

Rewriting Carolina Maria de Jesus: Editing as Translating in *Quarto de despejo*

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Abstract. Carolina Maria de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo* catalogues her experiences living in a São Paulo favela. De Jesus sought personal agency via the writing and publication of her diaries, yet whether through the editing choices of reporter Audálio Dantas or translator David St. Clair, her voice was mediated and determined by third parties. Both men engage in translation, understood in its broadest sense as rewriting, in order to market the diaries. As a comparison of Dantas's intervention with Elizabeth Bishop's contemporary translation of Helena Morley's diaries suggests, Dantas translated de Jesus for the Brazilian public via his editing.

Upon its publication in 1960, Carolina Maria de Jesus's *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada* became the bestselling book of all time in Brazil. Just two years later, an English edition titled *Child of the Dark* was published and widely adopted by North American universities. The following analysis suggests that the editorial mediations involved in both versions of the text are comparable as projects that seek to translate de Jesus as a narrator and as an author, functions that are often purposefully conflated in critical readings of her work.

A chronicle of de Jesus's hardships in a São Paulo favela, *Quarto de despejo* was an instant sensation, and the dramatic manner in which de Jesus was "discovered" by a young journalist, Audálio Dantas, only further legitimated the authenticity attached to her collected diaries. After overhearing de Jesus

threaten to put the misbehavior of neighboring adults into the book she was writing, Dantas gained her trust and ran segments of her diaries in the newspaper *O Cruzeiro* (1958–60), before editing and publishing them together as a single text. As an impoverished black woman, the gender, racial, and socioeconomic marginalization de Jesus experienced made her transition into a literary sensation all the more exceptional, although the acceptance she had hoped for proved elusive. Just as quickly as she had catapulted to fame, de Jesus was also dropped from the public spotlight, her subsequent books largely ignored. She was, in fact, forced to return to foraging for paper to survive, the very activity she poignantly describes in *Quarto de despejo*. She died in obscurity, forgotten by the literary and media establishments that lauded the sensational pronouncements of her writing persona yet never accepted de Jesus into the middle-class lifestyle for which she had struggled.

In an authorial aside near the beginning of *Carolina Maria de Jesus: uma escritora improvável* (2009), Joel Rufino dos Santos submits that de Jesus's story has been retold many times, though mostly in fragments. The most comprehensive accounts of her experience are still to be found in her own writing, yet dos Santos cautions against assuming that de Jesus and her narrator completely overlap: "A personagem [da Carolina] está nas entrelinhas dos seus livros; sua autora, nos seus escritos; a mulher, nos fatos de sua vida, que, como foram narrados pela autora Carolina, nos dão a *imagem* da pessoa, não a sua 'verdadeira' realidade" (21; emphasis in the original). If only one biography exists about de Jesus's life according to dos Santos, he is quick to highlight that his own book is neither a biography of de Jesus nor a historical portrait of Brazil before and under the dictatorship. As he confesses, "Minha Carolina, é, em boa medida, uma personagem que criei" (21).

His descriptions touch upon two important issues with regard to de Jesus's own writing, for *Quarto de despejo* also confuses easy genre classification, having been called many things—diary, testimonio, anthropological account—anything, in other words, but "literature," for the debate surrounding the general reluctance to confer literary status upon the book continues (Ferreira, "Na obra de Carolina" 103). In fact, well after de Jesus's death, a few critics still maintain that the diaries are a fraud perpetrated by reporter Audálio Dantas (Levine, *Unedited* 12–13). Yet perhaps more than evoke questions surrounding the discursive value of *Quarto de despejo*, dos Santos's claim to invent his own de Jesus invites revisitation of her self-fashioning within the diaries. Her autobiographical writing is interpreted by sympathetic critics as

a strategic means of coping with poverty and marginalization while seeking both literary and social agency, yet we may ask whether the de Jesus who exists between the lines of her text has not always been a character “created” or mediated by others. In *Quarto de despejo* and its English translation, editorial and translational interventions clearly determine the meaning of her work for audiences and limit the extent of her self-expression.

Historians Robert Levine and José Meihy, in large part responsible for rescuing de Jesus’s work from obscurity in the 1990s, have examined the ways in which her words have been mediated for her relative publics, criticizing aspects of David St. Clair’s English translation *Child of the Dark*. Levine also interrogates the role Dantas played as editor of the diaries, refuting claims that the newspaper reporter fabricated de Jesus’s text. Such mediation is distinct from the celebrated history in Brazilian literary circles of source-text manipulation. Vieira points to the reemergence of cultural anthropophagy via the *Tropicalismo* Movement in the 1960s as informing a specifically Brazilian “postmodern translational aesthetics,” where translation is not understood as a process to create source and target language equivalence, but rather a subversive means of devouring and transforming the original text (“Postmodern Transnational” 66–7).¹ There is little doubt regarding the importance that translations had for de Jesus’s work both within and outside the country; her posthumous *Diário de Bitita*, for example, was published in French in 1982, four years before it was ever made available to a Brazilian audience in Portuguese (Levine, *Life and Death* 74).² Nonetheless, while the self-reflexive approach to translation that Vieira details involves a playful irreverence, the then-contemporary translations of *Quarto de despejo* demonstrate none of this conscious subversion, instead enacting a desire on the parts of Dantas and St. Clair to create popular texts for consumption by national and international publics, rather than consuming the book as translators interrogating the originality of a cultural object. To what extent, then, can both men’s interventions be qualified in terms of translational aesthetics?

Basnett and Lefevere seek to expand the traditionally understood scope of translation as merely signaling the conversion of a source text into a target language by instead arguing that translation encompasses any means of “rewriting” an original text. Based on the cultural norms and ideological motivations that must inform attempts to rewrite, they stress that its practice is never innocent or transparent, as translation typically results in an asymmetrical, rather than equal, exchange of discursive power (“Proust’s Grandmother” 10–11).

Moreover, there are multiple types of translation; in addition to the interlingual kind that occurs between distinct languages, intralingual translation performs an important function as a form of rewording that takes place within the same language (Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects" 429). While St. Clair engages in the interlingual type more typically associated with translation, then, Dantas's editions may be seen to constitute an intralingual form.

The importance of Dantas's positionality with respect to the text cannot be downplayed, for in many ways *Quarto de despejo* represents his own intellectual project to create social awareness. Meihy wonders, "[C]ould Carolina have existed without Audálio? All of the events—the newspaper series, the book, the magazine coverage, Carolina's public appearance, seemed part of an interconnected web" (*Life and Death* 17). Maldonado Class suggests that Dantas's and de Jesus's cooperative relationship, along with Dantas's explanatory introduction, in which the reporter inscribes himself onto the project before allowing de Jesus's voice to be heard, act as a model for the blossoming genre of Hispanic American testimonio in the decades that followed (*El intelectual* 235, 280).³

Although Levine criticizes the extent of Dantas's omissions and active censoring, he recognizes that international reading audiences would not have adopted de Jesus as a symbolic oppressed heroine had Dantas published her diaries in their original form (*Unedited* 221). The phrase *quarto de despejo* is in fact a complex metaphor that is culturally specific, operating on multiple levels. Literally denoting a "garbage room," the phrase references a back room or enclosed porch in Brazilian homes, but it also alludes to de Jesus's mode of survival in which she picked up trash and paper to earn money via recycling; thus, "the published diary's title refers to a nondescript place in the back where castoffs and garbage were allowed to accumulate—just as human castoffs and people considered rubbish were allowed to accumulate in the growing shantytowns of Brazil's cities" (Levine, *Life and Death* 46). The lack of an equivalent metaphor in English perhaps explains Dutton Publishing House's choice to shift the American edition's title to *Child of the Dark* as a means to allude to de Jesus's emergence from difficult origins while still maintaining the sense of marginalization present in the Portuguese title. This alteration reflects more than just a titular shift, however; it is also symptomatic of the markedly distinct manners in which de Jesus's work was consumed by her national and international reading audiences. While part of her success stemmed from her portrayal of the human condition, her story also lent itself to various ideological interpretations; for socialist bloc countries her situation represented

the contradictions of capitalism, though in Europe and the United States her experiences were read as the unjust consequences of centuries of colonialism (*Life and Death* 15).⁴ Ironically, within Brazil, her success stemmed from Dantas's presentation of her work in a way that neither threatened middle-class readers nor specifically called for reform (Levine, *Unedited* 207). Thus, unlike their international counterparts, the Brazilian Intellectual Left rejected her, for they perceived that her individualistic writing did not attempt to collectively speak for feminist rights or against poverty.

Yet Dantas not only polished de Jesus's image; he defined it by choosing to publish only her diaries, whereas she had wanted to see her fiction in print. Indeed, despite the overwhelming success of her diaries, which provided sufficient financial support for de Jesus to move out of the favela with her three children and into a middle-class neighborhood that never accepted her, she had incredible difficulty publishing any of her creative writing. In her diary she relates how a shoemaker warns her that "não é aconselhável escrever a realidade" (*Quarto* 91), but this is the only mode of writing to which she would have access. When de Jesus first invited Dantas into her home to see her writing, she initially presented her short stories, but Dantas ignored "the childlike novels" (St. Clair, *Diary* 12), interested only in her testimony of favela life. In his introduction to *Quarto de despejo*, Dantas repeats sections of a favorable review of the diaries (written by poet and critic Manuel Bandeira), which suggests that "Carolina tem bastante talento literário para não fazer literatura" (n. pag.).⁵ The compliment is double-edged, and sadly, subsequent editors appear to have followed suit. De Jesus's second collection of diaries, *Casa de alvenaria* (1961), fared poorly on the market, signaling that her cultural currency had already peaked. A book of her personal proverbs had to be published at her own expense, and the novel she wrote about her grandfather's life as a slave, *Escravo*, was never successful in finding a publisher (Levine, *Life and Death* 73–4). Having faced such a battle to bring any of her fiction writing to the market, there is no little irony in de Jesus's third collection of diaries, published posthumously as *Diário de Bitita*, being classified as fiction by the publisher. In fact, the only associations of de Jesus with fiction have represented attempts to discredit her work, as when detractors charged that Dantas had fictionalized or invented the accounts of *Quarto de despejo*.

In North America, de Jesus's book has been used as a point of departure to discuss poverty in Brazil. Levine expresses surprise that the book continues to be used in university classes, wondering if Brazilianists do not comprehend

how dated the favela lifestyle that de Jesus lived is. He also directly criticizes St. Clair's translation of the work, *Child of the Dark*, "which has been in print for more than thirty-five years and is known to a generation of university students in Latin American Studies, [but] contains many errors, missed shadings of words, and missed emphases" (*Unedited* 4–5). And yet, St. Clair's is simply another in a string of ideologically charged translations, both literary and filmic, which have "crafted a Carolina for First-World consumption" (Kraay, "Documenting Carolina" 163).⁶ The notion that multiple *Carolinas* exist presupposes an original text to be rewritten, though the Dantas-edited Portuguese text that St. Clair translated, for example, was by no means an "original." There was pressure on de Jesus to rewrite some of her entries, though it is not clear whether she ultimately did revise any segments at Dantas's behest. Nonetheless, she may also have reacted to the knowledge from 1958 onward that he would publish her work by writing new diary entries with him as an intended audience, shifting the focus from private to public production (Maldonado Class 251).

In his translator's preface to *Child of the Dark*, St. Clair relates Dantas's claim that he limited his editing to the deletion of repetitious scenes: "I did not rewrite [...]. The words and ideas are Carolina's. All I did was edit" (*Diary* 13).⁷ Dantas's politically oriented preface, however, is absent from the English version, replaced by St. Clair's preface, in which the language is relatively neutral and only glosses de Jesus's relation to Dantas. Although his introduction erases much of Dantas's presence within her text, toning down the political nature of the Brazilian reporter's words, St. Clair's role in the creation of de Jesus's enduring diary-image is much more invisible. He claims to focus instead upon the authenticity of the images de Jesus narrates rather than upon their social implications, suggesting that "Carolina's words are the words of the street [...]. None of this has been altered in the translation, for to do it would be to alter the woman itself" (*Diary* 14–15), a claim to faithfulness with which Levine would take issue. St. Clair is of course modifying her words, though his above claim betrays a critical slippage, a tendency to read de Jesus's body and text as overlapping. To modify de Jesus's language, in other words, would amount not only to a translation of her textual persona, but also of her public self.

Nearly twenty years after her mother's death, de Jesus's daughter granted Levine access to the personal cache of unedited diaries that de Jesus had maintained. Putting to rest claims that Dantas had written the diaries, the archive provided insurmountable proof that "every single word she wrote was hers"

(*Unedited 2*). At the same time, the unedited diaries did provide a means to gauge the extent of Dantas's impact, which involved the deletion of two-thirds of her writing to create his abridged version. Levine concludes:

Dantas' deletions were so extensive that the Carolina Maria de Jesus who emerges from the pages of *Quarto de despejo*, the international bestseller, was a different woman from the one that emerges from the pages of her unedited diaries. The former was docile, wistful, and seemingly reluctant to comment on the gritty realities of Brazilian politics. Dantas presented her through his editing as a woman who was aware of her miserable condition but who stood at a curious distance from the events she lived through [...]. The real Carolina, revealed in her unedited writings, was feisty, opinionated, and quick to blame politicians and officials for the wretched conditions in which the poor were forced to live. (15)

Levine is primarily concerned with the reductive reading of de Jesus that is produced, rather than the effect an "alteration of words" would have upon the completeness of her documentation of favela conditions. This may be a consequence of critical focus that has tended to emphasize de Jesus's body or image rather than the content of her words, a strategic tactic employed by journalists who have attempted to undermine other female Latin American testimonial writers.⁸ Even so, de Jesus's work did fare better in Brazil than that of most other contemporary woman authors writing from marginalized social positions, which often simply fell through the cracks. Even narrative stances that were not as confrontational as those in *Quarto de despejo* were ignored, as "Brazilians during the 1970s and 1980s showed little interest in women writing about their difficult lives" (*Unedited 11*).

Her success may partially be traced to how Dantas and St. Clair managed to create an accessible narrator for distinct audiences. In order to suggest that the practices and motivations that guided the two men are not as distant as might initially appear, it may help to illustrate Dantas's relation to the text by comparing it with the strategies employed in the contemporary translation from Portuguese to English of another Brazilian woman's diary, that of Helena Morley. Despite the obvious differences inherent in interlingual and intralingual mediation, a brief comparative examination of the issues involved in this project will illustrate the shared goals to recast each diary writer, though this is in no way to suggest that Morley and de Jesus narrated similar issues or grew up in similar socioeconomic conditions.

In 1958, on the cusp of de Jesus's publication, the sales in Brazil of Helena Morley's *Minha vida de menina* were nearly that of the previous sixteen years combined (Machado, "Elizabeth Bishop's Translation" 130). The diary covered Morley's childhood from 1893 to 1895; first published in 1942 by her socialite husband, the jump in popularity in Brazil followed Elizabeth Bishop's English translation of the diary as *The Diary of Helena Morley*. In an analysis of Bishop's structural alterations to the text, Maria Teresa Machado is struck more by the conscious marketing strategies evoked than the specific linguistic issues involved, noting that for Bishop "it is the paratext, not the text, which is most revealing in terms of commercial expectations and marketing strategies. The paratext comprises the title of the work, author's names, prefaces, notes and other such things which encircle [Morley's] text" (125). Indeed, a quick examination of the features that Machado identifies reveals that in addition to sharing a desire to create a marketable commodity of the texts in their hands, Dantas and Bishop also follow similar courses in their enactment of their goal.

As Bishop's personal communication makes clear, her plan to create a "book of the month" sensation with Morley's text included attempting to link the book's title with that of Anne Frank's diary, a political and emotive tactic. The mediator's self-inscription upon the text becomes an important element for both Bishop and Dantas. Machado notes that Bishop's alteration of the diary's original title graces the bookcover with Morley's name for clarification purposes, as well as marking it as a "diary" for her North American audiences, yet it also leaves a void for Bishop's own name as translator to appear immediately below it.

It is in Bishop's long introduction, which competes with Helena's diary, where connections become most salient regarding how each respective editor stakes a claim to mediate the diaries of Morley and de Jesus. Bishop explains that when she visited Helena Morley in Brazil,⁹ Morley's husband revealed that he was in fact the editor of the diaries, having decided to "put together all the old scraps and notebooks and prepare them for publication" (*Helena Morley* xii). He also decided to limit the diaries published in order to omit his presence in her life. Like Dantas, the invisible hand of Morley's husband performed an act of omission via his decision regarding what aspects and which years of Morley's experience to use as parameters for the publication. For Bishop, the primary concern in Morley's diaries is that "*it really happened*; everything did take place [...] just the way Helena says it did" (xxvi; emphasis in the original). This obligation to justify or claim the veracity of

the text mirrors Dantas's own introduction, which champions the authenticity of de Jesus's book, lauding it over fiction, since "romances, quase sempre, são relatos ingênuos, sem os elementos capazes de interessar a alguém que não seja o próprio autor. Ora, Carolina não escreveu um romance, mas sim, um depoimento que, partindo da angústia individual, expôs as angústias de toda uma comunidade" (n. pag.).

A paradoxical relationship develops between the desire for the translator's visibility via the introduction and invisibility within each set of diaries; for both Bishop and Dantas the most salient aspect of their involvement concerns omission. In Bishop's translated version, thirty-eight of Morley's diary entries have been completely deleted, while within the entries preserved, entire paragraphs are missing, representing possible censorship of comments deemed unsettling for her North American audience. Machado does not take issue with the liberties that Bishop herself has taken, but rather her silence, her invisibility with regard to this "extensive pruning," which is not acknowledged in any way in the introduction to educate the reader (129). Although Dantas in his introduction does confess to having deleted phrases in order to defend himself against charges of fraud, he does not specify the degree of the deletion. He claims to merely minimize repletion, though potentially troubling commentary was similarly omitted. He frequently condensed eight pages into a single paragraph, and at one point, more than one hundred pages of de Jesus's diaries were cut to a mere four pages (Levine, *Unedited* 186). Nonetheless, the packaging as a testimonial work was successful: "[T]his is not to say that [as a book] *Quarto* suffered because of the deletions: its simple brevity contributed to its power as a social document and testimony. But the edited notebooks projected an image of the author that short-changed her personality" (206).

The point of Bishop's appropriative strategies, argues Machado, is to appeal to a mass audience, and the manner in which her translation literally rewrites Morley's persona and text helps put into perspective Dantas's alterations in his own appeal to mass readership. With her disproportionately long introduction, Bishop manages to bring her own presence into the reader's focus. And for all the brevity of Dantas's words, his presence too marks de Jesus's text. In his marketing role as editor, he enacts similar strategies to that of Bishop as translator—he assumes the role of de Jesus's first translator, though certainly not her last. In newspapers, the very medium that allowed for her exposure and subsequent success, journalists would continue to mediate de Jesus's words to the public, editing and constructing her words as they

saw fit.¹⁰ In doing so, they treated de Jesus in very similar fashion to the way that Bishop imagines Brazil in her translation; the country never emerges as a subject, but rather as a medium or vehicle to discuss social tensions (Cucinella, "Representing and Translating Brazil" 113). There is truth in Dantas's claim that the central subject of *Quarto de despejo* is not de Jesus herself (he claims that hunger is), though perhaps not in the sense that he intends. It may be equally possible to suggest that within Dantas's text de Jesus also serves as a vehicle rather than as a subject.

The battle over de Jesus's words continues. Levine's and Meihy's publication of her unedited diaries in 1999 is intended as a corrective to the lasting image of the author of *Quarto de despejo* by "setting the record straight." Unlike dos Santos's claim to write a book about the female author that is neither personal biography nor public history, Levine and Meihy aim to do both things by restoring de Jesus's own words (*Unedited* 17). In addition to analyzing intellectuals' motivations for misrepresenting her and her work, the book attempts to undo the de Jesus that Dantas created through his massive omissions in order to better demonstrate her contradictions and complexities. Additionally, their retranslations seek to correct the errors in St. Clair's version, although this would seem to only be the first step in a necessarily long project; de Jesus's image, already constructed, will be difficult to disturb or rewrite. Importantly, a variety of forms of translation are once again the key vehicle for uncovering de Jesus, though, ironically, while the two historians attempt to be as faithful to her words as possible, they admit that they too are forced to edit and delete sections in order to present representative samplings of the real individual and her work.

Notes

¹ Vieira utilizes the work of Augusto de Campos and Haroldo de Campos as examples of "transtextualization."

² Ferreira notes that the original title, *Um Brasil para brasileiros*, was altered by the editors to include de Jesus's childhood nickname "Bitita," but also infantilized the work in the process, changing the emphasis from nation to personal memories (106).

³ Just as Rigoberta Menchú would later seek to discredit the editorial intervention of anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray in *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú, y así me nació la conciencia* (1982), there also existed tensions between de Jesus and Dantas, which the former wrote about, and which may have been suppressed by Dantas. For excellent analyses of Latin American and North American intellectuals' stake in the success of *Quarto de despejo*, see both Maldonado

Class's *El intelectual y el sujeto testimonial en la literatura latinoamericana* and Paulino Bueno's "Carolina Maria de Jesus in the Context of *Testimonios*."

⁴ Given the reception of de Jesus's work in Europe, the British version published by Souvenir Press is curious, as the translation by St. Clair is rendered as *Beyond All Pity*, prompting the reader to question who or what is exactly beyond all pity. Is it the collected diaries or de Jesus? In such a case it would serve as an ironic reference to Brazilian society's treatment of de Jesus once her initial success faded from the national spotlight.

⁵ For a discussion of the literary qualities in *Quarto de despejo*, see Vogt's "Trabalho, pobreza e trabalho intelectual."

⁶ Kraay laments the one-dimensional nature of de Jesus's representation in a review of one of the few film projects about her to survive beyond its planning stages, *Favela: Das Leben in Armut* (1972). Much as Levine argues about the one-dimensional image of de Jesus that Dantas's editing created, Kraay believes that this packaging for international readership comes at the expense of the complexity with which she treats the favela "condition" in her work.

⁷ The "chain" of originality is complicated even within the translation. St. Clair does not identify the source of the citation, though he may well be referring to a line from Dantas's own introduction to the Portuguese edition where the reporter quotes Manuel Bandeira's literary review in self-defense of his role in the diary's publication: "Este declarou no prefácio que selecionou trechos dos cadernos de Carolina, suprimiu frases. Mas não enxertou nada. Acredito" (n. pag.).

⁸ Valdivia analyzes journalistic attempts to minimize the impact of Nobel Peace Laureate Rigoberta Menchú via focusing upon her image rather than her message ("Gendered Silence" 117).

⁹ Helena Morley is the pseudonym under which Alice Dayrell Brant wrote.

¹⁰ In a diary entry from 1961, de Jesus mentions she is at work on a novel *Diabolic Woman* (*Quarto* 111). Unfortunately, the book suffered the fate of her other works of fiction, never seeing the light of day. As de Jesus relates, her work was interrupted by a female reporter from Rio de Janeiro who, instead of listening to de Jesus's answers, wanted something sensational and tried to convince de Jesus to claim she was in the midst of a love affair.

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