Paulo Henriques Britto

Born in 1951 in Rio de Janeiro. Lived in Washington, D.C. from 1962 to 1964. Studied filmmaking at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1972-73, but failed to finish course. Returned to Rio and began to work as English teacher at a language school and as freelance translator. In 1975 enrolled at the Department of Letters of Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio); graduated, with a teaching degree in Portuguese and English, in 1978. Began teaching translation at PUC-Rio. Defended master’s thesis in Portuguese language, also at PUC-Rio, in 1982. Awarded PhD equivalence (*notório saber*) by PUC-Rio in 2002.

Currently teaches translation and creative writing on the undergraduate level, poetry translation and literature in the graduate school, at PUC-Rio. Has translated about 100 books, mostly fiction (including works by Jonathan Swift, Henry James, William Faulkner, John Updike, Philip Roth, V. S. Naipaul, Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon), but also poetry by Byron, Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, Allen Ginsberg and Ted Hughes, among others. Has translated into English several works by Brazilian authors (mostly literary theorists). Has published five books of poetry and one of short stories. A selection of his poetry has been published in the U.S. (*The Clean Shirt of It: Poems of Paulo Henriques Britto*, edited and translated by Idra Novey). Three of his poetry collections, his single book of fiction, and one of his translations have earned literary awards.

"Paulo Henriques Britto - Lewis Center for the Arts." *Paulo Henriques Britto*. Princeton University, n.d. Web. 13 Jan. 2013.

**On High**   
by Paulo Henriques Britto

I  
Even the world doesn’t fit  
within the slender space   
consigned to it.  
  
All things overflow their borders.  
(And so the taut angst of armchairs,  
the ashamed cry of faucets.)  
  
Not only you, poet, suffer from   
the stingy work of demiurges.  
Even the gods write twisted lines.  
  
Still, one has to attempt. For instance:  
“Night is a deep backpack.”  
No, not backpack. Maybe bat cave?  
  
Not that either. Far too wild,   
too tiresome, again. And the night,   
plainly, is no longer a child.  
  
 II  
Careful, poet: time fattens the soul.  
After a certain number of pages  
angels no longer rise between the lines.   
And even reason, that modern thing  
wears out as well, like any coin.  
  
Having a meaning is a risky game,  
and can’t be resolved in a single dice throw.  
The precision of a gesture alone isn’t enough.  
Even the most catlike movement is nothing   
without the ballast of existence, that   
  
tired thing, with its texture too thick   
to pass through the timid sieve   
of pale poetry, that ancient thing.  
Time is scarce. The dictionary is fat.  
Careful: no silence is ever enough.