

The Slave Ship

Castro Alves

PREFACE

By Godofredo Filho¹
David Barnhart



The present edition of *The Slave Ship*, of the poem by itself without the company of the others of its cycle, reconducts us to one of the most impressive examples of Brazilian poetry of the last romantic phase. Everything in it, from the symbols to the thematics, from single words to the contexture of imagery, gives us a just measure of that bard, whose youth illumined, not palely, in the taste of the precursors, but in a conflagration truly sunlike, the skies of his hour. And, even today, nearly a century after his death, the verses he wrote continue to be the best known and loved of our people, despite the fact that criticism, not always exempt of prejudice, attempts to situate them and study them from exclusivist and false angles. Unlike other consecrated romantics, on whom there is a consensus of unanimous judgment, statically delimiting them, Castro Alves transcends because of the complex phenomenon which he represented in our letters, the more perturbing because the realism in his work, did it not attain genial heights, would be condemned to the disenchantment of things lacking in mystery.

The attempts made to date to criticize his work or of its revision in the light of modern conceptions of criticism, some of which would permit, in depth, better knowledge of the message bequeathed, have been on the whole insufficient to appraise what it signifies, intrinsically. Castro Alves² has been not only little studied; more often than not he has been

1 Publicação com objetivo de divulgação cultural em Inglês da obra de Castro Alves, Navio Negreiro, aqui com introdução do poeta baiano Godofredo Filho e versão de David Barnhart. Está no livro *Navio Negreiro*, da Livraria Progresso Editora, Praça da Sé, 26, Salvador, Bahia – 1959. A obra contém ainda as versões para o Francês e o Alemão. Conta com gravuras de Hansen (Karl Heinsz Hansen nasceu na Alemanha em 1915 e veio para o Brasil em 1950). Foi-me dada por um vizinho, Julião Moura.

2 Castro Alves, Antônio de (b. March 14, 1847, Muritiba, Brazil--d. July 6, 1871, Salvador), Romantic poet whose sympathy for the Brazilian abolitionist cause won him the name "poet of the slaves." While still a student **Castro** Alves produced a play that brought him to the attention of José de Alencar and Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, Brazilian literary leaders. Having studied for the law, he soon became a dominant figure among the Condoreira (Condor) school of poets, likened, for their dedication to lofty causes and for their preference for elevated style, to the highest flying birds in the Americas. His romantic image was heightened by his sense of being

badly studied, which does not speak well for our culture. From Silvio Romero³ to the lucid Fausto Cunha, without tarrying with Afranio Peixoto⁴, deserving popularize of the poet, only Ronald de Carvalho⁵, although massively impervious to poetry, has indicated to us in well balanced synthesis the path to follow toward a perfect comprehension of the work of the young Bahian, in aspects which Eugênio Gomes and few others have sought to reveal.

But if Ronald carries us, through emotion, to a love for Castro Alves, and by this means to the possibility of an intelligent penetration of his work, another of our more scrupulous critics, studying from the point of view of pure poetry, or guided by premisses which were not to the point, gave us a singularly inexact version of the poet. We even believe that grave professor Antônio Herculano de Sousa Bandeira, who failed him in Geometry in 1862, thus barring him the following year from the Law School in Recife, was less severe with him than Mario de Andrade⁶ who, not many years ago, would have failed him in Theory and Practice of Poetry, making every effort to reduce his stature from that of an adolescent genius to the lowly condition of "an eternal child prodigy", with all of his floral brilliance playing "on our condescension".

But Mario's limpid glasses, in that striking if extremely cruel interpretation of the poet, are not the ones which will serve those who would see the poet in his proper perspective, in his "in view of our times". Without any preconceived intention of shading the profile, there is an almost naïve preoccupation with denying the existence of a star because the tips of our fingers cover it when we look.

A defense of the poet thus exposed to pity does not fit in this preface and is, for that matter, unnecessary. Nor is there room for a defense of all the accusations hurled at him when, in the name of posterity, he was argued over with malicious blandness, poorly disguised complacence and, underneath, with the most frightening lack, I should not say of tenderness, which would be too much, but of simple human understanding. That he was not a genius; that his dialectics, whether in love or in the fight for the slaves, was "a dialectic of caste and an opium for the people"; that he had not the "slightest dosage of

foredoomed by a wound incurred in a hunting accident. He lived and wrote at fever pitch while the wound worsened and eventually led to amputation of his foot. Tuberculosis set in, and he died at 24. *Espumas Flutuantes* (1870; "Floating Foam") contains some of his finest love lyrics. "A Cachoeira de Paulo Afonso" (1876; "The Paulo Afonso Falls"), a fragment of *Os Escravos*, tells the story of a slave girl who is raped by her master's son. This and **Castro Alves'** other abolitionist poems were collected in a posthumous book, *Os Escravos* (1882; "The Slaves"). Copyright 1994-1999 Encyclopædia Britannica

³ - **ROMERO** (Sílvio Vasconcelos da Silveira Ramos), Brazilian intellectual and historiographer of Brazilian literature, b. In Lagarto, SE, 1851 - d. In Rio de Janeiro, 1914.

⁴ - **PEIXOTO** (Júlio Afrânio), Brazilian Medical Doctor and novelist, folklorist, historiographer of Brazilian literature b. In Lençóis, BA, 1876 - and d. In Rio de Janeiro, 1947).

⁵ - **CARVALHO** (Ronald de), Brazilian poet and essayist. B. In Rio de Janeiro, 1893 - , 1935.

⁶ - **ANDRADE** (Mário Raul de Moraes), b. in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1893 - d. in 1945. Mulatto of large intellectual inquietude, he was the leader of Modern Literary Movement, in 1922. He was a poet, novelist, short stories writer, literary critic, theoretical on arts, musician and folklorist. He as influenced and still does over generations of Brazilian writers.

malice, that green malice that was the familiar devil of Alvares de Azevedo⁷"; that he was one of the "satisfied"; the "fulfilled"; that he was "an imprudent bard, fixing with insistence on the blameworthy floral part of geniality", that he was "a bombastic amplifier"; that he substituted "the theme for the subject matter"; that he permitted himself to be dominated by the "carnivorous pantagruelism of oratory"; and that we know of so, many more barbed arrows with which they pierced him, easily, however, extremely easily turned innocuous or transformed in symbols of his sown glorification in posthumous martyrdom.

We are tempted, however, to make a brief commentary, the most dangerous of all, which theologically would be a sin against the Holy Spirit, and the more difficult to defend if we accept as a defect that which, in its essence, seems to us a virtue, the fact that he strips a word of its "fluidity", that he systematizes "the employment of a, word in its exact sense, illuminating it with a new and very pernicious light"; that he subtracts from a word "its musicality completely", transforming in light what should be music. This terrible and subtle deception is supposed to be due to such a process of poetic expression, confined by logical intelligence; without possibility of evasion to the ineffable to which fluid words -conduce! What Castro Alves is incriminated with is the very reason for his permanence, with characteristics of his own, in the panorama of our romantic poetry, quite the contrary of the supposed vagueness of Gonçalves Dias⁸, of the melody of Casimiro⁹, of the demoniac savor of Alvares de Azevedo, and of so many other auditives and olfactory always inclined to the magic of the evanescent word. Castro Alves was a tactile, a visual like Hugo, never deprecating the appearances of the senses and, without knowing it, participant in an aesthetic conception which held him to pure logic instead of permitting him to listen to the intimate resonance to be translated by fluid vocables.

Valorizing the word and looking for its exact meaning, he did this less to find exact analogies than to give names to things, touched by the same supreme intention of which Genesis speaks. Like Claudel he also seemed "*le rassembleur de la terre de Dieu*". It is clear that we cannot understand him from the point of view of the pure facts, of a Valéry, or of a Max Jacob when he says: - "*Tout ce qui est constatation, description est antipoétique, fut-ce description lyrique, épique, apocalyptique. Pour avoir méconnu cette vérité les 90% des modernes sont caducs*". But, for the reason that only the same Claudel would point out to us, speaking of Dante, he was a poet who painted the universe of things, not from the point of view of the spectator, but of the Creator. Mario de Andrade accentuates, and he did so depreciatingly, that, in Castro Alves, "instead of music, the word turned to light, or better, sculpture". We recall Hello when he suggests that "*la parole et la lumière . . .*

7 - **ÁLVARES DE AZEVEDO** (Manuel Antônio), Brazilian poet of Romantic School, b. in São Paulo, 1831 - and d. in Rio de Janeiro, 1852. He followed the stream represented in Europe by Byron, Musset, Espronceda, and Leopardi.

8 **GONÇALVES DIAS** (Antônio), Brazilian poet (Romantic School) b. in Caxias, MA, in 1823 and d. in 1864. He was the son of a Portuguese father, and a Brazilian Indian mother, the mistress of Antônio's father. Grown up as an unhappy youth - bastard and mestizo -, he adds the refusal from the family of a white Brazilian girl, when he attempts to ask for her in marriage. All this made of Gonçalves Dias a very sad and epic poet, chanting the lyric images of Brazilian tropical forest, and its inhabitants, the Indians, Gonçalves Dias's ancestors. "I-Juca Pirama" and "Canção do Exílio" are his literary masterpieces.

9 **ABREU (Casimiro José Marques de)**, Brazilian poet, romantic, b. In Capivari, RJ, 1839 - d. In Indaiáçu, RJ, 1860.

frappent par ces similitudes cachées", because, *"la lumière présente le monde visible à l'admiration de l'intelligence; la parole met le monde invisible au service de l'intelligence"*. The defense of the word as employed by Castro Alves, proving a better world than the imagined, leads us, with Santayana, to underestimate to some extent the musical aspect of language, the word which flees from the representation of an object because it is deviated from its imminent qualities, from its phonic sense, from its specific function and logic. The word in our poet has the value of a particular object. And that is a merit which only later we should find in the lesson of the Parnassians, of whom, in certain aspects, he would be a precursor. The divisor between a musical word and one which is a simple signal, with an indicative function, does not in any way prejudice his poetry because frequently he transforms it in a flame and the visual sense lends things their most noble and exact life. Still with Santayana, the fact is not a revealer; he is a configurer, which heightens the prestige of the creator of forms which translate a significant experience.

In Castro Alves, despite what has been noted, the words are not fixed, cold, immutable signals with reference to the object. He knew better than anyone how to choose them, expressive more than impressive, and with a savor, a color and a volume which dispense with that musicality which is to blame for dangerous imprecisions or the melodic distortions so much to the taste of certain criticism with its telescopes mounted on the heights of we do not know what prejudices, as though these latter would not pass away with the style and the style itself with time.

Besides, the relationships of his language order themselves on the basis of a dynamics which, at determined stage, he can no longer control. The progressive syntagmas seem to project themselves in a spiral. We conclude that the Baroque in our Castro Alves is another facet of his poems still to be studied, and it may be that it will be, considering the matter from the point of view of Eugenio D'Ors, i. e. the connotations of the Baroque with Romanticism. The social, religious, and political, environment of Bahia of that time, the mysticism of patriarchalism, slavery and its implications on the economy, all powerfully influenced the poet, conditioning his work which rarely transposes the circle of the ideas and sentiments of his times. But let us guard against judging him purely on personal liking and without recourse to the instruments already available for an objective appraisal. No matter how easy it may seem, because of absence of mystery, constructed of images balanced in a net of exact words, the genesis of his own clarity carries us, to dangerous blank spots, to the recess of the laws which presided the eclosion of the imagery and, soon, to the emergence of expressional technique. In that maze of metaphors, of substitutives, in which despite the single correspondence almost always found between the real and the evoked, it is, not impossible that we will verge upon the secret also implicit in tangible things, which of his verses are apparently destitute of the minimum of irrationality. In other words, those of Husserl, we should have to flee from the hylic (substantive) plane of his poetry to attempt to explore its contents of an intentional character, that is, his noetic (abstract) plane.

Such problems, more of philosophy of the word or language, would carry us far from Bergson to Max Scheler, Husserl, Stenzel, Cassirer, Jousse, Pius Servien, Sausurre, Dámaso Alonso, Bousoño and so many others that are not to the point at the moment.

It is certain that in his unequal imperfect work, convulsed by the flight of the great wings of a condor, which only he truly was, as Manuel Bandeira¹⁰ very rightly noted, there are a multiplicity of platitudes, of common places, poetic license, of absurd metaphors, or extensive tirades in bad taste. Also the mediocrities of his times, whether forerunners or successors, were fertile in those exhibits of poetic or simply bombastic oratory. But, as I have already said, while a poet of real talent is capable of making verses which are not as good, alongside, of enchanting ones, of findings such as are only permitted by a complete surrender to the sorcery of the goddess muse, the mediocre, no matter how they try, never manage to soar. Such is the case of the lyricism of our Castro, of whom Grieco¹¹ affirmed that, "a drop of his poesy is sufficient to sweeten and perfume hundreds of the verses of his imitators".

Meanwhile, should we wish to discuss the assertion that he was mere plastic, or only plastic, master exclusively of those precise vocables which delimit the object, we should find an approach for contradiction. Castro Alves is so great, so exemplary in multiple manifestations of poetry, that we would not delay in discovering in his work expressions or words of a verbal fluidity capable of "drowning us in that lyric state of effusion", to which Mario de Andrade alludes. It suffices to open his books at random to learn that he also speaks of the 'illusive evening', or the 'desolate heights', and the 'blue front of nocturnal solitude!' It was he who referred to the most human of his Marys as 'celestial Mary' and transfigured a mediocre actress into a 'green flower". One cannot accuse the one who insinuated into words non-sonorous but vibrant with vague and distant music:

"Hear it? To hear it the pensative star
Lengthens its arch in a ray of languor!"

Nor the visual that, simile of the winged genii, suggested filters arrived through "a window open to the blue girations". And he would reveal to us, finally, in verses touched with perpetual adolescence:

"Love is not a word, love is a melody".

What there is of eternal in his message will be better understood in the light of studies which tomorrow may reveal his process of construction, from the semen of the occult mode of life to the plastic vigor which assures him perennially. He will not be only, as Euclides da Cunha thought, the poet of our ephemeral youth, but rather the poet of eternal youth who informs us about the secret of our ideal. Social rapsodist, heated to incandescence by matters still so alive, slavery and the liberty of the human person, master of words that move the world, the dramatic power of his word commanded even the dead whether they

¹⁰ - **BANDEIRA** (MANUEL CARNEIRO DE SOUSA BANDEIRA FILHO, said Manuel), Brazilian poet b. In Recife, PE, in 1886 - d. In Rio de Janeiro, 1968.

¹¹ - **GRIECO** (Agripino), Brazilian literary reviewer , b. in Paraíba do Sul, RJ, in 1888 – and d. in Rio de Janeiro, in 1973).

were the Black sailors of Palmares, the barque of granite, those of Pirajá and Cabrito, of whom he said, "disordered glory warmed them". And there are others who today would ask for revenging resurrection, so that they might return, like a storm, to lament along the sidewalks, because

"The park, the square is the People's
As the sky is the condor's".

Other figures of his work, that of the painter of the *Dawn on the Plains* (Crepúsculo Sertanejo), as well as the lyric (never the elegiac), require new angles so that they will be understood in the purity of their expression. The perspective of years does not erase their magic tenderness, nor does it attenuate the fatalistic and sensual sweetness of the lyre:

"Maybe you remember, Inês,
My eyes in yours were dying. . ."

And what an artist he was! With what tact, what deftness, what acuity of perception - almost divinatory - he corrected his verses, tortured by a purer form, and frequently gave us versions better than the original. He did not content himself with what came to him like a jet, with what emerged from the "bubbling of genius", creviced by detritus, by the impurities of ash and lava. He rearranged, purified, mended, substituted, now verses, now vocables, now rhymes, and, either through learning or innate gift, always perfected. A study of his manuscripts or of his complete works is worthwhile for this reason. We will be surprised at the attention which he always gave to the choice of an adequate word, to rhythm more than meter and to this latter more than to rhyme. This did not impede his being impotent to free himself of much dross, of many defects, of many vulgar clichés. But those he did free himself from, the declivities he consciously avoided are witness to his good taste and the valor with which he reacted against the distillation of the last romantics. In his never ecstatic verses, much the contrary, verses animated by a frightening propulsion, new blood flows, youth sings, not rarely with the inebriation of Dionysius, and, although he was dying and really disappeared at twenty four years of age, the 'palid' in his work is outreached by the red crepuscles of the plainsman and not even the moon of the romantics managed to displace the prestige of the sun's rays in which the poet would be consumed

"At times, when the sun in the virgin woods
Lit the bonfire of evening. . ."

Or in the painting of another evening fire:

"And in the afternoon, when the condor-sun bloody
In the west, nests somnolently,
Like a bee in a flower.. ."

That flame, that healthy appetite for life, that almost absolute sense of our nature (relative in Gonçalves Dias and so negative in Alvares de Azevedo) is what distances him from the romantics in general. His Musset was not that of the boudoir; it was of the

flowering balcony. And his Byron, as it has been stressed, was less the neurotic of the fog than the hero bronzed by the Mediterranean sun and the smoke of Greek battles.

Influences he clearly received. And he was not ashamed of this. But, as he knew how to convert the bronze or base metals others loaned him into gold, a metal which would also be his: ideas, words, vices, all the patrimony common to his school.

Let us turn our attention to ***The Slave Ship***. We should have spoken of it sooner, making an analysis of its metaphors, its anastrophes, the traditional images which predominate, the real plan agreeing with that evoked and, even, what in the convolutions of the verse may be hidden. However, we were tempted by an over-all view of the poetry of Castro Alves, a schematic notation and synthesis of his literary and human coloration.

The poem will present itself, then, almost bare of interpretation, like a cyclopic panel -r mural in diverse planes. guarding, however, a nexus of unity of contexture emanating from something like a breath of life. Because something of the primordial, the cosmic is present there and we seem to feel the artist ordering matter. And, then, his spirit above the waters: - "We are on the high seas. . ."

Or if we wish a semblance which will arbitrarily reduce it to music, it would be with Wagner, everything adapting to action and the melodic element subordinated to the multiple figurative lianas which bind it to the earth.

In ***The Slave Ship*** as in "*Voices of Africa*" the configuration at times reminds us of a work of plastic art, and the poet seems now to paint now to sculpt, and one sees that he is integrating these elements in the architectonic mass of the poem. We would forget the very rhythm or would be tempted to consider it as explicit (which molds), a sort of music of the "wind, which whistles on the strings", rustling them to the exact contexture of the lyre.

But the anemic content surpasses the phase of spacial sculpture and the poem seems to flow, permitting a maximum of emotive discharge. Everything in it is movement: "The *moonlight plays*. . .", "And *the waves run* after him. . ." Like *a band of troubled infants*. . ."; "The stars leap *like golden spray*. . ."; "*The sea. . . lights the phosphorescence*"; "*Two infinites, meet there*"; "To the warm *breath* of the marine breezes", "*Run sailed brig*. . ." "How the *swallows brush in the wake*": "In this Sahara *the chargers raise dust, gallop fly*"; ". . . ardent song *floating in the waves*"; "*Why do you flee. . . swift barque*"; "Oh! who would let me accompany you to your bert"; "That sows the *sea mad comet*"; "Shake you feathers, leviathan of space", "Albatroz¹²! Albatroz! Give me those wings". These are examples, and not all of those that occur in the eleven strophies of part I. And it continues with that dynamic, although the descriptive may predominate.

Part II, with a vocabulary more fitted to the authentic lyricism of one who knows how to "find in the waves the melodies of the skies", contrasts the sweetness of nostalgic song

¹² - Albatross.

with the pictorial of parts I and III.

Part IV rolls plastically, to the compass of a an "ironic strident orchestra". How inferior the p poetry of Heine on the same theme seems to us! If in the scene of the dance of the Negroes, he exceeds Castro in mordacity, in sense of suspense, there he stops. And that of our poet, with the alternatives of temporal and spacial composition completing each other, as a whole is mere beautiful. His inspiration was never that of the study, nor can he be criticized for lack of humor, nor for a poetry based on visionary images. His poetry, which he drank from the lips of the "Audacious libertine muse", is "this free savage poetry" rising to overcome the torment and on its way to transforming itself into, the adaggio of that *Hymn to Happiness* which Schiller foresaw.

In Part V the descriptive continues. But the terminal apostrophe is one that might roar from the mouth of a God.

"Stars! nights! tempests!
Roll from the immensities!
Sweep the seas, typhoon!"

From the pathetic, which in Part VI will only be repeated at the end of the last stanza, the poet returns to his native land to invoke the "green gold pendant" with different inflexions

"Standard that encloses the light of the sun
And the divine promises of hope. . . "

We have left some words about the extraordinary engravings of Hansen, which illustrate the poem. I do not know to what extent this preface and those engraving's interpret of accompany it. The former because it could not break down the text for the examination which would have been convenient, nor awaken its hidden meanings; and the drawings in black and white, dramatically beautiful, because they present themselves as a new plasticization of the theme, or its faithful prolongation, which, the illustrator's merit, notwithstanding, do not add to the emotional contingent, nor do they invite another and more perturbing voyage with the poet.

Anyhow, Castro Alves is there. It is what matters. It is less important that the "verbal genius" remain without equal or the highest specimen of our romantic family. What comforts us and makes us proud is that with all his multiple defects, but also with his youth, his lyricism, his passion he should remain to this day and for a long time to come the most authentic representative of Brazilian sensibility, the voice most indissolubly linked to the force of our nature which he sought out and knew how to express with fidelity.

Bahia, March 1958.

FOREWORD

From its title this ship belongs to Castro Alves as well as to Hansen. People called the ships used in slave traffic, “navios tumbeiros¹³”. Official papers identified them as just slave ships. The poem of Castro Alves entitled “**The Navio Negreiro**”, has perpetuated the adjective negreiro. No doubt the poet would enjoy seeing the powerful engravings which Hansen prepared to illustrate the fiery verses of Castro Alves.

The scenes described by both the artist and the poet were real. However, Castro Alves painted them in very dark colors giving them "a Dantesque quality". It was through these powerful descriptions that the poet helped to build a conscience against slavery. But we know that the poet's descriptions at times were exaggerated overstatements and at others were weak understatements. In spite of all this the poem is an artistic expression of a true historical event. Castro Alves was not trying to make nor could he make a documentary out of his poem. The evil that existed was the slave traffic. To transport Negroes was expensive and hazardous and it was to the interest of those who traded in this commodity to protect their merchandise which brought fabulous profits in Brasil. Certainly, greediness let ships bring cargos larger than their vaults could hold and death traveled aboard to make its return trip, cutting to a third the number of lives, struck by small pox, scurvy and beriberi, or poisoned by spoiled food. Many Negroes, victims of negligent captains, came to the ships affected with smallpox or leprosy. Negroes from Costa da Mina¹⁴ shore, who received the best care, were branded with hot branding irons dipped in "dendê" oil and sometimes re-branded

Though these facts were a common occurrence during the slave-trade period, they were not known to Castro Alves, who didn't even know what areas the slaves came from. He was outraged by the deck dance – a healthful custom that gave fresh air and exercise to bound bodies, anguished within narrow ship holds. However, he scarcely took note of the fact that the slaves traveled chained – "bound to the rings of a single chain". He didn't take full poetic advantage of this fact.

The chain served to acquit slave merchants – the whole human cargo could be thrown into the sea without leaving any traces – when the British Navy began to intercept slave-ships and to treat their captains with utmost severity. Castro Alves' misinformation was such as to allude to the traffic in his poem written in 1868, as if it were an current fact, 18 years after its halt, with the so-called Euzebio de Queiroz Act.

With these cuts, Hansen illustrates not only the slave-ships, those which in fact for three centuries carried on the slave trade with Africa, but the "sailed brig", that fantastic

¹³ - Navio (Ship) *tumbeiro* (mobile tomb).

¹⁴ - El Mina Castle shore, in Ghana.

ship with which Castro Alves tried to raise his contemporaries against an infamous slavery. In the evocation. of ***The Navio Negreiro*** the woodcuts and the poem complete each other.

Edison Carneiro¹⁵.

¹⁵ - Édison de Souza Carneiro (1912-1972) - B. in Salvador, Bahia, was a lawyer by graduation, but he followed the ethnology and sociology studies, following Nina Rodrigues and Arthur Ramos steps, in researching the African participation in Brazilian society.

THE SLAVE SHIP

By Castro Alves
Version: David Barnhart

We are on the high seas. . . Mad in space
The moonlight plays - golden butterfly;
And the waves run after it. . . tire
Like a band of troubled infants.

We are on the high seas. . . From the firmament
The stars leap like spray of gold. . .
The sea in turn lights phosphorescence,
- Constellations of liquid treasure. . .

We are on the high seas. . . Two infinites
Strain there in a mad embrace
Blue, golden, placid, sublime. . .
Which of the two is ocean? Which sky? . . .

We are on the high seas. . . Opening the sails,
To the warm breath of the marine breezes,
Sailed brig run on the crests of the seas,
As the swallows brush in the wave . . .

Whence do you come? Wither do you go? Of the erring ships
Who knows the course if the space is so great?
On this Sahara the coursers raise dust,
Gallop, soar, but leave no trace.

Happy he who can, there, at this hour,
Feel this panel's majesty! . . .
Below - the sea . . . above - the firmament! . . .
And in the sea and in the sky - the immensity!

Oh! what sweet harmony the breeze brings me!
What soft music sounds far off!
My God! how sublime an ardent song is
Floating at random on the endless waves!

Men of the sea! Oh rude mariners,
Toasted by the sun of the four worlds!
Children whom the tempests warmed
In the cradle of these profound abysses!

Wait! . . . wait! . . . let me drink
This savage, free poetry. . .
Orchestra - is the sea, which roars by the prow
And the wind, which whistles in the ropes.

Why do you flee thus, swift barque?

Why do you flee the fearless poet?
 Would that I could accompany the furrow
 You sow in the sea – mad comet!

Albatroz¹⁶! Albatroz! Eagle of the ocean,
 You who sleep in the gauze of the clouds,
 Shake your feathers, leviathan of space
 Albatroz! Albatroz! give me those wings.

II

What does the sailor's cradle matter,
 Or where he is the son, where his home?
 He loves the cadence of the verse
 Which is taught him by the old sea!
 Sing! Death is divine!
 The brig slips on the bowline
 Like a swift dolphin.
 Fast to the mizzen mast
 The nostalgic flag points
 To the waves it leaves behind.

From the Spanish, chants
 Broken with languor,
 They recall the dusky maidens
 The Andalusians in flower!
 From Italy the indolent son
 Sings of sleeping Venice,
 – Land of love and treachery,
 Or from gulf in its lap
 Recalls the verses of Tasso
 Close to the lava of the volcano.

The Englishman – cold mariner
 Who from birth found himself at sea
 (Because England is a ship,
 Which God anchored in the Channel),
 Stern, he intones his country's glories
 Remembering, proudly, histories
 Of Nelson and of Aboukir.
 The Frenchman – predestined –
 Sings of the triumphs of the past
 And the laurels to come!

The Hellenic sailors,
 Whom Ionian space created,
 Beautiful dark pirates
 From the sea that Ulysses cut,
 Lien that Phydias sculpted,
 Are singing in the clear night
 Verses that Homer moaned. . .

¹⁶ - Albatross

Sailors from all Ian Is,
 Know how to find in the waves
 The melodies of the skies! . . .

III

Descend from the immense space, oh cable of the ocean,
 Descend more. . . even more. . . human glance cannot
 Like yours plunge into the flying brig!
 Hut what is it I see there . . .
 What picture of bitterness It's funeral song! . . .
 What tetric figures! . . .
 What an infamous vile scene!. . . My God! my God'. What horror:

IV

It was a dantesque dream . . . the deck
 Great lights redenning its brilliance,
 Bathing it in blood.
 Clang of irons . . . snap of whip . . .
 Legions of men black as the night
 Horrible dancing . . .

Black women, holding to their breasts
 Scrawny infants whose black mouths
 Are watered by the blood of their mothers:
 Others, young, but nude and frightened,
 In the whirlwind of specters drawn
 From anxiety and vane resentment!

And the orchestra laughs, ironic, strident. . .
 And from the fantastic circle a serpent
 Spirals madly. . .

If the old man cringes, slips to the grouded,
 You bear shouts. . . the whip cracks.
 And they High more and more. . .

Prisoned in the bars of a single jail
 The famished multitude shudders,
 And weeps and dances!
 One is delirious from rabies, another is going road,
 Another, bruttish from martyrdom
 Sings, groans, and laughs!

Meantime the captain commands the maneuver
 And after gazing at the sky which unfolds
 So pure over the sea,
 Cries out of the gloom of dense obscurity,
 "Shake out the whip, mariners!
 Make them dance, more! . . ."

And the orquestra laughs ironic, strident. . .
 And from the fantastic circle a serpent
 Spirals madly. . .
 Like a dantesque dream the shadows fly! . . .
 Shouts, ahs, curses, embodied prayers!
 And Satan laughs! . . .

V

Lord God of the unfortunate!
 Tell me Lord God!
 If it is madness. . . or truth
 So much horror under the skies?!.. .
 Oh sea why do you not erase
 With the sponge of the waves,
 Your mantle, this blot?.. .
 Stars! Nights'. Tempests!
 Roll down from the immensity!
 Sweep the seas, typhoon!

Who are these unfortunates
 Who do not find in you,
 More than the calm laughter of the band
 Which excites the torturers to fury?
 Who are they? If the star hushes,
 If the oppressive space slides by
 Like a furtive accomplice,
 Before the confused night
 Say it severe Muse
 Free, audacious Muse! . . .

They are the sons of the desert,
 Where the land espouses the light
 Where in the open spaces lives
 A tribe of nude men.. .
 They are daring warriors
 Who with the spotted tigers
 Combat in the solitude.
 Yesterday simple, strong, brave. . .
 Today miserable slaves,
 Lacking air, light, reason. . .

They are disgraced women
 Like Agar was also,
 Who thirsty, weakened,
 Come from far far off.. .
 Bringing with tepid steps,
 Children and irons on their arms,
 In their souls – tears and gaul. . .
 Like Agar¹⁷ suffering so much
 That not even the milk of lament
 Have they to give Ismael¹⁸.

¹⁷ - Hagar

¹⁸ - Ishmael

Off there on the limitless sands,
 From the palms of the country,
 They were born – beautiful children,
 They, lived – gentle maidens
 A caravan goes by one day
 Wheat the virgin in the cabin
 Apprehensive from the veils of night. a.
 . . . Good-bye mountain but,
 . . . Good-bye palms of the fountain! . . .
 . . . Good-bye, loves. . . good-bye! . . .

Afterwards, the extensive sands. . .
 Afterwards, the ocean of dust.
 Afterwards, on the immense horizon
 Deserts. . . deserts only. . .
 And hunger, the tiredness, the thirst. . .
 Oh how many unfortunates give up,
 And fail to rise no more! . . .
 A place in the chain vacates,
 But the jackal on the sand
 Finds a body to gnaw.

Yesterday Sierra Leoa,
 The war, the chase, the lion,
 Sleep slept carelessly
 Under the tents of amplitude!
 Today the dark, deep hole
 Infected, cramped, loathsome
 Having the plague for a jaguar. . .
 And sleep always broken
 By death rattles
 And the thud of corpses into the sea. . .

Yesterday full liberty,
 Will for power. . .
 Today. . . the peek of malice
 They are not even free to die. . .
 The same chain binds them
 – Lugubrious iron snake –
 In the threads of slavery.
 And so humming of death,
 The lugubrious cohort dances
 To the sound of the lash. . . Humiliation!. . .

Lord God of the unfortunate!
 Tell me, Lord God,
 Am I delirious . . . or is it truth
 So much horror under the skies?! . . .
 Oh sea, why don't you erase
 With the sponge of the waves,
 Your mantle, this blot?
 Stars! nights! tempests!
 Roll down from the immensity
 Sweep the seas, typhoon!. . .

VI

A people exists that lends its flag
 To cover so much infamy and cowardice! . . .
 Transforming it in that feast
 Into the impure mantle of a cold bacchante! . . .
 My God! my God! but what flag is this,
 That impudent floats from the truck?
 Silence, muse. . . weep, weep so much
 That the standard may be washed, by your grief! . . .

Green-gold pendant of my land,
 That the breeze of Brazil caresses and unfurls
 Standard that in the light of the sun encloses
 Promises of divine hope. . .
 You, who in the liberty after war,
 Were hoisted by heroes on the lance,
 Rather that you had been torn in battle
 Than serve a people as a shroud! . . .

Atrocious fatality which overwhelms the mind
 Extinguish this hour loathsome brig
 The furrow that Columbus opened in the waves,
 Like an iris in the depth of the seas!
 But this is too much infamy!.. . From the ethereal region
 Rise, heroes of the New World!
 Andrada!¹⁹ Rip that pendant from the air!
 Columbus! Close the portals of your seas!

ERRATA - Alude (allude); Magesty (majesty); shrowd (shroud) mistery (mystery); lircism (lyricism);
 pereniality (perennially); accuity (acuity); pictoric (pictorial); adjetive (adjective); firey (fiery; heroe (hero);

¹⁹ -**Andrada e Silva** (àN-drä' de è sêl've), **José Bonifácio de** (1763?-1838) Brazilian politician, scientist, and poet who led the movement for Brazilian independence from Portugal. Microsoft Bookshelf.