Against the Grain

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Collecting to the Core-Portugueses Linguistic, Literacy and Cultural Travessias

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Collecting to the Core — Portuguese Linguistic, Literary, and Cultural Travessias

by Suzanne M. Schadl (Associate Professor and Curator of Latin American Collections, University of New Mexico; Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literatures Editor, Resources for College Libraries) <schadl@unm.edu>

Column Editor’s Note: The “Collecting to the Core” column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the Resources for College Libraries bibliography (online at http://www.rclweb.net). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD

As the early Portuguese explorers navigated a vast ocean to discover a new world and Guinaraes Rosa’s ‘travelers’ crossed the serrao…, so do language learners journey into uncharted territories of knowledge, embarking upon a travessia that will take them to new cultural horizons.”

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Os Lusíadas (The Lusiads), by the oft-cited master of the Portuguese language Luís de Camões, and The Devil to Pay in the Backlands (Grande Sertão: Veredas), by the distinguished twentieth-century Brazilian novelist João Guimarães Rosa, are important departures for those who embark on the journey of learning Portuguese. Both of these works often appear in foundational reading lists along with more recognizable authors like Homer and James Joyce. Their inventive use of structure and language makes their respective distinctions in the Portuguese and Brazilian literary canons incontrovertible. As cultural capital these works extend beyond basic literary and linguistic presenting and establish the trope of travessia (the long journey). Clarice Lispector’s 1977 novella The Hour of the Star (A Hora da Estrela) reinforces and builds on these cultural foundations. Because of their intricacies and astute sociocultural references, these works are difficult, if not impossible, to translate or understand out of context. As a consequence, they are quintessential challenges for Portuguese language learners and emerging Portuguese readers, including native speakers.

In the classroom, providing masterpieces like the above alongside accessible popular adaptations produced in television, film, or graphic media can create pathways for deeper cultural immersion. This essay makes a case for assembling diverse materials and formats to support Lusophone literacy — defined here for assembling diverse materials and formats to support Lusophone literacy — defined here as linguistic, literary, and cultural understanding of the Portuguese language. Brazilian examples dominate this essay, but they should be treated with corollaries in other Portuguese-speaking countries.

Portuguese speakers are diverse. Fifteenth and sixteenth-century Portuguese explorers navigated down the West African coast, around the Cape of Good Hope, along the southeast African coast to Calcutta, and also across the Atlantic Ocean, spreading the Portuguese language into areas of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Later, political turmoil in the nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe and Japan prompted significant migration to Brazil. Strong Portuguese language and literature collections should include works reflecting these complex migratory histories or travessias, which have the compound effect of underscoring Lusophone cultural references even as they expand them beyond the boundaries of the Western canon.

One path to literacy is to begin with the concept of the long voyage as presented in the quotation above by the authors of Os Lusíadas. The Devi...
to introduce challenging Portuguese literary texts to emerging Portuguese readers and language learners. Once in that space, the journey can unfold within uncharted territories to reveal myriad new travel routes and diverse cultural horizons. Facilitating this kind of educational exploration requires library resources beyond the book to other forms of cultural production such as music, film, television, children’s books, and graphic novels.

Endnotes
7. Tolman et al, Travessia.

To Blog or Not To Blog — Librarian Bloggers

by Pat Sabosik (General Manager, ACI Scholarly Blog Index; Phone: 203-816-8256) <psabosik@aci.info>

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ibrarians blog. They share opinions and processes with their colleagues in a peer to peer networked global community. Blogs gained popularity in the 1990s and are now an accepted communication tool for many professions. While the use of blogs differ by professions — critique, chronicling, hypotheses, opinion and observations, new developments — there are similarities and differences between academic blogging and librarian blogging.

The Guardian published an article in 2013 by Pat Thomson, Professor of Education and Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Nottingham, UK, and Inger Mewburn, Director of Research Training at Australian National University. The article, “Why Do Academics Blog? It’s Not For Public Outreach, Research Shows” sums up an informal study of one hundred academic bloggers into two key findings: “Firstly, many bloggers are talking together in a kind of giant, global virtual common room. Over at one table there is a lively, even angry, conversation about working conditions in academia in different parts of the world.” “Secondly, we have come to see blogging as a variation of open access publishing. Academics can get to print early, share ideas which are still being cooked and stake a claim in part of a conversation without waiting to appear in print.” Visit https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/dec/02/why-do-academics-blog-research-to-view The Guardian article.

Librarians, as academics, certainly fit into the discussion of blogging as a “virtual common room,” the tone is lively, but librarian blogs are generally more helpful and guidance-focused than academic blogs. Let’s look into some of the ways librarians are using this social media tool to advance librarianship.

During 2016, I curated a feature of selected scholarly blogs to be published in the Choice Magazine’s tablet edition. One of the subjects I was selecting was Library Science and I identified five to six scholarly blogs each month from the collection of blogs included in the ACI Scholarly Blog Index.

From this exercise, I saw that librarian blogs seemed to naturally fall into several recognizable categories: technology, the profession itself, librarian practices, and product reviews. Marshall Breeding, an independent consultant, and his blog, Library Technology Guides, reports on the latest product and vendor developments, and keeps the library profession informed.

Library Stuff, written by Steve M. Cohen, Senior Librarian, Law Library Management, Inc., and Letters to a Young Librarian, by Jessica Olin, Library Director, Wesley College, focuses on professional development. Olin’s recent blog post: “Writing (and Righting) Library Policies” is a good example of providing guidance to younger professionals.

There is a generous number of librarian blogs on technology topics, all warranted with different points of view, on how to approach incorporating technology into library service, discovery, analytics, and communicating to the user community through various library websites. Jason Griffey’s blog, Pattern Recognition, is a good starting point for looking at technology and public policy. Griffey is Head of Library Information Technology at the University of Tennessee and a Fellow at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University. David Lee King’s blog, David Lee King, looks at social media, trends, technology, and libraries. A recent post, “One Big Social Media Prediction for 2017,” sums up King’s views on social media channels and libraries’ use of them for communication. King is Director of Digital Services at Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library.

Scholarly blogs in the Library of Congress Classifications of librarianship, information science, technology, and the history of scholarship are all worth reading to keep up with the trends in librarianship and participate in what’s being discussed in the “virtual common room.”

Column Editor’s Note: All of the blogs mentioned here are included in the ACI Scholarly Blog Index along with other Library and Information Science blogs. — PS