



Silva, A. C. S., Ludemir, J., & Salgueiro, M. A. A. (Eds.). (2024). *Contemporary Afro-Brazilian short fiction: A bilingual anthology*. UCL Press.

Vanessa Lopes Lourenço Hanes

Fluminense Federal University

Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

vanessahanes@id.uff.br 

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0413-0190> 

Despite well-known exceptions discussed by Barbosa (1994) and Melo (2017), Brazilian literature is seldom translated in the Anglophone world. Rochol (2023) demonstrated that the number of translated books in the United States, for example, remains strikingly low: among major American publishing houses, only 447 first translations to English—from any other language—were published in 2022. Due to historical and local factors, Brazilian literature involves an additional layer of underrepresentation in the Anglophone book market. According to the 2022 Census (IBGE, 2022), most Brazilians consider themselves to be of African descent, but the country's cultural production, including literature, does not reflect this. Widely recognized Afro-Brazilian writers are relatively few, of whom only a very small number has ever been translated. Thus, in this context, where Black Brazilians are doubly marginalized, as an underrepresented group within an already undertranslated national literature, this volume edited by Silva et al. (2024) comes as a particularly welcome initiative to disseminate the work of contemporary Afro-Brazilian writers, within the even less visible genre of short stories.

This volume has been favored with several layers of validation. First, it is part of the *Literature and Translation* series, which currently includes 12 other titles organized by renowned scholars from different regions of the globe (Batchelor et al., 2019–2026); second, it was published by University College London Press, the UK's first fully open access university press; third, it was curated by Brazilian editors with a keen understanding of which materials would be genuinely representative; and fourth, it originated in an online workshop held within (but not restricted to) academic spaces, involving not only scholars and translators but also the authors themselves. This format allowed sustained debate and exchange throughout the translation process. It is worth noting that these workshops took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting translations thus stand as

concrete examples of scholarly initiatives that may not have emerged without the constraints of that period, which reshaped academic interaction on a global scale.

The diversity of voices that were involved in this project (organizers, authors and translators) is striking. The book presents 21 texts in bilingual format, which significantly enhances the visibility of the Brazilian writers. The contributors come from a wide range of professional and social backgrounds, including a school teacher, a playwright, a dramatist, social activists, professional translators, foreign and domestic university professors, a journalist, a cultural producer, an actress, etc. Thus, people from different walks of life and different generations were united by the need to communicate the blackness portrayed in these stories.

Another notable strength lies in the volume's successful integration of academic and literary dimensions. While its primary aim is to present these 21 short stories to Anglophone readers, the stories are preceded by an "Introductory texts" section with three substantial essays, each authored by one of the editors. In these essays, the editors articulate their perspectives for furthering this initiative. Hence, the volume is not merely a collection of translations, but a book about translation. Translation is foregrounded both as a practice and as a field of scholarly inquiry, including in-text translations of direct quotations in the introductory chapters, an element that would traditionally be relegated to footnotes or endnotes. In this respect, Venuti's (1995) hypothesis on the pervasive invisibility of translation in the Anglophone context is directly challenged.

In "Making contemporary Afro-Brazilian short fiction more accessible to English speakers", Silva (2024) shares many of the concerns that guided this editorial project at what Lambert & van Gorp (1985/2011) would call the preliminary, the macro-, and the microlevels of a translation, points that determine the systemic context of the translations found in this volume. One preliminary aspect is the question of who should be translating Afro-Brazilian writers, a highly relevant yet insufficiently debated question in contemporary translation studies. Following the "who" comes the "how," and Silva (2024) discusses a macrolevel element that resonates throughout the book: the search for balance between identification and unfamiliarity, which she considers to be the "underlying principle of the translations" (p. 19). This search is probably what led to the microlevel features considered in the essay, including the challenge of establishing a literary register while representing the authors' Portuguese, such as the use of slang from different communities.

In the second introductory essay, "Atlantic inferiority", Ludemir (2024) explores the underrepresentation and the changing scenario mentioned at the beginning of this review. He indicates that the historical scarcity in Brazil of publications by Afro-Brazilian writers only began to be reversed through government affirmative action policies in the 2010s, "significantly changing Black people's presence within the cultural landscape" (p. 27). The author also speculates of a future in which Brazil would receive an Oscar for one of its films, which materialized just one year after the publication of this essay (*Ainda estou aqui*). This underscores Ludemir's (2024) acute awareness of Brazil's growing cultural visibility and of the gradual transformations unfolding in its cultural polysystem.

In the final introductory essay, "Translating Afro-Brazilian short stories into English: challenges and perspectives", Salgueiro (2024) draws on her solid background in translation studies to point out that translation is far more than a merely interlingual operation; it is, fundamentally, an intercultural activity. She stresses that "the artistry of cultural-linguistic mediation" (p. 34) has been the guiding principle of this volume, whose goal was to produce understandable translations that



retain cultural and stylistic elements from the original. In her concluding remarks, Salgueiro (2024) frames this volume as one of many possible steps toward greater representation of Afro-Brazilian writers in both translation practice and research.

After considering these introductory chapters, readers are well prepared to immerse themselves in the short stories and appreciate why such an extensive critical framework was necessary or would, at least, be extremely helpful. The richness and uniqueness of Afro-Brazilian culture (or rather cultures) resonate throughout the texts, underscoring the importance of a carefully conceived translation project capable of conveying the distinct voices of these authors. Although each of these translations could stand on its own merits, the introductory matter and the stories' interconnectivity coalesce harmoniously.

This is not to say that some things were not lost in translation, as usually happens. That is why translation scholars have theorized about phenomena that tend to occur in different translations in different cultures. Berman's (1985/2021) deforming tendencies are one example, which, in spite of their rather negative name, objectively describe certain approaches in these translations. For instance, underlying networks of signification are obscured in several places. In "When the Gangster falters", a balloon is mentioned (Barbosa, 2024, p. 66). Although *balão* is generally used to signify a (rubber) balloon, or even a hot air balloon, in this case it signifies something culturally specific to Brazil, a spectacle practically unknown to the outside world: a huge, unpiloted "hot air balloon" made of waxed paper that is propelled by the combustion of kerosene-soaked cotton rags, which is released into the night sky in celebration of St. John's Eve and sails for miles, the hazards of which goes without saying.

In "No one regulates the Americas", the original comic word play from the name of actress Cassia Kiss is lost, resulting in an omission. In Portuguese, her name would be pronounced with a 'long e' (i.e., rhyming with 'piece'), indistinguishable from *quis*, the third person preterit of *querer* (to want). In the same story, a young man playing at the beach makes a glaring concordance error in reference to a ball: *esse bola* (*esse*, a masculine pronoun, rather than *essa*, the feminine form) (Conceição, 2024, p. 105). Such an error would immediately indicate a non-native speaker of Portuguese, but this tagging is lost, since English, being ungendered, offers no easy translation solution. Thus, monolingual readers will only discover that he is a foreigner later in the story. In "Metamorphosis", the transliteration of a regional expression from Minas Gerais, "wash the trains" (Guimarães, 2024, p. 154) is conflicting, given that, despite any intentionality as a humorous foreignizing vignette, it is unlikely that monolingual readers will contextually recognize it as "washing dishes".

In "Mirror women", translating *bagaço* as "mush" (Ribeiro, 2024, p. 217) is an example of what Berman (2021) called 'impoverishment'. English lacks an everyday term for the residue left after sucking or wringing the juice from a piece of fruit: the peel is left from a banana, the core from an apple, the seeds from a grape, or the pit from a peach. But how would one describe the mass of skin and connective tissue leftover after sucking the juice from an orange or a mangled stalk of sugarcane after being wrung through an extractor? This word, *bagaço*, passed into English as *bagasse*, particularly in reference to sugarcane, but it is hardly on the tip of anyone's tongue. However, in Brazil, where fruit is a constant, basic component of the people's diet, *bagaço*, as a metaphorical reference to a drained, exhausted, and/or abused person, is apropos. "Verbs under the skin" involves a case of ennoblement (Rodrigues, 2024, p. 223), in which the low-brow "*eu comia ela*" (I'd do her)

was translated as “I would, how about you?”, sharply elevating the register and omitting the main verb.

The above examples are not presented as translation errors, but rather as translation choices made to bridge the gap between languages and cultures, which may be more or less effective given the involved constraints. They are interesting cases that reflect some of the translators’ difficulties; other cases receive no mention here because they pass unnoticed in the translated text.

In sum, this volume is a much-needed platform for the dissemination of a group of writers who have been historically marginalized. It succeeds in conveying the Afro-Brazilian essence in its stories through a carefully conceived, sensitive, and intellectually rigorous editorial project. Amid its plurality, what ultimately stands out is the coherence and force of Afro-Brazilian voices in dialogue. Moreover, the opportunity to engage with the editors’ individual reflections and to follow their reasoning throughout the book’s development is a rare and valuable feature that can serve as a model for future initiatives of this kind.

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