not condone their relationship. Bom Crioulo's death is tragic because he does not recognize his sexual behavior as an "illness" that violates "natural" laws. Rather, Bom Crioulo's lack of education and the inhumane abuses visited upon him by his former master and then the navy captain had twisted his "natural" desires.

While some critics sympathetic to naturalism's goals did not find Caminha's depiction of same-sex relationships offensive, most found it to be pornographic. One sharp-tongued critic suggested that Caminha himself had been a passive sodomite, but the author pointedly rebuked this reviewer. He asked, "What is more pernicious: *Bom Crioulo*, which studies and condemns homosexuality, or these publications out there that preach, in a philosophical tone, the dissolution of the family, concubinage, free love, and every type of social immorality?" Despite the hyperbole and controversy, the book sold well, but after its initial edition it was not reprinted and most critics ignored it for almost a half-century.

Perhaps understandably, most scholars who have analyzed Caminha's body of work gloss over his interest in criticizing military impressment and flogging in favor of his depictions of transgressive sexuality. But as suggested above, these issues were intertwined. Impressment even arises in Caminha's novels that focus on other issues. In *A normalista*, one of Maria's uncles was punished as a youth with impressed service in the army because he was a *peralta incorrigível*, which can be translated as an "incorrigible fop" or an "incorrigible idler or vagrant." Both meanings were clear to Caminha's well-educated readers in the 1890s. Many Brazilians associated the military enlisted ranks with sexual depravity and as

an emasculating punishment for wayward poor men. The practice of disciplining vagrants and troublemakers with military service was not unique to Brazil. It had been a venerable European practice up to at least the mid-1800s. England impressed American seamen into the Royal Navy in the 1700s and early 1800s (one of the abuses that helped to spark the War of Independence and the War of 1812). The struggle to abolish impressment and slavery in the Atlantic world shared deep historic parallels. Members of Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army in seventeenth-century England compared military impressment to slavery. They then extended this critique to call for an end to slavery in the English colonies. Of course, these protests did not stop England from becoming the greatest European imperial power whose colonies depended on slavery. As in Brazil, the coercive methods used to fill the navy's ranks created an off-color image of intemperance, impropriety, and sadism; no less than Winston Churchill allegedly once said that the Royal Navy's history was one of "rum, sodomy, and the lash."

Caminha's depiction of Bom Crioulo's induction tells us, with allusions that would have been obvious to his contemporaries but not to later critics, that the former-slave had been forced into service. The opening chapter relates that before his health inspection by the navy, Bom Crioulo had spent the night in a jail cell. Thus, like most enlisted soldiers and sailors of his day, the police had apprehended Bom Crioulo and sent him to serve in the military. Caminha later clarifies: "Bom Crioulo only experienced an equal pleasure when they obligated him to become acquainted with liberty by impressing (*recrutando*) him into the navy's ranks." In the late 1800s, "recruiting" was a synonym for impressment. Initially, Bom Crioulo was happy with a sailor's life; he worked hard because he had better food and better treatment than he had had as a slave. Later, however, he changes his attitude when he is brutally flogged and navy officers restrict his liberty. Then Bom Crioulo muses, "A sailor and a black slave, in the long run, they come down to the same thing." Caminha wanted to see not only slavery abolished but also the slave-like conditions under which many Brazilian sailors and soldiers lived in the postabolition era.

Bom Crioulo was in many ways a model eugenic citizen in Caminha's text. A handsome "colossal, savage figure," he defied with "formidable muscles the diseased softness and weakness of a whole decadent, enervated generation." Here we hear echoes of Spencer's social Darwinist maxim: "To be a good animal is the first condition for success in life; to be a nation of good animals is the first condition for national prosperity." Bom Crioulo exhibited a nobility of physical strength, dexterity, and charisma—"a man to be watched" who exercised a "decisive influence over the crew" despite his low rank. When sober and well treated, Bom Crioulo



was generous, hardworking, tolerant, and philanthropic; in most respects, he was a Brazilian Billy Budd—the virtuous and virile “handsome sailor” whom Herman Melville made famous. Like Bom Crioulo, Melville’s Billy Budd had been impressed, flogged, and victimized by the corrupt justice of the British navy of the early 1800s. I have found no direct evidence that Caminha read Melville, but it is likely that he had heard of this revered American author and his seagoing novels during his New Orleans tour.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the uncorruptible “white” Billy Budd, Bom Crioulo was more human because his positive traits could be subverted. When poorly treated, Bom Crioulo became “rebellious,” given to drinking too much *cachaça* (sugarcane brandy) and provoking fights. His jealousy for the object of his affections, the cabin boy, consumed him. Caminha evinces doubts about Bom Crioulo’s race and political loyalties when he notes that the boardinghouse room he shared with the cabin boy when on leave had a newspaper portrait of the emperor on the wall. This symbol hints at the monarchist sympathies of most Afro-Brazilians, and the way republicans stereotyped nonwhites as “natural” monarchists whose lack of education left them unprepared for the duties of republican citizenship. His description of Bom Crioulo’s vices recalls that of Cesare Lombroso, the Italian criminologist who, according to one of Caminha’s own editorials, “considered the criminal a type of unconscious and uncouth savage, who reappears in civilization because of atavism.”

Caminha’s deeply ambivalent depiction of Bom Crioulo and his choice of a controversial tragic hero to condemn impressment and flogging distracted readers from his critique. *Bom Crioulo* presaged the 1910 Anti-Flogging Revolt, a rebellion led by Brazilian sailors to protest corporal punishment, impressment, and poor conditions in the navy’s enlisted ranks that nearly led to the bombardment of the nation’s capital. Few readers paid close attention to Caminha’s condemnation of impressment and flogging, but he recognized them as part and parcel of a struggle against slavery and its legacy. Impressment and flogging would come to an end in Brazil’s navy only in the World War I era.

Based on his own passionate beliefs and experiences, Caminha’s most important novels criticized aspects of the subordination of women and nonwhites and advocated greater equality, but he also expressed fears and doubts about what these new freedoms and rights might entail. For instance, if nonwhite men and women could indulge their own sexual freedoms, they might subvert the republican “whitening” project which assumed that women would “naturally” seek out lighter-skinned mates. Also, Caminha depicted same-sex relations as crimes against nature and nonproductive. In the sparsely populated, continent-sized country of Brazil, leaders saw population growth as essential to national develop-

ment and defense. Caminha treats Bom Crioulo sympathetically because in part he sees him as the victim of forces beyond his comprehension and control rather than as a conscious degenerate. Like other nationalists of his day, Caminha expressed the hope that education and humane treatment would make nonwhites and women into responsible and productive citizens, but he also betrayed his fears about the dangers they could pose to a healthy republican moral, social, and political order.

Adolfo Caminha reveled in the role of literary rebel. He used his fiction to critique Brazilian society, advocate causes, and discredit his rivals, all the while creating memorable literature, much more than political tracts or slanderous diatribes. It would be overly simplistic to say that after taking a swipe at members of Fortaleza society in *A normalista*, Caminha turned his attention to the navy in *Bom Crioulo*, but it seems to account for part of his motivation and selection of subject matter. Caminha’s *Bom Crioulo* leaves his careful reader with unresolved questions that still trouble us in the twenty-first century. Were Bom Crioulo’s “crimes” his own fault? Or did his social pathology result from an unjust social order that failed to educate him or to treat him humanely and as an equal because of his race? Did Caminha see Bom Crioulo as worthy of citizenship in Brazil’s national community? Or did he believe that Bom Crioulo’s race, lack of education, and sexual leanings disqualified him from full membership? The ambiguities in Caminha’s *Bom Crioulo*, one of the first Brazilian novels to feature a black man and former slave as the protagonist, reveal much about the anxieties that haunted the consciences of reform-minded republican nationalists of this generation in relation to manhood, sexuality, freedom, race, citizenship, and nationalism.

## NOTES

1. Apêlido Manuel Alves Vianna, Tribunal de Relação, Arquivo do Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico e Geográfico de Pernambuco, Recife, 1877, caixa II, Pasta 2.
2. In *Billy Budd*, Herman Melville describes the “handsome sailor,” a type that closely resembled Caminha’s depiction of Bom Crioulo.

In certain instances they (mariners) would flank, or, like a body guard, quite surround some superior figure of their own class. . . . I [once] saw . . . a common sailor so intensely black that he must have been a native African of the undiluted blood of Ham. A symmetric figure much above the average height . . . At each spontaneous tribute rendered by the wayfarers to this black pagoda of a fellow—the tribute of a pause and stare, and less frequent an exclamation—the motley retinue showed that they took that sort of pride in the evoker of it which the Assyrian priests doubtless showed for their grand sculptured Bull when the faithful prostrated themselves.

Both Billy Budd and Bom Crioulo were foretopmen, a job high in the rigging that required courage and skill. Melville's *Billy Budd* was published posthumously, so it is doubtful that Caminha read it, but he might have been familiar with Melville's novels with similar themes such as *White-Jacket* or *Moby-Dick*.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

The only Adolfo Caminha novel available in translation is *Bom Crioulo: The Black Man and the Cabin Boy*, trans. E. A. Lacey (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1982). A recent assessment of *Bom Crioulo* that focuses on literary criticism is Robert Howes, "Race and Transgressive Sexuality in Adolfo Caminha's *Bom Crioulo*," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 38:1 (Summer 2001): 41–62. See also Sânzio de Azevedo, *Adolfo Caminha (vida e obra)* (Fortaleza: Universidade Federal de Ceará Edições, 1997). For a more focused analysis of *Bom Crioulo* in the context of military imperialism, see Peter M. Beatte, "Conflicting Penile Codes: Modern Masculinity and Sodomy in the Brazilian Military, 1860–1916," 65–85, in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Donna Guy and Daniel Bouldersten (New York: New York University Press, 1997). On the life of enlisted military men, see Peter M. Beatte, *The Tribute of Blood: Army, Honor, Race, and Nation in Brazil, 1864–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). On slaves and military service, see Hendrik Kraay, "The Shelter of the Uniform: The Brazilian Army and Runaway Slaves, 1800–1888," *Journal of Social History* 29:3 (1997): 637–57. On "whitening" theory, see Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). On same-sex romance and community, see James N. Green, *Beyond Carnival: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). On black and brown political sympathies, see Eduardo Silva, *Prince of the People: The Life and Times of a Brazilian Free Man of Colour*, trans. Moya Ashford (London: Verso, 1993). On police and capoeiras, see Thomas H. Holloway, "'A Healthy Terror': Police Repression of Capoeiras in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 69:4 (1987): 733–56; and Carlos Eugênio Líbano Soares, *A negregada instituição: os capoeiras do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca Carioca, 1994). On military imperialism and its links to abolitionism in the British and U.S. context, see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). Caminha's literary criticism and editorials cited in the text can be found in *Carrus literárias* (Fortaleza: Universidade Federal de Ceará Edições, 1999).

## CHAPTER 6

### *Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon*

#### One Man's Search for the Brazilian Nation

TODD A. DIACON

Up to this point the biographies in this volume have revealed much about the hues and perceptions of Brazilians of African and European descent, but what about the indigenous population? These numerous ethnic and linguistic groups have held perhaps the most ambivalent of positions in the imaginations and policies of Brazil's political and economic leaders. In the mid-1800s an Indian craze swept members of the elite, some of whom went so far as to adopt indigenous names and proudly declare descent from indigenous forebears. A consequent Indianist literary boom brought forth some of Brazil's most treasured early national novels. Conservative senator José de Alencar's *O Guarani* inspired an operatic adaptation by the Brazilian composer Carlos Gomes—one of the best-known Latin American operas performed across Europe at the time and more recently in New York by Plácido Domingo. The *Tapí-Guarani* warrior symbolized for cartoonists the Brazilian nation in the 1800s much as Uncle Sam personified the United States.

The most radical Indianists proposed that the indigenous lingua franca, *Tapí-Guarani*, replace Portuguese as the official national language because it was "truly Brazilian." This linguistic appeal would remain an element of ultranationalist rhetoric for decades. In the twentieth century, modernist poet Oswald de Andrade borrowed from Shakespeare's Hamlet to parody this nationalist fetish: "Tapí, or not Tapí." In part, this Indianist craze was a way for Brazilians in the mid-1800s to assert their nationalism by distancing themselves from their former colonial overlords, the Portuguese. Who could be more "Brazilian" than the original inhabitants? Or so elites in coastal urban centers reasoned. But independent indigenous peoples did not call themselves Brazilians.

Even while nationalist intellectuals celebrated their romantic visions of Indians to create myths of Brazil's origin and identity, the decimation of indigenous peoples continued. An estimated pre-Contact population of some five million indigenes had been reduced to 100,000 by 1900. Most of the violence against Indians in Brazil was not carried out by the armed forces, but by frontier settlers who sought to despoil Indians of lands they claimed were rightfully theirs as citizens. The romantic Indianist craze died down during the Paraguayan War (1864–1870) when Brazilian soldiers fought