

GEORGE MONTEIRO

ARCHER TAYLOR TO A YOUNG LITERARY FOLK-
LORIST: AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS

Abstract: After having seen a collection of Portuguese proverbs in *Western Folklore* in 1963, Archer Taylor initiated a correspondence with the young folklorist George Monteiro who had put together the collection. They exchanged eleven letters over the next decade, the last one mailed by Taylor only weeks before his death in 1973. From this correspondence there emerges a portrait of the senior folklorist's kind and eager willingness to encourage the younger man's efforts by offering him specific and detailed advice about contacts, as well as suggesting places and opportunities for collecting.

Keywords: Portuguese proverbs, "Good fences make good neighbors", religious parodies, correspondence, folklore, *Proverbium*, *Revista Lusitana*, *Western Folklore*, Teófilo Braga, Victor de Guinzbourg, Matti Kuusi, Leite de Vasconcelos, Fernando de Castro Pires de Lima.

My interest in sayings, I am certain, antedates, my coming to know that there was a categorical name for such common expressions. Growing up in a Portuguese emigrant family, I heard these sayings at home and outside in the neighborhood. Door-to-door peddlers of fruits, vegetables, bread, and fabrics used them. So, it was not surprising to me, that later, when in graduate school working toward a degree in English literature, I took time out from my work toward a degree in English, to set down the proverbs I remembered from my youth and to think that I might begin to collect proverbs from members of my family and Portuguese friends. This collecting came to a head early in the 1960s when I prepared my collection of proverbs, garnered mainly from Portuguese-speaking natives of mainland Portugal who had settled in New England.¹ In the course of that preparation I ferreted about in search of scholarly materials pertaining to the collection and study of proverbs. Thus, right off, I came upon *The*

Proverb (1931). Thirty years after its publication, Archer Taylor's classic work was a revelation to a newcomer to the world of proverb study.

It would not have surprised his colleagues in scholarship, I imagine, that my collection, published in *Western Folklore*, caught Archer Taylor's attention or that he promptly wrote to me. It was the first of eight letters I received from him, the last one dating from the "summer of 1973" (as I recorded in the margin)—just before his death on September 30th of that year.

These letters to a hopeful scholar he did not know and would never meet, offer ample evidence of his readiness to extend a helping hand by way of offering advice and useful information to persons sharing his devotion to proverb scholarship. My "other" side of this correspondence has been included as an aid to rounding out the context for Archer Taylor's letters.

1.

University of California
Department of German
Berkeley 4, California

5 February 1963

Dear Professor Monteiro:

Your Continental Portuguese Proverbs are extremely interesting,—and some of them are obscure, even when translated.

I venture to suggest that the three men most interested in them are

Lt.-Col. Victor de Guinzbourg, Military Staff Committee, United Nations, New York.²

Look him up when you are in New York. He is charming.

Professor Fernando de Castro Pires de Lima, Rua Faria Guimarães, Porto, Portugal.³

Look him up, too, when you are in Porto. He is founding a new journal (I don't know the title, since no. 1 is printing), that will interest you.⁴

Professor Matti Kuusi, Runeberginkatu 29 B, Helsinki, Finland.⁵

He has complained to me more than once about the rarity of Portuguese collections. He has the Refraneiro you cite.⁶

He is the man most interested in international proverbs.

They would appreciate and use reprints, if you have any.

Our set of *Revista lusitana* is defective, and knowing that I haven't got round to see whether we have the portion that PdeL told me contains Leite de Vasconcelos's article or historical collection of Portuguese proverbs.⁷

Cordially
Archer Taylor

2.

February 12, 1963

Dear Professor Taylor:

Thank you so much for your kind letter on my Continental Portuguese proverbs. I shall of course send reprints to the three people whose names and address you helpfully gave me.

Since I have continued to collect all kinds of Portuguese folklore in the United States, I hope to be able to print in the near future a supplementary collection of proverbs. I have already gathered some seventy-five or so which are on the current list. Incidentally, I shall also print some riddles when I have added to the twenty-five I have now.

You mentioned in your letter that some of the proverbs in my article are obscure. I may be able to eliminate some this obscurity if you will be so kind as to send me a list of the numbers of those in question. Even if I cannot immediately account for all of them myself, I am certain that I can discover their meaning by checking them specifically with my informants.

Enclosed are reprints of some of my folklore publications. Thank you again for your considerate word.

Cordially,
George Monteiro

3.

University of California
 Department of German
 Berkeley 4, California

20 Feb. 63

Dear Mr. Monteiro:

I noted these proverbs that might call for comment:

- 6. Cape?
- 7. A bit dark to me.
- 12. Application? I would say without hesitation, "He has his roots in R. I."
- 16. Is a superstition involved?
- 18. This escapes me.
- 41. Don't we say "Better bend than break"? The difference is curious.
- 49. "Drags"? Drags them on the scene?
- 50. Just a little beyond me.
- 59. Very curious, but not altogether clear.
- 62. How applied?
- 100. This one inspired my comment. "I don't get it."
- 114. i.e., he's dead and we aren't?
- 116. The cobbler's wife (children?) is ill-shod? I quote inaccurately from memory.
- 139. Just a bit beyond me.
- 144. If it's Virgin, then perhaps I understand. If it isn't then I don't. The Portuguese suggests virgin.
- 156. Cf. Save a thing for seven years and you will find a use for it.
- 193. "If it's a question of dying?"
- 258. "at the brook" There is probably an explanation, but it would be hard to find.
- 321. ?
- 384. wind up?
- 389. ?
- 412. Mafra? I was there, a pretty place. There's an allusion here, but what?
- 419. ?

426. Is Lapa a place? Why italicized?

I suspect occasional American influences. This collection is, I repeat, very, very choice and extremely interesting. I am happy to have the reprint.

The men to whom you sent reprints will enjoy your collection. I haven't seen a collection of 457 genuine proverbs from oral tradition, the real stuff, "since Hector was a pup."

I was in Portugal three times between 1959 and 1962. I couldn't understand anything, but got the impression that it was the Promised Land for collecting. And it is a delightful country. I have yet to see Coimbra (through [which] I passed) and Evora. Pires de Lima said he would take me out in the country for two or three days, should I come again, but I wouldn't impose on his good nature to that extent. Go over and see him. He is delightful. His French is as bad as mine (that is saying a great deal), and he has no English, but we get on. In fact, the "contact" is better than when his nephew, a medical student who speaks good English, is present. If I were twenty years younger, I should find some way to get back into the mountains and collect tales.

P.S. and N.B. You know that if you fly to Europe, the return via Madrid and Lisbon costs perhaps \$12.00 more. Of course if you fly only to London, then it may be more, perhaps \$40.

Yours
Archer Taylor

Give Leicester Bradner my best when you pass him.⁸

4.

June 10, 1963

Dear Professor Taylor:

I have held off answering your letter until such time as I might be able to answer some of your questions on specific proverbs that you were kind enough to send me. In fact, if I ever reprint this collection (and since I have over two hundred additional items gathered more or less casually from just three or four informants, it appears probable that my collection may someday become substantial enough to merit doing so), I shall

make a number of changes in my translations which will reflect your comments.

Here are such explanations as I have been able to put together—

6. Cape?
A capa e a merenda nunca fez má companhia.
A mantle (or cloak) and a lunch are never poor company.
7. A culpa morreu solteira, porque ninguem a quis.
Exp. No one ever willingly accepts or “espouses” blame or guilt.
12. A gente não tem raiz na terra.
Application. Human beings have to eat, unlike trees and plants which gain nourishment by putting roots into the earth.
16. A mim não-me fazes o ninho na orelha, porque eu já passei no mar.
I do not know whether a superstition is involved here. One explanation, however, may be that only those who are inexperienced will allow a bird to build its nest in their ears.
18. A morte sempre deixa desculpa.
Exp. A cause (excuse) for anyone’s death can always be determined, even though death needs no excuse.
41. Antes quebrar que tercer.
The Portuguese proverb, unlike ours, is intended to suggest stubbornness, resolution, defiance; usually said about another.
49. As madrastas, o diabo as arrasta.
The devil himself belabors and abuses stepmothers.
50. As mulheres são umas no pano e outras na mostra.
Exp. Women are often treacherous, for their outward appearance is misleading.
59. Até para a morte há remédio, é estender a perna.
This proverb suggests the futility of finding a cure when the disease is death itself.

62. Besta grande, cavalo de pau.
Application is vague: As I understand it, it is usually said about a person large in size, but who has no ability.
100. Depois do burro morto, cevada ao rabo.
Exp. Ignoring a person when alive, but lamenting him and generally making a fuss over him after his death.
114. Ele pagou, e nós devemos.
Cf. Henry IV, I, each man owes God a death. Hence the dead have paid, but we, the living, are still in debt.
116. Em casa de ferreiro, espeta de pau.
Your suggestion: “The cobbler’s wife (children?) is ill-shod.”
139. Falaste tu que não estavas lá? Assim falou ele.
The times I have heard this one, its application was merely to report and to point up how evasive or embarrassed some third person (not present) had been when asked a question or when he should have taken initiative in a conversation. The meaning, then, is ironic: he spoke as readily and loudly as you did (but of course you weren’t there at all.)
144. Fia-te na virgem, e não corras, verás o tombo que apanhas.
You are quite right; it should be “Virgin.” The idea here is something like that of the Emily Dickinson poem: “Faith is a fine invention / For gentlemen who see; / But microscopes are prudent / In an emergency!”
156. Guarda o que não presta, encontrareis o que precisas.
Your suggestion “Save a thing for seven years and you will find a use for it” is appropriate. Perhaps I could give it: “Save what appears to be useless and therein you will in the future find what you will need.”
193. Morrer por morrer, môrra meu pai que é mais velho.

“If it’s a question of dying” is much better than my “Dying for dying.” Hence: “If it’s a question of dying, let my father die; he’s older (than I am).”

258. O Fevereiro enganou a mãe no ribeiro.
Your question “at the brook”? Since weather is most changeable (hence treacherous) in February, the mother (of a family, not, I think, February’s mother) was betrayed into going to the brook or stream to do her laundry. This proverb may be one of a connected series, but I do not have enough on it at this moment to work it out fully.
321. Quando a raposa anda ós grilos, mal para os pais, pior para os filhos.
When the fox is after such slim fare as crickets, it bodes ill for parents and worse for children. This suggests, of course, the paucity of foodstuffs in a given year.
389. Quem têm cu têm medo.
Exp. It is as natural for a man to possess fear as it is for him to have backsides.
384. Quem se veste de ruím pano, veste-se duas vezes no ano.
Please read: “Those who dress in poor fabric, end by clothing themselves twice a year.”
412. São como as obras de Mafra, que nunca têm fim.
You are quite right. The allusion is, as my informant explains, to great architectural projects—convents and palaces—planned and begun at Mafra but not yet finished. The expression now suggests endlessness and futility.
419. Se queres ver teu corpo desmancha o teu porco.
This is a statement, of course, of the physiological and anatomical similarity between the human body and that of the pig. (Fetal pigs are still used for dissection in introductory courses in biology at Brown.)
426. Srs. Da Lapa, quem boa vida leva boa fome rapa.

Again you are right. Lapa *is* a place and it should *not* have been italicized.

Since writing last, I have heard from Dr. Pires de Lima. Besides sending me copies of two of his recent works and asking me to contribute to his new journal, he has invited me to the International Congress of Ethnography to be held at Santo Tirso in July of this year. Although I seriously considered attending, it finally became clear that I could not go at this time. I have been trying to visit Portugal for five years, but have not yet succeeded in bringing time and money together. I should like nothing better than to get into the mountains to collect folktales, as you suggested. In fact, my father was a native of Trás-os-Montes and I still have two or three cousins, whom I have never seen, living in Freixo de Espada à Cinta. By next spring I shall have completed my dissertation on the poetry of Edward Taylor⁹; after that I shall probably be free to collect Portuguese folklore more systematically, both in New England and at some future time in Portugal.

Thank you again for your many kindnesses.

Cordially,
George Monteiro

Dept. of English

5.

15 June 1963

Dear Professor Monteiro:

Thank you for your very interesting letter. My three visits to Portugal in 1959, 1961, and 1962 have left me with such a warm feeling for the country that I am always glad, even with my scanty knowledge of the language, to read something about Portuguese things. You will find Pires de Lima a prince and I am happy that you have joined company with him. I shall keep your notes for future use.

I asked PdeL whether there was a historical dictionary of Portuguese proverbs. He referred me to some collectanea by Braga in *Revista lusitana*.¹⁰ Francis Very (assoc. prof. Spanish at Northwestern) found them for me and xeroxed them. Braga's collection is not very long, is arranged in the most inconvenient manner imaginable, i.e., according to the author and the se-

quence of the works, and stops in the vol. of Rev. lus. for 1924. I believe Braga died in that year. At any rate the amount of material is not large. Woodbridge, here, suggests that a collection should include all down to and through Gil Vicente.¹¹ Perhaps I can dangle Braga's collection in front of him and tempt him. Very also Xeroxed a study of proverbs by Adrião, but this doesn't seem to contain too much from a time before Gil Vicente.¹² And, I am indebted to him for something like \$27, more or less. The moralizing proverbs look pretty blind to me. Rev. lus. is here, although fragmentary, and I have not verified how much duplication there may be in what I have. At any rate I shall be mulling over this stuff during the summer.

With an additional two hundred proverbs you have a sizable collection and should good luck bring you more all the better. In any case you would have something very nice some day for PdeL's journal.

I do hope your chance for a month or two in Portugal comes and I shall be envying you when you start out for your good luck.

Cordially
Archer Taylor

6.

University of California
Department of German
Berkeley 4, California

18 February 1964

Dear Mr Monteiro:

Your collection of parodies is admirable.¹³ I did not know that so much had been printed. My only note is a text that isn't precisely a parody:

At the graveside where a notorious individual was being interred there was a silence after the coffin had been laid in the grave. No one could think of a word to say. Finally, someone spoke up and said, "We should have a prayer at this time." Another came forward and suggested the Lord's Prayer. And a third

volunteered to repeat it and began: "Now I lay me down to sleep..."

I am delighted to see that you hold to folklore interests. We need more good workers in the field. Thank you!

Cordially
Archer Taylor

7.

February 26, 1964

Dear Professor Taylor:

Thank you for your kind note, and particularly for your text. If not precisely a parody, the lines are made parodic through context; or effect, at least, depends upon something parodic. I shall have to think about this.

If you are not unwilling, I should like to use your text at some time in the distant future in a follow-up note. I have already received a half-dozen texts from people kind enough to write after having seen my note, and I have collected another three or four since reading proof for the JAF note.

Incidentally, may I tell you how much I learned from your delightful (and impressive) review-essay in the first issue of Pires de Lima's journal.¹⁴

Cordially,
George Monteiro

8.

2 March 1964

Dear Professor Monteiro:

Thank you for your good letter. I hasten to say that you may make any use you like of my little gible. It was sent to encourage you and I am glad to hear that others felt the same way. By all means do a more extensive job with it.

Thank you for the kind words about my article for Pires de Lima. It was done in haste, since notice was short and I wished to send something because I wasn't sure that he could get materials for an issue quickly. The second no. of his journal is here. It has a decided folklife-ish look. That's natural enough, since he is

director of a folklife museum. I'm not quite certain what region it serves, probably Douro-Litoral rather than Porto. He is also, as I may have said, something like a doctor (M.D.) of the city of Porto. I don't know how he does all the things he does. I felt much complimented that he should take me out in the country—, perhaps a dozen miles—to see his mother in the eighties, I suppose. Since my Portuguese is non-existent, I got along with him in very bad French (and his wasn't much better, but different). His nephew is studying medicine and speaks excellent English,—a very pleasant young man.

Cordially
Archer Taylor

9.

University of California, Berkeley
Department of German
Berkeley, California 94720

18 March, 1969

Dear Professor Monteiro:

It is a pleasure to hear from you and to have so substantial a contribution on proverbs.¹⁵ Portuguese proverbs have been often in my mind in the last couple of years because I have been corresponding with Professor Mac E. Barrick, 94 Channel Drive, Carlisle, Pa. 17013 (Professor of Romance Langs. Dickinson College).¹⁶ I have never met him but find him very well informed about proverbs generally. He is working on a historical dictionary of Portuguese proverbs (the Spanish field, which is his actual profession, seemed somewhat crowded in students of proverbs and dictionary makers). I am sure he would appreciate a reprint since he is in no way likely to see the *Revista*.

The *Revista* brings up memories of Porto and the editor Pires de Lima, who has been very kind to me on the two or three visits I have made to his city (now, according to the news report) as badly flooded as Florence was a couple of years ago.

I have an article, as chance has it, in the same number of the *Revista*—on “Let them eat cake,” said Marie Antoinette.¹⁷ I shall send you a reprint when they come.¹⁸

I am sending you a copy of Proverbium under separate cover. I hope this will interest you enough to write up some subject of general interest for it. The steering committee—that is, the committee that provides the funds—was very anxious that Proverbium should not give space to mere collections. I do not sympathize with this, but that's the way things are. What proverbs survive crossing the Atlantic, what do not? What changes occur in oral tradition in proverbs? This latter question might prove difficult to collect material for study.

I might say a word more about Barrick. I think his interest does not extend down beyond the 16th century, which seemed to make a division convenient to handle. But he intends to add comparative notes.

Cordially
Archer Taylor

10.

University of California, Berkeley
Department of German
Berkeley, California 94720

8 April 1969

Dear Professor Monteiro:

Kuusi has just published the 7th and next to last volume of a history of Finnish literature (647 pp.) and is starting the 8th (much comes from collaborators). He is chief of a foundation for scholarship (humanities) with 200 beneficiaries that takes one day a week. He tries to give one day a week to his Ovambo proverbs.¹⁹ And he has a professorship. That gives some notion of why he doesn't write quickly about editorial matters. He came back from Rome about a year ago. I have heard from him twice since he returned. I have no doubt that he has your note ready to use, when it fits.

Lt. Col. Victor de Guinzbourg, 32 Garden Place, Brooklyn Heights, N. Y.—I failed to note the zip code—has retired from the UN, has not been well, has also been depressed for various reasons (moving, the state of the world, and the like). In brief, he would much appreciate something from you. He also writes about as frequently as Kuusi. No, he writes less often. He still

has an urge to do something with proverbs and has the best private library that I know.

I got off an article for *Proverbium* on "Leave No Stone Unturned" and have sent a couple of supplements.²⁰ I am toying with the notion of finding a proverb that has a good number of variants, preferably in one language, to use as a basis for a discussion of the nature of variation in proverbs. I haven't really put my mind on this, to be sure.

With best wishes,

Yours
Archer Taylor

11.

University of California, Berkeley
Department of German
Berkeley, California 94720

[Summer 1973]

Please address me:

6000 Redwood Road, Napa, California, 94558.

Dear Mr Monteiro

Please note my new address. The reason for asking you is the university rule that causes departmental clerks and others who handle mail to either return mail not addressed to a departmental mailbox or to throw it in the wastebasket. The rule is followed with glee.

I write to thank you [for] the reprint on *Fences*.²¹ I am glad to see that you have this contact in Portugal. I have been to Porto at least three times to see the editor of the *Revista*, and owe him a letter and an article for his journal. The unfortunate situation is that I slipped and fell on this steep hillside six or eight months ago and broke my left leg in two places. It was nailed together and is healing satisfactorily. Your article is one that I have tried again and again to get a friend to write. Jente told me that he had considerable collections twenty years ago and needed to see a French collection, but he died before he wrote the article.²² I can't remember the name of the author. A man in UCLA refused

two or three times to write the article. And a third man also refused. The book should not be used as a source of English proverbs. Or if it is so used, one should express qualification. I send a few prints, for what they may be worth. I assume that you are receiving *Proverbium* and ask you to send an article there. I am much worried by the editor's long delay in getting out a number. I have a couple of reviews to write and an article for the Portuguese *Revista*, which is long overdue. I am toying with the notion of writing on what should an edition of a proverb contain.

With my greetings and warm thanks

Yours
Archer Taylor

Notes:

¹ "Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases of the Continental Portuguese," *Western Folklore* (Jan. 1963), 22: 19-45.

² Victor S. M. de Guinzbourg (1906-1976), who served the United States with the 307th Counter Intelligence Corps during World War II, was the author of *Wit and Wisdom of the United Nations: Proverbs and Apothegms on Diplomacy* (New York: Privately printed, 1961), and *Wit and Wisdom of the United Nations or The Modern Machiavelli Supplement* (1965).

³ Fernando de Castro Pires de Lima (1908-73) doubled as an M.D. and as the Director of the Museu de Etnografia e História in Porto, Portugal. Among his many publications was *Adagiário português* (1963).

⁴ Pires de Lima founded the *Revista de Etnografia* in 1963 and edited the journal until his death in 1973, when it ceased publication.

⁵ Matti Kuusi (1914-98), Professor of Folklore in the University of Helsinki (1959-77), edited *Proverbium* (1965-75).

⁶ The reference is to Pedro Chaves, *Rifoneiro Português* (Porto, 1928; rev. ed. [1945]).

⁷ José Leite de Vasconcelos Cardoso Pereira de Melo (1858-1941), the founder and first director of the Natural Museum of Archeology in Portugal, was the founder and editor of *Revista Lusitana* (1887-1943).

⁸ Leicester Bradner (1899-1989), a specialist in Renaissance Studies, was a long-time member of the Department of English at Brown University (1926-1968).

⁹ A funny thing happened on my way to the doctorate and I changed my topic from Edward Taylor to Henry James.

¹⁰ An ex-president of the First Portuguese Republic, Joaquim Teófilo Fernandes Braga (1843-1924) published several installments of his "Adagiário português" in *Revista Lusitana*, beginning in 1914.

¹¹ Benjamin Mather Woodbridge, Jr. (1915-2007) taught Portuguese at the University of California, Berkeley.

¹² Gil Vicente (c. 1465-c. 1536), a playwright and poet who wrote in Spanish, as well as Portuguese, was sometimes referred to as the "Portuguese Plautus."

¹³ "Parodies of Scripture, Prayer, and Hymn," *Journal of American Folklore* (Jan.-Mar. 1964) 77: 45-52.

¹⁴ "An Armful of New Books:... 'Proverbs,' ...," *Revista de Etnografia* (1963), 1: 219-22.

¹⁵ "As Palavras São Como as Cerejas: Umas Puxam as Outras," *Revista de Etnografia* (July 1968) 11: 33-68.

¹⁶ Mac E. Barrick (1933-91), who became best-known for his collections of central Pennsylvania folklore, compiled and edited the volume *German-American Folklore* (1987).

¹⁷ "And Marie Antoinette said...," *Revista de Etnografia* (July 1968) 11: 245-60.

¹⁸ Although he did not send me an offprint of this article, over the years he sent me others: (1) "The Place of Folklore," *PMLA* (Feb. 1952) 67: 59-66; (2) "The Buried Lover Escapes," *Studies in Medieval Literature: In Honor of Professor Albert Croll Baugh*, ed. MacEdward Leach (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 209-18; (3) "A Few Additional Nineteenth-Century American Proverbs," *North Carolina Folklore* (Special Issue: *Studies in Honor of Arthur Palmer Hudson*) (1965) 13: 37-38; (4) "A Tentative Comparison of Studies in Folktale and Folksong," *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* (1970) 19: 347-51; (5) "As Light as a Feather," *Folklore Research Center Studies* (1970) 1: 95-96; and (6) "The Anecdote: A neglected Genre," *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies*, ed. Jerome Mandel and Bruce Rosenberg (New Brunswick, N J: Rutgers University Press, 1970) 223-28, 368-70.

¹⁹ Matti Kuusi published *Ovando Proverbs with African Parallels* in 1970, followed by *Ovambo Riddles* in 1974.

²⁰ "'Leave No Stone Unturned' or an Afternoon with a Historical Dictionary of Proverbs," *Proverbium* (1971) 16: 553-56.

²¹ "'Good Fences Make Good Neighbors': A Proverb and a Poem," *Revista de Etnografia* (Jan. 1972) 26: 83-88.

²² Richard Jente (1888-1952) taught in the German Department at the University of North Carolina.

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