BOOK CLUB | RAUL POMPEIA| O ATENEU | 16TH JUNE, 6.30-9 PM

RAUL POMPEIA (1863-1895)

O Atheneu (Chronica de saudades) (1888)

translated into English as

The Athenaeum (2015)

Cover of the first edition of O Atheneu (Chronica de saudades), 1988
Boarding schools in fiction have long captured and re-enlivened our imaginations as depictions of the essence of ideal education but also as microcosms of human follies.

Revisit real and imaginary places of teenage years.

Discover the most famous fictional Brazilian boarding school at the height of its reputation in 19th century: The Athenaeum.

A father leaves his son at the doors of The Athenaeum, remarking that he is about to enter the real world, the young boarder is full of hopes, dreams and emotions, which gradually give way to angst as delusive hierarchies of power and complex human behaviours befuddle the boy.

This 1888 novel belongs to a long tradition of tales about schools dating as far back as ancient and medieval schools & those contemporary to The Athenaeum, early and Victorian British boarding schools, with the continual appeal to our days of Harry Potter’s boarding school!

Don’t miss multi-layered references: clue no. 1: name of the headmaster, Aristarchus, who happens to offer additional evening astronomy lessons (namesake of the famous Aristarchus of Samos)

And clue no. 2 is in the title. Athenaeums everywhere signposting long-standing shared values & unstinting cultivation of mind & soul, knowledge & arts kindling wit, imagination & creativity emanating wisdom.

DETAILS OF AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS:

ENGLISH


PORTUGUESE

FREE DOWNLOADS

The novel continues in print in Brazil with various editions available in Brazil.

**SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND TRANSLATIONS**

The original version of *O Atheneu (Chronica de Saudades)* comes with a subtitle, *Chronicle of Nostalgia*, placed in parenthesis, a fact that has more often than not been overlooked. A psychological novel and one of the great classics of Brazilian literature. However, scholars and publishers have tended to ascribe it to a category of the prevailing literary theory vogue or school.

First and foremost, it tells the story of the most famous fictional boarding school for boys in Rio de Janeiro in the second half of the 19th century with its cast of boarders along with the challenges and dramas they necessarily faced there. It could be described as partly biographical but almost all books on fictional schools in literature draw on the experience and perceptions of their authors in boarding schools. As a fictional genre, school stories have a long tradition and have been generating great interest as it is the case of Harry Potter’s school, Hogwarts, to date. In fact, the contemporaneous school fiction category describing Victorian schools and education share various themes and concerns with *The Athenaeum*. Equally, it seems plausible to argue that the author would have been aware of accounts of fictional schools in the 19th
England and elsewhere in Europe and knowledgeable about educational theories and practices.

In his choice of name for the school, Raul Pompeia evokes ancient temples of knowledge dedicated to Athena. In Rome, on the Capitoline Hill, Emperor Hadrian founded *The Athenaeum*, a school (*ludus* in Latin) for the promotion of literary and scientific arts (*ingenuarum artium*), adducing Athens, the city dedicated to the goddess Athena, and the city, which long remained as the ideal seat of intellectual refinement.

*O Atheneu (Chronica de Saudades)* was first published in *feuilleton* format in the *Gazeta de Notícias* from 8th April to 18th May 1888, gaining significant acclaim and subsequently published in book format in the same year by the *Gazeta de Noticias Press*. It was an immediate sales success story. A definitive edition (1905) would be published with illustrations by the author himself. There are 43 drawings by the author displaying his skills both as a draughtsman and caricaturist. The definitive edition brings the subtitle and a notice stating that the illustrations and text are the definitive original as reviewed by the author.

The full set of illustrations can be seen in the Francisco Alves Edition downloadable from *O Atheneu (Chronica de saudades)* Pompeia, Raul, 1863–1895 (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, [s.d.]) [http://www.brasiliana.usp.br/handle/1918/01505500](http://www.brasiliana.usp.br/handle/1918/01505500)
The Athenaeum is partly moulded upon the boarding school, which Raul Pompeia attended from 1873 to 1879, a very successful private boarding school, the Colégio Abílio founded by Abílio César Borges in 1871.

Abílio César Borges (1824 – 1891), Baron of Macaúbas, title granted in 1881 by Emperor Dom Pedro II, a Brazilian physician, educational innovator and reformer, owner of private boarding schools and author. He had founded other schools, the Ateneu Barrense and Ginásio Bahiano in Salvador, Bahia, in 1858, where he began to introduce innovative educational practices. He also taught at the high school that came to be known as ‘Colégio Sebrão’ (actually Colégio São José, founded in 1858, the mansion acquired by Prof. Francisco P. D’Almeida Sebrão, where notable Brazilians studied e.g. Rui Barbosa (1849-1923), Castro Alves (1847-1871) and many more currently the site of the Bahia Art Museum). He also taught the author, Raul Pompeia and Luís Edmundo de Melo Pereira da Costa (1878-1961) and many more.

Notice the likeness of Raul Pompeia’s illustration of the fictional headmaster Dr Aristarco Argolo de Ramos and the photo of Abílio César Borges (Photo by André Koehne).
Eleven years later, in 1881, because of the success of the Colégio Abílio in Rio de Janeiro, Abílio César Borges founded a branch, the Colégio Abílio in Barbacena in the state of Minas Gerais, where various notable Brazilians studied. Later, it became a Military High School and, currently, it is the home of the Barbacena Brazilian Airforce Air Cadets Training College.

Not only was Abílio César Borges a great innovator in education, he had travelled to Europe and became conversant with various educational theories (Pestalozzi, Locke to mention but a few), which broadened the foundations of his own educational philosophy. His ideas left a significant legacy in Brazil, which regrettably fell into oblivion.

He advocated high standards in teaching at all levels with care and attention to young learners, started the campaign to abolish corporal punishment in schools; introduced new concepts of state education for primary and secondary schools (a theme, which occupied contemporary Europeans especially in 19th century, e.g. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), François Guizot (1787-1874) & UK 1839 Committee of the Privy Council on Education) funded, published and distributed various books on a new model for state education, textbooks for various disciplines establishing a tradition of school textbooks and invented various devices/contraptions for teaching science, math and technology (with practical demonstrations), which have an enduring value to date; fostered reading from early school age creating a reading method, *Leitura Universal* (Universal Reading), for primary schools and offered numerous free reading courses, adapted classical literature to teenagers and hosted literary tournaments and developed content aimed at respect for civic duty. He set out his ideas in the theory and practice of children’s education in his 1884 book *Lei nova do ensino infantil*. He represented Brazil at the Buenos Ayres International Education/Pedagogical Conference in 1881. For him, education for all children was the only means by which Brazil could develop and become wealthier, and his vision was to educate and develop the young population within the highest standards of quality.

This background about Abílio César Borges, the Baron of Macaúbas, is most relevant for Raul Pompeia’s novel. Throughout the novel, there are multi-layered references to educational ideas and practices and even to the contraptions/devices that were used to teach various disciplines. Much attention has been devoted to the critical appraisal of the fictional headmaster and the boarding school and his money making enterprise or social class system or gender issues. This seems to be a contradiction as the subtitle hints at perceptions of the narrator, a sense of nostalgia expressed by the word ‘saudades’ in the subtitle, fond reminiscences of his time at the boarding school. The question stands, if the author added a subtitle, there must have been a reason. And why have later publishers decided to remove it?

There has been an excessive focus on other issues, which can be elicited from the narrative obliterating some fascinating ideas on learning and teaching. Albeit fictional, the novel mirrors some of the debates on education which were current in 19th century Brazil and further afield.

As ever, the advice is to read the book with an open mind and do not feel obliged to read introductions. Introductions in various editions do have a historical interest as they reflect points of view of a reader at point in time with overt or covert vested interests to persuade the reader that his/her interpretation is the most veritable. However, every reader brings his own encyclopaedic universe of knowledge to the reading act and embarking on the fictional journey offers a multiplicity of mental imaginary landscapes, which also vary at every repeated reading of any fictional story.

The translation into English was published only last year, 2015. The novel was translated by Renata Ruth Mautner Wasserman (1941-), a Professor Emerita at Wayne State University. The cover illustration is from an original drawing by Raul Pompeia.

Renata Wasserman has published the works related to Brazilian literature: book (1994) *Exotic Nations: Literature and National Consciousness in the*

The translator’s notes at the end of the book have been composed on the basis of professor Zenir Campos Reis 1979 O Ateneu edition (published by Editora Ática) foreword and notes. The English translation comes with an invented subtitle ‘A novel’ instead of the original.

The translation brings an introduction by César Braga-Pinto, associate professor of Brazilian, Lusophone African and Comparative Literature at Northwestern University, USA. He is the author of As Promessas da História: Discurso Profético e Assimilação no Brasil Colonial (2003) and the editor of Ligeiros Traços: escritos de juventude de José Lins do Rego (2007).

This publisher Northwestern University Press, similarly to various other current publishers, fails to revise the splitting of words at the end of lines properly, which is a pity.

BIOGRAPHY

RAUL POMPEIA (1863-1895)

Raul de Ávila Pompeia was born in Jacuecanga, Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro on 12th April 1863 and died in Rio de Janeiro on 25th December 1895. Son of Antônio de Ávila Pompeia, a well-off lawyer and Rosa Teixeira Pompeia (related to Tiradentes, Joaquim José da Silva Xavier). The family moved to the imperial capital in Rio de Janeiro and became a boarder of the Colégio Abílio and became a student of the Abílio César Borges, Baron Macaúbas (who had taught Castro Alves and Rui Barbosa).
Life changed for the young Raul Pompeia as soon as he started attending the boarding school. He was an exemplary student, enjoyed studying and reading, an excellent draughtsman and caricaturist. He even started editing and illustration a small newspaper *O Archote*. In 1879, he was transferred to Colégio Pedro II, and again became a distinguished speaker and wrote his book, *Uma tragédia no Amazonas* (1880).

In 1881, he went to read Law in São Paulo and became acquainted with the literary *mellieu* and reformist ideas. Very early, he became engaged with the
prominent abolitionist Luiz Gonzaga Pinto da Gama (1830 -1882), served as his secretary and also joined republican campaigns. He wrote for newspapers in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro often under the pen name Rapp.

He failed his degree exams in the 3rd year in 1883, and along with another 93 colleagues moved to Recife where he obtained his degree. In 1885, he returned to Rio and continued writing for newspapers and enjoying the bohemian life and the intellectual circles there. It was there that he penned *O Ateneu (crônica de saudades)* publishing it in 1888.

Once the Abolition of Slavery was decreed, he dedicated himself to the republican cause. In 1889, he contributed to *A Rua*, of João Carlos de Medeiros Pardal Mallet (1864 –1894) and the *Jornal do Comércio*. Once Brazil became a republic, Raul Pompeia was appointed to lecture on mythology at the Fine Arts School (Escola de Belas Artes) and, soon after that, as director of the National Library.

He was an ardent supporter of Floriano Peixoto (1839 –1895) contrary to most intellectuals of his group (e.g. Pardal Mallet and Olavo Bilac (1865 –1918). In a heated debate, a duel ensued between O. Bilac and R. Pompeia. The author fiercely opposed cosmopolitanism and regarded militarism embodied by Floriano Peixoto, as a true defence of the homeland at risk. When Floriano Peixoto died in 1895 he was removed from the National Library under the accusation that he had disrespected the President Prudente de Morais, in his eulogy at the funeral of F. Peixoto. His friends abandoned him and disdained by all acquaintances including those in newspapers, which used to publish his articles such as *A Notícia*, he ended his life with a bullet to his heart on Christmas Day 1895.

He was elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters, patron of chair 33.


The National Library of Brazil held a commemorative exhibition on the centenary of his birth in 1963: [http://bndigital.bn.br/projetos/200anos/raulPompeia.html](http://bndigital.bn.br/projetos/200anos/raulPompeia.html)

The Library also has an excellent set of source materials on Raul Pompeia: under the title in Portuguese ‘Um retórico na Biblioteca: o cometa Raul Pompéia (A Rhetorician in the Library: the Comet Raul Pompeia) including the 1963 exhibition catalogue. [http://bndigital.bn.br/projetos/200anos/raulPompeia.html](http://bndigital.bn.br/projetos/200anos/raulPompeia.html)

In 1979, a soap opera *Memórias de Amor* inspired by *The Athenaeum* was broadcast by the Rede Globo.

**Attendance is free, but booking is essential:**

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