

# The *Crônica*, the City, and the Invention of the Underworld: Rio de Janeiro, 1889-1922

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Everything is inside out.  
Health Street.  
The foreigner goes to rent a house right behind the street sign and dies.  
But if the street is pestilent, why does it have this name?  
No one explains it.  
Likewise, there's Harmony Street with its biweekly murders - Liberation Lane,  
where no one escapes armed assault.  
And in politics, as in diplomacy, in administration, as in art, everything is the  
opposite of what it claims to be.

Orestes Barbosa, on Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s<sup>1</sup>

Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Brazil produced a generation of literary and journalistic writers known as *cronistas* who were animated by both a curious desire to know their city and a healthy humility in the face of its impenetrable mystery. In a lighthearted and somewhat sardonic style, Orestes Barbosa's above passage reveals the thoughts of someone whose vocation is to know the city, and yet who pronounces it unknowable. Lame human attempts to place markers on the inscrutable urban terrain are only absorbed again into the chaos, leaving readers to ponder the irony and contradictions that emanate from the eternal enigma of the city. Barbosa's quotation is typical of its time and genre, the *crônica*, a hybrid form of expression halfway between literature and journalism. In their approach to writing about the city, the authors of these *crônicas* belong equally to the cults of mystery, fact-finding, and reporting. For the historian of urban Brazil, these texts present both a gold mine of insights into the daily life of the past and a minefield of authorial biases, distortions, and idiosyncrasies.<sup>2</sup>

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This study will revisit the genre of the *crônica* in the context of Rio de Janeiro during the first decades of the First Republic, 1889-1930. My analysis aims to promote a more critical use of urban *cronistas'* writings as historical sources, primarily to recover the social and cultural history of the urban poor and working classes. I will then suggest how these theoretical insights might guide a specific line of historical inquiry, as I explore how the writings of a select group of *cronistas* illuminate what has been termed Rio's urban underworld—the cultural, social, and political meanings of the daily activities that came to be controlled systematically and criminalized in turn-of-the-century Rio.<sup>3</sup> The *crônica* took part in the social and cultural process through which society designated certain activities as licit and others as illicit. It stood as a lively, influential, and sometimes judgmental record of urban life in Brazil at the turn of the century.<sup>4</sup> The following discussion will emphasize how useful republican Rio's *crônicas* can be when few other sources exist. It will also demonstrate that by inquiring critically into the sources we employ, it is possible to understand the legacy of the protracted distortions and myths that result from the conditions of their production and repeated use.

How does one begin to reconstruct the quotidian world of ideas, values, and social bonds and conflicts in a city's past? Cities are administrative and political centers of nations and regions; to live in an urban area in our modern age often means to live under state surveillance. Consequently, organs of the state as well as private individuals and groups produce a wealth of documentation that is richly informative for those wishing to understand the city's past. As cultural, publishing, and intellectual centers, the proliferation of newspapers, books, and other published texts can also provide the raw materials for the study of cultural or social urban history.

In the period immediately following the abolition of slavery known as the First Republic (1889-1930), Rio de Janeiro was not just the undisputed cultural and political capital of Brazil. The city also held its own as one of the most formidable in the Western hemisphere in both population and commercial activity. The combination of a quickly growing, modern bureaucratic apparatus and a complicated fascination with the city itself produced a wealth of sources available today for reconstructing the city's history. The ever worsening, traditional socioeconomic disparity, and the chronic social conflict this situation threatened, enthralled and often horrified contemporaneous commentators on the city. In the study of the urban social and cultural history of Brazil, the central methodological challenge has its origin in exactly this social disparity that stirred fear in Rio's republican elite.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, thousands of former slaves, migrants from Brazil's drought-ridden Northeast, and immigrants primarily from southern Europe flooded the city.<sup>5</sup> The majority of these people did not

Brazil's literary pantheon, but also as informants on both local and national history.<sup>9</sup>

Just as those who study colonial and early nineteenth-century Latin American history often rely heavily on the accounts of foreign travelers to gather historical information about daily life, those who seek to reconstruct the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century history of the city of Rio de Janeiro possess the *crônica*.<sup>10</sup> This form of contemporaneous narrative writing, and the relatively small but growing body of literary history and criticism about it, present historians with a seductive answer to the perennial dilemma of the lack of historical sources on the social and cultural history of Rio and, to a lesser degree, other Brazilian cities. Yet, as this study will suggest, historians have not adequately problematized these urban chronicles in their use as historical sources. Often quick to point out the potential political, socioeconomic, and ethnic biases that lurk in the subtext of Rio's *crônicas*, historians usually end their line of questioning there.

The temptation to pick over the panoply of richly detailed observations in an author like Orestes Barbosa and to bracket the subjective elements such as the artistic and the political is certainly understandable. For example, his 1922 collection of *crônicas* titled *Na prisão* records stories of daily life in one of Rio's prisons.<sup>11</sup> For anyone interested in such areas of inquiry as criminal justice and subaltern life in the early twentieth century, this volume provides a precious glimpse at a world rarely described in narrative prose. In order to incorporate responsibly this information into an historical study of Brazilian history, it might seem sufficient to account for the author's ideological predilections. For instance, the anthropometric ideas Barbosa expresses about the height of the prison director's forehead calls into question both the high praise Barbosa gives this individual and the supposedly excellent conditions for the prisoners.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, although Orestes Barbosa was known as a journalist, like so many writers of the period, he produced literary publications. He was not beholden to the facts which, not incidentally, could never be checked, since he made it his business to report on the obscure underbelly of urban life. It is not clear how much of his writing was reporting and how much was exaggeration, satire, irony, and fantasy. Surely the researcher extracting an observation from *Na prisão* on, say, social relations behind prison walls as historical evidence is doing a service to readers of the resulting historical study by pointing to the author's political biases and elusive literary imagination. Yet even knowing what biases might bend the accuracy of Barbosa's words does not help us connect the observed with the observer. However responsibly expressed, such caveats may have the effect of simply creating a more finely tuned realm of discourse, serving the larger realm of human experience.



read, write, or maintain any of their own records. How then do we, at the turn of the twenty-first century, tell their story in a responsible and accurate manner? The question of how we acquire our knowledge about the city is particularly significant, difficult, and laden with questions of social justice when describing the city's poor and working-class majority. People's encounters with the state's record-keeping apparatus—their run-ins with the law and dealings with the census taker and tax collector—have left a paper trail containing clues about the way these people lived and how that changed over time. Outside the realm of official politics and public administration, song lyrics survive mutely on paper, and fading photographs reveal some details of material life. Yet such artifacts of the Brazilian people's cultural past are precious and rare. The historical record for the most part documents not normal daily life in urban Brazil but rather pathological outbursts and episodes with state authorities. For those interested in history, it has become a truism that people's daily suffering, surviving, organizing, and planning activities only become visible to posterity when they rub up against the state. For instance, although we can know about the immediate causes of a given worker's strike, the years of planning and oppression that preceded it are often difficult if not impossible to reconstruct. Likewise, we can know with relative ease exactly who needed to answer charges for illicit gambling in the early twentieth century. However, it is decidedly more complicated to fill in our knowledge about the many gambling houses and back-alley runners who managed to evade the law.

In republican Rio de Janeiro, the problems that researchers confront recovering daily life elsewhere are compounded by the haphazard manner of maintaining and preserving official records in Brazil, and other structural peculiarities such as the large floating population which census takers did not register, and the unusually wide gap between written law and actual behavior. Despite methodological difficulties, Latin American social and cultural urban history has attracted increasing scholarly interest in the last thirty years.<sup>6</sup> The perceived dearth of data has led scholars back to a rich narrative source largely ignored until the 1970s: the urban *crônicas* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>7</sup> For much of the twentieth century, literary critics and historians had disparaged many of these texts for their precious and unsavory political predilections (whether reactionary, innocent, or ineffectually critical, or marked by extreme nationalism), and nostalgia.<sup>8</sup> By bringing Rio's *crônicas* back into print in new critical compiling edited collections, and allowing these texts to sneak into their citations, Brazilian and foreign researchers interested in the past have rehabilitated *cronistas* not only as important members



This study will outline some of the particular problems that accompany any attempt to apply texts such as *Na prisão* to an historical study. It is necessary, I argue, to push farther our theoretical and methodological understanding of such narrative sources as Rio's *crônicas* in order to reconnect the authors' observations to the historical processes from which they emerged and in which they participate. Readers of *crônicas* as history do not require such elaborate cautions and await such pitfalls only because these texts lead a double life as literature and journalism. Both human imagination and objective reality are present, inextricably woven together, in all historical sources. However, as a literary genre that also purports to fact, the *crônica* seems to present an ideal opportunity to explore the limits of our knowledge of the past. The genre reveals in a particularly pronounced manner the tension between discourse and material reality that tugs at the foundations of all historical understanding.

### Literature as History: The Theoretical Question

Literature, to paraphrase one illustrious literary critic, has often dwelt more comfortably in the eternal than in the diurnal.<sup>13</sup> Advances in recent literary-critical movements such as New Historicism notwithstanding, the status of literature as a gauge of everyday life is still very much in question. History, on the other hand, to quote an equally illustrious historian, has long been the "restless discipline of context."<sup>14</sup> The formal qualities of a text and its meanings, as well as the very categories that we use to interpret it — gender, class, beauty, perfection, justice, freedom, and so on—, only make sense to the historian as products of a particular place and time. The degree to which literary texts reflect a discernable and reasonably transparent historical reality depends upon the extent to which the historian can interpret that text within a meaningful context using established techniques of the discipline.

Of course, it would oversimplify both the capabilities and the problems of literary and historical study to reduce their respective realms to that of text and context. The methodological, theoretical, and thematic concerns of these two disciplines prodigiously overlap. Despite bitter polemics at the outer reaches of both fields, students and scholars in the mainstream of historical and literary study would probably agree that both the textuality and the historical context of a given literary work are analytical categories whose validity straddles disciplinary lines. The "textuality of history and the historicity of the text" has become a mantra for a post-modern age.

Yet outside the bounds of literary history, where a traditional aim of historical research is to describe the forces and human actors directly related to a certain literary text or group of texts, there exists little systematic inquiry

into how literary works can and have served as historical evidence to reconstruct social and cultural processes taking place outside the world of literary culture. Since the late 1950s, the so-called linguistic turn in the social sciences and humanities, animated by interdisciplinary modes of inquiry, set in motion a trend in historiography that has enabled us to study the world of ideas, behaviors, and social and power relationships in new ways.<sup>15</sup> Although these trends have advanced our understanding of the metaphoric and actual meanings of reading, writing, and story-telling in society, their insights enable us to understand intricately the discourse networks that surround human society without providing us with a built-in mechanism to engage the realm of experience and material life with these same insights. For example, one who studies crime and punishment in early twentieth-century Brazil is left with a dilemma of how to read the prison diaries that Barbosa and others published during that time. A student of literature might deconstruct the language or reduce it to a discursive system to gain access to hidden and perhaps unintentional meanings in the text. Thus understood, one can add the discourse contained in that text to the mix, and our conception of the nexus of ideas in circulation in the early twentieth century about criminality, authority, race, and the many other topics that these prison diaries touch on will be richer for it. But what if the objective is to understand the social dynamics of the early twentieth century, how society made normative judgements about behavior, and how people accepted, rejected, and acted against these ideas? Is it possible to read the literary text as an historical document that speaks beyond the ethereal realm of disembodied ideas?

This last point begs the question, what does it mean to read a document as an historian? In a way, such a reading comprises an "interrogation of facts" in the form of historical evidence in search of an adequately accurate reconstruction and representation of truth.<sup>16</sup> Such an aim approximates that of literary hermeneutics, which has as its ultimate goal the understanding of the event or experience in the encounter between reader and text.<sup>17</sup> However, recent thinking associated with post-modernism, characterized by intense reflexivity and a preference to deconstruct ideas and meaning, has resulted in an acute awareness of the contingency of knowledge. In the wake of this so-called crisis of knowledge and representation, a spate of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences has emerged that seeks to understand the relationship between language and that which it purports to represent.<sup>18</sup>

Yet critical theory leaves many nagging questions unanswered at the intersection of literature and history. First, in thinking of a literary work as an historical source, it is difficult to establish the categorical importance of the reflections and perceptions of the people represented in that work. The question of individual subjectivity and the process through which it forms is,



of course, a concern in philosophy and literary criticism, and these disciplines typically do take into consideration the subjectivity of the writer. However, the realm of thoughts, ideas, and actions of the individuals and social groups about which the author writes does not often appear on this horizon of concerns.<sup>19</sup> For the cultural or social historian reading a literary text, the vague and highly mediated presence of social actors other than the writer is troublesome. All that is known about the people represented as thinking, feeling, hoping, and believing human beings is conjecture, composed of observations made through the eyes of the author; in the cases on which this study focuses, the *cronista*.

The use of conjecture in reconstituting the past does not pose a problem in itself. All the raw materials that historians use, by definition, are extracted from the context in which they were created and extrapolated from the spotty comments of observers. In an essay intended to blur what he argues is an artificial divide between conjectural and evidential lines of inquiry, historian Carlo Ginzberg demonstrates that both history and philology —textual criticism— have their methodological roots in conjectural reconstruction and analysis.<sup>20</sup> The methodology that Ginzberg proposes seeks out "infinitesimal traces which permit the comprehension of a deeper, unattainable reality."<sup>21</sup> To scrutinize the situation for "traces, symptoms, and clues" —drawing an analogy with art connoisseurship, Hippocratic medicine, and Sherlock Holmes's ingenious detective work— is to note aberrations or changes that enable the acute observer to reconstruct the material details and structures of what happened and what existed.

Yet there is a problem in trying to apply Ginzberg's paradigm to the use of literary sources such as the *crônica*. The animal tracks allow the hunter to call upon his particular hunting genius to reconstruct and narrate the story of the animal that passed. The story the hunter tells is about the hunt and the animal, and not directly or necessarily about the pack the animal ran in or avoided, or the larger ecosystem of which the animal was a part. For this, the tracks would be simply inadequate. All the systems of clues that Ginzberg describes — Sherlock Holmes looking at the cigarette ash, for instance — are clues that are vestiges of the story that the historian, detective, or art connoisseur tries to reconstruct. In contrast, the *crônica* is a vestige of the writer's interaction with the society he describes, not necessarily of the society itself.

When attempting to make the *crônica* a useful source of historical information on turn-of-the-century Rio, there exists another related problem to be taken under consideration. The connection between the text and the actual lives of those being portrayed is obscure not only in that the text lacks traces of human subjectivity, but also in that these texts did not, for the most part, play an important or any part in the lives of the people being described.



*Cronistas* were in many ways outsiders to the culture they portrayed. Because of the exceedingly low rate of literacy, the large number of foreigners who could not read Portuguese, and the inaccessibility of newspapers and books to much of the population, the contemporaneous importance of these writings in both influencing and reflecting popular opinion is questionable.<sup>22</sup> In a culture like turn-of-the-century Rio, in which oral and other types of non-textual cultural transmission held such an important role relative to that of printed matter, it is inherently problematic to rely on textual sources to reconstruct the cultural past.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps the trickiest question to which a literary source is vulnerable as an historical source is: What do we make of the literary element in it? These sources were written purporting to fact but also for aesthetic enjoyment and thus under the tacit literary contract between writer and reader to suspend disbelief. Literature, by its very nature, tends to aestheticize and to find universal themes. As Nicolau Sevcenko reminds us in his study of literary production in republican Rio, to produce creative literature is by definition an act of nonconformity.<sup>24</sup>

A text that society has consecrated as literature exists simultaneously as an artifact of an act of observation and as discourse — the manipulation of ideas in the form of language. Because of their artistic value, literary texts inherently contain elements that escape our best efforts to explain and contextualize them historically. Yet a version of this obscurity exists in any historical document. The crux of the theoretical question an historical researcher must apply to a literary work, then, is not whether or how to force an either-or decision between literary "text" and historical "document," but rather what must be done conceptually to a work of literature before we can use it with impunity as an historical source. So, how *do* we subject a literary text to historical interrogation? Do we seek to isolate the mimetic rather than the imaginative effort the author put into it? Is it possible to tame a literary work without doing violence to the imaginative power that produced it, and therefore to the ranging meaning it contains? It probably is not. But we can back up and observe the different levels of observers and observed. A bird's eye view of the different interpretive relationships will show how we might equate a literary work such as a *crônica* with a court record, a photograph, or a political speech in terms of the richness and usefulness of the historical data it provides.

The distance between the actual moment and material reality that the writer records and the inclusion of that recording in an historical reconstruction can be seen as occurring in a series of interpretive steps, beginning with the act of observation or inspiration that initiates the writing of the document. To begin to re-envision the literary text as an historical document, it is first necessary to understand how the literary writer acts in his or her role as observer. There is

a distance between the person recording the information and the subject: for instance, the gap between the arresting police officer making a report and the criminal suspect. If arrested for vagrancy in Rio in the early twentieth century, for example, the accused would be subject to identification by a government body that existed exactly for that purpose. Looking now at the archived police records, through the various steps of an arrest process in the 1920s it is possible to see the same prisoner identified as black, white, and mulatto at different moments of his or her encounter with the judicial bureaucracy. One can only assume that these police officers intended to record faithfully the simple and objective information about prisoners that their job required. The human failings and idiosyncrasies of recorders of information later to be used as an historical source — in this case officers of the law— are clearly manifest. The lives being recorded in an historical document are infinitely complex and dynamic, and the observer can only ever hope to record an infinitesimally small shard of observable reality.

We can axiomatically agree, however, that there is something real that is the object of the writer's attention. In the case of the distance between the literary writer and his or her subject matter, the distance is infused with the writer's creative spirit. Indeed, often a writer uses that observed and lived reality only as a point of departure for a trip into a universe of his or her own artistic creation. All documents bear the distorting marks of the conditions under which they were written. Like the unspoken presence of torture in Inquisition testimony or politics in a campaign speech, the literary imagination in a novel, poem, play, or *crônica* is an unknown quantity whose impact is beyond analysis but undeniably has conditioned the data the document contains. Yet this by no means renders the document unusable, and the careful historian can account for and thematize the distance between the recorder of the information and the observed —for example, between the late nineteenth-century *cronista* and the crowded street scene he rhapsodically describes— in the course of the research and writing process.

To carry out such cautious historical investigation of the distance between the writer and the text he or she produced would indeed necessitate reading the text closely and learning of the stylistic predilections and personal perspective of the writer. But the historian cannot stop there, as it is necessary to use these insights to push the analysis of these texts further in order to see their composition as not just an act of observation but of creation. The cumulative effect of generations of scholars and writers whose prevailing tendency has been to treat *crônicas* as a factory of facts rather than as a social force in themselves has denied us the most subtle and potentially interesting way of understanding these texts as records of history. They acted to create social and geopolitical categories, such as the "underground" world this study



will later describe, and also to naturalize this same system of social classification they played a part in forming. The literary writer who reports on the daily life of Rio's poor, just like the judge's clerk (*escrivão*) who lists the skin color of an unemployed man who must serve prison time for the crime of vagrancy, records the category of the person while defining who will fit into this category in the future. Both records are invaluable to the historian, and both acts of recording are worthy of exhaustive study and circumspect use.

We can provisionally agree, then, that literary texts are not inherently more problematic than other types of documents and artifacts from which an historian customarily derives clues and insights about the past. Although the writer uses thematic, stylistic, formal, and grammatical qualities of language to creative/artistic ends, we can analyze the system of thought that produced the work. Writers whose work this article will touch on —João do Rio, Lima Barreto, and, in a more perfunctory manner, other *cronistas* such as Raul Pompéia, Luís Edmundo, Orestes Barbosa, and Coelho Netto— each produced a body of work whose individual character reflects strongly and clearly the preferences, personal experiences, and ideologies of the author in question. They sought to catalog the everyday, but not at random. As an individual, each *cronista's* selection of details, repetition of certain favorite themes, and passing of moral judgments, all occur within this economy of meaning. As a collective but heterogeneous and dynamic force in society, these writers can speak eloquently to the historian as part of a collection of contradictory stories. The ultimate goal of applying these texts to historical analysis is not to lay bare these contradictions or attempt to resolve them, but to set them against each other.

### **‘Com que linguagem falar da cidade?’**

The *crônica's* late-medieval European beginnings foreshadow some of the questions now brought to bear on its usefulness in reconstructing the past. In the Iberian world, the *crônica* was born when Dom Duarte, King of Portugal, created the official post of *cronista-mór* in 1434 to document the accomplishments and activities of the royal dynasty and the loosely bound nation over which they ruled. In its early incarnations in the Iberian tradition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the *crônica* served to elaborate a national history based in a shared tradition. These early *cronistas* did not concern themselves with authenticity and attention to fact in assembling data; if the facts in late-medieval *crônicas* were not outright fabrications, they were usually lifted from older works.<sup>25</sup> The genre represented a purposeful attempt to compose a narrative of national history. Paradoxically, the *crônica* also



grew out of oral tradition. The plebeian telling and retelling of local stories intersected with the desire of kings to record moments of dynastic import in the early prototypes of the genre. It was marked by oral flourishes that some literary historians still observe in the lyrical style and meandering structure of the *crônica* of today. Since in orally transmitted culture each teller adds something of his or her own invention, oral testimony began to lose its legitimacy as the scientific revolution took hold in the mid-seventeenth century. Through several different stages attributed to its genealogy, from the chronicler-conquerors of colonial Latin America to the moralist wanderings of Daniel Defoe and his peers through Early Modern European cities, the *crônica* would fall away from its performative, oral roots and flourish henceforth in the textual world of the literate.

It was with this historical trajectory that the *crônica*—instrument of national history and narrative form that programmatically denies orality—came to Brazil.<sup>26</sup> The rapid growth of the Brazilian periodic press in the nineteenth century played a notable role in the hold that the *crônica* came to have on Brazil and the burgeoning city that was its capital.<sup>27</sup> Since the 1870s, the literary chronicle has been the "almost daily companion of the *carioca* reader."<sup>28</sup> The end of the nineteenth century, a time characterized by a rebirth of literary nationalism and ardent nativism, saw the emergence of several writers who undertook to make the transition from journalist to literary writer or, in reverse, from belletristic dilettante to journalistic *cronista*.<sup>29</sup> These writers seem to have filled several social and cultural functions in providing entertainment, cultural enrichment, gossip, and information about the increasingly complex urban world of the First Republic.

The Brazilian *cronistas* whose texts would be used as fodder for historians of the city asked at least implicitly the same literary questions as those posed by their predecessors such as Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, and Charles Dickens: What language should one use to speak of the city?<sup>30</sup> The answer to this interpretive problem ultimately was an individual authorial choice. Despite their varying approaches to the literary use of language, *cronistas* all concerned themselves directly with the mundane aspects of the city. They wandered the streets and described the places they visited, publishing their short pieces in the daily press and, only occasionally, collecting their essays in volumes. Although they may well have fictionalized many of their accounts, they were eye-witness observers of and at least to some degree participants in the scenes, social interactions, and urban landscape they made careers out of chronicling.

Contemporaneous ideas about the city clearly influenced Rio's *cronistas'* stylistic and formal approach. During the period encompassed in this study, the earliest urban histories to consider the city as a unit of analysis, and even

as a social actor in itself, emerged.<sup>31</sup> Narrative prose such as realism and naturalism in Europe and the Americas in the late nineteenth century, including that written by the *cronistas*, typically comprised a sort of scientific experiment. The writer's methodology of collecting stories, and often of entering unfamiliar territory such as tenement blocks and prisons in the line of duty, has labeled the *cronista* as a kind of proto-ethnographer or scientist. *Cronistas*, like the naturalist novelists who were their contemporaries, created a more or less fictional space in which creatively conjured elements — people, forces, exogenous events — interact in a given sequence.<sup>32</sup> They inhabited the city as both voyeur and active participant, and their writing comprised an act of creation not just of literary art but, in certain ways, of *carioca* urban society itself.<sup>33</sup>

### A Brief Case Study: Chronicling the "Underworld"

If the street corner was the scene where the lively drama of daily urban life occurred, it also had far less appealing associations. In the imagination of many members of Brazilian society, sordid and dangerous forces reigned on the city streets, from assassins to pickpockets to prostitutes to disease-causing miasmas, and everything in between.<sup>34</sup> After the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the end of the monarchical Brazilian Empire in 1889, the new Brazilian republic experienced the consolidation of political and economic power in the city. As in much of the rest of Latin America during this period, elite intellectuals viewed the urban center as the principal site of both the civilizing mission and the nation-building project. In the first few years of the twentieth century, the mayor's office sent out armies of workers to demolish tenement houses, widen narrow streets into boulevards inspired by the Paris of Georges Haussmann, and make Rio into a concrete showcase of Brazil's orderly progress.<sup>35</sup> As the city's poor population swelled, the local and national elites undertook the programmatic repression of many forms of popular culture and police vigilance over daily life of the poorer classes. Historians have shown that an elite obsession with transcending what they perceived as laziness and colonial backwardness, mixed with racial and class tensions, contributed to a deep fear of the city's poor and working classes.<sup>36</sup>

The physical location of this fear came to be known as the "underworld," or *submundo*.<sup>37</sup> Rio's *cronistas'* writings came to typify the narrative that described aspects of this *submundo*. Their understanding of the world of illicit and usually amoral activity associated with the poor and nonwhite populations of the city was more than just discursive. Its importance straddles the realm of ideas and values recently designated "the popular imaginary," and also the arenas of juridical and political action. As both

observers of and participants in this social process of the invention of the underworld, the *cronistas'* depictions of this marginal space in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro provides an ideal case through which to probe those theoretical and methodological questions of appropriateness, accuracy, representation, and subjectivity that the historical use of literary sources in general raises.

The *submundo*, the realm of activity that mainstream Brazilian society came to designate juridically as illicit and as a cultural world apart, provides a fascinatingly telling case of the construction of a normative view of urban society. Recent scholarship has identified the First Republic as a period in Brazil's history when it is possible to observe the modernization of the traditional, oligarchic social order as it became a new but still dramatically stratified society enforced by the apparatus of the modern state. Although historians do not agree upon the particular constellation of causes behind this phenomenon, there is a general consensus that a process of "*aburguesamento*" (*embourgeoisement*) brought about a class and race-related cultural separation between "high" and "low" enforced by judicial means.<sup>38</sup> A detailed description of the material characteristics and forms of cultural expression of Rio's marginal socioeconomic classes that came to be associated with the so-called underworld during the First Republic stands outside the scope of this brief study. It bears mentioning, however, that this underworld did not exist in one agreed upon or commonly understood locale. As with similar concepts in other cities throughout the world at this time, the term described the activities that the populations considered dangerous engaged in and the places they frequented.<sup>39</sup>

For the historian of Rio wishing to study the empirical reality and mythology of experience and belief consigned to the underworld, the use of the *cronistas'* narrative descriptions of daily urban life is not just the gravy but in fact the meat and potatoes of historical analysis. In addition to filling in holes in the historical knowledge in other types of documents, the *crônicas* help us to solve the mystery of how and why urban Brazilian society drew the line between the morally/legally permissible and the illicit in the manner in which they did.

Of the several authors who reported on this dangerous but enticing realm, I will introduce two whose work contrasts in revealing ways. The paragraphs to follow will examine selected works that might provide historians with information on the social and cultural history of Rio's urban life on both sides of the frontier between licit and illicit spheres of action, as well as clues about the workings of the system that draws that line. João do Rio and Lima Barreto, two now canonical *carioca* writers of *crônicas* publishing at roughly the same time, come from markedly different perspectives. The works of these



writers can be seen as both reporting on and contributing to the creation of the social and geopolitical category of the underworld in the context of Rio on the verge of modernity. The paragraphs below will outline a selection of writings that suggests rather than proves these *cronistas'* contribution to the invention of the underworld. The purpose here is to pose an open question that calls for further empirical research, and above all to draw conclusions about the promise and the problems involved in the use of these writings to reconstruct Brazil's urban past.

In a classic example of the turn-of-the-century preoccupation with intrepid fact-gathering and faithful fact-checking about the urban social and cultural scene, *cronista* and renowned dandy João do Rio begins his *crônica*, *As religiões do Rio*, with this epigram: "Cecy est un livre de bonne foy." "This," he tells the reader, misquoting sixteenth-century French nobleman and essayist Michel de Montaigne, "is a book of good faith."<sup>40</sup> This volume compiles a collection of *crônicas*, first published as a series of reports in Rio's daily newspaper *Gazeta de Notícias*. It epitomizes the *cronista* in his role as ethnographer; the author attempts to observe the entire range of religious practice that occurred in the city of Rio de Janeiro, from Afro-Brazilian religions to the Positivist church. He frames his project as a "good faith" quest for truth, but he couches his observations in the language of mystification. In this book and others, his insatiable desire to enter ever darker corners of his deeply beloved city and articulate their wonders in lyrical and politically disengaged language has provided fodder for those curious today about the city and people he observed.

João do Rio, born Paulo Barreto, uses rhapsodic style to describe mundane occurrences on the city streets. By all accounts, the author had an intensely personal and ostentatiously public relationship with the city of Rio where he was born, lived, and died at the age of 40 in 1921. His life and writing attracted scholarly interest only infrequently until the 1970s, when literary critics revived his work. Now he is required reading for anyone studying the cultural history of Brazil's First Republic. Using the *crônica-reportagem*, a new literary genre that he himself created, he concerned himself with exploring and commenting on all aspects of daily urban life, from the pathetic, to the ostentatious, to the absurd, to the purely mundane, to the sublime. In his works, the boundary between literature and journalism is impossible to draw with any degree of precision. João do Rio invented his hybrid category at an historical period when the former was being recreated and the latter was being invented. In a typically clever turn of phrase, he referred to himself as an "*arte-sã*," a pun that makes reference to the Portuguese words for both "artisan" and "sane art."<sup>41</sup> His short but prolific life and career constituted an earnest revolt against the Romantics,

Symbolists, and *decadentistas* who had clustered in Rio's salons, book shops, and *confeitarias* (tea shops) composing fanciful European-inspired poems and dominated the literary scene for the last half century.<sup>42</sup> His aesthetic rebellion is not only against the precious and, he would argue, egotistical and artistically spurious material produced by the likes of Olavo Bilac and Coelho Netto, but also against the "vulgarization and massification of customs and the arts."<sup>43</sup>

In a collection of chronicles that epitomizes his relationship with his beloved Rio de Janeiro, a series of magazine and newspaper essays united under the title *A alma encantadora das ruas* in 1908, João do Rio wanders through the city and comments on the daily lives of its rich assortment of personalities and physical human types.<sup>44</sup> He launches frequently into long, rhapsodic passages that express his wonderment at the urban alchemy that animates the streets of Rio. Under the avowed influence of the ideas of European writers such as Oscar Wilde, Eugène Sue, and E. Demolins, João do Rio held that "The primary and decisive cause for the diversity of races is the street, the path that men follow [*o caminho que homens seguirem*]. It was the street that created the social race and type."<sup>45</sup> Here, he applies contemporaneous ideas about geographic determinism, on the micro-level, to the city streets. He cleverly alludes to the double meaning of the word "path" (*caminho*), employing the vernacular, metaphoric meaning of the word to create a formula through which the streets upon which one walks will govern the direction one's life takes. The urban types that the streets generate are organic outgrowths of the diversity of conditions throughout the city—from the filthy tenements and gambling dens to the posh boutiques of the rua do Ouvidor, Rio's finest shopping street. This statement of the deterministic force that the city imposes on human destinies implicitly justifies the author's short but productive lifetime of writing dedicated to wandering those streets and cataloging its types.

According to the paradigm in which João do Rio operates, his detailed descriptions of Rio's back alleys and boulevards arise naturally from the environment in which he places himself. To receive inspiration from the "Muse of the Streets" one needs only to wander them and to observe, and to let one's heart beat in rhythm with the "heart of the *urbs*."<sup>46</sup> Although João do Rio's muse is explicitly a plebeian one—he terms her "a *Musa-povo*"—, the writer's perspective is a high-minded, high society one. He composes his literary portraits of the urban underworld (although he rarely uses that term) under the spell of the city streets, which cause him to see beauty and fascination in a rag-clad peddler or to explain that Rio's prison walls are bursting with "bards," "troubadours" and other poets.<sup>47</sup>

The main character in João do Rio's now classic collection, *A alma*



*encantadora*, is nothing less than the city street, the great enchantress whom he genders female not only because of its grammatical designation (*a rua*), but moreover because of its power to seduce and to generate human life.<sup>48</sup> With the relationships between domestic and public life in rapid flux during this time, the streets evoked a particular mix of danger and comfort for this author and others. Sevckenko describes Rio's streets as a new social and cultural world, where the well-off began to step out of their colonial verandas and salons and out into public spaces newly lit by gas lamps and electric lighting. This "new world" held such importance for those who benefited from it that they "sought to organize themselves to guarantee its maintenance, to demand its extension to all of the most far-flung points of the city and to prevent it from reverting" to the primitive and disorderly state in which they believed it had languished before.<sup>49</sup>

Even among the elite, however, competing and even self-contradictory aesthetic codes governed what people believed made the urban landscape beautiful. João do Rio spared neither wealthy, consumerist philistines nor poor, depraved urban criminals in his often sarcastic critiques. Yet in the variety of urban types that he describes, it does not seem to have mattered if some were morally and aesthetically repugnant, as for João do Rio the beauty of the city as a whole seems to have been an unquestioned and eternal quality.

So, when João do Rio ambled through the city's back alleys and interviewed the illegal gambling agents on the street corner, what occurred between himself and his subject? What went into his act of observation and classification that we might now use to understand the *crônica*, the textual artifact of that encounter? His manner of depicting poor and working-class people never intends to assert their equality with members of elite society, even though he glorifies their folkloric, colorful ways. However, the *cronista*-dandy goes so far as to identify himself with members of underworld society: "What does it mean to be a *flâneur*?" He proceeds to answer his own question. "To be a *flâneur* is to be a vagabond and to reflect, it is to be a vagrant and to make commentary, to have the virus of observation that is connected to that of vagrancy. It is to wander around, in the morning, in the day, at night, to walk among the masses." A *flâneur* spends his day roaming from the theaters of the center of the city to the public spaces in the outlying suburbs where the poor met to compose and sing, and write popular ditties, admiring all minute details along the way, and following his whims.<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that in early twentieth-century Brazil, when this work was published, the terms "vagabond" and "vagrant" were heavily weighted with moral, class, and racial connotations. João do Rio asks the reader to consider equating his own writer's profession with that of the vagrant, whom the political and judicial authorities had labeled dead weight to society because



they were guilty of the crime of doing nothing. "Perhaps," he responds, "to be a *flâneur* is to have the distinction of perambulating with intelligence. There is nothing like the useless to be artistic."<sup>51</sup> João do Rio's mission as *cronista* was to turn the useful, the daily mundane activities of the urban masses, into the useless, and thus into art. Here he defiantly plays with the bourgeois ethic of usefulness and work that he found so appallingly prosaic and uninteresting. The writer's odd identification with this persecuted, floating population interests us principally for one reason.<sup>52</sup> In demonstrating the similarities between how he spends his day and the daily life of a vagrant, he shows an acute awareness of the arbitrariness of the line between rich and poor, between that which society permits (indeed, condones) and that which it outlaws. The poor and working-class who belonged to João do Rio's underworld existed as part of a seamless and beautiful whole which, although it was a city socially stratified, was not bitterly divided against itself but rather peacefully and permanently resigned to its divided state.

In contrast with João do Rio's propensity to aestheticize misery and poverty, Lima Barreto (Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto), who was not successful in his final bid for Paulo Barreto's seat in the Brazilian Academy of Letters upon the latter writer's death in 1921, wrote about the urban poor and working class neighborhoods with a sharp sense of irony and a deep tone of melancholy.<sup>53</sup> Unquestioned among literary critics and historians as one of the *carrioca* writers of greatest artistic and cultural accomplishment, Lima Barreto died in 1922 at only forty-one years of age, destroyed by alcoholism and mental illness. This son of a former slave mother and a (white) Portuguese father was a prolific journalist and chronicler, and novelist, who has been the subject of prodigious amounts of biographical and literary-critical study.

Lima Barreto, unquestioned among literary critics and historians as one of Brazil's greatest writers, held conventions of language as far less important than social justice. His low esteem for "rancorous and ultracanonial grammar" is only matched by his nationalism and his love of Rio's popular socioeconomic classes and the neighborhoods where they lived.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the large body of work that he left behind when he died at only forty-one years of age, evidence demonstrates that Lima Barreto had a heightened idea of his vocation as a writer and his social role in that capacity.

Lima Barreto's *crônicas* are marked by return visits to particular spaces; his favorite places to visit included Rio's cemeteries, and the north and west ("suburban") zones of the city to which, increasingly, Rio's poor were forced to relocate.<sup>55</sup> Many of these favorite places are associated with the underworld of criminals, marginal members of society.<sup>56</sup> His examinations of the underworld did not elicit lyrical soliloquies inspired by the "urban

Muse," but rather poignant, dismal, or hopeful examinations of the injustices that his fellow human beings withstood and the failings of the official apparatus supposed to benefit all the people of Brazil.<sup>57</sup> His cynical comments never overshadow his abiding, visceral love for his city.

Although his personal misery and cynicism are the subject of some discussion in Brazilian literary history, some have read an overwhelmingly hopeful spirit in his writing. Lima Barreto's work indicates a belief that the new Brazilian republic provided an opportunity for modernity, and his vision for modernity was a democratic one of equal opportunity through communal spirit, education, social awareness.<sup>58</sup> In his writings, he suggests that those groups of people marginal to mainstream politics and society suffer because they have been betrayed by the state and denied political participation. He does not portray a beautified urban underworld as João do Rio does, but he does seek out and glorify everything vernacular as the only hope for what he perceived as an unjust and inefficiently run Brazil. Only the poor and working-class *povo*, the undervalued heart and soul of the Brazilian nation, could save the nation from the economic and spiritual impoverishment toward which he believed it was headed. The exact mechanism through which he hoped this would be accomplished seems unclear even to Lima Barreto himself.

A closer look at the *crônicas* of Lima Barreto demonstrate that his approach to the poor and working classes of Rio is more ambivalent than it may appear. For example, in the short texts written in the 1910s and collected in his *Vida urbana: Artigos e Crônicas* (or, Urban Life: Articles and Stories) he writes about the theatrical reviews that were a mainstay of Rio's popular music scene with a tone of unease. In these writings, he reveals his relationship with popular culture to be a confusing and unsettling one, tugging him back and forth between his heartfelt love of the popular classes and his regard for taste and the artistic. Similar tension is evident in his description of the practice of fortune-telling, which he treats condescendingly but supports in the end because, paraphrasing the author, we all need illusions.<sup>59</sup>

In the arbitrary demarcation between right and wrong, licit and illicit, fortunate and unfortunate, Lima Barreto observed that the poor, mostly darker-skinned majority tended to lose. The chronicler repeatedly described in his writings different members of Brazilian society who fell on the wrong or the right side of the law due to nothing more than luck.<sup>60</sup>

In a *crônica* from *Vidas urbanas* simply titled "An anecdote," he evokes some of his complicated sentiments on the arbitrariness of the classifications of the criminal and the moral in his society. This first-person account is told from the perspective of someone poor living in a room that looked "like a sepulchre." One night he returned home exhausted, and he napped. Awaking

to find a would-be robber in his room, he apprehended the unwelcome guest, who did not resist, and grabbed him to turn him in to the police. On the way to the local police station, the two men began a friendly conversation. "I liked him," the narrator says. Passing by a café, the robber invites the narrator in, who accepts. He continues, "after a little while, I had forgotten that I had before me someone who had tried to rob me." When it came time to pay, the would-be criminal asks, "do you have any money on you?" "No," the narrator says. The thief pulled a large bill out of his pocket.<sup>61</sup>

Such is Lima Barreto's treatment of the underworld of criminals and shadowy figures. Their lives bear detailing and have meaning. If given their natural sense of community, the freedom to provide mutual assistance, and ability to set their own moral standards, the popular classes can survive and thrive. Yet it appeared to him that the city provided little latitude for the exercise of those freedoms. Lamenting the influx of desperate Brazilians from the countryside flooding the city of Rio seduced by greed and disingenuous politics, Lima Barreto tells of how their fascination for the city draws them there and then their sad fate leaves them as "vagabonds" in the streets. "Go back to the land! Go back to the farm!" he implores. The author ends this especially poignant *crônica* with a potent dose of his characteristic sarcasm: "*O Rio civiliza-se!*", he writes.<sup>62</sup>

In reiterating this battle cry of the turn-of-the-century rebuilders and reformers of the city, which may be translated as "Rio, get civilized!" or "Rio, civilize yourself!", the author reminds the reader of some of the human costs of the elites' modernizing mission. For Lima Barreto, civilization did not lie so much in a particular place as it did in a type of relationship between human beings, one which he felt was about to be lost to the world. The underworld of those overlooked or plowed under by the civilizing process fascinated Lima Barreto since, among other things, he appears to have felt that it upheld a possibility for Brazil genuinely to civilize itself. More than their importance as individual subjects, the prostitutes, thieves, old gamblers, police soldiers, poor children, and vagabonds who populate his chronicles have profound meaning to Lima Barreto as upholders of an all-important but endangered community. Only with the second coming of this community did Lima Barreto feel he could hope for collective success, happiness, and justice for the Brazilian nation. It is in this spirit that he observed the people of Rio and published his reflections on them.

## Conclusion: Dilemmas and Possibilities

For both these writers and others of the genre they represent, the city was observable; in fact, it demanded observation of all its minute details and most



hidden and obscure crevices. It was the job of the *cronista* to make the obscure and obscene more transparent and approachable. But, ultimately, if it became fully comprehensible, it would no longer be interesting. Rio's *crônicas* of the early twentieth century are marked by the writer's ability to let this obscurity wash over him as a source of intense pleasure. Coelho Netto, in an essay called "Confissão," in his collection of *crônicas Vida Mundana*, writes, "No, I don't have any scruples about confessing that I am a sensualist [*sensual*]. Epicurius affirmed that the belly [*ventre*]<sup>63</sup> was the center of pleasure, or certainly its immediate environs. I would place the center of pleasure higher, in the brain, the core of imagination. I am a *cerebrino* [a brain-oriented person]: my sensualism, or whatever you would like to call it, is not satisfied with the material pleasure of possession, it is more demanding, it is refined through voluptuousness, or lasciviousness, as you like."<sup>64</sup> He finds — and invites the reader to find with him— sensual pleasure in the mental journey he takes to Rio's elite tearooms and decrepit taverns. The somewhat paradoxical objective of the *cronista* is to provide an entertaining and instructive portrait of dense, threatening terrain and often, too, to feel pleasure from this interaction. The city is entertaining and pleasurable exactly because it is dense and mysterious.

Here, one of the ripple effects of this type of portrayal becomes apparent. It is important to realize that to mystify is to leave both the observer and the reader, who identifies with the observer as an ineffectual player, left standing agape in the face of the terrible, sublime beauty of the underworld. One needs to ask how this perspective might distort the historian's sense of the concerns of the poor majority and how they got through the day. One might further ask what the long-term effects of this mystification might have been, both in shaping the body of knowledge about the city and the way we, as researchers, approach it.

The *cronistas*, in describing the city, not only look awe-struck around the streets but also longingly to the past. Through both mystification and nostalgia, they have helped generate a discourse forever by definition removed from the reality of Rio's daily life. João do Rio, in 1909, in his column "Cinematógrafo," in the daily newspaper *Gazeta de Notícias*, laments that the modern city loses all that is specifically its own. "Uma cidade moderna é como todos os cidades," he writes; "A modern city is like any city."<sup>65</sup> With a certain prescience, he observes the phenomenon of globalization and homogenization already taking place. He visits the old markets where the popular classes buy their goods, and he is filled with nostalgia. Similarly, in Orestes Barbosa's 1920 descent into prison as an observer, he describes the phenomenon known as *capoeiragem*, Rio's largely Afro-Brazilian martial-arts gangs associated with violent assaults and fights

on the city streets, which had been under serious repression since the late nineteenth century. Barbosa laments the disappearance of *capoeiragem*, and he speaks sentimentally of the old-fashioned criminals and scoundrels of Rio ("os malandros antigos do Rio").<sup>66</sup>

The way the *crônica* mythologizes and mystifies the city is reflected in the way the thinkers and writers of the city have come to mythologize the *crônica*. *Cronistas* occupy a somewhat heroic place in *carioca* culture. They are said to embody and channel the spirit of the city of Rio and epitomize the people of Rio's own characteristic ways of manifesting and reproducing their culture: their appreciation of the *povo* and their folkways, proud scoundrel-spirit, and audacious exceptionalism. The editors who brought back into publication Barbosa's works in the late 1990s call Rio's *cronistas* "bard[s] of the city," who embody quintessentially the city's local life as they "seek the roots of the *carioca* people."<sup>67</sup> *Cronistas* are credited with recognizing "an endless literary vein" in the city streets. They "dedicated themselves to the street corner," thus altering the course of Brazilian literary writing at the end of the nineteenth century. The preface to Barbosa's volume further states, the *cronistas* "typify the figure of the urban inhabitant, positioning themselves as interpreters of a new reality *created by the city*" (emphasis mine).<sup>68</sup>

This last phrase is striking. In other words, the city itself has become an agent of action. Such pronouncements that place the city in the subject position of a sentence are surprisingly common in discussions of Rio's *cronistas*, and it appears that this genre of writing has inspired generations of literary critics and historians to view the city as a complete and reified presence rather than a process. According to the above quotation, it is the city itself that has created "a new reality." How, then, is it possible to allow for the fact that the city itself is in flux and undergoing a process of creation? How can we account for the multiplicity of human actors who push and pull history along? Discourse that imagines the city as an agent of action, almost as a character in the story, teleologically projects the city in its current form as an idea, if not yet as a material reality into existence.<sup>69</sup> And it tends to mystify the human process through which history is made. A possible solution to this dilemma is to understand the human elements of the city neither as a unified and concrete entity, nor as a sort of independent variable that is an accomplished fact, but rather as a process. In other words, to paraphrase the textual metaphor that William Roseberry uses, like all structural elements of society we should not view the city as "written." Rather, it is a continually renewed process; it is "writing."<sup>70</sup>

Certainly, this brief study primarily serves as a reminder of how much empirical and theoretical work needs to be done to allow historians to make *crônicas* and similar types of narrative texts speak evocatively of their time.



First, for methodological, theoretical and empirical reasons, we need to know more about the poor and working classes' relationship to the printed word. We know that through many such creative and often defiant means, people who did not know how to read sought the information and the power of the printed word. Yet much research remains to be carried out to tell these stories. Second, we need more complete information on how particular literary works have been used as historical sources and to what effect. Similarly, case-based research can further our understanding on the reciprocal relationship between discourse and experience. Extensive archival research on the social instruments behind the social reality of what I call in this study the urban "underworld" is needed to complement further research on the literary and discursive invention of this geopolitical and cultural space. From a case-study approach, it will be possible to trace the formation and acceptance of an idea such as that of the dangerous and sublime urban underworld. The history of ideas and new cultural history have paved the way for such an inquiry, but it has yet to be done. With a critical mass of this case-study scholarship, we can begin to make some educated suppositions about the legacy of the *cronistas*' portrayals of urban life, and how the use of these types of idiosyncratic sources have shaped the body of knowledge we have inherited.

The purpose of providing the earlier examples of two *cronistas* who have written on the urban underground with differing socioeconomic status and political views is not to show how ideology either consciously or subconsciously tainted their writings. That these authors' politics and values helped shape their depictions of their beloved city of Rio has been demonstrated elsewhere.<sup>71</sup>

Instead, I wish to emphasize that the historian's task in assimilating a literary text into his or her fund of knowledge about the past is neither to try to debunk the author of that text nor to neutralize his or her biases with formulaic disclaimers, but to understand them in the system of thought these authors helped create and the one that created them. When they are pressed into service as historical informants, as they so often and fruitfully are, literary writers can be comprehended as one voice added to the raucous symphony of other perspectives. What then begins to emerge is a social landscape marked by conflicting testimonies and competing ideas. It might not be possible to discern objectively what happened from the documents, but it is possible to understand how different social agents involved in these stories produce and explain their diverse versions of the story.<sup>72</sup>

This approach would involve placing analytical importance on social actors' interpretations and retellings of events. The idea that we can find illuminating truth through examining contradictions and conflicts among



social actors might help us get past the desire simply to raid texts such as Rio's *crônicas* for facts. On the other hand, such an approach might help us turn away from the propensity to drift further into the lifeless and depopulated realm of pure discourse.

## NOTES

1. "Tudo é às avessas./Rua da Saude./O estrangeiro vai atrás da placa, aluga uma casa lá e morre./ Mas, se a rua é pestilenta, por que tem esse nome?/ Ninguém explica./ Assim, a rua da Harmonia com os seus assassinatos bissemanais - a ladeira do Livramento, onde ninguém escapa de um assalto a mão armada./ E na política, como na diplomacia, na administração, como na arte, é tudo ao contrário do que se anuncia." Orestes Barbosa, *Bambambã!* 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Coleção Biblioteca Carioca, 1993), 94. This volume unites a selection of short pieces that the author first published in the 1920s. All translations are the author's, unless otherwise indicated.
2. This study was born as a conference presentation for the roundtable "New Approaches to Brazilian Studies: A Roundtable Discussion," at the Ninth Congress of the International Federation of Latin American and Caribbean Studies in Tel Aviv, in April 1999. The author wishes to thank Jeffrey Lesser for organizing the roundtable and for his patient, insightful assistance throughout the process of producing this article.
3. In this study, the shorthand term "Rio" will appear interchangeably with "Rio de Janeiro," as is the common practice in Brazil to denote the city.
4. A small but rich historical literature has begun to elucidate the historical process through which Brazilian urban society has drawn the line between licit and illicit behavior in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the period of the Brazilian Empire, see Thomas H. Holloway's already classic study, *Policing Rio de Janeiro: Repression and Resistance in a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century City* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), and Sidney Chalhoub, *Cidade Febril: Cortiços e epidemias na Corte imperial* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996), pp. 20-28, 39 and passim. For a work that straddles the Empire and the First Republic, see Martha Huggins, *From Slavery to Vagrancy in Brazil* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985). For the First Republic, see Boris Fausto, *Crime e cotidiano: A criminalidade em São Paulo (1880-1924)* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1984). The seminal work that develops the idea that the cultural and political impact of literary production does not result from but rather promotes geopolitical and epistemological boundaries is Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
5. The population of the Federal District of Rio de Janeiro grew from approximately 274,972 in 1872 to 522,651 in 1890, and finally reached 811,443 in 1906. Eulalia Maria Lahmeyer Lobo, *História do Rio de Janeiro: Do capital federal ao capital industrial financeiro*, vol. 2. (Rio de Janeiro: IBMEC, 1978), 470-471.
6. A complete bibliography of recent monographs, collections of essays, articles, and dissertations on Latin American urban history would be ponderously large. To name only a notable few, recent social and cultural history scholarship on cities in modern Latin America during the period that the present study covers includes: Ronn Pineo and James A. Baer, eds., *Cities of Hope: People, Protests, and Progress in Urbanizing Latin America, 1870-1930* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998); Teresa A. Meade, "Civilizing" Rio: *Reform and Resistance in a Brazilian City, 1889-1930* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania Univ. Press, 1997); Sidney Chalhoub, *Trabalho, lar, e botequim: O cotidiano dos trabalhadores no Rio de Janeiro da belle époque* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1986); Rachel Soihet, *Condição feminina e formas de violência: mulheres pobres e ordem urbana, 1890-1920* (Rio de

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- Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 1989); José Murilo de Carvalho, *Os bestializados: O Rio de Janeiro e a República que não foi* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987); and Jeffrey D. Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
7. That there is a common perception among historians and other scholars of Latin America that there exists a serious dearth of data on urban social and cultural history is apparent in the frequency with which such a dearth of sources is mentioned in the introductory remarks of scholarly works on the subject. See, for example, Ronn Pineo and James A. Baer, *Cities of Hope: People, Protests, and Progress in Urbanizing Latin America, 1870-1930* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 8.
  8. On the disregard for *cronistas* as both literature and history for much of the twentieth century, see Luís Martins, "Introduction," in João do Rio, *As religiões do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Aguilar, 1976), 7. See also Brito Broca, *Ensaio da mão canhestra* Series: Obras Reunidas de Brito Broca, vol. 11 (São Paulo: Livraria e Editora Polis, 1981), 179-182.
  9. New editions of *crônicas* first published (either in volumes or in newspapers) during Brazil's First Republic include João do Rio, *A alma encantadora das ruas*, 3rd reprint (Rio de Janeiro: Coleção Biblioteca Carioca, 1995) and Raul Pompéia, *Crônicas do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro: Coleção Biblioteca Carioca, 1996). For a recent volume in which literary critics and historians compile *crônicas* on Rio de Janeiro written from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, Beatriz Resende, *Os cronistas do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1995). For a recent, publicly-funded publication that demonstrates interest in *cronistas* to recuperate the history of the Brazilian state of Paraná, see Julio Estrela Moreira, *Fontes para a história do Paraná: cronistas séculos XIX e XX* (Curitiba: Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, 1990).
  10. Travel accounts have long been one of the most abundant sources of information on daily life in Latin America. The problematic nature of their use as historical sources has only recently begun to attract the attention of Brazilian scholars. See, for example, Miriam Lifchitz Moreira Leite, *Livros de viagem, 1803-1900* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 1997); and Ilka Boaventura Leite, *Antropologia da viagem: Escravos e libertos em Minas Gerais no século XIX* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 1996).
  11. Barbosa, Orestes, *Na prisão: crônicas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised. (Rio de Janeiro: Jacintho Ribeiro dos Santos, 1922).
  12. *Ibid.*, 17.
  13. Geoffrey Hartman, "Closing Remarks," in "Angelus Novus: Perspectives on Walter Benjamin," Conference (New Haven: Yale University, 27 September 1997).
  14. E. P. Thompson, quoted in Kenneth Mills and William B. Taylor. *Colonial Spanish America: A Documentary History* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1998), xvi.
  15. For an excellent summary of some of these historiographic trends, see Ciro Flamarion Cardoso and Ronaldo Vainfas, *Domínios de história: Ensaio de teoria e metodologia*. (Rio de Janeiro: Campus, 1997), chs. 2-5 and *ibid.* On the linguistic turn, see Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth, *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 536-37.
  16. In his influential essay "The Poverty of Theory or an Overly of Errors," British historian E. P. Thompson proposes certain "ways of interrogating facts" as part of the historian's task; in *The Poverty of Theory and other Essays* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1978), p. 30. This essay was written as an attack on French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's sweeping structuralist dismissal of the ability to achieve historical knowledge. According to Thompson, Althusser's claim that knowledge "emerges wholly within thought" makes it "possible to dismiss both the question of experience and the question of specific procedures of investigation (experimental or other) which constitute that empirical 'dialogue' which I will shortly consider"; 16.



17. Groden and Kreiswirth, 376.
18. For example, in the course of David Mayfield and Susan Thorne's excellent description of the various forms British historian Gareth Stedman Jones' scholarship has taken, these authors detail some of the turns scholarship has taken since the linguistic one, with which he argued that language determines thought and knowledge, and that we form our social identities discursively. The authors assert that language is not referential and prefigurative. "Social History and its Discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones and the Politics of Language," *Social History* 17 (2), 165-188. For an excellent synopsis of another, related scholarly debate, that surrounding New Historicism, see Groden and Kreiswirth, 536-37.
19. Subaltern studies, which extends into the study of both literature and history, is an exception to the failure to inquire directly into the subjectivity of the heretofore voiceless people about which a text is written. Subaltern studies has its own problems, however, that mitigate its usefulness in conceiving of a literary text as an historical document. Primarily, it has been criticized for its focus on discourse rather than material reality or the intersection of these two realms. For an example of a scholarly essay that levels this critique against subaltern studies, see Florencia E. Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 99.5 (Dec 1994), 1491-1515.
20. "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. Anne and John Tedeschi (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 96-125.
21. *Ibid.*, 101.
22. For an overview of the press in Brazil, see Maria Helena R. Capelato, *Imprensa e história do Brasil: Imprensa oficial e imprensa contestadora, o jornal como documento; o papel do jornal na história* (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1988).
23. I do not intend to argue here that it is not possible to use textual sources effectively to reconstruct the lives of peoples who did not themselves, for the most part, interact with texts. The discipline of archaeology rests on such inquiry. Furthermore, the historiography of colonial Latin America contains plentiful examples of the effective use of colonial texts to reconstruct the lives of indigenous peoples. In addition to the pioneering work of historian James Lockhart, see, for example, Karen Spalding, *Huarochiri: An Andean Society under Inca and Spanish Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984) and Sabine MacCormick, *Religion in the Andes: Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
24. *Literatura como missão: Tensões sociais e criação cultural na Primeira República* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1983).
25. Afrânio Coutinho, org., *Raul Pompéia: Obras*, vol. 6 (Rio de Janeiro: MEC-FENAME Editora Civilização Brasileira S. A., 1982), 13-34.
26. *Ibid.*, 18.
27. Carmem Lúcia Negreiros de Figueiredo, *Lima Barreto e o fim do sonho republicano* (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1995), 28. Resende, *Cronistas do Rio*, 27-42.
28. Resende, 11.
29. For an extended examination of the Brazilian nativism that characterized late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro, see June E. Hahner, *Poverty and Politics: The Urban Poor in Brazil, 1870-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).
30. Renato Gomes, "A cidade, todas as cidades," Lecture (New Haven: Yale University, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, October 1995).
31. Literary historian Richard Lehan names the three intellectuals, all sociologists, of particular importance in developing the modern study of the city; these include Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel. *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 6.
32. A work that epitomizes Brazilian naturalist prose during the First Republic is Aluísio Azevedo's *O Cortiço* (Rio de Janeiro: Garnier, 1890).
33. The term *carioca* signifies of or from the city of Rio de Janeiro.



34. Barbosa, 10. Chalhoub, 47-48. In her monographic study of the cultural politics of Lima Barreto and the historical context he lived through in Rio de Janeiro, Carmen Lúcia Negreiros de Figueiredo also points to the prevalent dread of the floating subaltern population, which fed the economy but raised race and class fear.
35. Meade, *Civilizing Rio*; Jaime Larry Benchimol, *Pereira Passos: Um Haussmann tropical: A renovação urbana da cidade do Rio de Janeiro no início do século XX* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca Carioca, 1990).
36. For example, see Sevcenko, *Literatura como missão*, 25-68 and passim; Chalhoub, *Trabalho, lar, e botequim*, 28-56, 171-230 and passim; Marcos Luiz Bretas, *A guerra das ruas: Povo e polícia na cidade do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1995); Carvalho, *Os bestializados*.
37. A careful etymological study of the word *submundo* in use in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Brazil certainly is called for here, but is outside the scope of the present study. An examination of the English word "underworld" shows that it was precisely this same historical moment, the last quarter of the nineteenth century, during which it came into use in the Anglophone world to signify an implicitly urban social environment populated by dangerous, criminal, and marginal individuals. See "underworld," *OED Online*.
38. Sevcenko, 33-34. Both literary critic Roberto Schwarz and historian Jeffrey Needell discuss at length the process through which the Brazilian urban elite culture in republican Brazil grew apart from the non-elite majority of the population. While Needell attributes the cultural stratification noted here to a persistent tendency among Rio's elite to imitate French culture, Schwarz argues that the "discrepancy between the 'two Brazils' was not due to an imitative tendency; nor did it correspond to a brief period of transition. It was the lasting result of the creation of a nation-state on the basis of slave labor." "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination," in *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (New York: Verso, 1992); Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque*.
39. See, for example, Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).
40. Luis Martins, "Introduction," in João do Rio, *As religiões do Rio*, 9.
41. Renato Cordeiro Gomes, *João do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Brasiliense, 1996), 42-43.
42. On Rio's late-Empire literary "bohemia," see Needell, 188-192.
43. As literary critic Renato Cordeiro Gomes points out in his biographical study of João do Rio, the writer expresses his disgust with what he perceives as the excessive popularization of culture through the carnivalesque character Zé Pereira in his work, *Crônicas e Frases do Godofredo de Alencar*, published in the first decade of the twentieth century. This figure is a "symbol of the Republic, an allegory of noise, moral fidelity, [and] cheap joy," whose presence has the ultimate effect of destroying what is truly important in Brazilian culture." *João do Rio*, 39.
44. 3<sup>rd</sup> reprint, (Rio de Janeiro: Coleção Biblioteca Carioca, 1995).
45. *Ibid.*, 11.
46. *Ibid.*, 173.
47. *Ibid.*, 153.
48. The fact that João do Rio was publicly gay is not inconsistent with his personification of the street as a woman. First, it stands to reason that the writer would have followed the literary and cultural convention of attributing mystery and seduction as a female quality, particularly since his career was characterized by his success as a widely popular, entertaining writer. Second, his relationship with the city streets was deeply mystical, and the use of this rhetoric of mystery and seduction is likely to have been intended as something spiritual and metaphysical, not just sexual.
49. Sevcenko, 37. Several works in the humanities and social sciences have asserted the importance of the street (*a rua*) as a Brazilian social and cultural construct. See Roberto da Matta, *A casa e a rua: espaço, cidadania, mulher e morte no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora

- Brasiliense, 1985). See also Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *House and Street: the Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
50. "A rua," *A alma encantadora*, 3-19.
  51. *Ibid.*, 5.
  52. For a full analysis of the role of the misery of the poor as a literary device in the works of João do Rio, see Antonio Arnoni Prado, "Mutilados da Belle-Époque: Notas sobre as reportagens de João do Rio." In Roberto Schwarz, ed., *Os pobres na literatura brasileira* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1983), 68-72.
  53. Needell, 223-224.
  54. Lima Barreto, *Recordações do Escrivão Isaías Caminha*. Quoted in Lima Barreto, *Vida urbana: Artigos e crônicas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1961). For the most part, the essays and stories that appear in this collection were first published as ephemera (in daily newspapers) during the first two decades of the twentieth century.
  55. See, for example, Lima Barreto, *Feiras e mafuás: Artigos e crônicas*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1956). The *crônicas* from this collection were originally published in newspapers in the early 1920s.
  56. Although Lima Barreto's posthumously published *folhetim* (pamphlet), *O subterrâneo do Morro do Castelo*, is a work of fiction and therefore falls outside the scope of this study, it is worth mentioning here. This pamphlet's title and thematic content — an underground excavation project in what had been one of the neighborhoods of Rio's popular classes — suggest that the underground as a geopolitical and cultural construct held an important position in Lima Barreto's imagination. (Rio de Janeiro: Dantes, 1997).
  57. For example, see Lima Barreto, *Vida urbana: Artigos e Crônicas*, 61-62.
  58. For example, see *ibid.*, 93-94.
  59. *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 64, and *passim*.
  60. *Ibid.*, 96-97.
  61. *Ibid.*, 238-239.
  62. *Ibid.*
  63. In the context of the above quotation, the word *ventre* used in the original Portuguese can be translated into English as either "belly" or "womb."
  64. 2nd edition (Porto: Livraria Chardron, 1924).
  65. Quoted in Renato Cordeiro Gomes, *João do Rio*, 13.
  66. *Bambabã!*, 201-202.
  67. Amarando Gens and Rosa Maria de Carvalho Gens, "Apresentação," in Barbosa, 9.
  68. *Ibid.*, 12.
  69. This is not to suggest that it was the *cronistas* and their commentators who originated the idea that the city itself is the "writer" of urban lives. Some notable recent scholarship in cultural history and literary criticism has emphasized formal aspects of writing as most important in understanding writers' attempts at mimesis, and therefore their importance as markers and tellers of history. In an urban context, this type of scholarship has argued that the exigencies and characteristics of urban life established the grammar and a vocabulary for all aspects of life. See, for example, Flora Süssekind, *Cinematografo de letras: Literatura, técnica, e modernização no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia de Letras, 1987); and Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*.
  70. "Balinese Cockfights and the Seduction of Anthropology," in *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History, and Political Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 17-29.
  71. On Lima Barreto, see Sevckenko, *Literatura como missão*. On João do Rio, see Roberto Magalhães, Jr., *A vida vertiginosa de João do Rio* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1978).
  72. For an excellent work of history that applies this methodological paradigm, see Chalhoub.