

AFONSO HENRIQUES LIMA BARRETO (1881-1922)

Alex Severino

Like his world famous fellow novelist Machado de Assis (1839-1908), Lima Barreto was born in Rio de Janeiro, the son of a mulatto. After graduating from Rio's famous highschool, **Colégio Pedro II**, he enrolled in a school of engineering, but due to his father's death was compelled to abandon his studies in order to go to work to support his family. Unlike Senhor Castelo, the hero in the short story that follows, he became a public official in the Ministry of War after having successfully passed a Civil Service examination. At the same time, he began to publish his works in the "carioca" press. **Recordações do Escrivão Isaías Caminha** (Recollections of the Scribner Isaías Caminha), 1909; **Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma** (The Sad End of Policarpo Quaresma), 1915; **Numa e Nimfa** (Numa & Nínfa), 1915; **Vida e Morte de M.J. Gonzaga de Sá** (Life and Death of M.J. Gonzaga de Sá), 1919; **Histórias e Sonhos, Contos** (Stories and Dreams, Short Stories), 1920. His published work sprang out of a personality at odds with the society in which he lived. As a mulatto, he felt the stigma of Rio's society and fought back against it through his novels and short stories filled with satire against the learned the "doctors"), the rich and the accepted mores of Rio's bourgeois society. He was a social revolutionary and his heart went out to the poor, the Negro and the social outcast. Since he used his art mainly as a social weapon with which to combat society — his literary output was always at best a badly disguised confession of his ills — he never got himself free of his prejudices. He died in 1922, after spending a time in a mental hospital in Rio. He left some unpublished material now being offered to the public.

The short story that follows, "The Man Who Knew Javanese," is characteristic of Lima Barreto. The mulatto this time has got the upper hand. With a touch of cleverness, he becomes a prominent official in the diplomatic service through pretending to know Javanese. But, underneath the light tone comes the realization that all wealth and power is thus obtained and that only the poor trully work for what they get.

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE:

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- SERPA, Pochion** — **Lima Barreto**. Sauer, 1943.