BRAZILIAN BILINGUAL BOOK CLUB | LAURENTINO GOMES | 1808 - COMO UMA RAINHA LOUCA, UM PRÍNCIPE MEDROSO E UMA CORTE CORRUPTA ENGANARAM NAPOLEÃO E MUDARAM A HISTÓRIA DE PORTUGAL E DO BRASIL

21st September 6.30-9 PM

2017- the year of #lovetoreadBrazil

1808 - Como uma rainha louca, um príncipe medroso e uma corte corrupta enganaram Napoleão e mudaram a história de Portugal e do Brasil (2007)

by LAURENTINO GOMES (1956-)

translated as

1808: The Flight of the Emperor, subtitled How a Weak Prince, a Mad Queen, and the British Navy Tricked Napoleon and Changed the New World (2013)

Original Royal Decree on the opening of the ports to friendly nations issued by Dom João VI- 28th January 1808

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The story of an exceptional and unique case of a colony, which turned into a royal court … for thirteen years!

Laurentino Gomes, a journalist, ruffles the feathers of historians in Brazil & elsewhere but sparks huge interest in history among so many in Brazil!

Don’t be put off by the title: Actually, the author demystifies some of the sources of the flippan, vexatious & broadly-spread clichés about the Portuguese Royal Family in Brazil.

It is salubrious to recall that all histories contain bias, misrepresentations as Lucy Worsley aptly reminds us through ‘British History's Biggest Fibs’.

Laurentino Gomes’s merit is that he recovers history with good humour. A part of the history of Brazil, which has almost fallen into oblivion.

1808 … is reminiscent of the narrative style of the Lake Poet & Poet Laureate Robert Southey (1774-1843), author of History of Brazil (3 volumes: 1810-1819) & pertinently the Peninsular War (3 volumes: 1823-32).

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Paraphrasing Dame Hilary Mantel*, Laurentino Gomes ‘takes history out of the archive and relocates it in a body’ of historical awareness & puts the reader in the moment, even if the moment is some 200 years ago.

*Reith Lectures - Lecture 4: Can These Bones Live?

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SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND TRANSLATIONS

The author gives us an account of how the idea of the book emerged in the text of book itself. In the original 2007 version under the title, ‘O Editor, A Professora e o Bibliófilo’ [The Editor, the Professor and the Bibliophile’ N.K.], Laurentino Gomes tells us that the book is ‘the result of ten years of journalistic investigation’. He acknowledges the support, encouragement and guidance of three people: the journalist Tales Alvarenga (1945–2006), the professor and historian Maria Odila Leite da Silva Dias (1940–) and the book collector José Mindlin (José Ephim Mindlin 1914 – 2010).
Laurentino Gomes tells us how Tales Alvarenga, chief editor of the national magazine *Veja* commissioned him (then serving as head editor at *Veja*) to do a special series on the history of Brazil, which would be distributed as free supplement with the magazine *Veja* and *Visão* on the following themes: discovery of Brazil, the flight of the Portuguese Royal Family to Brazil and the Independence of Brazil. The initiative was inspired by the success of an earlier series on the centenary of the Proclamation of the Republic of Brazil. Only the first topic would become a *Veja* publication under the title *The Adventure of Discovery* in 2000, the year in which Brazil celebrated 500 years from its discovery. Tales Alvarenga felt there was no proper connection for the magazine to publish on the theme of the flight of the Portuguese Royal Family. However, the author had become inspired by his research into history and decided to embark on a much broader pursuit of the topic.

In researching for the book, Laurentino Gomes greatly benefitted from the advice of the historian Maria Odila Leite da Silva Dias, who has a significant number of publications. She was his neighbour in São Paulo, which also helped. He tells us that she suggested that the 1908 *Dom João VI no Brasil* ([https://archive.org/details/domjoovinobrazi02limagoog](https://archive.org/details/domjoovinobrazi02limagoog)) by the historian and diplomat Manoel de Oliveira Lima (1867-1928) would be a good starting point.

Manoel de Oliveira Lima actually served as the Charge de Affairs in Brazilian Legation in London in 1900, and was one of the founding-members of the Brazilian Academy of Arts, and owner of the third largest private library in Brazil at the time ([http://www.funag.gov.br/chdd/index.php/personalidades-historicas?id=134](http://www.funag.gov.br/chdd/index.php/personalidades-historicas?id=134)).

Laurentino Gomes equally perused the vast collection of books in the private library of the Odessa-born lawyer and businessman, José Mindlin, who later along
with his wife bequeathed it to the University of São Paulo Library collections. Our regular book club members have often heard and read about the ‘Brasiiliana Guita and José Mindlin Library’, a major and invaluable resource particularly for historians searching for original texts and primary sources (https://digital.bbm.usp.br/handle/bbm-ext/1).

In addition, the author used various key archival resources both in Brazil and abroad, particularly in Portugal, for example, the Ajuda Library, one of the oldest libraries in Portugal (http://bibliotecaajuda.bnportugal.pt/en/colections.htm) and counted on the expertise and generous assistance of librarians and archivists.

Laurentino Gomes gives us an instructive insight into how a journalist, who became engaged with and passionate about historical research, pursued the reading of necessary primary sources and materials. Needless to say that Laurentino Gomes was probably aware that his work would be a major sitting target for historians of all persuasions. Intentionally or not, he also highlighted the fact that history writing basically requires reading primary sources, often lacking in so many histories.

Furthermore, the narrative line adopted by Laurentino Gomes immediately invites the reader into the ‘site’, in the context of space and time, where events unfold moderated with a critical approach, which is tempered by his humour and irony. By the same token, the narrative brings mirth to readers as they can almost view the sequence of episodes in a sort of virtual visual documentary itinerary. 1808 sounds like a fictional narrative, albeit non-fiction. It is equally riveting that his writing style is reminiscent of that of the histories produced by Robert Southey (1774-1843). The author gives covert hints to his sources of inspiration in many forms.

The original 2007 brings a quotation (page 5) from This Sceptred Isle – Empire by the historian and broadcaster Christopher Lee (1941 -),

‘People make history, but seldom are they aware that they are making it.’

A most interesting reference since Laurentino Gomes uses various audio sources. The title of the 1995 radio series This Sceptred Isle (216 episodes) is a quotation from Act 2, Scene 1 of W. Shakespeare’s King Richard II attributed to John of Gaunt:

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‘This royal throne of kings, this scepter’d isle, This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars ... This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England’.

A second quotation appears in Laurentino Gomes on page 17 after the time line, ‘The editor,... etc’ and introduction is from Napoleon Bonaparte’s memoirs on Dom João VI, shortly before his death in exile on the St. Helena island, referring to Dom João VI, King of Brazil and Portugal,

‘He was the only one, who tricked me’.

The C. Lee’s quotation was excised from the English language edition, and text explaining the quote about Bonaparte was also removed.

The original cover contains a section of the portrait of Dom João VI (1817) by Jean-Batiste Debret (1768-1848), part of the collection of the Brazilian National Museum of Fine Arts.

No wonder that 1808 ... has become an editorial phenomenon, selling over a million copies (new revised editions have been published by Globo Livros) and continues on best-seller lists.

For the British reader, it has a major interest as it covers a period which is primarily and intrinsically linked to the history of Britain in many ways.

The English language edition, the translation of the book, published as a hardback, according to the author, was made possible by the efforts of three people, the translator, Andrew Nevis, Professor of linguistics at University College London, Jonah Straus, the author's literary agent in New York and James Jayo, editor.
Andrew Nevins does research on the indigenous languages in Brazil and Brazilian Portuguese. He was a Fulbright scholar and at Harvard University. He holds a PhD from MIT. The UCL website brings the following short bio of the translator:

Andrew Nevins is a Professor of Linguistics at University College London. Professor Nevins earned his Ph.D. in Linguistics from MIT in 2005. His research areas are phonological and morphological theory and the use of experimental methods to shed light on speakers’ knowledge of patterns in their language. He is primarily interested in formal restrictions on phonotactics and morphotactics, microvariation within closely related varieties of the same language, naturalistic misperception, and the representation of features. He has current research projects on nasal harmony, lenition, compounding, and cliticization, including work on Brazilian Portuguese, Basque, Maxakalí, and Slovenian. [http://www.homepages.ucl.ac.uk/~ucjtai/]

The English language version has a different sequencing from the original. It brings a portrait of Dom João VI (black & white) and two maps (journey from Portugal & Brazil) before the introduction, followed by a part one: *The Flight of the Emperor* – chapters 1-11 and a part two entitled *The rise of Brazil* – chapters 12-29, followed by ‘acknowledgements’, which is actually the text from the original, ‘Ó Editor, A Professora e o Bibliófilo’ [The Editor, the Professor and the Bibliophile’ N.K.], notes, bibliography and index. The division into parts one and two does not feature in the original. The cover brings a portrait of Dom João VI (c. 1818) by the Brazilian artist José Leandro de Carvalho (1750-1834).
Prior to the publication of the translation into English, Kirkus Review, produced the following appraisal:

KIRKUS REVIEW
A journalist’s highly readable account of Portuguese monarch João VI’s historic 1808 flight from Europe and subsequent exile in Brazil.
In 1804, Napoleon crowned himself emperor of the French. But by 1807, the year Gomes’ book opens, he “ruled as absolute lord of Europe.” Aside from Britain, only one continental nation, Portugal, remained unconquered. Unwilling to surrender but unable to fend off a full-scale invasion, the fearful and often indecisive Prince Regent João VI, whose “sickly obesity gave him the air of a peaceful dullard,” deceived Napoleon long enough to transfer his entire court to Brazil. Shepherded by the indomitable British navy, the trans-Atlantic voyage was fraught with challenges for the Portuguese ruler and his retinue, who faced the ever-present risk of disease. But it was João’s abandoned people who paid the price for his ultimately successful flight. By 1814, 500,000 Portuguese had starved or died or fled the country to escape the chaos created in the wake of their monarch’s departure. Meanwhile, the court lived comfortably in sultry Rio de Janeiro. The greedy beneficiaries of the colony’s mineral and agricultural wealth, João and his nouveau riche ministers still managed to lay down the cornerstones of a national infrastructure. They built roads, schools and factories, opened up Brazilian ports to trade with other countries and united quarreling colonial provinces. The king many dismissed as unfit to rule departed in 1821, with only one-third his retinue, to return to a Portugal wracked by chaos and revolution. In a grand twist of historical irony, what he left behind became the makings of a vibrantly complex society that now stands poised to become a major economic power.
A well-researched, engaging history.

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Review Posted Online: June 30th, 2013 Kirkus Reviews Issue: July 15th, 2013


1808... was the first of the trilogy written by Laurentino Gomes: two other books, 1822 and 1889.
LAURENTINO GOMES (17th Feb 1956-)

Laurentino Gomes is a Brazilian author and journalist. He was born in the city of Maringá, in the state of Paraná, on 17th February 1956.

He was born into a family of coffee planters. He grew up in the town of Água Boa with his three brothers. His parents used to plant coffee on his grandfather’s property but they were very poor. His parents had not been able to be fully educated but wanted their children to study and encouraged them to do it in the best possible way. All children graduated and ‘are a living proof that education transforms the lives of people’, as he stated in an interview in 2011 published in the newspaper Gazeta do Povo. In the same interview the author commented on how tough his childhood had been, adding a positive note, saying that it served the good purpose of making them grow up well. He states that,
‘I have worked since an early age; I used to harvest cotton and coffee. I have always reconciled work and study and always attended state schools. I've done all sorts of odd jobs before I became a journalist. I was a gardener, cobbler, office clerk, packer at a supermarket and other jobs. Everything to help with household bills. In 1976, I passed the university entrance examination to read journalism at the Federal University of Paraná, a dream come true and moved to the capital. (...) At the beginning it was tough for a country boy to be in the capital living at a boarding house at Rua Saldanha Marinho, a rather precarious place. Then I got a job at the old Bamerindus Bank working from midnight to five in the morning in cheque clearing. After that I would study the whole day. I was tired and felt sleepy but went to my classes. After three months, I got a better job working for the Inland Revenue from seven in the evening to one in the morning. It was wonderful as I could have some rest before going to the university. The dream came true one year later, when I got a job as a reporter. My life began to change then.’

Laurentino Gomes graduated in journalism from the Federal University of Paraná, and did a post-graduate degree in management at the University of São Paulo. He worked in a variety of journalistic roles in various media and after his studies he became a reporter for the newspaper Estado de São Paulo, and later served as the managing director for the publishing house Editora Abril.

In the same 2011 interview, he spoke of his passion for history:

História sempre foi uma grande paixão da minha vida. Tive bons professores na área no ensino médio. Enquanto eu exercia a atividade jornalística, lia muitos livros. Jornalismo e História parecem ser áreas diferentes, mas é a mesma coisa. Jornalistas também fazem e registram a história do Brasil e do mundo. O livro 1808, por exemplo, surgiu de um projeto de História que fiz para a revista Veja. Depois de um certo tempo a revista cancelou o projeto, mas continuei a pesquisa porque gostava dela.

[History has always been a great passion in my life. I had good history teachers in high school. When I worked as a journalist, I read many books. Journalism and History appear to be different areas, but they are the same thing. Journalists also make and record history of Brazil and the world. The book 1808, for example, came out of a History project, which I did for the Veja magazine. After a while the magazine cancelled the project, but I have continued researching because I enjoyed it. N.K.]

In 2007, he published his 1808 and was awarded the prestigious Jabuti Literature Prize, in 2008 the book received a second accolade as it was voted as the Best Essay by the Brazilian Academy of Letters at the recommendation of the Academician and historian José Murilo de Carvalho (1939-).

In 2010, he published the second book of his first trilogy, 1822 – Como um homem sábio, uma princesa triste e um escocês louco por dinheiro ajudaram D. Pedro a criar o Brasil – um país que tinha tudo para dar errado. [1822 – How a wise man, a downhearted princess and a Scot mad about money helped Dom Pedro to create Brazil – a country set up to fail N.K.]. The second book in the trilogy focused on the
independence of Brazil was awarded the Non-Fiction Book of the Year Prize in the 53rd edition of the Jabuti Literature Prize.

In 2008, the magazine Época ranked him as one of 100 most influential people of the year for highlighting historical matters in addition to having his books continually in the best-seller lists. He would receive more of such honours.

In 2013, he published his third book of the trilogy: *1889 – Como um imperador cansado, um marechal vaidoso e um professor injustiçado contribuíram para o fim da Monarquia e a Proclamação da República do Brasil* [1889 – How a tired emperor, a vain marshal and a wronged professor contributed to the end of Monarchy and the Proclamation of the Republic of Brazil](NK)

Over a million and a half copies of his books have been sold, a roaring success of a passionate historian-journalist. In May 2015, the author announced that he was writing a second trilogy on the Slavery in Brazil, the first book to be launched in 2019 and the last in 2022. In a piece published by Maria F. Rodrigues in *O Estado de S. Paulo* on 11th May 2015 the author tells us:

Como são livros-reportagem, vou percorrer três continentes – África, Europa e Américas – com o objetivo de entrevistar pessoas e visitar dezenas de lugares relacionados à história da escravidão, como os pontos de onde partiam os navios negreiros na costa da África e as regiões de desembarque no Brasil, no Caribe e nos Estados Unidos", (…).

[‘As they are books of reportage, I will be travelling across three continents – Africa, Europe and the Americas – in order to interview people and visit tens of sites connected to the history of slavery, such as the points from where the slave ships on the coast of Africa departed and the regions where the slaves were disembarked in Brazil, in the Caribbean and the United States’. (…) N.K.]

M.F. Rodrigues comments that the author regards slavery as a key topic in the history of Brazil, which remains unresolved.

Laurentino Gomes is a member of the São Paulo Historical-Geographical Institute and of the Paraná Academy of Letters.

**Interviews in Portuguese:**

http://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/caderno-g/autor-de-1808-laurentino-gomes-pesquisara-para-1889-na-pensilvania-9neo2kk0e0x2jsl0758q807i

http://cultura.estadao.com.br/noticias/literatura,nova-trilogia-de-laurentino-gomes-sera-sobre-a-escravidao,1685396

The author’s website:


http://www.laurentinogomes.com.br/laurentino-gomes--globo-livros.html (English)

On Robert Southey:

http://www.peninsularwar.org/penwar_e.htm

https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008687988
2017- Celebrating the love of reading Brazilian literature
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BBC Radio 4’s iPM programme, broadcast on Sat, 5 Jul 14, and entitled ‘Savages, slaves and future greatness’, explored Southey’s ‘History of Brazil’ – Linda Pratt & N. Kerecuk
http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04807mk

Also of interest:
http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Napoleons-Exile-on-St-Helena/
http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2017/hilary-mantel-reith-lectures

‘Laurentino Gomes: História contada em linguagem simples atrai os brasileiros’
by José Venâncio de Resende 16/07/2015

Attendance is free, but booking is essential: nadia.kerecuk@itamaraty.gov.br

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