

Remembrance by Howard S. Becker (independent scholar)

I never really knew Antonio Candido. My contact with him came about when I appointed myself as the person who was going to translate some of his work into English. I did this, essentially, because no one else was doing it and I thought it ought to be done.

I became aware of him and the mountain of his published work, none of it available in my country, when I went to Brazil in 1990, courtesy of the Ford Foundation, to be a visiting professor for a few months in the Department of Anthropology at the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro. I learned of his work when, quite by accident, I read his essay "Quatro Esperas," in a journal I didn't know which I found on the desk of my host, the anthropologist Gilberto Velho. I was, as we say, blown away by Candido's brilliant analysis of the theme of waiting for something to happen as it appeared in several European fictions, and read everything of his I could get my hands on. And went home to the United States with a lot of reading to do. Which I did. I was not expert in Portuguese, but I could read it and I did read everything I'd brought home and decided that something had to be done to make these ideas available to my sociological colleagues who so desperately needed them, though they didn't know that.

I wrote Professor Candido, who surely must have been surprised by this unexpected approach from someone I was sure he had never heard of. He graciously offered to cooperate in any way he could and was in fact very helpful with the problems I encountered.

Here's a sample problem. Translating his essay on Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, I decided not to translate the excerpts from Dumas from Candido's translation of the French original into Portuguese, but rather to find the standard translation of these passages in one of the many English language versions of the ever-popular book. To my surprise, I could not find the passage in question in the English language version in my hands—or, I soon discovered, in any other English translation I consulted. I asked Professor Candido about this and, as surprised as I was, he sent me a copy of the passage in question from a French edition. It was soon obvious that the publisher of the first American translation had cut this particular passage (a graphic and detailed description of a beheading with blood spurting from the neck of the deceased) presumably because it

would upset children, the intended audience for this book of “adventure.” Well, OK, that’s what had happened in that case but surely there were other translations in which the passage appeared. No, there weren’t and, in fact, there weren’t any other translations, not ever. Why pay someone to make a new translation when a perfectly good, time-and sales-tested one already existed? It was a lesson for both me and Professor Candido.

Another problem. As I confessed in the introduction to the collection, I had particularly wanted to include something from the collection *Na sala de aula*, Candido’s collection of essays on Brazilian poetry. As I said in the introduction to the book, “The difficulties of translating poetry are well-known and, in this case, the problem would be doubly difficult, even were it within my powers, since his analyses make so much use of the sounds and rhythms of the Portuguese language, most of whose subtleties are integral to the effects he analyzes.”

Friends in publishing had warned me that no house would take on the publication of such a book, since there would be no market for it. It was hard enough, I was told repeatedly, to market translations from Spanish. Portuguese was much more difficult to publish. I persisted and finally persuaded Mary Murrell, a courageous editor then at Princeton, to accept the challenge. She did and the higher-ups went ahead with the project. And the doomsayers were right. About 300 copies were sold over a period of years. (I have to say, in defense of Princeton that they don’t keep the book in print in paper, they do make an electronic version available to this day.)

I did not hear from Professor Candido again. But this project was one of the great intellectual adventures of my life and it was made a pleasure by his kind and understanding approach to the amateur translator I was.

REMEMBERING ANTONIO CANDIDO
2018 MLA Convention – New York City
January 6, 2018, 7:15-8:30 PM