

EXTRACTS FROM A BRAZILIAN JOURNAL

P. K. Page

February 1st, 1957

How could I have imagined so surrealist and seductive a world? One does not *like* the heat, yet its constancy, its all-surroundingness is as fascinating as the smell of musk. Every movement is slow as if under warm greenish water. The flavour is beyond my ability to catch. The senses are being sharpened by *that* smell: the vegetable pole-cat called jack-fruit, which, when fallen, looks in size and contour like a black porcupine and is picked, when ripe, from the trees in our jungle; by *these* sights: Niemeyer's bridges, for instance, built over the canyons of this extraordinarily mountained city — long, sinuous, low bridges on pylons, with glimpses of the sea both above and below; recurring couples — on the street everyone is paired, in love, embracing or half-embracing whatever the heat; the recurring solitary figure in the window, most often female, quite classical, framed by a mat of hot air, and gazing off in a kind of languor, as if all time were designed for this purpose.

It is hard to get anything done. It is hard to focus. A thought is barely born before it melts and in its place so lovely a void, one could hardly have guessed emptiness so attractive. We swim now, in the great hot pool, not cooling off, merely drowning our wetness in a greater wetness, while next door the Sisters sing their *Aves* in the totally dark convent. The other night we heard the giggles of a myriad of small girls, and leaning on the balustrade, in what must surely be the classical Brazilian pose, found — instead of a children's party as we had thought — the Sisters themselves, those whom we have seen at dusk silently reading their breviaries under the cassia trees, now swinging on the swings, dark robes flying. A wonderful subject for Pegi Nichol had she been alive to try the inky ranges of greens and blues, and momentarily lay aside her bright jujube colours. I think of her now perhaps because our reception rooms are like the shell-white rooms where mermaids might sober up after a drunken night — and a large Nichol of girls gardening and bending would shed a warmer light in all this green and white. A Nichol and a Frieman and a great Bonnard.

The Goodrich (Roberts) that we have — and all my life I've wanted to live with a Goodrich — is large and dark and totally without movement. The pines against the sky are characteristic as a signature — but it might be forged. Sky, trees, water — his best ingredients — lie locked on the canvas. I think of his

large still-life in the National Gallery and remembering, would hang it so happily with those other paintings. The fruit, the bottle, the plate — painted as if he had suddenly glimpsed a world in which all objects glow.

A. is spilled on his bed like warm milk, and the frogs, tree toads, cicadas and whatever else, cut, saw, bang and hit the black tropical night. Around and around the driveway the armed guard in his sand-coloured uniform strolls like a succession of men. In the darkness between the pools of light shed by the lamps, he is totally lost. The frogs sound like dogs, like hens, like drums, like strings, and when they stop, which they do occasionally, as if they are obeying a conductor, one hears the other drums and the wierd singing from the *favela*.

It is from the *favelas* that the sambas come, according to our host of the other evening, a small Brazilian of Italian origin. He is, he claims, a true Cariocan: loves the heat, the negroes and the samba, and he takes pride in being responsible for having published many of the best known sambas, found by him when visiting the hills.

February 6th

The heat is over for the moment. During the weekend the temperature soared above the century and no breeze moved among the smallest leaves of the maiden-hair. But, dramatically, Sunday night a storm blew up and the house seemed to rise like a flight of wooden eagles, wooden wings flapping, as every shutter banged and swung. You could almost see the cooler air as it streamed through the rooms overturning photographs, riffling papers — a manic housekeeper on the loose.

Last Sunday, a day as sunny as looking through a topaz, we set off for the Corcovada. This is one of the highest of the peaks surrounding Rio. On its top an immense stone figure of Christ the Redeemer. Just below the summit kiosks selling postcards and dolls and butterfly wing pictures, and small boys swinging smoking braziers and carrying cone-shaped packets — some edible for sale, but what? Then endless flights of steps and lovers loitering — black, brown, white — dressed in their Sunday best. And finally at the top, the Christ, and the lovers being photographed at His feet by young men popping under black cloths. And below — all Rio, fabulous, extraordinary, with its bays and islands and mountain peaks and lagoons and skyscrapers.

February 13th

Notes on flora and fauna: in the garden a bird like a yellow-bellied flycatcher. Trying to find it in the inadequate bird books we have acquired, I discovered the fact that Brazil has a marsupial duck! Why baby doesn't drown while mother swims, I don't understand.

Yesterday, when Maria, the Spanish maid of all work, was cleaning the

verandah, she found a very blond frog asleep on the lintel above the door to the *sala*. Giving it a good peasant swipe with her broom — the kind she would give in affection to her husband — she brought it to the marble floor with such a resounding smack I'd have thought it dead. Instead, it leapt through the door to the sitting room and straight onto an upholstered French chair with all the authority of the transformed prince. Finally, finding Maria's persistence with the broom too much for it, it clung with both forearms to a railing of the verandah and emitted a loud wail like a Siamese cat.

For the first and quite unforgettable time, we have seen a Brazilian blue butterfly — as large as a flying hand — the upper surfaces of its wings a fluorescent Mary-blue, the underside soft as the colour of snuff.

February 18th

Today I fired the laundress with elephantiasis. Hated doing it but she was not a very good laundress and five kilos of beef and eighteen sugar bananas unaccountably disappeared on Saturday. Unfairly, perhaps, I suspect her. Yet I am sorry to see her go. It is unlikely I shall ever again employ a grotesque: elephantiasis of the legs and breasts and a strange little beard which hung straight down under her chin and curled only at the end. In a book I was reading the other day, the author said Baudelaire was the poet of the Brazilian jungle . . . and certainly Lourdes, for that is her name, is pure Baudelaire. Ready for the clothes line, her great brown arms full of white sheets, rows of clothes pegs clipped to her dress like rows of nipples on some gargantuan sow, she was a truly awesome figure.

In the garden one tree has four great sprays of tree orchids growing from it — white with purple centres. Another, a yellow orchid with a rust centre; still another, an indescribable flower of bright cerise with cerulean blue tips on its large heather-shaped flowers. I wish I knew how to describe the vegetation, or indeed, how to paint it. It is so excessive. Every tree puts forth some flower in clumps or sprays or showers of yellow, purple, pink, white or red — and almost every trunk bears orchids. Nature doesn't seem to know how to control itself! For instance — the other day a yellow-bellied fly catcher flew out of a cassia tree heavy with yellow blossom, the tree growing in a flower bed massed with yellow day lilies — and caught, if you please, an immense yellow butterfly.

In my bedroom at this moment there is a flying creature about two inches long — a cricket? a locust? — black lace wings and a green brocade head and a noise like a DC3 revving up. Just as the crisp air, the warbling of the magpies and the smells of gum smoke and daphne will forever conjure Australia for me, so will immense wet heat and thousands of night creatures — *bichos* — with their noise-makers, conjure Brazil. And too, the tremendous length of white sand, blinding white in the sun, the façades of white buildings which, for all their contemporary

design, look somehow like the ruins in a John Piper painting; pedlars with eagle-shaped kites under a coloured balloon barrage on the boulevard by the sea; tropical children in pony carts with coloured nurses in starched white; the faded patchwork of the houses in the *favelas*; people balancing parcels on their heads; crowds at the beaches in mid-day heat, minus sun-glasses, minus hats, beating out samba rhythms on the blistering hot radiators of their cars. This is Barbados and Paris. But there is more and other as well.

February 23rd

It is cool — seventy-five degrees with humidity a hundred. The air coming through the windows is like sheet rain. Everything is mildewing. We burn lights in our clothes cupboards and place bags of salt among our shoes but the mildew forms. I have just found, stashed away in the basement, some bottles of *Mildu-Rid*. Plan to plaster it over everything.

February 26th

Notes on fauna: yesterday, flying over the lotus pool, dragonflies of bright cerise with blue wings. Someone once said that cerise was hideous and not a true colour. When I asked what they meant by 'true,' they said it was a colour not found in nature. They had certainly not observed nature much in the tropics where bougainvillea and dragonflies deck themselves in it.

Last evening a bird like a ballerina — tiny, black, dressed in a white *tutu*, flew out onto mid-stage, did a fabulous *tour en l'air* and disappeared before I could further observe it.

February 27th

Today the house is full of plumbers (*bombeiros* in Portuguese, which also means firemen and spies!), painters, and electricians. This afternoon I have been de-mildewing books. Each day it's dry enough outside, I remove the books with the longest beards and put them in the sun. Today, however, I got caught with my books down. In one minute flat the sun had turned to torrential rain.

This is a very public house. In part, because we are over-run with workmen, but it is also something to do with Brazilian life, I think. I remember an Indian friend in Ottawa complaining how lonely she was in a Canadian house; in India she did nothing alone, she was always accompanied by others — in everything as far as I could make out, from cooking to making love. The bliss for me of a house where I see no one all day!

Curiously, even though I speak of the house as public, at the same time, I wonder about its "emptiness." For it *is* empty, psychologically. Built by de B., reported to be a cousin of the King of Portugal, on a dramatic site overlooked by twin peaks, *Os Dois Irmaos*, with imported marble for the floors, imported artists

to paint the ceilings, it is architecturally beautiful. A long three-storey house of terra-cotta pink with white trim, wrought iron railings, terraces, verandahs and arches; double and triple French doors with shutters and charmingly designed transoms. Lighted, at night, it is like a birthday cake, waiting to be blown out; while doubled, upside down in the swimming pool, its pinkness melts and slides in the dark water and the seven frosting-white arches of the lower terrace reflect in shimmering U's.

To lay out his gardens, de B. employed Burle Marx, the best landscape gardener (and jeweller!) in Brazil who used a stream with a waterfall, a lotus pond, flagstones and three different coloured grasses planted in sweeping curves, to make an abstract painting of the land.

Here in this *palacete* set in a jewelled garden, de B. lived with his beautiful wife until one day she was missing, then found dead. Sometimes Maria, eyes large, says, "The Senhora walks tonight, Madammy." And, occasionally when I've been weakened by the heat and unable to sleep again because of the drums from the *favela* or the frogs or the tree toads, I wonder if the Senhora *does* walk. But I have never felt her presence. If anything it is her absence that I feel — a sense of her having walked *out* taking the essence of the house with her, and it is that emptiness that the walls guard, as if it were a trust.

March 6th

All of Rio is sleeping off the orgy of *Carnaval*. Nothing now but hangovers, fatigue and hospitals and prisons bulging. For the rich there were a series of balls, all fancy dress — a ball a night, we are told. The Municipal Ball had a mere 7,400 attend! Many thousands of *cruzeiros* are spent on costumes and the dancing goes on all night. For the poor in the *favelas* this is the event of their year. Months in advance they join 'samba schools' and practise night after night. Just what they practise I am not quite sure because their 'dances' to the samba beat are a kind of mass walk, arms in the air. Each school has its own group attire — one group of about forty all in diapers and bonnets and sucking bottles.

Virtually everyone dresses up. In mid-afternoon we saw two adults, male and female, in Grecian costume in earnest conversation on a downtown street. And a man mounted on a *papier maché* horse in the manner of an ice comedian, 'riding' it along a sidewalk all by himself and having considerable difficulty keeping it from throwing him. Here and there a ghastly looking female (male, I suspect) carrying a placard: *Miss Portugal, 1957*, which bears out what we have already been told, that the Portuguese are one of the favourite butts of Brazilian humour. No baby so small it could not wear a paper hat, at least; and one, only a matter of months, was in all that heat, dressed as a white rabbit. Tiny tired Spanish noblemen in black velvet were lifted to rest on the radiators of cars. And everyone, large or small, carried with them the golden spray bottle of

scented 'ether' which is said to provide the energy to keep going. A very small boy sprayed A. on the legs so we came home smelling of carnival.

In the evening on the invitation of the Mayor, we went to the *Teatro Municipal* to watch the parade of floats sponsored by the Tourist Department. To my surprise we were able to fight our way through the crowd and up the wide stone steps through the mass of people — flexible, good-natured, rubberized almost and so able to contract and expand at will. The Mayor, looking a little like a Brazilian clerk because of his double-breasted white linen suit, greeted us with champagne. Below, one of the most extraordinary sights I've ever seen: a wide river of people samba-ing up and down the *Avenida Rio Branca*, thousands of them moving in such a way that if you half closed your eyes you lost entirely the sense of them being people at all. A great illuminated multi-coloured pattern pulsing to the beat of the samba. As far as one could see, there was nothing but people; the tropical night sitting fat and black on herds of zebras, families of leopards, tiny ballerinas no longer on their points and other enthusiasts who had done nothing more than sprinkle talcum powder on their heads. One indefatigable equilibrist whom we had seen in the afternoon standing on a narrow, sloping ledge and knitting a red woolen garment with frantic speed, was still there, hours later, knitting with the same frenzy.

Nature notes for the day: after one of the worst days domestically I have ever been through, I went out to get flowers for the dinner table and something moved in the high branches of one of the trees. I promised to forgive the whole day if it were a monkey. And it was! The wretched little thing, however, swung away from me into the jungle. It was small, only slightly larger than a squirrel.

Trees: in the garden there are varieties of what the Australians would call Rain Trees — with composite finely fretted leaves and clusters of flowers — pink, red, white or yellow. There are numerous palms — one with a pointed blade-like leaf and a massive tower of white blossoms; one like a feather duster which throws its old leaves down — feathers shed from a giant bird. We have the elephant ear tree, of which no more need be said, and one that grows smooth and straight as a young telephone pole, no branch below twelve feet. Then there is the dense and darkly massed foliage of the jackfruit tree and a spreading tree, with large, deeply indented leaves and green fruits which look like mangoes. Feathery stands of bamboo. And both nearby and, as it were, echoing off into the jungle clad hills, the *Quaresmas* (the name means Lent which is when they flower) blooming now with vibrant purple; and beside them, trees of pure silver, broad-leafed, and others with small clustered flowers yellow as gorse.

March 12th

Last night dinner with the D's. A small party: the Argentines, two Shell people, Ambassador N. — President of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio, and

C. — newly appointed ambassador to London, a Senator, owner of a chain of thirty newspapers, magazines, radio stations as well as prime mover in the Sao Paulo Museum of Art. The women elegant in black; much jewelled. Ambassador N. large, warm, expansive, sophisticated. We waited interminably for C. who finally phoned to say he would be 'a little late.' N. loathed C. and made no bones about it. Said he would not have accepted the invitation had he known C. was invited. Interesting to compare the two — both Brazilians, both ambassadors, both involved in Museums of Modern Art. There the similarities end. N. is an immense man, C. a Napoleon. C. spoke volubly in French which N. claimed was ninety percent error. When, forced as he later was, to speak English, he was just as voluble and the percentage of error just as high.

When the party broke up, C. asked A. and me if we would care to see the Cruzeiro Palace. It seemed obvious that we *should* care and so we drove off through the rain and darkness (nights seem immensely dark in Rio by virtue of a by-law forbidding the use of headlights, only parking lights permitted) down into the old part of the city where the streets are narrow, the buildings warehouse and undistinguished, to come at last to an immense cube, light as foam rubber and glowing as if phosphorescent. This was the Cruzeiro Palace, the plant where the magazine *O Cruzeiro* is published. Although in use, its presses rolling and its night shift working, the building is not yet finished. Designed by Niemeyer, it is raised on pillars, the walls of all floors above the ground floor are glass, covered entirely by a *brise-soleil* of punched sheets, the punch holes being two to three inches in diameter. It is this that gives the effect of such lightness; and because a very white fluorescent light is diffused through the holes, the phosphorescent glow results. A mural by Portinari is underway in the entrance hall and upstairs a dozen of his paintings are waiting to be hung. Strange paintings, flat, like cartoons for his mural. Groups of people, wonderful in their design, disappointing only in their surfaces, looking much as prime coating does on a wall.

Thinking of the three of us — C. small, stocky, ill-tailored, talking execrable English, yawning, pulling us by the force of his will across the cobbled streets in the black rain — the two men, black and white in dinner jackets, I in a black and white dress with ribbons — to the cool martini of a building, it seems more like a sequence from a black and white movie than an actual experience. And C. talking on, yawning and talking through his yawns, of his masters — Caesar and Nietzsche — of the ugliness of the world, of his great marble hall in Sao Paulo 'for the people.' The photo of him that we had seen in front of the book about the Sao Paulo Museum is a wonderfully good portrait — it is a snapshot only, of a small, squat man in a crumpled suit, wearing on his head a child's newspaper hat. The accompanying wooden sword is not there because he doesn't use one. Of wood.

Manuel, our gardener's assistant, has planted a new lawn at the side of the house. This is done in the manner of planting seedlings. A little hole is made in the earth and a small root of grass popped in. The effect, at this stage, is that of a candlestick bedspread — brown with green tufts. The whole as if measured and ruled.

March 30th

Went, the other afternoon, in intense heat to see the *Museo de Arte Moderna* in the process of construction. It is being built by private subscription and costing in the vicinity of three million dollars. The building committee consists of Sra B., wife of the owner of one of the largest newspapers; Ambassador N. whom we met at dinner; the elegant young chief of the Department of Tourism; and Henrique Mindlin, architect and editor of an interesting and well-produced book about modern architecture in Brazil. We know his book and I had noticed among his acknowledgements the name of Elizabeth Bishop. When I asked him if she is still in Brazil, he said, yes. The next thing is to meet her.

The maquette of the Museum is impressive, and standing in the dust and brick of the actual foundation, on land recently reclaimed from the harbour, one is aware of how immense the building will be and of how wonderful the site.

April 1st

The Portuguese language is fascinating. In a country which, to us, seems to place small value on life, there is a difference of only one letter between *to live* — *morrar*, and *to die* — *morrer*. So far I have been unable to find any expression for *how funny* — perhaps because the Brazilian finds everything funny. One learns *muito bom* — *very good*, immediately. It is used about almost everything that is not *muito bem* — *very well* or *muito mau* — *very bad*. In fact, the ubiquitous *muito* is said with such feeling that the most ordinary events become dramatic. Life itself becomes dramatic. There are differences between the language texts and the spoken language: servants are no longer *criados* — a word originating with slavery when a small slave child would be brought up in the house of the master, in effect, *created* — but *empregados* meaning *employees*, used however, with *voce*, the intimate second person, not *o senhor* or *a senhora*, the more formal third.

As to the small value placed on life, one has only to read the newspapers to learn of the number of people who carry guns and fire them. A member of the Chamber of Deputies fatally shot a traffic policeman who had stopped him for speeding. This is but one of many such incidents reported in the press. If one can believe what one is told, the very law itself ignores the importance of life. In a traffic accident, responsibility for the injured lies with anyone who calls an ambu-

lance or obtains medical help, with the inevitable result that a victim can lie in the roadway for hours before anything is done.

April 22nd

Our car has arrived. A great relief. I can now, if I wish, get away from the house. I took off for Copacobana this morning — my first shot at Brazilian traffic!

Such a morning . . . the sea beautiful and miles of beach. I swear every child in Brazil has a kite and manages to get it air-borne no matter how tiny the piece of ground on which he is standing. The sky jerks and bobs with them. One, a candy-pink heart on a string, leapt and spurted its joy.

I walked among the shops, just looking. Prices high, even of fruits — custard apples, *kaki* and *mamao*. In a workman's shelter on the side of the street a group of men was solemnly playing dominoes.

April 30th

To produce small boys quicker than you can say 'kite,' fly one. We went on Sunday with our *papagaio* to the beach at Ipanema. A strong wind tossed it up and flung it down again, its right wing always leading. All the small boys on the beach were kite doctors. Each took it as his right to tie another knot in the harness string to 'restore' the balance. One finally tore off its cat's cradle harness to make a new one. After each 'restoration' the kite descended, right wing leading. The small boys made us offers for our poor kite. Many negotiations.

The beach was beautiful — slightly hazy. Black, brown, white Brazilians in *futebol* sweaters, kicking the ball about in the thick, soft sand; the curving façade of apartment buildings — whites, pinks, blues; the odd-shaped mountains — how describe their shapes? — elongated cones? the top joints of thumbs? — making the sea look like a surrealist painting; and the waves tumbling in — riding in green and high, their plate glass cracking and breaking and pulverizing into crystals and white powder.

We drove back with our wounded bird to the young man who sold it to us and he undertook to mend it. A long, thin, tight young man with one leg swinging at an unusual angle and a face like a Modigliani. He ripped the existing harness from our kite and, from a spool of string, measured exactly from wing-tip to shoulder, shoulder to beak, wing-tip to beak, knotting as he went and hanging the strings around his neck until he was ready; checking further measurements by the length of his palm plus one, two, or three fingers — all his actions quick and pretty with certainty. We squatted with him on the boulevard beneath his row of coloured balloons bobbing in the wind as the light failed suddenly and street lamps came on and traffic increased and the balloons bobbed more wildly. His small helper, wearing shorts and the top of an old bathing suit which came to

just below his nipples, ran to his bidding as he shouted orders — the two of them serious and intent beneath the balloons.

By the time *papagaio* was completed, the wind was too strong for kite flying and the night too near. But the young man gave him a trial flight, letting him out over the traffic then losing him in a perilous drop over the telephone wires in a sudden calm, fighting as if he had a trout on his line, using all his skill and cunning to edge the bird into whatever wind he could find until, coaxing, beguiling, he finally eased it up and over the wires and, miraculously, safely back. I thought then, as all kite flyers must have thought, that this strange childish sport which holds so great a fascination, is really fishing in reverse.

May 1st

Drove into the depths of the city yesterday alone for the first time. Took as my route the whole length of beach. Beautiful, beautiful. I shall never get used to it.

May 12th

On the first, we left for Sao Paulo by plane, returned yesterday by car. One world to another. One planet to another. Between the two cities a difference much greater than between Montreal and Toronto.

From Rio's downtown airport you can catch a plane to Sao Paulo every half hour, like a bus. The buildings, designed by M. M. M. Roberto, are not my cup of tea. Columns too heavy and a kind of de Chirico-like desolation about them. We were given numbered discs upon arrival and boarded the plane according to number. Very orderly and neat. *Café* and *biscoitos* served on board.

Driving in from the airport Sao Paulo looked more like my idea of a Scandinavian city than a Brazilian one. The houses on the outskirts, mainly two-storeyed, white and austere. Our hotel, The Jaragua, a mixture of North America and Australia in flavour. It is the upper half of a skyscraper, the lower floors of which house the largest newspaper in Sao Paulo. Much use is made of tile, inlaid in floors and walls and forming planters filled with tropical plants. From our window we might have been visiting a higgledy-piggledy New York — skyscrapers everywhere, as if without plan. Our room was full of those extraordinary baskets of flowers — *cestras* they are called, and I hate them. Each flower head is cut off and wired. Within a day they are all dead.

Sunday the best day of all. We visited an early nineteenth-century *fazenda*. A colonial house — light pink with white pillars and lacey black grilles on the windows. The present owners have modernized the plumbing but left everything as much as possible in its original state. The downstairs hall with its honey-coloured stone floor and rough-beamed ceiling was decorated with three beautiful cherubim and four flat candelabra from old churches, wooden, painted cream and gold. Off the hall, a room full of trophies and slave relics, and off that, the slaves'

room. I asked Senhora M. if it was haunted and she replied that there was a little old lady, very nice, full of good will. Upstairs was a mixture of modern and old, containing beautiful church carvings, a Gobelin tapestry covering an entire wall and, oddly, a Vlamink. On a deep verandah, dark from creepers with pink bells, were birds in cages and a white tasselled bridal hammock. She said C. had given her an antique white one and her Doberman puppies had eaten it!

Her husband, a rich industrialist who is now a rich farmer and who gave up riding some years ago in favour of a jeep, still wears the shiny chestnut boots, spotless white breeches, white shirt and chestnut tweed jacket of an equestrian. He is blond, bland, blue-eyed. She dark, with long thin hands and immensely long scarlet nails, was wearing plaid slacks and a white twin-set.

We drank a Brazilian cocktail — made from *pinga*, a sugar cane liquor — which tasted very like a daiquiri. Then lunch. On the dining room table, and running its entire length, was a narrow, flat dish crammed with every kind of yellow, red and orange flower the garden produces — brilliant, no leaves, startling. The meal began with what looked like a bowl of potato soup with a poached egg staring from its centre like a jaundiced eye. This was *carra* soup. Traditional Brazilian. The *carra*, I would guess, is a variety of yam. This was followed by roast pork, black beans mashed and made into a roll and garnished with little sausages and sitting on a bed of what looked like cooked grass which tasted bitter and pleasant. For salad, sliced cucumbers and cold sliced marrow. Dessert was candied pumpkin served with farm cream and fried bananas. And coffee. Everything a product of the *fazenda*. Everything traditionally Brazilian. And very good indeed.

After luncheon we saw the coffee plantation. Brilliant green bushes with scarlet berries. And the coffee 'courtyards' where the beans were placed to dry. We visited the calves which sucked your fingers as if they were udders when you put out your hand to stroke them and saw the elaborate forecasting month by month of the number of calves to be born. A *Senhora* looked after the coffee and he the dairy. He preferred, he said, his cows to his textile workers!

One day we visited the park that was built to celebrate the fourth centennial of the foundation of Sao Paulo — its gardens laid out by Burle Marx and its buildings designed by Niemeyer. There is a desolation about this architecture. Every bit of it seemed wrong, which just shows how illogical I am because there are times when I find it so wonderfully *right*! Perhaps it needs sun. The building which houses — but does not show, for I think it is rarely open — the aeronautical exhibition and the Santos Dumont artifacts (Dumont was a Brazilian whom the Brazilians claim was the first to fly — even before the Wright Brothers) — is a long, low two-storey structure of glass and pillars. Seen under a grey sky, with the nose and hand prints of a thousand A.'s attempting to peer in, it looked simply shoddy. From our peering position it seemed unsuitable for the display of

aircraft, the ceiling being so low that the top of even a small plane all but touched it. The Palace of Arts, built exactly — but exactly — like an igloo with the addition of a row of portholes around its lower edge really depressed me. Why transport a form dictated by materials and weather conditions of the arctic and put it down in Brazil — and then blow it up, give it a radius of two hundred and fifty feet?

Disturbed and excited by Brazil. Why? What is it all about? Does place alter person? It's like falling in love — with the country itself.

Am reading Yeats's letters. He complains that George Eliot had morals but no religion and that if she only had had a bit more religion she would have had less morality. He writes too of his dislike of reasonable people whose brains suck all the blood from their hearts. And how he disliked moralists with neither spirit nor imagination enough for a good lie. How he would have loved Brazilians and how, indeed, do I!

Drove to Santos, the coffee port and took the ferry to Guarajà, an island summer resort. Going down the escarpment from Sao Paulo the weather was clear so we could see the sinuous double road with its tunnels, the narrow strip of flat land and the sea. Very lovely. Arrived finally at a totally unspoiled beach on a wild and beautiful coast and, unfortunately, an all-too-Hawaiian-appearing restaurant. More interesting the absurd trio of small monkeys in a cage — the ones with tufted ears — whose tiny fingers, trying to remove my rings, felt moist and limp as the stems of violets. Four *araras* — the large macaws — wing feathers cut to prevent flight, sat on perches and cracked sunflower seeds. Their extraordinary black, dry, ill-fitting tongues moving about in their mouths, looked as if they had each bitten off the little finger of a negro, which now they were trying unsuccessfully to spit out. Nearby, two green parrots, chained and aggressively bad-tempered, screamed at each other and everyone else.

There was a clean and pretty aviary where I had a chance to identify some of 'our' birds, for their keeper — a truly Conradish man with a week's growth of beard and a long, wistful face — was kind enough to understand my Portuguese and let me understand his. As he stood in the cage peeling bananas and fixing them onto the bars, cutting oranges in half and impaling them on pointed branches, placing sunset coloured arcs of *mamao* on the ground, he also told me the names of the birds around him. We saw 'our' tanagers in the cage and the little jumping birds with striped heads were identified as *tico-ticos*. The *sabia* was there too — like the North American robin, only larger — and the dove and a dozen pairs of lovebirds all freezing and huddled together.

After a long wait, a fine lunch: fresh shrimps from the sea and good Brazilian beer. Afterwards I followed a row of bright pink shells along sand almost as hard as turf. Returning, in the distance, beyond the curve of this lovely shore, appearing like shafts of distant rain, the skyscrapers again, surrealist in such a setting.

Their vertical lines a reaction against the horizontal lines of colonial architecture, perhaps. Or, more likely, A.'s theory, that Copacobana has become the symbol of all things lovely and so is being duplicated everywhere. In Santos, this argument is certainly borne out. There, like Copacobana's twin, the curving Santos beach is rimmed with skyscrapers, its sidewalks patterned with black and white stones.

We drove to the port — the largest coffee port in the world — and visited the aquarium where we saw the terrible Amazonian carnivore — the fish which, within seven minutes, I think the statistics run, can reduce a horse to a pile of bones. I had imagined something the size of a shark and found, to my astonishment, a little fish no more than a foot long. This remarkable creature can smell blood a great distance off, and will come in a flash to attack anything already wounded. Saw too, the inevitable sea horse which never fails to amuse me — why should it want to stand upright like a man? — and those poor blind shrimps with their wide-ranging antennae, looking half like a caricature of a guardsman, half like a nervous pianist — their anxious white front legs like fingers nervously playing the same music over and over again. At one tank of striped yellow and black fish, as bright and flashing as anything you could wish, a minute child gazed mutely until an inch-long colourless guppy swam into sight, whereupon it set up a great howl of excitement: *Pequeninho, pequeninho!* (Baby, baby!).

The Museu de Arte, C.'s collection, even with most of its best paintings currently on exhibition in the States, was still enjoyable. There is a whole roomful of Portinaris, large strangely grey paintings full of pain; some Segalls and di Cavalcantis and a fair collection of da Silvas. Also a lovely El Greco of St. Francis, two enchanting little Renoirs; a number of early religious paintings; and then, almost alarmingly, about five hundred small Degas statues, looking rather like the black notes on the piano. The much larger ballerina in her real *tutu* is there too, with her hair tied back. But all the little ones lose any impact they might have. Quantity definitely diminishes quality — the eye blurs. The figures are reduced to no more than the stick-men I drew on the upper right corners of the pages of my school books to make a 'moving picture' when I riffled them quickly with my thumb.

Lunch with A. at a French restaurant and then to the natural history *museo* with Senhora L. to see the birds. We began by having coffee with the curator, a man with a face just like a dog's. Most extraordinary. As I looked at his eyes they were dog's eyes — those pale eyes often seen in curs — and I would think, 'Nonsense, look at his nose,' and his nose too, was a dog's. And so I switched to his teeth — pointed, white dog's teeth. Uncanny. But such a polite dog. Would not cock his leg just anywhere.

I don't really like stuffed birds, nevertheless I learned a good deal. 'Our' lovely little blue bird with its black mask is the *sai-azul* (blue skirt). Upstairs — prefer-

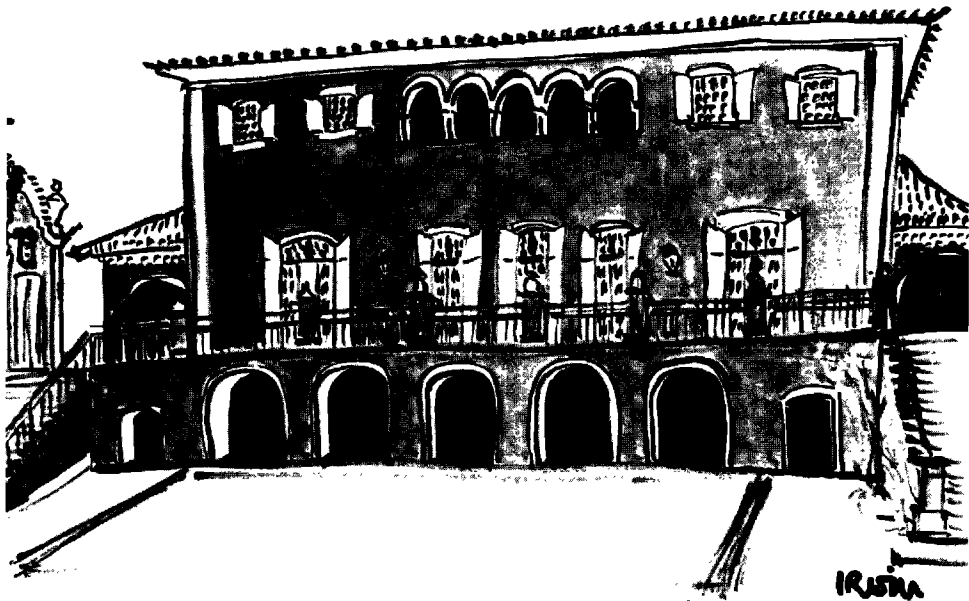
able to those in the cage below simulating life — the recent result of one man's field trip, twelve hundred birds lying on their backs, stuffed with dried grasses. So light! And like a rainbow. Drawers full of them. The *alma de gato* — soul of a cat — is a variant on our Mangrove cuckoo or yellow-billed or black-billed. Rufus above, grey beneath.

I asked about the marsupial duck. It is true enough. Brazil has a number of marsupials. I said, "Australians think *they're* the only ones who have," and our guide replied morosely, "It's not the business of Australians to know about Brazil. And we will never tell them because all we think about is football." He showed us a large blond marsupial rat with four babies in her pouch. And a skunk, just like ours only brown instead of black. We saw a balleen in his bones, long-fingered at his sides.

"I cannot tell who loves the Skeleton
Of a poor Marmoset, nought but boan, boan.
Give me a nakedness with her cloaths on."

And I had a long, slow look at the sloths, with their loofah fur and their Henry Moore faces.

The drive back from Sao Paulo was beautiful — rolling country culminating in mountains as we approached Rio — a climb and then a tortuous drop to sea



"OUR HOUSE"

level. We passed coffee plantations, citrus fruit farms, cattle. Saw oxen hauling carts and burros with wicker baskets and negroes in bright colours and *flamboyantes* in flaming flower.

We passed one little town built on a knoll from which every tree and blade of grass had been meticulously removed, the whole earth-coloured structure of houses and hill rising like an Australian ant-hill, while crowding at its perimeter, the lush, tropical growth of Brazil. One day I hope to return and go into the church, for it was here a miracle occurred, so the guide book says, but my Portuguese is not quite enough to understand what the miracle was! O Glory be.

May 18th

Nature notes: I saw a spider with a golden web. (It sounds like the start of a riddle poem.) This spider has a torso about the size of the top joint of my thumb and of the same general shape. In colour it is dark grey with gold spots. The web matches the spots. I would have thought it a trick of light, except that no matter what the light, the gold was unchanging, and on the spider's abdomen was a clot of golden thread — like the clot formed by a sewing machine on the under side of the stitching if the bobbin has not been correctly adjusted.

Does it eat only those it can lure by beauty? I had believed, without knowing much about spiders, that they spin webs as invisible as possible in order to deceive insects into thinking they are flying through air. If that *is* so, then what is this spider up to? And still what, even if it isn't? Do flies have an aesthetic sense? Why do I imagine it is the property only of 'manunkind'? Is stupidity justified by anything less than beauty's trap?

June 13th

I have been drawing with a felt-nibbed pen and so much enjoy it. Trying to recreate the wonderful shapes of the leaves and the intricate background of mosaic tiles. I think I might be able to draw if only I could . . . what? If only I *could*.

There is a phrase — *amigo de onca*, meaning *friend of the tiger*, a term used to denote someone who is not your friend. Heard the origin of it today. One man said to another, "What would you do if you were chased by a tiger?" "Why, I'd run, of course." "And if the tiger was gaining on you?" "Why, I'd climb a tree." "And if the tiger climbed the tree after you?" "Look here, are you my friend or the friend of the tiger?"

June 17th

Our marble floors are like sliced brawn — or is it head-cheese? — lots of gelatine and veal and pork with occasional bits of fat. A cold-buffet chef's dream.

The Royal Palms are truly the elephants among trees. Their trunks are, to the trunks of other trees, as the elephant's leg is to all other legs.

July 5th

I have done another large drawing of a *cesta*. It amazes me how easily and quickly I draw — just start right in with my heavy black pen.

July 6th

Last night dined with Senhora M., a famous Brazilian sculptress. The apartment is wonderful — Renoirs tucked away in corners, a group of nudes by Rouault, a Picasso and a new acquisition by that Portuguese woman, da Silva, entitled *The Circus*. It was like an intricate and mysterious crossword puzzle in more than the usual number of dimensions, mixed with the feeling of circus tents and the checked clothing of Pierrot, the patches of Harlequin and the corridors of dream. With my felt pen I *could* have done such a thing . . . I cannot blame the tools!

August 17th

How do I write my love song? It is as if I were wired and someone (Someone?) had their finger on the buzzer all the time. A strange feeling that makes me almost afraid. Can one fall in love with a country?

Drove today up over the hills and through the *favela* which should make any sensitive, decent person devote their life to social reform, but I'm afraid my initial reaction was one of a fierce pleasure in its beauty. Turning a corner we saw a group of vividly dressed people standing against a great fortress of square gasoline tins, painted every conceivable colour. Water — of course. And socially distressing, but my eye operates separately from my heart or head — or at least in advance of them — and I saw first the beauty.

Following the beach, the great roaring green waves rising and smashing, the roadside edged with a low-lying palm-like plant which is putting forth small ears of golden corn, we came finally to Bandeirantes beach where a high conical rock joins the sea to the sand and a disreputable looking inn is located. But I love the inn, straight out of a rather sordid short story, and its round tower and tile roof and untidy paling fence and the herds of munching goats and the sheep that tried to eat our picnic basket. In front of the inn two men were involved in what appeared to be a minute survey. One, black, dressed in a spotless pith helmet and white shirt, carried a knife with a blade long enough to disembowel you. The other, white, pant legs tucked into ankle-high boots, made his calculations beneath a violet beach umbrella. Drugstore cowboys riding delicate little motor scooters, arrived by the half dozen, wearing lilac and yellow shorts. And a dusky *brasileira* in a linen suit of so bright an orange that it almost hurt your eyes,



A CORNER OF H.'S GARDEN

walked along holding the hand of her sweetie whose pale green slacks made her the ripest orange on the tree.

Home by the beach road again — the pounding sea on one side, the lagoon on the other and an evening mist giving the impression that spume illuminated the dark land. Earlier it had been bathed in a smoky blue, translucent and luminous, I grow to love it all more each day — even the wide flat corner with some rather awful houses and no vegetation but grass cover. That to me, now, is so like a Portinari painting that I greet it with a special kind of eye. In fact, I think much of my pleasure is a literary pleasure. Had I read nothing and seen no pictures, what *would* I see?

August 18th

Luncheon today with the N.'s. Their house, in the heart of Rio — a high heart, for it's up a steep hill from the centre of the city — is an old coffee *fazenda*. It overlooks the bay and has a vast garden with pool and guest house.

N. has had Portinari paint his wife and children. He showed us with pride the first Portinari they commissioned — the Sacred Heart, which hangs in a golden frame. In their dining room three enormous murals of Brazilian fauna — monkeys, parrots, anteaters.

The party was entirely family — dozens of young people — girls with immense eyes and young men with brandy snifters. Highly baroque mirrors with frames of gilt and mirror 'tears' let in, like eyelet embroidery. In the library their books all bound in gorgeous leathers. We ate Bahiana food — ground rice cooked to look like snow; fish with shrimps and a blistering hot sauce full of tiny peppers.

This morning I drew the jacko tree — attacked it like a crazy woman to get it onto paper before we went out. It's not very good but I shall do it again.

August 19th

This wild Rio wind is tearing at the house. Last night it blew and blew and blew. Blew through my dreams. Awakened as if I had been tossed about all night.

Reading the letters of R.L.S. What a darling he was. And how extraordinary of him to set off for the South Seas with his wife and stepson and mother, when, at any moment a hemorrhage could have ended his life. And what a life in Samoa. It would suit me fine. Every day a new vegetation to fascinate my constantly hungry eyes!

August 21st

Started out this morning with H. She was full of confusion and concern — we must go to Saint Antonio's to draw because she owed him some money. She

had lost her diamond clip and had promised him a lot of money if he found it. Later, when she discovered the clip on a dress, a friend had told her that as it had not been lost, she no longer needed to give the money. But H. claimed that this was Saint Antonio's way of showing her that she hadn't been giving enough to the poor, so she must go today before she forgot. But first, could I drive her to her dentist, as she had broken a tooth.

It was terribly hot, even at nine. The air coming in through open windows was like a furnace, but the sun was shining and the day beautiful. We parked the car outside the *Teatro Municipal* and, acting against all previous plans, went straight to Saint Antonio's. It's an exquisite church with a simple putty-coloured façade, plain except for the lovely curlicues on the towers and the stonework around the windows. Inside we stayed only long enough for H. to drop to her knees, scattering drawing blocks, paints, a folding chair in various directions. Saint Antonio himself wore a halo of baguettes of mirror. Through a room like a formal drawing room with floorboards a foot wide and dark with years of polishing, jacaranda doors and a white ceiling with simple mouldings of burnished gold leaf, we entered the chapel. Pure gold — every inch — every half inch. Dazzling. It reminded me of the day when I was a child and my father stopped the car and asked me to go and get some information from a man working in a field. When he opened his mouth to reply, it was as if he had the sun in his mouth — uppers and lowers of gold. His mouthful of gold is the only thing comparable to the excess — but in this case the beautiful excess — of that chapel.

Standing on the black and white marble squares outside we overlooked a clutter of roofs, all tile, moving in a dozen different directions — high gables, low gables, wide gables, narrow gables, all red tile. Spent two hours drawing like someone demented. H. draws with great sensitivity. She drew the façade of Saint Antonio's with its curlicues delicately, elegantly — a very beautiful subject but one that I had no wish to do.

Then through the crowds to H.'s dentist, sambas blaring and the whole world light-hearted. One particularly light-hearted fellow above me dropped a paper cone full of coffee which landed bang on my head, point first, before spilling its contents over my dress. Ended the morning at a shop that sells paints. I bought some gouache. On reaching home I put some dirty red paint on all those tiles and felt very content.

Bedtime. My first day of paint. As well as the dirty red on the tiles, I have added putty colour to the façades and laid a thin and mimsy sky. There is now a pale ochre wash on the jackfruit and the house is pink. I like these gouaches. The colours are vivid, they mix easily and are what you will — transparent or opaque. But I am overwhelmed. I hardly have enough time to draw. How will I have time enough to paint?

August 27th

The other night talking about Saint Antonio's church with a Brazilian, he told me that Saint Antonio has the rank of colonel in the Brazilian Army and that one of the Brothers goes monthly to the paymaster to collect his pay. They made him a corporal a long time ago in a moment of great military need, and he did so well that he was promoted to sergeant. Since then he has gradually worked his way up. It is this kind of thing that makes me love Brazilians.

August 28th

Drawing with H. in her dream garden. Words cannot describe it, which is perhaps why I draw. Anturias of every size and shade — white to deep red; those great red rockets bursting out of banana-like leaves; an ipè in full flood of yellow — its flowers seen middle distance like yellow hydrangeas. Against a blue sky it is unbelievable.

H. says, among other things, that the Brazilian woman lives always in the shadow of her husband. And as lunch time drew near, she bore this out, becoming anxious, eyeing her watch to make sure she would not be late. Her husband is a handsome man, a hunter, and his cages are full of birds whose calls he can imitate exactly. "Good eating," he says.

ADOBE

Al Purdy

From the mud
 thick bubbles pop
 up comes newt and salamander
 up comes man
 the immortelle of humans
 mud nursery of humans
 mad nursery rhyme
 mud bubbles pop
 pop pop

Mud bricks
 baked in fire
 the sun's fire a bakery
 for living men and living women
 people of the dust
 not Aztec kings or Inca lords
 but people of the brown dust
 mud fireflies
 flash brown instants