



**THE CAUTIONARY TALE OF  
CAROLINA MARIA DE JESUS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper traces the fortunes of an Afro-Brazilian woman from the slums of São Paulo, a self-taught writer who for a brief period during the 1960s became an international celebrity as author of the best-selling book in Brazilian publishing history. Outspoken and independent, she refused to be patronized or conform to the role expected of her by educated white elites and the media, who reacted with a combination of personalistic attacks and neglect. She died in poverty and was buried in a paupers' cemetery, and today her story has been largely forgotten.

## **RESUMEN**

El presente trabajo reconstruye el destino de una mujer afrobrasileña, proveniente de los barrios pobres de São Paulo, escritora autodidacta que, durante un breve período en la década de los sesentas, se convirtió en una celebridad internacional como autora del libro de mayor venta en la historia de las publicaciones brasileñas. Franca e independiente, se rehusó a ser patrocinada o a adaptarse al papel que de ella esperaban las élites blancas educadas y los medios de comunicación, los cuales respondieron a ese rechazo con una combinación de ataques personales e ignorancia. Murió en la pobreza y fue sepultada en un cementerio para los pobres y, actualmente, su historia ha sido en gran medida olvidada.



Carolina Maria de Jesus was a fiercely proud black Brazilian woman who lived with three illegitimate children, each of a different father, in a São Paulo *favela*. She had learned to read and write narrative by continuing to study by herself after only two years of primary school. In 1958 her diary fragments came to the attention of an enterprising journalist. He helped her publish it, and for a brief period during the 1960s she became an international celebrity, the author of the best-selling book in Brazilian publishing history. For many reasons—the imposition of military dictatorship in 1964 and accompanying reaction against social criticism and, especially, because of the ways in which she handled her fame and related to the press and to the public—she fell from the public eye. Within a few years she was forced to move back into the *favela* and to scavenge for a living. A brief flurry of publicity in 1969 about her fallen condition prompted a slight improvement for her, but she was soon forgotten again. In 1977, living in near-indigence, Carolina died of asthma and emphysema. Her complete life story has never been told, and Brazilians today for the most part do not know that a black woman from the slums electrified the world in the early 1960s, nor do they read her books.

Carolina's story embodies a cautionary tale, reflecting not only on her but on the social system of which she was a part. A black woman of desperate poverty possessing an aggressive, sometimes reckless personality, Carolina was remarkably aware of the burden of the legacy of racism, gender prejudice, and political neglect of the marginalized. Because she understood how the system worked, and because she was considered to have acted ungratefully, that system conspired to make her to fight without allies and caused her to perish. She did not conform to stereotypes. She claimed that she never married because she refused to become dependent on a husband. Journalists and politicians turned on her because although her ideas as expressed in her diary were docile, in public she expressed herself stridently and without good manners: she was an "uppity" black. Nor did leftist intellectuals embrace her: she was not strident enough for their class-based view of marginality. The whole issue of impoverished migrants fleeing to the cities during the presidential administrations of Juscelino Kubitschek and Jânio Quadros, in part caused by the displacements resulting from multinational industrial penetration during the late 1950s, touched a nerve amidst an atmosphere in which politicians strove for answers while the favelas grew and grew without stop.<sup>1</sup>

Who was Carolina Maria de Jesus? She was born in 1914 in the small interior town of Sacramento in Minas Gerais, the descendants of slaves probably brought to the mining region from the declining sugar region of northeastern Brazil.<sup>2</sup> She left school after the second grade. Initially, she had not been a willing student: her mother had to spank her practically every day to make her attend. She later claimed to have been influenced in her youth by her grandfather, whom she called an "African Socrates." When her mother found a job on a farm outside of

Sacramento, Carolina could no longer go to school because there was none available. Her first days in the country were spent, in her words, crying. In time she came to enjoy living in the country, but when she was sixteen her mother moved to the city of Franca in São Paulo State. There Carolina as well as her mother worked as a cook and a maid.<sup>3</sup>

At the age of 33, in 1947, following a typical migration trajectory for black women, Carolina set out on her own from Franca for the metropolis of São Paulo. Her grandfather had died by then; there is no record of the fate of her mother. Carolina slept under bridges and in doorways. She took various jobs, mostly as a domestic, cleaning hotel rooms, working in a hospital, selling beer. Once she tried to join a circus. She found employment as a maid for a white family but was fired after four months: she was too independent, she said, to clean up their messes. In addition she had become sexually active; she would slip away at night to meet men. She held six more jobs and was dismissed from all of them. For a short time she worked for a doctor, Euricles Zerbini, who gave her access to his books; in later years she claimed to have worked briefly for General Goés Monteiro, the *eminence gris* of the Estado Novo (1937-1945), whom she described as “physically repulsive but very smart,” with what would come to be her trademark bluntness.<sup>4</sup>

In 1948, a Portuguese sailor made her pregnant, then abandoned her. The white family for whom she was working as a maid barred her from their house. She then had no other choice but to live in a *favela*, a shantytown for migrants; in the late 1940s in São Paulo there were 50,000 *favelados* settled in seven different locations.<sup>5</sup> Selecting Canindé *favela* because it was close to a junkyard, Carolina carried boards on her head which she stole from a church construction site five blocks away and constructed a shack with her own hands, covering it with scrap tin. Her son João was born three months later. The roof always leaked, rusting her pots and pans and rotting the mattress she had found. She affixed a sack over her window for privacy. She used a rag to cover her nose from the *favela* stench.<sup>6</sup> When she had soap, she washed clothes in the nearby Tieté River.

Carolina strapped her infant to her back and walked the streets collecting paper and odds and ends in a burlap bag. She foraged in garbage cans for food and clothing. She was paid one cruzeiro (1/4 of a U.S. cent) per pound of usable paper, bottles, and cans; on good days she earned twenty-five or thirty cents, on bad days, nothing. She continued seeing men. Two years later a Spaniard (“who was white and gave me love and money”) fathered her second son, José Carlos. Now she had to pick through garbage cans with two children strapped to her. Later she wrote that she met a rich white man who thought she was pretty. She would visit him and he would give her food and money to buy clothes for her sons. “He didn’t know for a long time that I bore his daughter,” she wrote; “he has many servants and I guess that’s where Vera Eunice gets her fancy ways.”<sup>7</sup>

Feisty and independent-minded, Carolina refused to conform to the expected behavior of a *favelada*. She claimed to have been rejected by her neighbors because of her airs as someone who could read and write and because she despised their violent behavior and penchant for lying. She was especially hostile to Northeasterners, whom she considered violent and unpredictable. As a kind of therapy, she began to write poems, stories and, beginning in 1955, a diary in notebooks fashioned from scraps of paper she found in the trash. Her first entry, for July 15, 1955, typifies her personal, hopeful, and rueful style:

The birthday of my daughter Vera Eunice. I wanted to buy a pair of shoes for her, but the price of food keeps us from realizing our desires. Actually we are slaves to the cost of living. I found a pair of shoes in the garbage, washed them, and patched them for her to wear.

Her diary mixed revulsion against her miserable life with touches of gentleness:

The sky was the color of indigo (she wrote) and I understood that I adore my Brazil. My glance went over to the trees that are planted at the beginning of Pedro Vicente Street. The leaves moved by themselves. I thought: they are applauding my gesture of love to my country.<sup>8</sup>

Although Carolina always claimed to have been at odds with her fellow *favelados*, a close reading of her diary shows that although she considered herself a “loner,” not closely tied to any other *favelados* or groups, she actually was seen within the *favela* as a person who was stable and who could be trusted.<sup>9</sup> *Favelados* knew that she could read and write, and they admired her for it. Some sent their children to her to be cared for when they were released from FABEM, the institution for homeless and delinquent children. When there was a fight, it was Carolina who called the police. She acted as an agent of stability and decency within the stinking *favela* world.<sup>10</sup>

Some of her diary entries, on the other hand, revealed bitterness. She wrote of death, of watching restaurant employees spill acid in their garbage cans so that the poor could not take the leftover food, of excrement, of drunkenness, of sons who beat their parents, of prostitution, of undernourishment, of hopelessness. “Black is our life,” she said; “everything is black around us.”<sup>11</sup> She chided politicians for showing compassion during elections and then forgetting the poor. She conjured up wistful images: “What I revolt against is the greed of men who squeeze other men as if they were squeezing oranges.”<sup>12</sup>

In April 1958, during a municipal election campaign, Audálio Dantas, a 24-year old reporter for the *Folha de São Paulo* was sent to cover the inauguration of a playground near Canindé (to provide election-eve politician-granted benefits was an old Brazilian political custom). Dantas had been born in northeastern Alagoas. His father had come to São Paulo in the 1930s to open a food store in the interior of the state. The son never studied journalism, but taught himself to write

in a newsy style and hustled stories, shooting photographs as well and submitting them as a free lance. Eventually he was hired by the *Folha de São Paulo* as a feature reporter.<sup>13</sup> At the playground, he witnessed an exchange of curses between men standing in the crowd who had been competing with the neighborhood children for places on the see-saws and swings; he heard a black woman yell “If you continue mistreating these children, I’m going to put all of your names in my book!”

Dantas asked her about it. She took him to her 4-ft. by 12-ft. shack (#9, on Rua A) in Canindé, and showed him pages filled with fairy tales, fiction about rich people, poems about the countryside, and entries from her diary. Reading the scraps of paper, he found them to be, in the words of her English-language translator David St. Clair, “crude, childlike words, much like a primitive painting done in words.”<sup>14</sup> Dantas selected one of her twenty-six notebooks which covered a three-year span. But at first she refused to let him take it to his editor, saying that her diary was “filled with ugly things and ugly people.”<sup>15</sup> Dantas ignored her protest, and published excerpts from it along with an accompanying story.<sup>16</sup> Carolina was forty-six years old at this pivotal point in her life.

The published story awakened sudden interest in Carolina, although she received nothing at all in payment until much later. This was despite the fact that Audálio Dantas devoted a great deal of time to her story and capitalized on it professionally. “I am not bring you a newspaper story,” he said to his readers; “but a revolution.”<sup>17</sup> The *Folha* published more of her entries. Soon afterward, Dantas was made bureau chief of *O Cruzeiro*, Brazil’s leading weekly magazine, published in Rio de Janeiro. As Carolina’s agent and mentor, he worked editing her diaries for a year, publishing additional excerpts but refusing to print any of her stories or poems, which she felt were more important. After encountering initial reluctance from several publishers to take the book as a whole, he finally reached an agreement with Livraria Francisco Alves’s editor, Lélío de Castro. Livraria Francisco Alves was one of Brazil’s most notable publishing houses, the publisher of Euclides da Cunha. But even on the day that Carolina walked out of the *favela* at 5 a.m. with her children to see her book for the first time, she had to sell junk she had scavenged to have enough money to eat.<sup>18</sup>

A thousand people queued up outside the publisher’s bookshop in São Paulo on the book’s first day of sale in August. Carolina, sitting at a table outside the store, signed 600 copies, talking with each of the people who bought one.<sup>19</sup> Labor Minister João Batista Ramos told the press that she would be given a brick house—something she had repeatedly dreamed and written about in her diary—by the government. She replied that *favelas* should be eradicated.<sup>20</sup> In three days the initial printing of 10,000 was sold out just in São Paulo. After six months, 90,000 copies had been bought, making the diary the all-time best seller in Brazil. Within a year she had joined Jorge Amado as the most translated Brazilian author. The national press frenzy over



Carolina, in turn, helped establish the context in which Carolina became an international success. The 182-page *Quarto de Despejo* (The Garbage Room) was published in thirteen languages in forty countries, including the Soviet Union and Japan. Her feat was astonishing: other books were published later in Brazil describing wretched living conditions suffered by lower-class women but never achieved a fraction of the attention won by Carolina.<sup>21</sup>

Carolina's contract with Editora Francisco Alves gave her 10 percent of the proceeds from the sale of each book, with an additional 5 percent allotted to Audálio Dantas.<sup>22</sup> Royalties for her book during the first three months of sales ran to \$60 a day. In August, four months after the publication of her diary, she and her three children moved with a table, two beds and a mattress, a bookshelf, and six pots, out of Canindé. As she was moving out, her *favela* neighbors surrounded the truck that took her away, jeering at her. One man screamed at her that she was a "black whore"; that she had become rich by writing about *faveladas* but that she had refused to share any of her money with them. Rocks gashed the face of one of her sons and struck Vera Eunice on the arm.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the nature of the contract sharing royalties with Dantas and because of her lack of proper documentation, Carolina could not open a bank account in her own name, so the publisher opened a joint account with Dantas in which the royalties were deposited. She then made a down payment on a small brick house in a respectable working-class neighborhood (Imirim), at Rua Benta Pereira, 562, Santana, on a nice, tree-lined street. Inexplicably, members of the press nastily called her house a *barraco* (hovel), but to her it was a palace; it had a modest-size living room, a kitchen, electricity, and running water. Photographers posed her in her house seated on a sofa, sewing, with her daughter standing behind her and her boys stretched out on the floor, reading. Vera Eunice, the accompanying story remarked, who "never liked going without shoes," now has them, and someday may become a pianist.<sup>24</sup> Other newspaper stories claimed that the house had been "given to her by the government," but this was untrue.<sup>25</sup> There was a dark side to the stories about her success. Even amid the euphoria, most journalists still did not know what to make of her. They belittled her accomplishments even as they caricatured her message: *O Cruzeiro* called her the country's "first black woman writer" and said, wholly inaccurately, that her work "denounced strongly and violently the miserable conditions of *favela* residents."<sup>26</sup> Sadly, Carolina and her family never felt at home in the house of her dreams. Neighbors shunned them; curiosity seekers came at all hours; the police were called to stop fights that broke out between drunks and passers-by and Carolina was blamed. From the first day she moved into her Santana house, Carolina knew that she would sooner or later have to leave.

Public reactions to Carolina's fame varied widely. Some journalists mocked her sudden notoriety.

She lives in a government-financed house in industrial Santo André [Santana], she spends her days in the city, sometimes at the “Fasano” tea parlor frequented by the elegant people of Avenida Paulista... With mascara-painted eyelashes and wearing high-heeled shoes, dressed in silk and elegant accessories from the best downtown shops, Carolina, accompanied by her three children, strolls twice weekly on Avenida Itapetininga, where *paulistas* descended from the colonial elite also walk.<sup>27</sup>

And:

Playing the part of a fashion model, the formerly-humble chronicler of urban misery addressed Governor Carvalho Pinto himself with a sense of superiority, according to a social columnist...during a visit of cultural figures to the governor's Campos Elísios palace, she did not take the initiative to greet him. Instead, when he went over to her, at the end of the session, she said to him: “Ah, were you here?”<sup>28</sup>

It may be, however, that this never happened. Carolina wrote elsewhere of her visit to São Paulo's vice governor, Porfírio da Paz, and claimed that when she was there she felt “atonic and disoriented.”<sup>29</sup> The perception that she had acted arrogantly in the presence of the governor probably reflects her fear and timidity, not her flippancy. But in any case, she became, according to Audálio Dantas, “drunk with success.”<sup>30</sup> Carolina's writing, and her outlook on life was always hopeful: she never threatened anyone. Eight years after she burst into the spotlight, when she was back living in poverty, she still maintained a stubborn optimism. “God does not smile on indolents,” she often said.<sup>31</sup> In turn, the media, reflecting the values of its elite clients, treated her as a side-show performer. They judged her continually, commenting on her manners and on her clothing, and expected her to appear in public, accompanied by her daughter Vera in a starched white dress with ribbons in her hair, with docility. This “model” Carolina would answer questions sagely in a nonprovocative manner; she would realize her place; she would permit her managers and editors to plan her appearances and to “protect” her from her crude former self.

But she refused. Neutral politically and temperate in her criticism, she nevertheless offended Brazilians because she would not conform in her personal behavior. At the height of the military dictatorship in 1969, she told a reporter that she had read carefully all of the speeches of the President, General Garrastazu Médici, and that she was planning to write him a letter telling him to provide government funds to permit slum dwellers to leave their *favelas* and to return home. On another occasion she offered praise to General Geisel, telling a reporter that “he is a good man and the people like his government.”<sup>32</sup> In an atmosphere where the left was engaged in kidnapping and urban guerrilla activity, her criticism was remarkably mild, yet copies of *Quarto* were never sold during the period of the dictatorship, either banned or subject to self-censorship by timorous publishers.<sup>33</sup>

Always self-confident, Carolina saw herself as a professional writer, free from censorship. In the spirit of the early 1960s, heady days for Brazilian political expression, investigative

journalists were, for the first time, challenging the system and demanding broader rights for Brazilians although always within “safe” limits. Some of Carolina’s advisors, including Audálio Dantas, coached her to write more about social injustice, but she defied them. Instead, she insisted on writing fiction, essays, anything that popped into her mind. She refused to be “handled,” and her sharp tongue and annoying habit of demanding adulation and respect for her unvarnished self quickly alienated her self-appointed advisors.

According to Carolina, she chafed under Dantas’s Svengali-like efforts to program her life. “I wanted to appear over the radio, to sing, to be an actress. I became furious with Audálio’s control over me, rejecting everything, canceling my projects.”<sup>34</sup> She accused him later of having altered her prose so much in the books that followed *Quarto* that all of the “pretty” phrases had been taken out. It is not known to what degree Dantas changed or embellished her writing. He exerted two kinds of control over her writing. First, he improved her prose—although he argued in an interview that her work was completely her’s; that he never would have been able to write in her untrained, primitive style. Second, and most apparent in her second book *Casa de Alvenaria*, he edited out statements, leaving the telltale “...” indication, these being especially heavy in the section in which Carolina talks about Dantas himself.<sup>35</sup> He permitted some of her criticisms stand in print: in *Casa de Alvenaria* she wrote that he “gave the impression that I am his slave.”

Foreign critics treated Carolina with more respect than the Brazilian media, approaching the story in human terms, praising the author for exposing social miseries and for having the courage to speak out. The New York *Herald Tribune* called her diary “a haunting chronicle of hunger...a dramatic document of the dispossessed that both shocks and moves the reader.” *Horizon’s* reviewer said that the book contained “the seldom-told truth which inspires in some compassion, in some revulsion, and in others revolution.”<sup>36</sup> *Life* magazine devoted a full page to her; *Paris Match* ran a longer story.<sup>37</sup> Novelist Alberto Moravia, in his introduction to the Italian translation of *Quarto de Despejo*, contrasted Brazil’s natural beauty with the ugliness revealed by Carolina’s diary, calling her the product of a “caste of pariahs” as damned as untouchables in India.<sup>38</sup> In his prologue to the Casa de las Americas edition (1965; reprinted 1989), the Cuban Mario Trejo called Carolina a conscience, visionary, the creator of a “subliterature rising out of the soil of underdevelopment.”<sup>39</sup>

Carolina’s book was translated in Argentina as “Hunger is Yellow” (*La Hambre es Amarilla*). In 1975 West Germans produced a documentary about her, “O despertar de um sonho,” directed by Gérson Tavares. But it was censored in Brazil and not permitted to be televised. It was broadcast in Europe over protests from the Brazilian ambassador. She was offered a copy, but she turned it down: “What am I going to do with film cans?”<sup>40</sup> Carolina was paid \$2,500 for the film rights. Some Brazilians did not know what to make of her success. Her diary, Carlos Rangel wrote, was a “kick in the stomach [chute na boca do estômago] of the literary establishment of

New York and Paris, obliged to accept *Quarto* as even a greater success than Jorge Amado." Like Pelé, he added, she is the perfect kind of hero for the North Americans: she came out of nowhere to achieve glory and fortune.<sup>41</sup>

Readers in Brazil reacted to Carolina's diary in ways consistent with their outlook on life or their political agendas. Jânio Quadros, elected mayor of São Paulo as a reformer (and Brazilian president by the time the book appeared in print), had himself photographed embracing her. Dom Helder Câmara, Recife's "radical" archbishop, said: "there are those who will cry 'Communist' when they face a book such as this." J. Herculano Pires opined: "*Quarto* is the response of the *favela* to the city. No one expected that the *favela*, sunk in mud, was preparing a response." Luís Martins distanced himself from the author as if she would give him a disease: "I don't know if *Quarto de Despejo* is, rigorously speaking, a decent work of literature, but it is a book that leaves a mark." Others saw the work as a manifesto that needed to be read by "politicians, administrators, and candidates for political office." Walmir Ayala called Carolina a "person whose viewpoint is still not corrupted." Some accepted the book without hyperbole or reservation: "it is not a work of literature, and it is not a mere denouncement," Vivaldo Coracy wrote: "It is a document, and, as such, has to be taken seriously."<sup>42</sup> At least one member of high society, student Eduardo Matarrazo Suplicy, met with her at one of her autograph sessions and invited her to his home.<sup>43</sup> Carolina purportedly received dozens of offers of marriage. She was looked at, in the words of journalist Elias Raide, as "a curious animal."<sup>44</sup>

The early 1960s spawned a reformist wave characterized by amazement that the lower classes could produce figures—in this case, a black woman—worthy of attention. Such reformism in the past had been limited to projects by upper-class volunteers to teach uneducated women, usually not from the poorest nor darkest-complexioned groups, how to sew or prepare meals hygienically or care for their infants. In the 1930s, for example, such efforts in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo had been led by the "ladies' auxiliary" of the proto-fascist Integralist Party before it was banned for political subversion in 1938. In São Paulo during Getúlio Vargas's presidency in the early 1950s, Governor Prestes Maia worked to involve government agencies in relief for the poor. Through the late 1950s charity was provided either by the Catholic Church or by white upper-class society women, administered on a small scale in a sanitized, controlled environment. Two groups organized by women from the *paulista* elite—the *Sociedade Amigos da Cidade* and the affiliated *Sociedade de Amigos de Bairro*—actively worked to help poor families. But despite good intentions, *favelas* swelled in size, new ones were spawned, and millions lived in squalid conditions in tenements and in jerry-built houses like Carolina's as the industrializing city expanded in every direction with minimal services for the poor in the city and virtually no services in the periphery.

Most of the reporters who turned to investigative journalism in the late 1950s to find stories worthy of coverage came out of the reformist milieu. Furthermore, most stories of this kind had little follow-up: they tended to be published for the sensationalist aspects of the subject, then dropped. Brazil's lack of a longer-standing tradition of investigative journalism may explain why when women like Carolina were discovered they were treated so patronizingly and held at arm's length, or worse if they were black. Even when such women were praised, they were described stereotypically and with biting emphasis on their physical appearance. Zulmira Pereira da Silva, also from Minas Gerais like Carolina, also received attention from the press for her lifelong work of uncompensated charity. "Mother Zulmira," of the city of Governador Valadares, had spent most of her 64 years caring for the destitute in her home out of her meager resources because, as she was reported to have said, "I cannot leave anyone to die outdoors and be devoured by vultures."<sup>45</sup> But the stories soon stopped. In them, there was always an edge of condescension—the news stories constantly referred to her as "black and fat"; "the goodly black woman"; "the old black woman"—and there was an implication, even if faint, that she must have been slightly peculiar to choose to care for people who otherwise would have died in the street.<sup>46</sup>

### Carollna's Success

The published diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus became a sensation probably less because it revealed truths or secrets about slum life in Brazil than because it had been written from within by an uppity self-taught woman who refused to play by the rules and who demanded the right to dream of elevating herself and her children on her own terms. It became Brazil's all-time best-seller, surpassing even novelist Jorge Amado in sales, but the diary's message did not encourage the urban poor to challenge the system. Hunger and her constant struggle to find food for her family, not race and class, were Carolina's main concern.<sup>47</sup> She scorned her fellow *favelados*, reviling them as she fought to take her own family out of misery. *Quarto de Despejo* shocked its readers, but it did not anger them. She blamed *favelados*, whom she called "human wrecks," for their own misfortunes, arguing that they preferred drunken idleness, cursing, and fornication to working or self-improvement. She scolded politicians for their cynicism, but she never advocated abrupt social change. She did not dwell in her writing on problems of racial discrimination.<sup>48</sup>

Her dreams were abstract and escapist. She wrote about one, after a day hunting for scrap and carrying it to the junkyard:

I am very happy. I sing every morning. I'm like the birds who sing in the morning because in the morning I'm always happy. The first thing that I do is open the window and think about heaven.<sup>49</sup>

Some days later, she reported another:

I dreamt I was an angel. My dress was billowing and had long pink sleeves. I went from earth to heaven. I put stars in my hands and played with them. I talked to the stars. They put on a show in my honor. They danced around me and made a luminous path. When I woke up I thought: I'm so poor. I can't afford to go to a play so God sends me these dreams for my aching soul. To the God who protects me, I send my thanks.<sup>50</sup>

In the United States, *Quarto* was published by E. P. Dutton in 1962 in Rio resident David St. Clair's able translation. Critics lauded the book, calling it "immensely disturbing," adding their analysis of the causes of the conditions Carolina de Jesus described to the debate over the ways to combat hemispheric poverty in the spirit of the Kennedy administration's new Alliance for Progress. The book appeared in the following year as a Mentor paperback, published by the New American Library, and has been in print continuously although its trade imprint has changed since then to Penguin USA. The Mentor edition paperback sold 313,000 copies in the United States. From these books alone, according to her original contract, Carolina and her family should have received more than \$150,000, but there is no evidence that she received even a tiny portion of this.<sup>51</sup>

Carolina appeared on radio and television, gave dozens of interviews, lectured at universities, went on a tour of Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, and became a celebrity. In Buenos Aires she was presented with the "Order Caballero del Tornillo." Four months after her diary was published, she was honored by the Academy of Letters of the hallowed São Paulo Law Faculty. She was named "honorary citizen" of São Paulo and given the key to the city. She travelled throughout Brazil; she constantly surprised her audiences by reacting unpredictably to questions and by making statements considered provocative. Carolina in person was far more irritating than readers of *Quarto* expected. In Porto Alegre, when a black man appeared at her talk and protested racial discrimination, she joined with him, contending that he was right.<sup>52</sup> She argued with politicians Carlos Lacerda, the governor of Rio de Janeiro, and *paulista* Abreu Sodré. She posed alongside politicians frequently, permitting herself to be used, in essence, to further their careers.

Her subsequent books sold poorly. In November 1961, less than a year after *Quarto de Despejo* sold out its first edition, her publisher launched *Casa de Alvenaria: Diário de uma ex-favelada*, in the same diary form as her first book. It covered the period during the months after her departure from Canindé to her *casa de alvenaria*, her brick house. Although Audálio Dantas and others claimed that the second book was as important as the first, it sold only 3,000 of its edition of

10,000. Reflecting her rejection by her working-class neighbors in Santana, *Casa de Alvenaria* was much more aggressive than *Quarto de Despejo*. Carolina adopted more extreme language: perhaps this was acceptable for white-skinned radical students and intellectuals, but it was not tolerable from an uncouth black woman lacking public manners. In *Casa*, Carolina blamed politicians, even reformers who would be silenced by the 1964 military coup, including Miguel Arraes, Dom Helder Câmara, and Leonel Brizola. From a sideshow freak Carolina, by the time of the military dictatorship in the middle and late 1960s, had in the mind of hardliners become transformed into a communist, an advocate of strikes, someone who quoted from John F. Kennedy.<sup>53</sup> Literary critics remained aloof. One simply dismissed her work as a “failure” in the marketplace; another called it a “pastiche” of earlier described misery.<sup>54</sup>

Carolina’s third book, *Provérbios de Carolina Maria de Jesus* (1969) [Proverbs...], a collection of homespun homilies (e.g. “Only the strong know how to overcome the vicissitudes of life”), was dismissed in the press as the work of “Carolina Maria de Jesus, writer from the *favela*.”<sup>55</sup> “The greatest spectacle for the poor today,” she wrote, “is to have enough to eat at home.” Carolina paid for its publication from her other royalties: no publisher wanted it. *Provérbios* sold even fewer copies than *Casa*, and it yielded no royalties at all. She had worn out her curiosity status. As a result, her financial position, always precarious from the day she departed from the *favela*, suffered. Now that she was no longer a celebrity, there was no market for her books as literature.

By the time her last book, *Pedaços da Fome*, appeared in 1983, a novel along the lines of a television soap opera, Carolina had turned to a less prestigious publisher, São Paulo’s Editora Aquila, Ltd. Her new publisher tried everything to make the book succeed. The cover featured a drawing of a poor young girl holding an infant: oddly, both seemed to be more Caucasian than black. The introduction was written by a Finnish writer, Eva Vastari. There were four pages of critics’ excerpts extolling Carolina and her new book, ranging from Jorge Amado to such foreigners as the [unnamed] editor of E. P. Dutton in New York, the French critic Roger Grénier, Nobuo Hamaguchi, author of the preface to the Japanese edition, a Dutch critic, and a Swede. Her arguments were simple: personal wealth makes one bourgeois—not education, refinement, or social standing. Her novel’s characters were criticized for holding a manichean view of society. There are two types of wealthy people, she argued: rural landowners, and industrialists. Her urban male figures were vain and malicious. Rural men come to the city and are seduced by it.

Critics examining her writing during the late 1960s and early 1970s in some cases showed grudging respect for what they considered to be the improved quality of her grammar and accuracy, although they were quick to point out that her daughter Vera had helped her. In the words of an *O Globo* reporter, “for someone unschooled, the technical side of her writing is surprising.” “She is also...erudite, although this manifests itself [in] a certain mental confusion

[that] perhaps robs her of the authenticity she showed in the *favela*.”<sup>56</sup> We should not be surprised that Carolina made progress in her writing—she always had worked hard to improve herself and she used some of her royalties to buy a dictionary, desk encyclopedia, thesaurus, and daily newspapers. But few were willing to acknowledge this. Her discoverer, Audálio Dantas, said later that she “was a person subject to highs and lows,” and that this likely resulted from “a process of insanity, or mental overexertion, brought about by all of the misery through which she had passed.”<sup>57</sup>

### Blaming the Victim

Newspaper reports about the amount of royalties received by Carolina varied widely. One story claimed that through March 10, 1961, *Quarto* had earned for Carolina Cr\$6,000,000—the equivalent of \$31,579 at the beginning of 1961, and \$19,544 at the end.<sup>58</sup> She received small payments in dollars—in one case, \$300—from her American publishers, but she was prohibited by contract from authorizing foreign translations, ceding this right to Editôra Paulo de Azevedo Ltda., a branch of the powerful publishing house of Francisco Alves. She was to receive 10 percent of the sale price of foreign translations, minus 30 percent for Audálio Dantas.<sup>59</sup> With her initial proceeds she was able to buy a small dwelling in Santana, but she was soon forced to give it up because she could not maintain it.

In 1967, a photograph of Carolina picking up waste paper in the streets of São Paulo was published in newspapers across Brazil and throughout the world. An American, Robert Crespi, possibly moved by Carolina’s condition, wrote on Harvard University stationery, in a “mixture of Portuguese and Spanish,” asking her if the story of her return to poverty was true. He wrote to Carolina:

I have just read the English translation of *Quarto*. I have never read a better book about Brazilian life. I have heard that you are back in the *favela*. This life of hunger and survival is sad; I do not understand why you had to return. I hope that you can soon take your children to a better place...[but] I don’t know how one escapes from this kind of life. You may write to me if you wish...<sup>60</sup>

In 1969 she had accumulated enough resources, presumably from royalties trickling in, to move further away from her hostile Santana neighborhood, to Parelheiros, a weather-beaten, barren area near houses of the wealthy in the hills but, at lower elevations, the site of some of the poorest housing in the city’s suburban zone. Here, taxes and prices for land were lower and, most important, she thought she could find solitude.<sup>61</sup> Stark contrasts between rich and poor characterized the region: fabulous houses of the elite adjacent to huts of the poor, usually in valley areas where the air was polluted because of the proximity to the heavily-industrialized



region known as the “ABC.” Parelheiros, though poor, was as close as she could get to approximating the countryside of her childhood without entirely leaving the city of São Paulo and its public schools to which her children could travel by bus. Her son’s wages paid for part of the upkeep of her cement-block house. Carolina now spent much of her day alone, reading the daily newspaper, and cultivating corn and other garden crops but complaining that her gardening efforts cost as much as they yielded.<sup>62</sup>

Interviewed by a reporter, she said that she hoped to enlarge her property, build a water tank for irrigation, and grow more. She had come to live, in the journalist’s words, on the level of the “typical poor Brazilian *caboclo*,” a pejorative term used in this instance to emphasize her dark skin.<sup>63</sup> Her three children lived with her in her still-unfinished house, two hours by bus west of downtown São Paulo: João José, now 21, was a textile factory worker; José Carlos, 19, was enrolled in the first year of high school and also sold items by the side of the road to make money; Vera, 16, was a student. The house was built of cement blocks on 7,500 square meters of land, adjacent to an unpaved road. Visitors walked on boards over mud to enter the pumpkin-colored house with green window frames. The press later said that Carolina called her house the *Chácara Coração de Jesus*, the “Heart of Jesus cottage,” a pun on her name, but she denied it.<sup>64</sup> Shortly after arriving in Parelheiros, her royalties stopped. She had so little money that she and her children spent some days walking and collecting paper and bottles to sell, just as she had done in Canindé, although now she would use part of the money she earned scavenging to buy sodas or tickets to the movies. She soon settled into a routine. From time to time, she delivered avocados, bananas, and manioc she grew to a woman who sold it for her at a market. She raised chickens and pigs. Newspaper reports claimed that Carolina was receiving “small but steady” royalty payments but they were simply too small to lift her out of near-poverty. Carolina’s family lived much better than in the *favela*, but far below the level that an author whose books were still selling well in several foreign countries might otherwise be expected to have attained.<sup>65</sup>

She turned 57 years old in 1970. Although her personality continued to annoy people, it was very predictable. She continued to show audacity in fighting for herself and for her children. In that year she wrote to the governor of the interior State of Goiás, asking him to permit her to live among the Indians there, so that she could divide her property among her children; the letter was leaked to the press, which ridiculed it.<sup>66</sup> The flurry of sensationalism in the wake of revelations that she had fallen back into poverty subsided, and she continued living in her bare house in Parelheiros. Critics blamed her for failing to adjust to the middle-class life her success had made possible, and the reporters who were sent to write about her from time to time consistently showed irritation that this black woman-social critic was still a complainer. No one acknowledged that for a former slum dweller to have ups and downs, or to have difficulty adjusting to a world that

reviled people like her, was understandable. By emphasizing her eccentricities, the elitist press establishment trivialized her importance and depoliticized her message.

In 1972 Carolina let it be known that she was writing an autobiography concentrating on her youth, and especially on her family under her grandfather's influence. It would be titled *A Brazil for Brazilians*, and, consistent with her tendency to see things in an upbeat way, would contain anecdotes and humor. Yet in spite of her modest and straightforward goal of capturing the world of her youth in a positive light, her intentions were belittled. Her project was called "another effort by the writer to reconquer the fame and fortune which she had been unable to handle in the past."<sup>67</sup> The reporter interviewing her resented her reluctance to admit how much money she had earned, remarking that "it seems that she understands that she was tricked, but she is confused about it." "To admit this publicly," the reporter concluded, "would be a too-strong blow to her vanity."<sup>68</sup> Her response seemed not to be very confused at all: "I'm not sure how much I got," she said; "I still am receiving some revenue from France, where *Quarto* was successful. I earned about 40,000 cruzeiros" [in January 1972 this was the equivalent of \$7,100; in December, \$6,500]. The East bloc countries, she recounted in another interview, paid her nothing.<sup>69</sup>

Critics still attacked her. The well-known journalist Carlos Rangel, in a June 1975 interview, felt obliged to belittle even Carolina's perceptions. The "thread of water" near her "tiny homestead," he wrote, she calls a stream (*riacho*). A year later, Carolina was interviewed by Neide Ricosti of *Manchete*, the Rio de Janeiro-based national features magazine. The journalist emphasized Carolina's personal bad luck and unpleasant appearance: "With mud-covered feet, badly dressed, and disheveled, the *ex-favelada* lamented that the worst thing that had ever happened to her was to have written four books." As many times before, Carolina was blamed in elitist and racist terms for what had happened to her: "the surprising success that had yanked her out of misery," the article pontificated, "was too heavy for her naive-laden, almost primitive upbringing."<sup>70</sup> The reporter described for her readers the "discomfort and slovenliness" of Carolina's house on its "tiny plot of land." On the walls were yellow photographs, "demonstrating that time has passed, fading, as well, one's illusions." Electricity had been hooked up in 1974, and there were two television sets, one owned by her son, who lived with her. But there were no copies of *Quarto de Despejo* or *Casa de Alvenaria* in Portuguese, although her bookshelves contained copies in the languages to which her diaries had been translated.<sup>71</sup>

The reporter called attention to Carolina's vanity, quoting her subject's wistful statement that once she had purchased beautiful clothing at the Bela Itália emporium although Carolina herself made light of the matter by adding with a wide smile that "both the store and I are finished." She spoke in a firm voice in her "old manner" of making eye contact "from bottom to top" of the person with whom she was speaking. "A bit distrusting," the reporter added; "she resists talking

about the past.” “I don’t dwell on those days,” Carolina was quoted as saying; “Things were very confused; I didn’t understand what was happening to me. I went to Chile, Argentina, Uruguay... [as for] friends [they] come only when one has money. With poverty, everyone disappears.”<sup>72</sup>

According to Ricosti, Carolina claimed that although the press had said that she had earned the equivalent of thousands of dollars, she had earned little. Carolina attributed her relatively better standard of living in Parelheiros to the fact that she had left the *favela* “for the country.” There, she could “eat vegetables, kill a chicken, make soup.” As for what made her happy, she replied that they now had clothing to wear. Then the *Manchete* reporter quoted Carolina:

If I had to write *Quarto de Despejo* now, I wouldn’t. I was very rude... The book was a disaster for my life... I wrote influenced by hatred, hunger, misery, in the harsh atmosphere of the *favela*. I was a kind of a witch. It was hard to live in that atmosphere. In Brazil, there is no need to have that type of place: there is so much land. I don’t know how people carry on there. People who live in *favelas* totally lack culture. A cultured person, one who doesn’t get drunk, who reads, who behaves, who doesn’t steal from employers—doesn’t live in *favelas*. This is what my grandfather said; I wrote them down.<sup>73</sup>

Carolina had now come to incorporate into her own discourse about herself and her work the attitudes demonstrated so often by her critics. This should not have been surprising. She was now in her sixties, and her life had been filled with clashing values: pride in herself but a stubborn unwillingness to adopt the behavioral niceties that are supposed to come with attaining the things she aspired to; anger at other marginalized individuals for their failure to control themselves and to elevate themselves. The pattern of elitist and racist attacks on her continued even after Carolina withdrew to the isolation of her homestead in Parelheiros, and Carolina seemed to be growing more and more unwilling to respond in her old feisty manner. The passing of time and the continued burdens of her life were wearing her out.

One last opportunity arose for Carolina to regain public recognition for her writing. In December 1976, a São Paulo publisher made arrangements to issue a new, low-cost edition of *Quarto de Despejo* in the Edibolso series. The repressive atmosphere of the military regime had begun to lift, and publishers seemed more willing to take chances releasing books on issues of race and poverty. Carolina was invited to sign copies at various bookstores and newspaper kiosks on the Viaduto do Chá, São Paulo’s main artery, at the Shopping Center Iguatemi, in front of the old Matarazzo building, at the craft market at the Praça da República, and at other important places. She did the same in Rio de Janeiro, autographing books downtown and in Copacabana. She signed each book carefully: “With affection, Carolina Maria de Jesus,” or “God will guide you.” Briefly, Carolina exhibited excitement about the prospects for further attention to her book which was first published sixteen years before. Some of the autograph sessions were filmed and

broadcast over television; newspaper reports claimed that there would be a film made by a studio in the United States.

But the *Folha de São Paulo* story's caption was terse and patronizing: "Carolina: Victim or Crazy?" The story itself was worse. When the reporter arrived—unannounced—at Carolina's house, Carolina, she wrote, greeted her with a "grunt." Readers were told in words conveying distaste that when Carolina had visited Montevideo, she had "shaken the hand of the President of the Republic," Victor Hampedo. Was Carolina's hand dirty? Was it unnatural for a black *favelada* to make physical contact with the president of Uruguay? Readers were told that the Argentines had mocked her, presenting her with the "Order of the Screwdriver" with the inscription "only nuts make it to fame" [Falta um parafuso a menos em quem alcança a fama].

The barrage continued. "The woman who taught the Argentines [about Brazilian *favelas*] and who dreamed about stars," the reporter wrote, "met us [at Parelheiros] wearing a pink dress covered with dust. Her legs were covered with ordinary stockings, a clear dark beige, with blue and white tennis shoes." Carolina's garden plot, the reporter conceded, was well tended, and the ground well swept, "with the exception of one spot covered with a piece of newspaper which apparently had been blown there by the wind." The house's main room, the story went, was messy but clean; there was a cement floor. There was a bookcase with mostly "bem velho" [very old] volumes—Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Machado de Assis's *Quincas Borba*, and Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*. Carolina Maria de Jesus, best-selling author, was being judged by a *paulista* newspaper reporter on how she coordinated her wardrobe and kept house. Was she also being mocked for reading literary classics? The books were supplied by a used book dealer, the reporter found out.<sup>74</sup>

In this article, based on what may have been Carolina's last interview, the *Folha* reporter argued that *Quarto de Despejo* had achieved great success because of its authenticity—it was a book "of a paper scavenger who narrated her day-to-day life in the hell of the Canindé favela"—and because, the reporter claimed, Carolina was the creation of the press; never because of Carolina's talent or insight. Audálio Dantas, she wrote, now the president of the Association of Professional Journalists in São Paulo, hinted at this with the claim that when he arrived in April 1958 at the Canindé playground, Carolina chastised the men who were pushing the children off the swings, "because she saw it was me." "She had been trying to get her book published since 1948," Dantas said, emphasizing the point that naturally a black slum dweller could never get anything published on her own.<sup>75</sup> Dantas's peers, in fact, praised him for having not only done everything to get Carolina published but for working to set up a public commission to find ways to improve *favela* conditions.<sup>76</sup> There is no evidence that the commission ever accomplished anything.

Priests in Parelheiros, the article quoted Carolina as saying, were giving her writing lessons. She complained that her son played the phonograph too loudly for her to be able to read. Her photograph published with this final interview showed her with alert staring eyes. The caption read: “[Her] ideas, her complaints, her delirious head continue the same as ever.”<sup>77</sup> She had remained alert. Watching television and reading the newspaper, she was filled with ire about the continuing deterioration of slum conditions, about high infant mortality rates, about pollution, and about other issues of the day. She said that she knew how to write books that would be commercial successes, but she refused to do so because such books were “pornography.” She was never really happy, her son said, but “she never made a big thing about it in her life.”<sup>78</sup>

By 1976, two of Carolina's children, Vera and José Carlos, had married. José Carlos and his wife had three children. The reporter described Carolina's four-year-old granddaughter, Ligia, as a “light-skinned little *mulata* with a runny nose.” Late in the questioning, which lasted several hours, Carolina, who had always tried not to express bitterness when being interviewed, lashed out at Audálio Dantas and “all of the Brazilian and foreign publishers” involved in her work. She showed a notebook to the reporter, saying: “This is my way of getting back. I have terrible poems in which I will seek my vengeance. Here in this notebook I have all of my grief.”<sup>79</sup> To the reporter, she charged specifically that others were collecting royalties that by rights should have gone to her, based on her understanding that she would earn most of the money, followed by Dantas and Lélío de Castro of Livraria Francisco Alves.<sup>80</sup> She claimed that the only countries still paying her royalties were France and the United States. Dantas, in turn, accused her of having spent her money foolishly and blamed her for selling her house in Santana and taking an unnecessary loss. He added that much of Carolina's money had been squandered on unscrupulous lovers. No one ever attempted to explain publicly the fact that although Carolina should have received tens of thousands of dollars over the years for sales of foreign translations alone, she seems to have received a tiny percentage of this.<sup>81</sup>

Carolina died of emphysema at the age of 64 on February 13, 1977. Having difficulty in breathing, she had taken a bus to her son's house, and told her daughter-in-law, Joana, that she had come to their house to die. She refused to be taken to a hospital. Her children insisted, but she died en route to the local first-aid post. José Carlos, her surviving son, had no money to bury her. Her children appealed to the press for financial help, saying that they were penniless, but no help materialized.<sup>82</sup> Days before her death, she had been talking about visiting the United States to arrange for the movie about her life; she believed that she would play herself in the film. She did not invent this: two weeks before her death, the editor of the Edibolso series admitted to the press that a representative of her American publisher, E. P. Dutton, had contacted Carolina to say that the Scarpelli film company had offered her an advance of \$15,000 for the film rights to her

book. Edibolso sent a counteroffer, demanding a larger payment. Carolina, of course, earned nothing from this.<sup>83</sup>

Just as newspaper articles about her from the first time she came to public attention had always judged her harshly, the obituaries in the Brazilian press blamed her for having failed to adjust to success. She was unable to acquire a beneficial relationship with the “right” people, and she was too proud to play by the elite’s rules. The *Jornal do Brasil* obituary read in part:

Carolina Maria de Jesus, the author of *Quarto de Despejo*, died yesterday at the age of 61, as poor as she had been when she began to write the diary which would turn into the major best-seller in Brazil of all time...<sup>84</sup> Her book royalties allowed Carolina, in 1961, to purchase a brick house, a symbol—as she often pointed out—of her personal victory over hunger and misery. But her second book failed to attain the popularity of the first, and she began to quarrel with her friends and supporters including the journalist Audálio Dantas, who had discovered her scavenging for paper on which to write her diary, and who had acted as her agent.

Little by little, Carolina began to lose the monies which her book had brought her. She purchased everything in sight: she visited the famous, frequented the salons of the rich—but in time she began to irritate her hosts... Her inability to adjust to success cost her dearly... Forced to sell her brick house for non-payment of debts, she relocated her family to a rural shack along the Parelheiros road. There she raised chickens and pigs and lived in poverty, refusing, however, to become a burden on her now grown children. It was in this place that she was found yesterday, dead of an attack of acute asthma.<sup>85</sup>

Carolina, clearly, was being held to a higher standard than other Brazilians. The obituary virtually blamed her for having failed to transform herself into a docile, mannered member of the middle class even though consistently her neighbors—in Canindé as well as in Santana—always ostracized her. “When her body was discovered,” it concluded, “the mayor of nearby Embu-Guaçu offered a valedictory.” She was buried in the paupers’ cemetery of Vila Cipó, a polluted industrial suburb near Parelheiros, the place she had escaped to in search of fresh air and peace.

Shortly after Carolina’s death, a French publisher issued her fifth book, which was pieced together from manuscript fragments she had given to French reporters who had come to visit her. This was her *A Brazil for Brazilians* project, but it had never been completed. It was only published in Brazil in 1986, receiving little attention. In *Diário de Bitita*, she finally achieved her dream of writing about her childhood and the countryside. It speaks of poverty and racial discrimination but, just like her other writing, tempers bitterness with a sunny outlook and dry humor. She described a visit of her uncle to a photographer’s studio. The picture came out black: only his white suit could be seen. He refused to pay, protesting that “I’m not as black as this.”<sup>86</sup> The book ends thanking God for protecting her, even as a child, and asking only that she be permitted someday to buy a house and to live in peace.

Where had all of her royalties gone? We do not know for sure. She lost money on the sale of her brick house when she moved to Parelheiros. When she first became a sensation, she was accused of spending extravagantly on clothing, but she always had been modest and it is unlikely that she was able to squander all of her income. Audálio Dantas claimed that, like the French writer Colette, unscrupulous lovers took from her. Hard businessmen, her publishers forced her to pay with royalties from *Quarto de Despejo* for the publication of her three later books, all of which lost money. Publishers, not authors, typically receive the bulk of royalties paid for foreign translation rights,<sup>87</sup> and Audálio Dantas shared in her largesse. Dantas's own career, in fact, took off on the same trajectory as Carolina's in the beginning, but while hers quickly derailed, his continued to rise until he became a nationally known figure, the president of the national syndicate of journalists.

Carolina had no contracts or documents about author's royalties in her possession. She claimed in 1966 that she had been promised CR\$ 6,000,000 for the rights to the German translation but that nothing was ever paid. One of her editors told her it was "pointless to give anything to a negro who behaves like you."<sup>88</sup> The first ten editions of *Quarto de Despejo* sold out; the eleventh edition of 5,000 copies, printed in 1982, was still in print in late 1991, a sign, according to the publisher, that "the book's trajectory has ended." *Casa de Alvenaria* had sold out years before, and no records were kept of its sales or royalty payments. Claudio Lacerda of Livraria Francisco Alves Editora, her publisher, claimed that in the 1980s royalties for a 1982 edition were paid regularly through the company's São Paulo office to Carolina's daughter.<sup>89</sup>

In the view of the book's commercial success it still is difficult to believe that Carolina should have returned to poverty so soon after her meteoric rise to international fame. Given that reporters constantly beat a path to her door in Parelheiros during the 1970s, and that she continued to write and to demonstrate an acute awareness of her misfortune, it seems extraordinary that no one bothered to take her side or to intercede on her behalf. But Carolina alienated people by refusing to temper her opinions. She embarrassed everyone who held to the myth of Brazil's national trait of tolerance. She never found a patron to rescue her, if only as a symbol of a brave woman who fought tenaciously to climb out of her abject poverty; but then again she never asked to be defended or cared for, she was too independent for that. It seems odd though that this never happened, because the Brazilian style traditionally has been to deny the existence of discrimination against classes or groups of people.

In late 1991, Juliano Spyer, a history student at the University of São Paulo, took a bus to Parelheiros and attempted to track down Carolina's family. The task proved easy: there was no mystery about her children; simply no one had asked in years. Vera Eunice de Jesus Lima and her husband Paulo, a metal worker, live nearby, but no one lives in Carolina's house except for caretakers hired by Carolina's daughter to maintain the garden. While her mother was still alive,

Vera became a teacher in the local public school; she studied English at night at the private, low-prestige Anhembi-Morumbí academy, taking a crowded municipal bus to classes. João José, the eldest son, died. José Carlos, born before Vera Eunice, lives in Vila Cipó with his wife and their children. An alcoholic, he is rarely sober during the day.

What is remarkable about Carolina's saga is that fifteen years after her death, three decades after *Quarto de Despejo* became Brazil's all-time best selling book, even socially aware Brazilians of the younger generation rarely have more than a vague recollection of her saga. Her books, to be sure, disappeared from bookstores after the military coup in 1964. It is unclear whether this was a result of direct action by censors or of voluntary decisions by Carolina's publishers to withdraw books that might be considered subversive or incendiary. It is unlikely that any of Carolina's books were assigned as reading in secondary schools or included in university-level course reading lists after 1964, a fate shared by the works of most women writers.<sup>90</sup> When asked about Carolina in 1991, one young woman, an anthropologist in São Paulo, remembered her as the "favelada que pirou" [the slum-dweller who cracked up], but knew nothing about her book.

That Carolina Maria de Jesus remained far better known in France, the United States, and the rest of the world than in Brazil is understandable given that Brazil's elite and middle classes turned their backs on her. Her case was not unique. Her story paralleled in some ways the career of Joaquim Cruz, a Brazilian black who rose from poverty to win two Olympic medals, a gold in 1984 and a silver in 1988, only to be ostracized later because he refused to be submissive.<sup>91</sup> Another case was that of boy actor Pixote, who starred in an internationally successful film, became impoverished again, had a second chance with films and television, but ended up killed while participating in a robbery. Still another was the case of Flavio da Silva, a chronically ill 12-year-old Rio de Janeiro *favelada* photographed by *Life* magazine's Gordon Parks who, after being brought to the United States and treated for two years, returned to Rio, spent the funds accumulated for him by *Life* readers, and quickly reverted to a marginal existence.<sup>92</sup>

Carolina was portrayed as naive, but in reality it was her powers of observation and her uninhibited willingness to express herself that made her distinctive. She had neither money management skills nor any understanding of what educated Brazilians expected of her. To the Foreign Ministry, which ignored her request in 1966 to declare her diary property of the national domain, she said that she had "figured that I would be back on the streets looking for paper," but that she never expected to have to fight for such a small honor.<sup>93</sup> At the time of the publication of her diary, she called President Juscelino Kubitschek a "wise man living in a golden cage." Carolina never failed to touch a nerve; therefore she had to be fast relegated to obscurity. Her story illustrates several themes characteristic of Brazilian society: the gulf separating the very poor from everyone else; the awkwardness of privileged whites having to deal with a crudely mannered



black woman; and the uneasiness of contact between members of the lowest classes and others. In this case, class lines may pose more of an obstacle than racial lines for interaction purposes, but the fact that Carolina's blackness obsessed many of her critics casts light on the social expectation in Brazil that to be accepted a black must conform to white norms. Carolina either did not know how to do this or did not want to do so, and therefore she was discarded as an embarrassment.

By dismissing Carolina's achievements and by pointing out the flaws in her writing style, the journalistic and literary establishment effectively neutralized the impact her work might have had if it had been read for its content. More than anything else, *Quarto* and her later books unmasked the myth of Brazil as a racial democracy, a myth so embedded in national culture that for anyone to challenge it—especially an unmannered black woman from the slums—could not be tolerated. Virtually all the reviews and commentaries that appeared in print evaded the issues that Carolina wrote about: poverty, hunger, the fate of blacks and poor women. One after another, reputable critics focused on the individual Carolina herself, at best painting her as a curiosity, at worst as a scold and a nuisance. What Carolina suffered at the hands of the Brazilian establishment had been shared by many if not most prefeminist female authors on socially controversial subjects, but what was unusual about her case was the lack of even grudging acknowledgement of her importance and of her message by any critics from any ideological position. It was as if Brazilian academics and journalists and writers and politicians closed ranks to stifle her point about the absence of racial democracy and the contempt held for the underclass, especially for its black and women members. Never did reviews of her work or commentaries about her life attack the system. Over nearly two decades, critics neutralized her critique, emphasized its internal inconsistencies, and refused to recognize Carolina either as a literary figure or as a crusader or as a fighter for the dignity and well-being of her family.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The controversial study by Janice E. Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), esp. pp. 242-245, found Rio de Janeiro *favelas* to be relatively well-organized, hard-working, and resourceful, but later specialists, including Nancy Cardia and Myriam de Castro, working independently in the slums of São Paulo, found these to be not very organized, filled with independent people who did not trust one another.

<sup>2</sup> On other occasions, she was described as having born as early as 1913 and as late as 1921. See Célia Pisa, introduction to the French translation, *Le Dépotoir* (Paris: Éditions A.-M. Métailié, 1982), p. 7; Robert Collin, "Elle a écrit un best-seller," *Le Monde*, Arq. *O Globo*.

- <sup>3</sup> None of the prefaces or introductions to her published books give anything more than these sketchy details about her early life. Clearly her publishers were not interested in seeing her as an individual.
- <sup>4</sup> Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31.
- <sup>5</sup> By contrast, less industrial Rio de Janeiro had by this time 200 favelas with at least 337,000 inhabitants. See David St. Clair, Translator's Preface to *Child of the Dark: the Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus* (New York: Mentor Books, 1962), p. 8. See also Lea Ramsdell, "National Housing Policy and the Favela in Brazil" in *The Political Economy of Brazil: Public Practices in an Era of Transition*, ed. Lawrence S. Graham and Robert H. Wilson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 164-185.
- <sup>6</sup> *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Oct. 24, 1972; David St. Clair, Translator's Preface to *Child of the Dark: the Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus* (New York: Mentor Books, 1962), pp. 8-9.
- <sup>7</sup> David St. Clair, Translator's Preface to *Child of the Dark: the Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus* (New York: Mentor Books, 1962), p. 10. St. Clair says 1943; he likely meant 1953.
- <sup>8</sup> *Child of the Dark*, p. 37.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview, Cristina Mehrtens, Coral Gables, December 11, 1991.
- <sup>10</sup> I am grateful to Cristina Mehrtens for this observation.
- <sup>11</sup> *Child of the Dark*, p. 44.
- <sup>12</sup> *Child of the Dark*, p. 47.
- <sup>13</sup> Audálio Dantas, interview with Juliano Spyer, São Paulo, p. xxx.
- <sup>14</sup> David St. Clair, Translator's Preface to *Child of the Dark: the Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus* (New York: Mentor Books, 1962), p. 12.
- <sup>15</sup> David St. Clair, Translator's Preface to *Child of the Dark: the Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, p. 12. Juliano Spyer observes that Carolina's diary entries for the years 1955-58 may have been sparse when Dantas read them, and that he may have worked with her to add material retrospectively.
- <sup>16</sup> *Folha da Noite* (São Paulo), May 9, 1958, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- <sup>17</sup> Quoted in Carlos Rangel, "Após a glória, solidão e felicidade," *Folha de São Paulo*. June 29, 1975, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- <sup>18</sup> Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Casa de Alvenaria*, p. 11.
- <sup>19</sup> Copies were sold exclusively at Livraria Francisco Alves for a week; then they were released to other booksellers. St. Clair, Translator's Preface, p. 12.
- <sup>20</sup> *O Estado de São Paulo*, February 14, 1977, Arq. *O Globo*.
- <sup>21</sup> These included Elizabeth Burgos-Debray's *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú* (Barcelona, 1983; São Paulo, 1984), about the life of a Guatemalan Indian peasant, and Moema Viezzer's *Se Me Deixam Falar* (Mexico City, 1977; São Paulo, 1982), the story of the life of a miner's wife. José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy notes that Carolina's diary became famous for different reasons in Brazil and in the exterior. Nationally, it addressed the concern at the time over questions of urban reform, poverty, the migration of northeasterners to the south, and related issues; to international readers, it offered dramatic evidence of the dangers of underdevelopment.
- <sup>22</sup> Notarized Contract, Liv. Francisco Alves, 1960 (date is unclear from xerox copy of contract). Courtesy Claudio Lacerda and Nélida Piñón.
- <sup>23</sup> David St. Clair, Translator's Preface, p. 14.
- <sup>24</sup> Maria de Lourdes Teixeira, "Diário da Fome," *Manchete*, c. 1960, p. 10. Arq. *O Globo*.
- <sup>25</sup> See, for example. "Da favela para a fama," *O Globo*, February 14, 1977, Arq. *O Globo*.
- <sup>26</sup> *O Cruzeiro* (Rio de Janeiro), November 1961, Arq. *O Globo*. (Note: All sources from the *O Globo* archive are clippings and therefore do not have page numbers.)
- <sup>27</sup> *Tribuna de Imprensa* (Rio de Janeiro), March 10, 1961. Arq. *O Globo*.
- <sup>28</sup> *Tribuna de Imprensa* (Rio de Janeiro), March 10, 1961. Arq. *O Globo*.
- <sup>29</sup> *Casa de Alvenaria*, p. 118.
- <sup>30</sup> Quoted by Neide Ricosti, "Carolina de Jesus," *Manchete*, April 21, 1973, n.a., Arq. *O Globo*.

- 31 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Dec. 11, 1969, Arq. *O Globo*.
- 32 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Arq. *O Globo*; Carlos Rangel, "Após a glória, solidão e felicidade," *Folha de São Paulo*, June 29, 1975, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- 33 Claudio Lacerda of Livraria Francisco Alves Editora said in 1991 that he doubted if specific pressure had been applied from the dictatorship for the book to be suppressed, pointing out that newspapers and the periodical press were subject to censorship much more than book publishers. Letter, Claudio Lacerda to Diana Aragão, Rio de Janeiro, December 16, 1991, courtesy of Dr. Ivo Barbieri.
- 34 Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Casa de Alvenaria*, p. 2.
- 35 *Casa de Alvenaria*. (Courtesy of Cristina Mehrtens).
- 36 *Herald Tribune* and *Horizon* quotes from back jacket of Mentor edition of *Child of the Dark*.
- 37 Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31.
- 38 Alberto Moravia, preface to Carolina de Jesus, *Quarto de Despejo* (title of the Italian edition] (Milan: Valentino Bompiani, 1962), pp. 6-7.
- 39 Mario Trejo, Prologue to *La Favela: Casa de Desahogo* (Havana: Casa de las Americas, 1989), p. vii.
- 40 Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31; Carlos Rangel, "Após a glória, solidão e felicidade," *Folha de São Paulo*, June 29, 1975, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- 41 Carlos Rangel, "Após a glória, solidão e felicidade," *Folha de São Paulo*, June 29, 1975, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- 42 Statements published in frontpiece to Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Casa de Alvenaria: Diário de uma ex-favelada* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Francisco Alves, 1961).
- 43 Courtesy of Cristina Mehrtens. Suplicy later became a prominent member of the Marxist-inspired Labor Party (PT), and in the 1990s attained considerable success in elections in São Paulo, becoming until now the only PT senator.
- 44 Elias Raide, cited in Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31.
- 45 José Franco, "Dona Zulmira: Guardiã dos pobres," *O Cruzeiro* (Rio de Janeiro), Dec. 9, 1961, pp. 57-58.
- 46 José Franco, "Dona Zulmira: Guardiã dos pobres," p. 58.
- 47 See George Reid Andrews, *Black and White in São Paulo* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. xxx. Her conservatism and her emphasis on food, not race, may have alienated her from intellectuals.
- 48 *Child of the Dark*, p. 103.
- 49 *Child of the Dark*, p. 229.
- 50 *Child of the Dark*, p. 105.
- 51 Marvin S. Brown, Editor of the New American Library, letter to author, New York, February 13, 1992. Mr. Brown says that no records were kept on the number of hardcover sales. He declined to provide data on sales of the new Penguin USA edition or about the book's royalty arrangements.
- 52 Interviews, Audálio Dantas, São Paulo, p. xxx. Like her, he was a lone figure speaking out against society; she empathized with him. (Courtesy Cristina Mehrtens.)
- 53 *Casa de Alvenaria*, p. 135.
- 54 Carlos Rangel, "Após a glória, solidão e felicidade," *Folha de São Paulo*. June 29, 1975, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- 55 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Dec. 11, 1969, Arq. *O Globo*.
- 56 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Dec. 11, 1969, Arq. *O Globo*.
- 57 Cited by Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31.

- 58 Exchange rate courtesy of Cristina Mehrtens.
- 59 Notarized contract, *op. cit.*
- 60 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Dec. 11, 1969, Arq. *O Globo*. According to the newspaper article, she did not reply, "to avoid further scandal."
- 61 Interview, Vera Eunice de Jesus Lima with Juliano Spyer, March 1, 1992.
- 62 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Dec. 11, 1969, Arq. *O Globo*.
- 63 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro). Dec. 11, 1969, Arq. *O Globo*; Neide Ricosti, "Carolina de Jesus," *Manchete*, April 21, 1973, n.p., Arq. *O Globo*; *Jornal do Brasil*, Feb. 14, 1977, Arq. *O Globo*. The term *caboclo* more properly meant a person with mixed Indian, Caucasian, and African blood but in the sense of the newspaper article it clearly meant a black. It was used, in Monteiro Lobato's sense of the term, to connote laziness and lack of industry.
- 64 Vera Eunice later denied this, suggesting instead that the press invented the story about the name for irony. (Courtesy Juliano Spyer.)
- 65 See *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), December 11, 1976, Arq. *O Globo*.
- 66 *Folha de São Paulo*, Feb. 9, 1970, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- 67 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Oct. 24, 1972, Arq. *O Globo*.
- 68 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Oct. 24, 1972, Arq. *O Globo*.
- 69 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), Oct. 24, 1972, Arq. *O Globo*. (Exchange rate courtesy of Cristina Mehrtens.) See also Carlos Rangel, "Após a glória, solidão e felicidade," *Folha de São Paulo*, June 29, 1975, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- 70 Neide Ricosti, "Carolina de Jesus," *Manchete*, April 21, 1963, n.p., Arq. *O Globo*.
- 71 Carolina claimed that she had purchased copies of the Brazilian edition from time to time in used bookstores, but that people had stolen them from her when they visited her house. Carlos Rangel, "Após a glória, solidão e felicidade," *Folha de São Paulo*, June 29, 1975, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- 72 *Loc. cit.*
- 73 *Loc. cit.*
- 74 He was Hernani Ferreira, whom Carolina called her "lawyer." See Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31.
- 75 Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31. If this is true, Dantas must have been referring to her stories and poems, since Carolina did not begin writing her diary until 1955. For Carolina's part, she claimed in 1975 to have called the *Folha* to send a reporter to cover the playground story.
- 76 Elias Raide, cited by Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31.
- 77 Photograph in *Folha de São Paulo*, Dec. 1, 1976, p. 31.
- 78 José Carlos de Jesus, letter to *Folha de São Paulo Ilustrada*, Feb. 20, 1977, Arq. *Folha de São Paulo*.
- 79 Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31.
- 80 She singled out for blame a Mr. [Ernest] Miller, who arranged for author's rights from various countries, and Romiglio Jean Compoff, who had arranged for the rights in Germany and Italy. Cited in Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" p. 31. Miller, she told another reporter, "took a good deal of advantage." The Argentine agent (Juan Compof), she said, "vanished"; she may have been referring to Compoff. See *Jornal do Brasil*, December 11, 1976, Arq. *O Globo*. Audálio Dantas, who according to Regina Penteado asked Regina not to publish the names, said that Miller, who spoke several languages, had volunteered to help Carolina negotiate with foreign publishers, and vouched for his integrity. The reason for lack of domestic royalties, he said, was due to the poor sales of all but her first book. Apparently her Brazilian publisher deducted its losses on the subsequent books from the royalties due for *Quarto*.
- 81 Audálio Dantas, quoted in Regina Penteado, "Carolina, vítima ou louca?" *Folha de São Paulo*, December 1, 1976, p. 31. In the United States, Dutton's Signet, Signet Classic, Mentor, and

other book lines were acquired by Penguin Books USA in 1990. To this date, efforts to obtain from the American publishers of *Child of the Dark* either sales figures or information about to whom in Brazil royalties have been paid have not been successful.

82 *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), February 14, 1977, Arq. *O Globo*.

83 *O Estado de São Paulo*, February 14, 1977, Arq. *O Globo*.

84 This, of course, was not true. She did not die "as poor as she had been" earlier.

85 Alberto Buettemuller, "Carolina Maria de Jesus: A morte longe da casa de alvenaria," *Jornal do Brasil*, Feb. 14, 1977, Caderno B, p. 5.

86 *Diário de Bitita*, p. 64.

87 Traditionally, the publisher retains foreign translation rights and is obliged to pay royalties to authors only when provided for contractually. This may have been the case, although Carolina's foreign publishers refused to comment on the matter. See letter to author, Marvin S. Brown, Penguin USA, New York, February 13, 1992.

88 *Jornal do Brasil*, July 6, 1966, Arq. *O Globo*.

89 Letter, Claudio Lacerda to Diana Aragão, Rio de Janeiro, December 16, 1991. (Courtesy of Dr. Ivo Barbieri.)

90 David St. Clair wrote in 1962 that her book had "become required reading in sociology classes" but his statement may have not been meant literally. See David St. Clair, Translator's Preface, pp. 13-14.

91 He left Brazil, and found athletic sponsors elsewhere. (Courtesy of Glaucio Dillon Soares, Department of Sociology, University of Florida.)

92 See Gordon Parks, *Flavio* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978); "Freedom's Fearful Foe: Poverty," *Life*, June 16, 1961, pp. 86ff; *Life*, "Flavio's Rescue," July 21, 1961, pp. 24-35; Vicki Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), pp. 185-189.

93 *Jornal do Brasil*, July 6, 1966, Arq. *O Globo*.