

José Luiz Pereira da Costa

Rua Monroe, 181/112

90810-229 – Porto Alegre, Brazil

27/10/2004

Hyperion

77 West 66th Street, New York

New York 10023-6298

Dear Sirs,

I would humbly wish to introduce myself as a Brazilian, who has written a novel that may be of interest to your esteemed Publishing House. I would be most grateful if you could grant me a moment of your time in reading the following:

The letter you will find below was published as the “Africa Update”, Vol. VII, and Issue 1 (Winter 2000): The Mazrui - Gates Debate

The letter

The Mysterious African Prince of Porto Alegre, Brazil

Research Notes by José Luiz Pereira da Costa, Porto Alegre, Brazil

An African gentleman who called himself a Prince, lived in my hometown, Porto Alegre, South Brazil, from the early days of the twentieth century until the year of 1935, when he died. Some old people know a bit about him including the following:

1 - He used to say that he was part of the Royal Family of Benin, who were overthrown by the British in 1897.

2 - In Brazil, he adopted the name of Custódio Joaquim de Almeida.

3. He used English as his language of communication

He was considered a wealthy man, at a time when Afro-Brazilians were very poor, living massively in slums. Indeed he acted as a rich person. Apparently he could afford the ownership of race horses at the local Jockey Club a place where then Afro- Brazilians were not admitted. People used to say, as well, that each month, until he died, he collected at the local branch of a London bank, a pension in sterling pounds.

If as historians claim, Oba Ovonramwen of the Benin Empire was exiled to Calabar (Nigeria), and died there in 1914; and, since the gentleman that lived here in Porto Alegre died in 1935, for sure, Mr. Custódio Joaquim de Almeida was not the overthrown Oba. But then, who was he? Was he a brother or a son of

Ovonramwen, who left Calabar and moved to Brazil, and was rewarded with a pension for life? Note that during the nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries there were regular ships between Bahia, Brazil and the West Coast of Africa.

About that date (Winter 2000), I was finishing the romance Benin. The romance was not published, but I would like to know if there is any chance that a reader from your House, capable to read Portuguese language, would be interested in knowing the book's content, and if considered of interest, to translate it into English language, and publish it.

I will present briefly, a summary of the plot, and the historical sources that was used to structure the African background for the plot. I remark that, it aims to be purely a novel, so it has no intention to be a historical book. But it tries, in fact, to be as much truthful as possible to the events that represents the plot's background.

I will appreciate very much if you could kindly inform me if there is any interest on this in your House, so that I could ship a copy for your review. In any case, my electronic address for your kind comments is: kofi@dacostaex.trix.net

Plot synopsis

With ten chapters, and 364 pages, the novel explores, in its initial chapters, the early days of a boy named Idugboa, son of Adolo, Benin's reigning Oba. It shows as well Idugboa's youth, his training; introduces the court people, and the intrigues they live in. Various characters living around the court, each one portrays how the life was in Benin at that time. So, also will it play an important rule in the story Obaro, the younger brother of Idugboa; Kotou, the first friend of Idugboa, which will be in the ripe days of his youth, the master of Metals, *iguneronmwan*. The religious behaviour of the society will play an important rule of the priestess Emotan, *ogwega*, and later as a powerful witch, Azonye. To act as a ruler for the political scenario, the main character is Obayemi, the chief *uzuma*, head of the council of the Oba's Makers. He acts along the whole plot, with the power the prime-ministers use to have. And to counter-act to him, was the mayor of Ughoton, Abiola, the *enogie*. There was corruption and sectarianism, across the voices of the characters in Benin at the end of Nineteenth Century.

Since the actual history of Benin leads to her conquest by the British, some important British characters are acting along the novel, as Cranfield, the British Preacher,

kind of intelligence agent to the British Empire. As well, plays important rule the Official of H. M. Navy, Captain of Frigate Henry Levingson Sauer.

In the plot there are the initiation rituals for the youth future Oba, the dead of his father (Adolo), and his ascension with new name, Ovonramwen, or Overami.

The plot displays moments of War and Peace:

War led by Oba's younger brother, Obaro; and finally by the depressing deposition of Ovonramwen.

Peace, by a romance between Ovonramwen and Edim, the astonishing twin daughter of a rich man of the caravans. In Edim, Ovonramwen's seed is sown, connecting her with the future events in Calabar, place of Ovonramwen's exile, and in Brazil where a Beni Prince will live and die.

The plot marches on to Calabar where new characters came into the scenery. And it all leads to an end, both in Porto Alegre, the Brazilian city, and in Harlem, New York.

All the characters, but Ovonramwen, his father, and few historic characters, are fictional names.

Yours faithfully,

JOSÉ LUIZ PEREIRA DA COSTA

Support books

Topics in West African History, By Adu Bohaen – (Longmans, Green and Co Ltd)
Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897, By Alan Ryder – (Humanities Press Inc, New York, NY)
Benin Kingdom, of West Africa – By John Pepper-Engels (The Rosen Publishing Group)
Edo, The Beni People of the Benin Kingdom, By Chucwuma Azounye – (The Heritage Library of African Peoples)
Art, Innovation, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Benin, By Paula Girshick Ben-Amos. (Indiana University Press)
Dahomey and the Slave Trade, By Karl Polanyi – (AMS Press Inc.)
The Dahomean, By Frank Yerby – (Dell Publishing Co., Inc.)
A Enxada e a Lança – By Alberto da Costa e Silva (Editora Nova Fronteira – Brazil)
The Building of Modern Africa - By D.D. Rooney e E. Halladay – (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd)
The African Experience - By Roland Olivier – (HarperCollins)
The African Origin of Civilization - By Cheikh Anta Diop – (Lawrence Hill Books)
Religion in Africa (Experience & Expression) – By Walter E. A. Van Beek & Dennis L. Thomson
The Kings & Chiefs of Old Calabar (1785-1925) – By Ekei Essien Oku – (Glad Tidings Press Ltd.)
Fluxo e Refluxo – By Pierre Verger – (Curupio, Brazil)
História Geral da África - África sob o domínio colonial - 1880-1935, organizado por Adu Bohaen (Ática – Unesco, Brazil)
Black Voices – By Abraham Chapman (Penguin Books Ltd.)
Da Escravidão à Liberdade - By John Hope Franklin e Alfred A. Moss, Jr. (Alfred A. Knop Jr.)
American Negro Spirituals - By James Weldon Johnson & J. Rosamond Johnson (Viking Press Inc.)
Free Within Ourselves - African American Experience - By Geoffrey Jacques (Grolier Publishing)
Harlem Renaissance - Art of Black America - By Mary Schmidt Campbell, David Driskell, David Levering Lewis e Deborah Willis Ryan

Du Bois - Writings - *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade, The Souls of Black Folk, Dusk of Dawn and Essays.* – Excerpts from W. E. B. Du Bois – (Library of America)

Douglass - Autobiographies - *Narrative of the Life; My Bondage and My Freedom; Life and Times* – By Frederick Douglass)Library of America)

Dom Obá II, D'África, o Príncipe do Povo – By Eduardo Silva (Companhia das Letras – Brazil)

Vínculos de Fogo – By, Alberto Diniz (Companhia das Letras – Brazil)

The Collected Works of Phillis Wheatley, edited by John Shields (The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers)