

erick the Great, had similar features, but an even greater warrior, Napoleon, had not.

During the World War General Costa fought in the African colonies of Portugal, Germany, and England, trying to handle our German General Lettow. He has written a book about it which the publishers are pushing as hard as possible just now, while the iron is hot. I have read the book, hoping to find something sensational, for

we journalists, thank God! have not found real sensations at Lisbon. It is the calm, serious work of a good soldier, without emphasis or perspective — little more than a diary of his daily marches. He hardly mentions the enemy. When he does so, it is as he would mention any other soldiers: But one sentence — the concluding sentence of the preface — caught my eye. It was: 'The highest and noblest task of man is war.'

A LESSON IN PORTUGUESE¹

BY VALÉRY LARBAUD

THE temptation was too strong. It made me forget my good resolutions, my firm resolve to forbid myself any more adventures of this sort at my age, which is no longer the time for wild ideas and caprices. But here I am, past forty, learning a new language.

As long as I lived far from the country where the language was spoken I resisted the temptation, because it presented itself simply in a theoretical, even a utopian, aspect. Not without effort did I persuade myself, when a book or a magazine written in this tongue passed under my eyes, that I could read the text before me only after long hours of labor. But now that I have gone to the country where this language is spoken, the temptation presents itself in a practical, irresistible way. I must cure this isolating deafness in the midst of a life that surrounds me, speaks to me, and that I want to question. All this is

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enough to justify my impulse to embark upon this philological adventure.

What I want to do is to set down here the sensations, while they are still fresh in my mind, of the first phases one passes through in conquering a new language by memory and sensibility. I have observed at close range, and with more detachment and more clearness than I have ever been capable of before during the first flush of linguistic passion, the movements and the reactions that we feel in coming into contact with a foreign syntax and vocabulary. Here are an interesting field of observation and a body of literary material that are far from negligible. For the process of learning any language is a little like the developments of a love affair. Paul Claudel made one of his characters say, 'I have grasped this woman like a science.' I know people who can say, 'I have learned this language as one gains the love of a woman.'

There is first the phase of complete indifference. In speaking a language very much like the one we are learning we gesticulate and reproduce certain noises to make ourselves understood. That is enough. But as soon as the desire to acquire this intellectual wealth is formed, we can no longer endure being unable to hear or understand, and we are like lovers, for whom any means are good that bring us to our lady, and to whom no road appears too long or tedious that leads us to her presence. Many such roads are open to us: the dictionary, newspapers, the grammar that we largely avoid — for we are not scholars — and that we use only to discover certain puzzling obscurities as they present themselves to us.

To tell the truth, the Portuguese that we see in the newspaper is rather repulsive. If we did not feel that the journalist is in a professional position of power, how insipid and distressing this veritable cloud-burst would seem — an unrelieved, colorless stream of words forgotten as soon as they are read! Messy, turgid, defaced! At length it reminds us of an old coin, worn almost smooth, its indistinct markings vulgarized and half effaced by the routine of constant use.

But we must also reckon on luck. If Minerva is going to protect us, she will place us in front of a store containing the book of our salvations — the book that will carry us along with the vigor of its thought and style to the complete conquest of our linguistic fortunes. It will be the book which, in ignorance of our good luck, we carry home saying to ourselves: 'I will read ten pages a day for a week; then fifteen pages the following week; then each week I will double my dose of this medicine against deafness and dumbness.' But, behold, the book is so fascinating that I cannot rest in

peace until I have finished reading it. At the end of a hundred and fifty pages I give long rests to my slave the dictionary, and the fascination of the last twenty pages has carried me brilliantly along, without recourse to the slave, whom I have consulted only in exceptional cases, and whom, in fact, I am already beginning to despise.

We now know that a great deal of a new literature is at our disposal. It is as if we had studied the list of the stock exchange, telephoned our bankers, and, in a few hours, had made a hundred thousand francs; and we begin to recognize, one after another, words which we have read in the book — brilliantly colored words, skillfully employed in the language of the people with whom we have dealings and talk to in street and café. We discover their system of pronunciation and try to imitate it, but this contact with the spoken language brings with it many surprising gifts. Look here: this *o* is pronounced like *ou*; that word has its accent on the antepenult; and the first syllable of this one is mute. Who would not have known it? But this other one — you give a *sh* sound to the *s* followed by a consonant — possesses an unexpected allure; and finally — ah, there you are in the midst of the spoken language, and you rein in your little infinitives that have so often kicked up their heels.

Then one goes back to books again, and begins to apply to the text the rules of pronunciation learned in talking. The procession of words that used to file by in silence now begins to sing to us. The word that we hardly noticed makes itself distinctly heard, halts our progress, makes us put it in its place in the acoustical balance of the sentence. A new word appears, music in hand, like a singer on the stage of a small theatre. I take in everything that is going on, scanning

the features of the actors. I am already able to pass judgment on their physique, to find in this one a certain charm, in that one a certain beauty; and I give them a little applause.

Often there are certain characters on the stage — perhaps it is a turn of phrase, a verb with its complementary clause placed in a peculiar manner — that surprise me. Well done, you acrobats! Or maybe, when some pretty little expression dances across the scene, I, the public, want to cry out: 'Bravo! Bis! Encore! *Brava, ole tu madre!*'

Or it may also happen that we are distressed by the weakness of some expression, by the ineptitude of some turn, by its lack of grace, or by its vulgarity or platitudinous quality. You lack originality, word that means 'original.' You look too much like your linguistic brother across the border. At least you should be a little more different, either written or spoken — but you are not. You, who come from India, ought to have kept a little more of your frankly exotic air. Your Latin flavor gives you a false air of nobility. At bottom you are frightfully barbarian. The meaning assumed by this other one, of Greek or German origin, is really misleading, bizarre, scandalous, suitable only for a collection of freaks. It was not worth making such a long voyage in space and time over the lips of so many generations.

The adventure in the course of which I received these impressions took place in Portugal, and it is a Portuguese troupe that has been playing on the stage of my linguistic theatre.

I was all eyes and ears, all attention and respect, knowing well that the elements of a great literary language were here, a language whose vocabulary and syntax have been developed by some of the greatest poets, dramatists,

and prose writers of the West. These words, these turns of phrase, these conversational clauses, the etiquette of letter writing, all have a touch of genius. They were fashioned at the court of kings, and watched over by divine assemblies. But this respect for the language did not detract in the least from the freshness and force of my impressions when they were bursting in on me with all their novelty. Apart from the masterpieces that have transfigured them, these sacred elements seemed part of a great verbal edifice.

Actually it is not such a difficult language to understand. Unquestionably the Latin substructure can be discerned behind Portuguese, as it can behind Italian, Spanish, Catalanian, and Provençal, even more distinctly than in French. But Latin is not our most constant and accurate guide. The person who knows two Latin languages one of which is Spanish easily finds his way about in Portuguese. (In the same way, I imagine, a person who knows two Germanic languages one of which is German has no great difficulty in mastering Dutch or Flemish.) Such a person knows enough Latin even if he has never looked at Cicero. A Portuguese or Catalanian woman who says to you, '*Amor meu,*' speaks no better Latin than the Spanish or Italian woman who says to you, '*Amor mio.*' One cannot fall back entirely on Latin to understand the details of Latin languages. There are some slight differences in orthography and pronunciation. *Deus, mulier, simplex, are* both Latin and Portuguese. So is *meus*; but observe that in Portuguese *meus* is nominative and accusative plural. So let us take as our guide Spanish, which is more a sister than a mother language. It will lead us down the royal road of phonetic and orthographic equivalents.

You will often find, hidden where you least suspect it, an ancient or modern Spanish word under a deceptive Portuguese disguise. It is rather like a masked ball. You have to guess who is talking to you. The Portuguese word *occo* gave me a lot of pleasure. I did not know what it meant, and was going to give up guessing and appeal to my slave the dictionary, when suddenly the Spanish in me reacted: *hueco*. Eureka! When the slave was consulted, it told me that the word meant 'pit.'

Spanish is our guide; but let us be careful. Often this Portuguese mask is extremely deceiving, for it is more a family peculiarity than a mask. To get a proper idea of the strong personality of Portuguese one should really look at a printed page of the language. The words that closely resemble Spanish are no less characteristic, either in meaning or in pronunciation. If we follow our Spanish guide too humbly, we are likely to fall into strange errors, and to believe, for instance, that *ninho* (nest) means a child.

Spanish is more a ground of comparison than a guide for the person who is learning Portuguese. It brings out the grace and weakness of certain Portuguese words: *namorar* (*enamorar*), and *namoro*; *doente*, which, when compared to the Spanish *doliente*, is as if the sick person had stammered out 'Doence' and were unable to pronounce the middle letters *li*. Another point — the softening of the diminutive, such as one finds in Galician songs, *ito*, *ita*, being made into *inho*, *inha*; and the dropping of *tr* in the possessives: *noso*, *nosa*.

So, meaning 'alone' and 'only,' never changes its form, whether it is an adverb or an adjective, in masculine or feminine. It is a nice word, too. What loneliness, what abandon, it

expresses! A woman says that she is *so*, just as a man does — as if solitude made her sex a matter of no importance. And *sosinho*, which my dictionary does not mention, is also worthy of remembrance. It means 'alone with myself.' In this case the diminutive is not only logical, but it expresses with marvelous force the dependence of a single person on himself in solitude. There are other words in which the Latin and Spanish *l* has dropped out, and they have taken on a new kind of fascination which gives them a great deal of character: *voô* (*vol*, from *volare*); *dôr* (*dolor*), *côr* (*color*).

I was also very fond of *carvalho*, for 'oak,' *orvalho* for 'dew,' *cotovia* for 'lark,' and the word *immeso* (prodigiously) used adverbially (to spend *immeso*). I have compared the word that means 'girl' — *rapariga* — with its Spanish equivalents, *rapaza*, *muchacha*, *zagala*, and with its Italian equivalent, *ragazza*, and I have found that it has the same quality that makes the Italian word so likable. It has a joyous noise, like laughing children running through school passageways into the street. Still, *rapariga* is the one that makes the most noise. And *garôta*, for a little girl, is not at all bad. It is entirely a city word, and applies to the little daughters of ordinary people in a big city. If I were married to a Portuguese, I believe that I should call her *garôta*. What tender familiarity, what amorous lack of respect for *minha senhora*: 'Come and kiss me, *garôta*!'

The diphthong *ão*, which is unpronounceable by anyone who is not a Portuguese, exercises an irresistible attraction upon us. It signifies a beautiful nasal sound, very different from the French *on* and *an*. It is not so open or so prolonged as its appearance makes us believe. We take a

childish pleasure in pronouncing *aon* and in substituting it for the French ending *tion*: 'I have made an *excur-siaon*'; 'I have had a *discussiaon*'; 'There was a *revolutiaon*.'

To tell the truth, one would expect such richness from the language of navigators and kings who imported the wealth of Africa and America and the luxury of Asia, princes who paced the streets of Lisbon with processions of elephants and slaves bearing precious fans made of rare plumes, and cages of animals symbolizing the different provinces of their Empire — lions, tigers, leopards, rhinoceroses. These lords of the sea introduced the fabulous exoticism of Imperial Rome to sixteenth-century Europe. Yet there is something pompous, something worthy of King Manuel, in the Portuguese language. There is a touch of *Wanderlust* even in the Portuguese architecture, where anchors, cables, masts, nautical instruments, are worked in with Oriental, Chinese, Indian, and African motifs. This exotic tendency goes so far that the Portuguese word for 'queen,' in spite of its undeniable Latin derivation, has something exotic about it, like Asiatic perfume or Malayan apparel: *rainha*.

The word *menina* for a little girl is charming, slightly old-fashioned, rather smacking of the Court vocabulary. As for the word meaning 'doll,' *boneca*, I have thought a lot about it without arriving at a definite opinion; but I have arranged all the words that I know meaning 'doll' like a class in school, and I have put them in the order of their beauty as I see it. It comes out something like this: first, *bambola* (Italian); second, a tie between *boneca* (Portuguese) and *muñeca* (Spanish); third, 'doll' in English; fourth, a tie between *poupée* in French and *Puppe* in German; fifth, *kukla* (modern Greek); sixth, *bugatta* (Genovese).

The word *devagar* (*lentement, adagio, despacito* — slowly) has interested me a lot, and I am not yet able to account for it. But the sublime phrase of King Sebastian at the battle of Alcázar-Kebir, '*Morrer, sim; mas devagar!* (To die, yes; but slowly!)' has engraved it indelibly on my memory; and only yesterday I was able to say to a reckless chauffeur, just as I was getting into the automobile, '*Agora vamos, mas devagar, muito devagar.*'

Much can be said about the rôle that the letter *h* plays in Portuguese. As in French, and sometimes in Spanish, it either signifies hard breathing or takes the place of a consonant that has disappeared. Besides this, it is a phonetic symbol when it appears as *lh* and *nh*. In other words it has more of a decorative activity in Portuguese than in any other language that I know. Where I have found the Portuguese *h* most effective is in words like *Hespanha* (Spain) and *hespanhola* (Spanish) and *as hespanholas* (the Spanish). This word has a great air. It is as if the two *h*'s suddenly clothed all Spaniards in holiday costume. It makes a particular appeal to Frenchmen who have lived in Spain and have treasured memories of love and pleasure, and who will always retain a Spanish girl in the chambers of their memory. Until they have learned Portuguese, they will call her *mi española*; but behold this familiar *española*, whom we have daily treated with the limitless familiarity of reflected love, suddenly transformed into *hespanhola*. We are intimidated.

It is too bad that the recent form of spelling has already made those forms archaic. One hardly ever sees *Hespanha* any more, but *Espanha*. The letter *x* has become *ch*. Traces of Greek derivations are being obliterated. The *th*, *ph*, *y*, *x*, and *h* for the hard breathing, which gave Portu-

guess the same air of a learned language that French has, are disappearing. In a word like *hipopótamo* the second *p* has disappeared, although the *h* is still retained. Some zealous reformer at once protested against this anomaly, and the gentle, submissive hippopotamus in the Lisbon zoo will see himself deprived of his *h*.

But even as I am writing now, I have reached that point in a new language where one comes to take it for granted, where one no longer stops to consider each word for its own sake, but examines the effect that it produces on our sensibilities. I shall no longer come to a halt, congealed in idiotic ecstasy before Portuguese words in the same way a peasant from the mountains gapes at the windows of the Lisbon stores. I am accepting and assimilating them. Consumed, they will enter into my subconsciousness, into the circulation of my blood.

But when the process is completed, I shall take pleasure in going over the impressions that I received when I was so actively conscious of this mutual act of the Portuguese taking possession of me and of my learning Portuguese. I shall recall pleurably how I acquired little by little, word by word, a new verbal coinage, a currency that entitles me to unlimited buying power in the literatures Portuguese and Brazilian.

Let me take this opportunity to pay homage to two writers who have aided my modest beginnings and whose unforgettable style has swept me over all obstacles — Eça de Queiroz and Oliveira Martins, two classics of the last half of the nineteenth century. On the eve of my departure I bought two more books — ones that I probably ought to have bought the first day, and certainly should have bought if I had not found another book to pull me through. They are the New Testament and the Roman Catholic Prayer Book. Think of hearing Saint Paul speak in the language of the conquerors of all oceans! And what tenderness, what an exotic scent of chapels in distant islands, worthy to be celebrated by Saint John of Persia, the '*Salve, Rainha*' must have in Portuguese.

Richness, new wealth so agreeably gained! An infinite journey, to approach nearer and nearer the classics of the sixteenth century and at last to read the greatest of all! Yes, learning a language is itself like making a fortune; and whoever acquires it adds to his stature and enriches his life with a thousand new pleasures. But all the while the question of two infinitives still occupies me; and the morals and customs of the adverb *apenas*, so different from its Castilian brother, have not stopped troubling me.

COMMUNISM AND LITERATURE ¹

BY DOCTOR VLASOV

The radical transformation which Bolshevism, considered primarily as a doctrine, has gradually undergone is unquestionably one of the most absorbing spectacles which the history of contemporary culture presents. Superficial political events do not begin to reveal the all-embracing character of this transformation. Even keen observers who merely get casual glimpses of what is occurring easily overlook its fundamental character. . . . Nowhere is the all-pervasiveness of these changes better illustrated than in art and literature.

For a time the horrors of the Red Terror, revolutionary experiments, civil war, and famine practically extinguished all literary activity. Every scrap of paper, every printing press that was still in condition to be operated, was used for propaganda.

No perceptible change occurred until the so-called New Economic Policy, which represented a repudiation of Communist economics, was adopted. Soon after that event, however, the first swallows of a new spring appeared in the form of a little group of storytellers, the Serapion Brothers, who constantly received recruits from survivors of the old educated classes who had adjusted themselves to the new situation and were trying to pick up again the threads of their former literary life.

It is no wonder, however, and no sign of failing inspiration, that these

people found themselves insufferably hampered by material and moral obstacles. Older and more experienced writers, like Gorkii, discovered that it was better, for the time being, not to abandon their old world of impressions and characters. Only Veresaev, who has always been more of a publicist than a cultivator of pure literature, managed, in a clever but nevertheless ineffective tale called *In a Blind Alley*, which he published in 1923, to show what a catastrophe Bolshevism had been for the revolutionary Messianists among the old intellectuals.

Younger writers, like Ivanov, Piliak, Zamiatin, became deluded with the idea that the existing chaos could express itself best in equally chaotic literary forms. They were encouraged in their opinion by the favor which the Bolshevik leaders for a time showed to these revolutionists of art. Had this fermentation been permitted to spend itself freely it might gradually have thrown off its scum of exaggeration and artificiality, and have produced something of more artistic worth than the fragmentary and ejaculatory remnants that it has left behind. But it was not allowed to develop freely. It was utterly stifled by the dictatorship.

The results are interestingly described in an article by the Bolshevik critic Osinskii, published in the New Year's number of *Pravda*, 1925: 'Under such psychological conditions a new literature can arise only with difficulty. Added to this was the supreme obstacle of the general social situation.

¹ From the *Preussische Jahrbücher* (Berlin Conservative-Nationalist historical monthly), June