BRAZILIAN BILINGUAL BOOK CLUB | ÉRICO VERÍSSIMO | OLHAI OS LÍRIOS DO CAMPO |

19th October 6.30-9 PM
2017- the year of #lovetoreadBrazil

Olhai os Lírios do Campo (1938)

Érico Lopes Veríssimo (1905-1975)

translated as

Consider the lilies in the field: A novel (1947, 1967)

First best-selling novel by one of the literary masters of Brazil – Érico Veríssimo.

A gruelling conundrum for a young medic in 1930s:
reneging true love and marrying into wealth to guarantee fame in society?

Medicine, high status profession, practiced as a means of profiteering & betrayal of the Hippocratic Oath.
Total chaos ensues with fate presenting a sting in the tail as for the ambitions of aggrandisement… during the turmoil at home 1930s & abroad with WWII.

How much influence have Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley, Katherine Mansfield had in Érico Veríssimo’s novels?

A insoluble quandary in Eugênio’s life and his women: a beloved one, a wife and a lover & … a daughter?
Does Consider the Lilies of the Field really present a real ethical and/or moral resolution to it?

Ignore the ideological balderdash & enjoy reading the fascinating psychological games in the narrative!

DETAILS OF AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS:

ENGLISH

Reprinted as:


PORTUGUESE

Olhai Os Lírios do Campo – various editions available, e.g. 2005 published by Companhia das Letras

SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND TRANSLATIONS

It is quite fortuitous that there is an account of how Érico Veríssimo conceived his 1938 novel Olhai os Lírios do Campo (1938), his fifth novel, which became an instant bestseller, and propelled him into international success. Also, he became one of the two or three 20th century Brazilian writers, who were able to live from their craft.

The novel was written on Saturdays or weekends while the author worked and was described as a puerile novel by the author later in life. At that point, he argued sought to write about ways in which people could find happiness.

In his memoirs published under the title Solo de Clarineta. Memórias published in 1995, he describes how the main idea came to him. He was visiting a
friend at a hospital as he saw a young man leaving one of the rooms with a new-born baby in his arms. The author was told that the mother had died during childbirth. A set of nebulous ideas and images (hospital, a woman who dies, a man who probably loved her ..) were whirling around the author’s mind etching the future small world of Olhai os Lírios do Campo. The author felt that he was on track to a novel (C.f. page 265).

With the benefit of hindsight, the author continues to tell us how the plot evolved:

‘An impecunious young man wants to succeed in life and choses the shortcut of a rich marriage. It will be, I see it straight away, an unhappy wedlock. Eugênio leaves behind the only woman he truly loved. Olivia. Yes, that was her name, but I don’t know why. A nurse? No. A doctor. They had been at university together. I imagined the graduation ceremony at the São Pedro Theatre. A warm evening in December (The scent of gardenias of my childhood was convened to anoint this blessed evening in the lives of Eugênio and Olivia). I saw the two friends, after the ceremony, sitting on the steps of the monument in the square in front of the theatre, without knowing what to do with those scrolls, which gave them the right to practice the medical profession.’ [1995:266 transl. NK]

Um rapaz pobre que quer conseguir sucesso na vida e segue o atalho dum casamento rico. Será, vejo logo, uma união infeliz. Eugênio deixou para trás a única mulher que o amava de verdade. Olivia. Sim, esse era o nome dela, não sei por que, mas era. Uma enfermeira? Não. Uma médica. Tínham estudado juntos. Imaginei a solenidade da formatura no Teatro São Pedro. Uma noite quente de dezembro. (O perfume dos jazmins da minha infância foi convocado para embalsamar essa noite assinalada na vida de Olivia e Eugênio.) Vi os dois amigos, depois da cerimônia, sentados nos degraus do monumento da praça, à frente do teatro, sem saberem o que fazer com aqueles camudos que lhes davam o direito de exercer a profissão médica.

In an interview with Clarice Lispector (Manchete 1969), she asked Érico Verissimo whether he had planned the whole story or whether he writes little by little. She would add that she would have a vague unconscious plan and then the story blossoms as she writes it. To which, he replied,

‘I do plan, but never obey the sketched plan rigorously. Novels (you know this better than I do) are the arts of the unconscious. On the other hand, I am about to say that I regard myself as more of a craftsman rather than an artist. And with this you will understand better why literary critics do not regard my works as deep.’
In another account, the author tells us how his early books were rather weak and that he was not a ‘deep novelist’, rather a wordsmith, creating narratives in a rush in between jobs, and that is the case of Olhai os Lírios do Campo, a bit of ‘nonsense’ as the author claims, as he wanted to contribute to peace and happiness of the world. It is a covert manner that the author probably found to criticise his own approach to writing with nuances of ideological discourse. In Olhai os Lírios do Campo, the author included passages in monologue or stream of consciousness format of political verbiage. The author highlights the fact that his early novels served as a good lesson for his subsequent work, namely, ‘they had the ability to excite readers with love of reading and with the demonstration of good-will towards fellow men’.

The fact is that that Olhai os Lírios do Campo became the first Brazilian best-seller with forty thousand copies sold following its publication, having had many editions, it continues in print and read to this date. The author was working for Editora Globo at the time as a foreign book editor and also as a literary translator. This novel marked the start of the commercial success of the author affording him the ability to support himself and his family.

Under the aegis of the US Good Neighbour Cultural Diplomacy* in 1940, Érico Veríssimo was invited to tour the United States. At that time he had published six novels and 17 children’s books. Subsequently, he would be invited successively becoming a Cultural Ambassador of Brazil in the United States.


The US State Department created a Division of Cultural Relations in 1938, which had a Pan-American exchange programme, ‘opening channels for the flow of cultural production from other countries to the United States’ and that the Department of Cultural Relations would ‘contribute in no small way to spread the knowledge of foreign cultures among our own people.’ (in Hispania R. Pattee, 1939:236). The initiatives of that Department were usually regarded as a particularly successful instance of cultural diplomacy. President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) established a government agency, the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American
Affairs (CIAA), headed by Nelson A. Rockefeller (1882-1945). The Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) aimed at promoting hemispheric solidarity and combating Axis infiltration and domination by bolstering inter-American cultural ties.

It is a particularly relevant period of the book publication history of Brazilian authors in translation in the US, who would face numerous challenges, in view of the ideas of the commercial publishers regrading the kind of books which should be published, and who regularly sought ‘stories which would really reflect the country’ (Doris S. Patee editor at Macmillan) and with a further bias of reviewers from Spanish-speaking Latin America.

Despite the invitations to the US, and the support that Érico Veríssimo had, the pathway to get translations published in the US were not easy. It took a great deal of effort and a strike of luck that the author’s began to be published by Macmillan. They published eight of his books in translation. He became a commercial success in the US and was the only Latin American author to have more than two titles published between 1940 and 1967, a rare privilege.

A number of reviewers had commented on the skilful and delightful writing style and ability to capture the human condition. William DuBois (1903-1997) a playwright, novelist and a long time editor for The New York Times Book Review wrote an untitled review in the Book Review Section on 24th January 1943 (page 6) highlighting the Brazilian setting in the capital of the southernmost state of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul. DuBois drew comparisons between Érico Veríssimo and the US novelist and journalist Theodore (Herman Albert) Dreiser (1871 – 1945), commenting that Érico Veríssimo had better command over form and content.

The original of the novel with the corrections that Érico Veríssimo made by hand became part of José Midlin Library created by the businessman and book collector José Mindlin (José Ephim Mindlin 1914 –2010).

The translation of Olhai os Lírios do Campo as Consider the Lilies of the Field: *A Novel* was published in New York in 1947 by Macmillan by a translator, Jean Neel Karnoff. Rather puzzling is the fact that there is no biographical detail on the translator. One could probably surmise that it is a pen name or that the author
himself translated it. The translation of the novel does not bring any introductory or biographical note on either the author or translator. It was a hardcover publication with a dustjacket. It was reprinted by Greenwood in New York in 1969.

There are two translations into Spanish Mirad los Lirios del Campo published in Buenos Aires, Club del Libro Americano, in 1943 and translated by A. Jover Peralta e Antonio Ortiz Mayans. Buenos Aires: Tupã, 1944. There is a Japanese translation by Lee (without date).

An Argentinian film company made the first film adaptation Mirad los lírios del campo in 1947, directed by Ernesto Arancibia (1903-1963) screenplay by Tulio Demichel (1914-1992) and Mariano Perla.

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0178758/?ref_=ttmi_tt

A soap opera adaptation, Olhai os lírios do campo, by Geraldo Vietri (1927-1996) and Wilson Aguiar Filho (1951-1991), was produced by TV Globo in 1980,
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directed by Herval Rossano (1935-2007). In the cast Cláudio Marzo and Nívea Maria.

Further details available at:


BIOGRAPHY

Érico Lopes Veríssimo
(17th December 1905- 28th November 1975)

Quando os ventos de mudança sopram, umas pessoas levantam barreiras, outras constroem moinhos de vento.
Precisamos dar um sentido humano às nossas construções. E, quando o amor ao dinheiro, ao sucesso nos estiver deixando cegos, saibamos fazer pausas para olhar os lírios do campo e as aves do céu.

A vida começa todos os dias. Érico Veríssimo
Érico Lopes Veríssimo, one of the most popular Brazilian authors, wrote novels, short stories, memoirs, major translations of foreign literature into Portuguese as well as children’s books. He also served as a Cultural Ambassador of Brazil in the US.

The author was born in the town of Cruz Alta in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, son of Sebastião Veríssimo da Fonseca (1880–1935), a pharmacist, and Abegahy Lopes Veríssimo, a wealthy family that suffered financial ruin.

In 1909, he became very ill with meningitis but was cured and in 1912 started school at Venâncio Aires Primary School and, also, attended classes under a private tutor Margarida Pardelhas in his home town. At around 1914, young Érico makes his first foray into writing by creating a magazine Caricatura, making drawings and writing short texts. He often started a novel with sketches and drawings. In 1920 he starts attending the boarding school Colégio Cruzeiro do Sul, which followed a protestant system, in the borough of Teresópolis in the capital of the state, Porto Alegre.

His parents separated in 1922, because of his father’s misdemeanours and his mother taking both of her sons Érico and Ênio and their adopted sister Maria moved to the grandparents’ home. His father became bankrupted the following year losing his pharmacy. In order to help ends meet, Érico worked at his uncle Américo Lopes’s shop and then got a job at a bank. He started by copying works by Euclides da Cunha, Machado de Assis and other Brazilian and foreign authors and also became greatly interested in lyrical music, influenced by his uncle and aunt. He began to write and his cousins were the first to read his stories. In 1926, he became a partner of Pharmacia Central in Cruz Alta with a friend of his father, but the business failed in 1930, leaving him with a protracted debt, which he settled some seventeen years later. He also worked as tutor offering literature and English language classes. In Cruz Alta,
he fell in love with his neighbour Mafalda Halfen Volpe (1931-1977), who was 15 at the time, who would later, in 1931, become his wife.

In 1929, he began to publish locally attracting attention to his skills among literary circles and in 1930 moved to Porto Alegre and decided to write for a living. He would meet various other authors Mário Quintana (1906-1994), Augusto Meyer (1902-19700, Guilhermino César (1908-1993) at the Antonello Bar. He started working as the editor’s secretary for the Revista do Globo (published from 1929 to 1967), and then became its editor, and wrote for local newspapers and magazines. He also began to publish translated literature in order to make ends meet. In 1932, he would become the director of Revista do Globo.

The magazine Revista do Globo (Cover Year IV nº 7, 1932, illustrated by Francis Pelichek above & Year 1 Issue1) was an important disseminator of cultural and intellectual ideas in Rio Grande do Sul. It was launched by the bookshop Livraria do Globo originally set up in Porto Alegre in December 1883 by Laudelino Finheiro de Barcellos and Saturnino Alves Finto as a bookshop and stationary shop and, subsequently, at the beginning of the 20th century, became a renowned publisher. The business split into separate enterprises in 1956 - as a bookshop, Livraria do Globo and the publishing house, Editora Globo. The latter was sold in 1986, to Roberto Marinho’s Rio Gráfica Editora, which then adopted the name Editora Globo.

Érico Veríssimo, returned to Cruz Alta to marry his sweetheart Mafalda Halfen Volpe in 1931, and they had a long and happy married life. The author paid homage to Mafalda as she supported and secured his life as an author. They had two children Clarissa Veríssimo (1935-), named after the author’s first novel Clarissa, who lives in the United States and Luis Fernando Veríssimo (1936-), a prolific author. Our Brazilian Bilingual Book Club read his The Spies in January this year.
Érico Veríssimo’s writing career was launched with Fantoches, a collection of stories for theatre, followed by his 1933 translation of Aldous Huxley’s Point Counter Point (1928), printed in 1935 in Brazil as Contraponto and his novel Clarissa (7,000 copies) in the same year.

His novel 1934 Música ao longe, was awarded the Machado de Assis Prize and the novel Caminhos cruzados, inspired by A. Huxley’s Point Counter Point was awarded the Fundação Graça Aranha Prize but aroused suspicions of communism and he called to answer questions by the Political and Social Order Department of Rio Grande do Sul. The novel Música ao longe and the A vida de Joana d’Arc were published in 1936 and he travelled to the federal capital, Rio de Janeiro, where he made acquaintance with numerous authors such as Jorge Amado, Murilo Mendes, Augusto Frederico Schmidt, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, José Lins do Rego to mention but a few.

In the same year, he began to publish children’s literature, his first book was As aventuras do avião vermelho, and created a children’s radio programme ‘Clube dos três porquinhos’ broadcast by Rádio Farroupilha. This inspired a collection Nanquinote of children’s stories. Because the Estado Novo Press and Propaganda Department (‘DIP’) required him to submit the stories for his radio programme before broadcast, he refused to submit and ceased broadcasting.

Olhai os lírios do campo, his bestseller launched in 1938, ensured a steady income. He dedicated much energy to editorial department of Globo in 1939. The launch of the series ‘Nobel’ and ‘Biblioteca dos Séculos (Library of the Centuries)’ jointly with his colleagues Henrique Bertaso and Maurício Rosenblatt, became an immense success publishing translations of Virginia Wolf, Thomas Mann, H. Balzac and Marcel Proust and other key authors. He also succeeded in publishing children’s books A vida do elefante Basílio and Outra vez os três porquinhos’, and a book of science fiction Viagem à aurora do mundo.

In 1940, he launched Saga, gave a series of lectures in São Paulo and published translations of John Steinbeck, James Hilton and Katherine Mansfield. Under the aegis of the US Good Neighbour Cultural Diplomacy in 1940, Érico Verissimo was invited to tour the United States. By then, he had published six novels and 17 children’s books.
He spent three months in the United States in 1941, giving a series of lectures and published a book on the experience *Gato preto em campo de neve*. An unfortunate episode inspired his next publication, *O resto é silêncio*, a suicide of a woman who jumped off a tall building falling in Alfândega Square in Porto Alegre, which he had witnessed with his brother. The novel attracted negative reactions from the local clergy.

He accepted the invitation to lecture on Brazilian Literature in the US and moved with his family to Berkley, California. The Mills College, Oakland, California, awarded an Honorary Doctorate to him in 1944. The California lectures were published in a book *Brazilian Literature: An Outline* (1945), published later in Brazil as *Breve história da literatura brasileira* in 1955. He also travelled through the US giving more than 200 speeches on Brazilian literature to a variety of audiences engaging in the promotion of the translations of his own works with US publishers. On his return, he published *A volta do gato preto* in 1946 about his life in the United States.

It was the US that he is instigated to write his most famous novel *O tempo e o vento*. He started to write it in 1947 and the first volume had about 800 pages – a saga set in his state, which ended up as a trilogy with some 2,200 pages published over fifteen years. The first volume under the title *O continente* (1949) was well received by the critics. The second volume *O retrato* was published in 1951 but to lesser acclaims. He started writing the last part of his trilogy *O arquipélago* in 1958 and the publication was completed in 1962. It is a phenomenal fictionalized history of Rio Grande of Sul.

In 1953, he was invited to head the Department of Cultural Affairs of the Pan-American Union, in the Office of the Organization of American States by the Government of Brazil replacing Alceu Amoroso Lima (1893-1983), who from 1919 adopted the pen name Tristão de Ataíde. In 1954, the Brazilian Academy of Letters awarded the Machado de Assis Prize for his oeuvre. He published his novella *Noite*, translated in Norway, US, France and UK and went on a lecture series in various Latin American countries. On his return to Brazil in 1956, he launched the children’s books series *Gente e bichos*. His daughter married the physicist David Jaffe leaving for the US (grandchildren: Michael, Paul and Eddie). A book of the impressions of his travels in Mexico was published in 1957.

In 1965, his *O senhor embaixador* (His Excellency, the Ambassador) portrays a fictional republic of Sacramento, a severe critique of governments and corruption (which resembles Cuba), was awarded the Jabuti Prize. In 1967, his complete works in five volumes were published by the publishing house José Aguilar in Rio de Janeiro with a short biography *O escritor diante do espelho*.

In 1969, the house where the author was born in Cruz Alta became the museum - Museu Casa de Érico Veríssimo, subsequently transformed into a foundation. Various items which belonged to the author are displayed in the museum, as for example, his first typewriter, glasses, books, hats and originals of his works as well as some pieces of furniture. [http://museuscruzalta.blogspot.co.uk/]
Incidente em Antares, a satirical novel written about the fantastic and supernatural happenings as the gravediggers are on strike in Antares, the dead souls roam the town uncovering indiscretions, published in 1971. The first volume of his autobiography Solo de clarineta was published in 1973. The author died suddenly on 28th November 1975. His wife and a lecturer, Maria da Glória Bordini, of the Pontifical Catholic University in Rio Grande do Sul started to organize his documents in 1982, and in 1984 a project to create his archive was launched there. It was digitalized as Fontes da Literatura Brasileira in 1991. See https://periodicos.ufsc.br/index.php/textodigital/article/viewFile/1422/1132).

His son Luis Fernando became the chairman of the ‘Associação Cultural Acervo Literário de Érico Verissimo’ in 1994, created with the aim of looking after the author’s archives.

Érico Verissimo's books have been translated into various languages, e.g. English, German, Dutch, Spanish, Finnish, French, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Romanian, Russian and Czech.

Érico Verissimo and his family became acquainted and engaged with numerous writers and authors during his lifetime. It was in Washington when he was heading the Cultural Affairs Department of the Pan-American Union (1953-56) that friendship developed between the author’s family and Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) and Maury Gurgel Valente. Érico and Mafalda became godparents to Clarice's children: Pedro and Paulo Gurgel Valente.

Photo from Calrice Lispector's Archives - Instituto Moreira Salles
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WORKS

Collected works

1956 *Obras de Erico Verissimo* (17 volumes)
1961 *Obras completas de Erico Verissimo* (10 volumes)
1966 *Ficção completa de Erico Verissimo* (5 volumes)
2017 *Obras Completas de Erico Verissimo* - Editora Globo (28 volumes)

Short stories

*Fantoches* ("Puppets")
*As mãos de meu filho* ("My Son's Hands")
*O ataque* ("The Attack")
*Os devaneios do general* ("The reveries of the general")

Novels

1933 *Clarissa*
1935 *Caminhos Cruzados* ("Crossed Paths")
1936 *Música ao Longe* ("Music From Afar")
1936 *Um Lugar ao Sol* ("A Place in the Sun")
1938 *Olhai os Lírios do Campo* ("Behold the Lilies of the Field")
1940 *Saga*
1943 *O Resto é Silêncio* ("The Rest is Silence")
 *O Tempo e o Vento*:  
 1949 *O continente* ("The Continent")
 1951 *O retrato* ("The Portrait")
 1961 *O Arquipélago* ("The Archipelago")
1954 *Noite* ("Night") - (the versions published in Portugal contain also "A Sonata" ("The Sonata"), a short story written by a solitary music teacher, that sees himself transported to the past, to the year of his birth, where he falls in love for a beautiful woman)
1965 *O Senhor Embaixador* ("His Majesty, the Ambassador")
1967 *O Prisioneiro* ("The Prisoner")
1971 *Incidente em Antares* ("Incident in Antares")

Children's literature

1935 *A vida de Joana d'Arc*
1936 *As Aventuras do Avião Vermelho*
1936 *Os Três Porquinhos Pobres*
1936 *Rosa Maria no Castelo Encantado*
1936 *Meu ABC*
1937 *As Aventuras de Tibicuera*
1938 *O Urso com Música na Barriga*
1939 *A Vida do Elefante Basílio*
1939 *Outra vez os três porquinhos*
1939 *Viagem à aurora do mundo*
1939 *Aventuras no mundo da higiene*
1956 *Gente e bichos* (series)

Travel literature

1941 *Gato Preto em Campo de Neve*
1946 *A Volta do Gato Preto*
1957 *México*
1969 *Israel em Abril*

Autobiographies
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1966  O escritor diante do espelho (in ‘Ficção Completa’)
1973 Solo de Clarineta – Memórias (Volume I)

**Essays**

1945 Brazilian Literature: an Outline
1973 Mundo velho sem portaria
1955 Breve história da literatura brasileira

**Biographies**

1972 Um certo Henrique Bertaso

**Translations**

**Novels**

The Ringer, by Edgar Wallace – 1931
The Crimson Circle, by Edgar Wallace – 1931
The Door with Seven Locks, by Edgar Wallace – 1931
Jahrgang 1902, by Ernst Glaeser – 1933
Point Counter Point, by Aldous Huxley – 1934
Kleiner Mann, Was nun?, by Hans Fallada – 1937
We Are Not Alone, by James Hilton – 1940
Goodbye Mr. Chips, by James Hilton – 1940
Of Mice and Men, by John Steinbeck – 1940
Portrait of Jennie, by Robert Nathan – 1942
They Shoot Horses, Don't They?, by Horace McCoy – 1947
Then and Now, by Somerset Maugham – 1948
The Clue of the New Pin, by Edgar Wallace – 1956

**Short Stories**

Psychology, by Katherine Mansfield – 1939 (Revista do Globo)
Bliss, by Katherine Mansfield – 1940
Her First Ball, by Katherine Mansfield – 1940 (Revista do Globo)
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The year of #lovetoreadBrazil

Books & manuscripts by

ACERVO LITERÁRIO DE ERICO VERISSIMO - ALEV

Created in 1982, donated by the Verissimo family, the archives include the following: books, originals, illustrations, sketches, manuscripts, letters, personal effects, photographs, and numerous materials about the author.


Available from http://lojadoims.com.br/ims/produto.cfm?id=28094

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