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English as She Is Spoke: 150 Years of a Classic

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Books Reviewed

Review Essay: *English as She Is Spoke: 150 Years of a Classic*

Fonseca, José da and Pedro Carolino. *O Novo Guia da Conversação em Portuguez e Inglez*. Intro. James Millington and Mark Twain. Preface Marcelo de Paiva Abreu. Rio de Janeiro: Casa da Palavra, 2002. 208 pp.

Fonseca José da, and Pedro Carolino. *English as She is Spoke: Selections from O Novo Guia da Conversação em Portuguez e Inglez, em Duas Partes / The New Guide of the Conversation, in Portuguese and English, in Two Parts*. Ed. Paul Collins. [Brooklyn, NY]: McSweeney's Books, 2002. xii + 133 pp.

Surprising as it may seem, this Casa da Palavra edition of José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino's celebrated phrasebook, based on the book's first edition published in 1855,¹ appears to be the first such edition ever published in Brazil. What is even harder to believe—the original was published in Paris—is that the book has never been published in Portugal. The Brazilian edition under review also reproduces in English and in Portuguese translation the two prefaces, by Mark Twain and by James Millington, for independent English-language editions published on either side of the Atlantic in 1883. The McSweeney edition, in fact, is only the latest addition to a series of English-language editions published over the last one hundred and twenty years.

Fonseca and Carolino's inadvertent masterpiece has been called many things. "An Anglo-Portuguese phrasebook to end all phrasebooks."² "Perhaps the worst foreign phrasebook ever written" and a "linguistic train wreck."³ A book of "miraculous stupidities."⁴ "The most ludicrous foreign attempt ever made to teach our language."⁵ Most often under the title *English as She Is Spoke*—a title shared by an English song published in 1880 and first employed for the Fonseca and Carolino volume in 1883—the mid-nineteenth-century Portuguese phrasebook has become a minor classic.⁶ Yet it is not as a book of instruction intended for those Portuguese who would learn English that it has survived—nay thrived—for the last century and a half, but rather it is as a work of accidental comedy and unintended humor. It is known that there was at least a second edition of José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino's guide following its first publication in Paris in 1855, but

in the United Kingdom and the United States there have been numerous editions, as will be seen below.

The curious story behind *English as She Is Spoke* is told by Leslie Shepard:

It really began in 1836, when a certain José da Fonseca, a respected Portuguese lexicographer resident in Paris, published a little book entitled:

O Novo Guia da Conversação em frances e portuguez; ou escolha de dialogos familiares sôbre varios assuntos; precedido de um copioso vocabulario de nomes proprios, com a pronuncia figurada (etc.) Paris, 1836

This work, offered to the students of Portugal and Brazil, must have proved very useful, for it was reprinted in an enlarged edition in 1853 (a further edition of 1849 is reported from Rio de Janeiro, but I have no details).

The idea of an English language version was perhaps a natural one, and it seems that da Fonseca [sic] became acquainted with a certain Pedro Carolino, who confidently undertook the task of producing an exact English edition. This bilingual work bears both names as authors:

O Novo Guia da Conversação em Portuguez e Ingles (etc.) em duas partes

The New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English, in Two Parts
por José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino. Paris, V^a J.-P. Aillaud, Monlon e C^a, 1855 (Two parts in one volume)

This had the same format as the original Portuguese-French work, except that the columns of French words were replaced by somewhat approximate English equivalents with imitated pronunciation, the Portuguese original remaining the same.⁷

As James Millington surmises in his introduction to the first English edition in 1883, it is more than likely that Pedro Carolino's knowledge of English was limited to what he could learn, not from a Portuguese-English dictionary, but from a French-English dictionary.⁸ Even during José da Fonseca's lifetime, the product of his collaborative effort with Carolino was widely deemed, in Shepard's words, to be "a greater contribution to humor than linguistics," and he authorized no second edition.⁹ Yet, in 1869, less than three years after Fonseca's death, Pedro Carolino brought out a new edition that he credited solely to himself. Actually printed in Paris, this edition is identified as having been published in Peking. As Shepard surmises, "it is possible that the surprising 'Peking' imprint was a blind to justify piracy, or it may be that Carolino's edition was really distributed in the Far East and helped to perpetuate some of the unusual English that is still spoken there."¹⁰ (Pedro Carolino's identity has not been discovered, though it is possible that he was the Pedro Carolino Duarte who translated works by Cónego Schmid, as catalogued by the Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon, Portugal: *Escola de*

histórias moraes [1858], *A joven Stephania* [1857], *A filha incognita* [1857], *A senhora de preto* [1855], *Stema ou a joven turca* [1861], and *Berta ou o guarda-fogo* [1861]. which were published in Paris by V. J. P. Aillaud. José da Fonseca [1788–1866] was a reputable linguist, who, among other works, compiled the *Novo Dicionario da lingua portugesa* in 1836, translated *Vinhola dos proprietarios* from the French, and edited a Parisian edition of *Os Lusíadas* in 1846.)

Beginning in 1883, Fonseca and Carolino's book has gone through a number of English-language editions. So far I have identified fourteen of them:

1. *English As She is Spoke, or, A Jest in Sober Earnest*, by José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino, with an introduction by James Millington (London: Field and Tuer, S. C. Simpkin, Marshall and Co.; Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1883).
2. *English As She is Spoke, or, A Jest in Sober Earnest, "Her Seconds Part,"* with an introduction by James Millington (London: Field and Tuer, 1883).
3. *English As She is Spoke, or, A Jest in Sober Earnest*, by José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino, with an introduction by James Millington (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883).
4. *The New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English in Two Parts*, by Pedro Carolino, , *First American Edition, reprinted verbatim et literatim*, with an introduction by Mark Twain (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1883).
5. *English As She is Spoke: or, A Jest in Sober Earnest*, by José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino (The Parchment Paper Series, No. 1) with an introduction by James Millington (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1884).
6. *The New Guide of the Conversation in English*, with an Introduction by Mark Twain (London and New York: George Routledge and Sons, 1884).
7. *English As She is Spoke*, by Pedro Carolino, edited from the original edition by Paddy Kitchen, with an introduction by Paul Jennings and illustrations by Edward Bawden (London: Lion and Unicorn Press at the Royal College of Art, 1960). An edition of 200 copies.
8. *The New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English*, by Pedro Carolino (Halcyon Booklets VI), introduction by Mark Twain, with an Introduction by Brendan Gill to the Introduction by Mark Twain (New York: The Halcyon-Commonwealth Foundation, 1966). (An abridgement of the 1883 Osgood edition.)
9. *English As She is Spoke: or A Jest in Sober Earnest*, with an introduction by James Millington, and a new introduction by Leslie Shepard (Detroit: Gale Research, 1967).¹¹
10. *English as She is Spoke (The New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English)*, by Pedro Carolino (José da Fonseca), with an introduction by Mark Twain (New York: Dover Publications, 1969). (Abridgement of 1883 Osgood edition.) [Reprinted in 1974, 1985.]¹²
11. *English As She is Spoke, or, A Jest in Sober Earnest*, by José da Fonseca and

- Pedro Carolino, with an introduction by James Millington (London: Hamish Hamilton/St. George's Press, 1970). A facsimile edition.¹³
12. *English As She Is Spoke: or A Jest in Sober Earnest*, [by José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino], introduction by James Millington (Whitstable, Kent, UK: Pryor Publications, 1982). (Facsimile of *English As She Is Spoke: or A Jest in Sober Earnest* [1883].) (Reprinted in 1999.)
 13. *The New Guide to the Conversation in English*, by Pedro Carolino (Cloone, Leitrim, Ireland: Mermaid Turbulence, 2001).
 14. *English as She is Spoke: Selections from O Novo Guia da Conversação, em Portuguez e Inglez, em Duas Partes / The New Guide of the Conversation, in Portuguese and English, in Two Parts*, by José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino, edited by Paul Collins, No. 1 in the Collins Library ([Brooklyn, New York]: McSweeney's Books, 2002). An edition of 1000 copies.

In the United States it is Mark Twain who is most frequently associated with Fonseca and Carolino's work. His interest in the book might well date from the late 1850s or early 1860s. In 1858 *The Athenæum* published a piece entitled "English Spoken," in which it is remarked: "The English of this volume so strongly resembles the Pigeon *patois* that I fancy the authors must have studied our tongue in the school of Hong-Kong; otherwise it is difficult to conceive how they could have had the audacity to concoct such an unprovoked and atrocious libel upon the language of an ancient ally."¹⁴ The piece caught the attention of the compilers of *Littel's Living Age*, published in Boston, who reprinted an abridged version of the piece in November of the same year.¹⁵ Five years later Thomas Hood published a piece entitled "Portuguese English" in *Browne's Register* for March 1863.¹⁶

In 1864 Mark Twain was working on *The Californian*. As this new journal's assistant editor, he was at least aware of, if not responsible for, "Portuguese English" and "More Portuguese English," two unsigned compendia of selections from the Portuguese phrasebook. These pieces appeared in the fifth and sixth issues of that journal. The first selection in the *Californian*, in the June 25th issue, is prefaced with these remarks:

Ludicrous blunders are often as amusing as the most brilliant wit. Who has not laughed at the mistakes of foreigners trying to speak our language? We have been fortunate enough to discover a mine of just such blunders. It is a book entitled *O Novo Guia da Conversação em Portuguez e Inglez* ("New Guide to Conversation in Portuguese and English") published in Paris in 1855. The main purpose is to assist Portuguese and Brazilians to learn English. In the preface the two authors, José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino, say that they had examined many books published for the same purpose but all were full of imperfections, and typographical errors, and were written by persons who did not understand English; and their book is recommended for scrupulous exactness, typographical "correction" and adherence to the spirit of both languages. We quote the preface entire and then give

some quotations from the English column; the Portuguese translation occupies a parallel column. In some places, we have thought it necessary to translate the English of Fonseca and Carolino into common English, putting our translation in brackets. In more places than one we have been unable to ascertain the meaning of a sentence until we had read the Portuguese.¹⁷

Although the Fonseca and Carolino volume continued to find an audience in the English-speaking world in ensuing years—there were pieces in journals such as *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1865 and 1872), *Galaxy*, *London Examiner* and *Round Table* (all in 1867), and *All the Year Round* (1870),¹⁸ the book itself did not appear in English until 1883, when an abridgement was brought out in London and a full version in Boston. James R. Osgood published the latter with a preface by Mark Twain, who was pleased enough with Osgood's finished product to send copies of the book to friends and acquaintances. He even thought about sending a copy to Queen Victoria. After meeting Princess Louise (Queen Victoria's daughter), he announced that he "very much want[ed] to send a little book to her Royal Highness—the famous Portuguese phrase book."¹⁹

The "famous" phrasebook seems to have had a wide appeal—from lending its English title to one of the famous Haldeman-Julius Blue Books, a collection of pieces by Mark Twain (not including, oddly enough, his preface to the Osgood edition of the Carolino book) to a beautifully illustrated edition with a run of two hundred copies. Among its prominent readers was the wife of the historian and writer Henry Adams, Marian "Clover" Hooper Adams. Resolutely she begins a letter written in 1883: "I will *take the day by the front hair*, as my Portuguese grammar says,"²⁰ referring to "Tomar a ocasião pelos cabelos," which Pedro Carolino translates as "Take the occasion for the hairs."²¹ She need explain no further, she knew, confident that her correspondent would understand the reference. Mrs. Adams's "Portuguese grammar" was still well enough known when, a dozen or so years later, the Chicago *Chap-Book* commented on the changes evident in magazine portraits of Stephen Crane, now flush with the success of his novel *The Red Badge of Courage*: "oh! which wonderful change! and who, the little boy for the pleasure what he gives us! as the Portuguese grammar might say."²²

A particularly pleasing reference occurs in "Recent Conversations in a Study," a piece of dialogue between two artists, Belton and Mallett. First published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1889 and reprinted in the same year in *Littell's Living Age*, this sprightly piece is the work of William Wetmore Story, the Boston businessman turned sculptor whose biographer was the American novelist Henry James.

Bel. Did you ever see an extraordinary phrase-book in English and Portuguese published in Paris by José de Fonseca and Pedro Carolino?

Mal. Yes, I have heard of it—a most amazing book. But why do you ask in this connection?

Bel. Because, as we were speaking of proverbs, one or two in this book came into my mind—this, for instance: "A horse baared don't look him the tooth"—for "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth."

Mal. Amazing! It seems hardly possible that a book like this could have been written in earnest, and yet it plainly is. No one in joke could so travesty English. Nothing but ignorance could succeed in such wild blunders, just as no accomplished artist can draw with the *naïveté* of a child, however he may try. But it is difficult to believe that any two men could seriously have set their heads together to teach the Portuguese how to speak English after this fashion.

Bel. Oh, the seriousness is not to be contested. These authors are, as Heine says, “as serious as a dead German.” And yet it is difficult, as you say, to believe it when you read such an anecdote as this: “One-eyed was laid against a man which had good eyes, that he saw better than him. The party was accepted. ‘I had gained over,’ said the one-eyed. ‘Why, i see you two eyes, and you not look me who one.’”

Mal. What a magnificent series of unintelligible monosyllables! The astonishment is that we can understand this, though the meaning is plain despite the grammar and construction.²³

As Mark Twain himself marveled, in the *Century Magazine* in 1887, everyone had “sampled ‘English As She is Spoke,’” along with “‘English As She is Wrote,’” the latter a concoction thrown together to cash in on the popularity of Fonseca and Carolino’s phrasebook.²⁴ Billed as “A Companion to *English as She is Spoke*,” *English As She is Wrote (Showing Curious ways in which the English Language may be made to convey Ideas or obscure them)* was issued by D. Appleton and Company in New York as No. III in the Parchment Paper Series in 1884. And in “Humours of Dictionaries,” Cecil Headlam, writing in the London version of *Literature* in 1899, followed a list of eccentricities from English and French dictionaries with this remark: “These things, indeed, are not so perfect of their kind as the ‘This girl have a beauty edge’ or the ‘Not so devil as he is black’ of Senhor Pedro Carolino’s ‘New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English.’”²⁵

With Mark Twain’s introduction as a guide, the poet Elizabeth Bishop drafted an essay on *The New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese*. “On my desk I have a borrowed book (& now have had, for two years, since I cannot bear to part with it),” it begins. “It is small, about 6 by five inches, the sad color of dried mustard, and on the cover it says, in black fanciful late nineteenth century lettering: THE NEW GUIDE OF THE CONVERSATION IN PORTUGUESE AND ENGLISH ‘with preface by Mark Twain.’” She proposed to offer a “sampling” of those things that promised to “secure,” as Mark Twain said, the little book’s “immortality.” In her mind she envisioned its author. “I somehow see Doutor Pedro Carolino as an elderly eccentric, living, perhaps in a small town where he tutors a few sons of the distinctly wealthier citizens,” she imagined. “Although it may be about 1830, he is still living in the 18th century; he wears steel-framed glasses, a pig-tail, and breeches—perhaps in the last pig-tail in the parish. He has always wanted to travel and has got as far as Oporto once.”

As a sample, here is the second of the two dialogues chosen by Mark Twain to conclude his preface to the 1883 Osgood edition:

DIALOGUE 17

To inform one's self of a person.

How is that gentleman who did speak by and by?

Is a German.

I did think him Englishman.

He is of the Saxony side.

He speak the French very well.

Though he is German, he speak so much well italyan, French, Spanish and English, that Among the Italyans, they believe him Italian, he speak the frenche as the Frenches himselves. The Spanishesmen believe him Spanishing, and the Englishes, Englishman. It is difficult to enjoy well so much several langages.

To which Twain adds inimitably: "The last remark contains a general truth; but it ceases to be a truth when one contracts it and applies it to an individual—provided that individual is the author of this book, Senhor Pedro Carolino. I am sure I should not find it difficult 'to well enjoy so much several languages'—or even a thousand of them—if he did the translating for me from the originals into his ostensible English."²⁶

Remarkably, a century and a half after its first appearance, Pedro Carolino's inadvertent and most unlikely classic continues, unchanged, to find new readers and, quite impressively, new publishers.

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Notes

1. José da Fonseca and Pedro Carolino, *O Novo Guia da Conversação, em Portuguez e Inglez, em duas partes / The New Guide of the Conversation, in Portuguese and English, in Two Parts* (Paris: J.-P. Aillaud, Monlon e Ca., 1855).

2. Paul Jennings, Introduction to *English As She is Spoke* by Pedro Carolino, edited from the original edition by Paddy Kitchen, illustrations by Edward Bawden (London: Lion and Unicorn Press at the Royal College of Art, 1960), 6.

3. McSweeney's Books, <http://store.yahoo.com/mcsweeneysbooks/enassehispp.html>.

4. *The New Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English*, with an introduction by Mark Twain (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1883), vi.

5. Quoted in Paiva Abreu, "Prefácio à Edição Brasileira," in *O Novo Guia*, p. 9 n 1. His source is the copy of Fonseca and Carolino's original edition in 1855 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The sentence, undated and unsigned, appears as an inscription.

6. "English as she is spoke," written by and composed by George Dance, arranged by Jean Paulus (London: Francis Bros. and Day, 1880). There is a copy in the British Library.

7. Leslie Shepard, "The Curious History of a Most Curious Book," in *English As She is Spoke: or A Jest in Sober Earnest* (1883), introduction by James Millington (Detroit: Gale Research, 1967), unnumbered pages 2–3.

8. James Millington, "Introduction," to *English As She Is Spoke*, iii.

9. Shepard, "Curious History," unnumbered page 3.
10. Shepard, "Curious History," unnumbered page 4.
11. It was reprinted for "Friends of the Gale Research Co. on the occasion of the 86th Annual Conference, American Library Association, San Francisco, May, 1967."
12. There is evidence to indicate that, also in 1969, Dover brought out the same text under the title *Fractured English As She Is Spoke*.
13. See Richard Boston, "Pedro is valuable his weight's gold," *Manchester Guardian* (April 8, 1972): 9.
14. R. W. R., "English Spoken," *Athenæum* no. 1613 (Sept. 25, 1858): 400.
15. "English Spoken," *Littell's Living Age* 59 (Nov. 6, 1858): 458.
16. See M. H. Spielman, "English as She is Spoke," *Literature* [London] IV (May 20, 1899): 529.
17. "Portuguese English," *The Californian* I.5 (June 25, 1864): 5. "More Portuguese English" appeared in no. 6 (July 2, 1864): 5.
18. See A. H. Guernsey, "English for the Portuguese," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 30 (Feb. 1865): 365–66; Edward Gould Buffum, "Parisian English," *Galaxy* 4 (May 1867): 47–52; "English for the Portuguese," *Littell's Living Age* 94 (Sept. 14, 1867): 688–89; "English Broken to Bits," *All the Year Round* new series, no. 67: 348–52; and James Grant Wilson, "English Translations," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 45 (Oct. 1872): 769–70.
19. Shepard, "Curious History," unnumbered page 6.
20. *The Letters of Mrs. Henry Adams 1865–1883*, ed. Ward Thoron (Boston: Little, Brown, 1936), 428.
21. Abreu, *O Novo Guia* (2002), 197.
22. *Chap-Book*, I (April 1896), 496.
23. W. W. Story, "Recent Conversations in a Studio," *Littell's Living Age* 183 (Oct. 19, 1889): 166.
24. Mark Twain, "English as She is Taught," *Century Magazine* 33 (May 1887): 932–36. This essay was later issued by the Mutual Book Company of Boston, Massachusetts, as *English as She is Taught by Mark Twain with Biographical Sketch of Author by Matthew Irving Lans* (1900).
25. Cecil Headlam, "Humours of Dictionaries," *Literature* [London] IV (May 13, 1899): 497.
26. Mark Twain, Introduction, in Abreu, *O Novo Guia*, 27.

Other Reviews

Arenas, Fernando. *Utopias of Otherness: Nationhood and Subjectivity in Portugal and Brazil*. Minneapolis, MN: U Minnesota P, 2003. 179 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index.

Departing from the premise that Portugal and Brazil have exerted and continue to exert a significant influence on each other's sense of identity, *Utopias of Otherness* explores the representation of nationhood in contemporary Portuguese and Brazilian literatures and focuses on the utopias that have guided the national imaginaries of both countries in light of centuries of Luso-Brazilian relations and reciprocal cultural interpretations. Arenas traces the weakening of utopian