THE GENTLE MADNESS
OF A
GUARDIAN OF
RELICS

A Chat
with José Maria Manilla
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PREFACE

THIS INTERVIEW with José Mindlin speaks so effectively for itself that the role of the preface writer can hardly be to justify or explain it. Mindlin of São Paulo, Brazil, is one of the world’s premier book collectors, measured not so much in the sheer quantity of volumes in his possession or in their monetary value—although those considerations are surely not slight in Mindlin’s case—but in refinement, discrimination, taste, and comprehension, qualities that cannot be gained by study or conscious effort but must come from a lifetime of loving appreciation of books. It is not as common to speak of a “connoisseur” of books as a connoisseur of paintings, but perhaps that is the best word to describe Mindlin.

The balance Mindlin has somehow achieved in his life between the responsibilities of leadership of his great manufacturing company, Metal Leve, and his inexhaustible delight in all manifestations of high culture, is such that anyone who meets him would wish to know the secret of this wonderful equanimity. In an era when the management of personal time in the industrialized countries has become something of a crisis, José Mindlin seems to have time for everything important, above all for books.

It is surely because of this uncommon balance that Mr. Mindlin generously agreed in 1988 to join the Board of Governors of the John Carter Brown Library, a board that meets three times a year in Providence, Rhode Island, some five thousand miles distant from São Paulo. The benefit to the Library of Mr. Mindlin’s active participation in its governance has been incalculable and impossible to repay. It should be no surprise, then, that when the Library was informed of the publication in 1990 of a long and charming interview with José Mindlin
in the Brazilian magazine *Bric-a-Brac*, we seized this chance to propagate more broadly in English Mindlin's personality and observations.

I wish to acknowledge here the assistance and cooperation received from Professor Nelson Vieira, chairman of the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, Brown University, at the time this project began, and the assistance also of Professor Mário Lajolo, of the University of Campinas in São Paulo, who prepared the footnotes for the interview and made other stylistic contributions. Marguerite Harrison, a graduate student in the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, did the fine translation, and Mrs. Susan Newbury, Chief of Cataloguing at the John Carter Brown Library, assisted with bibliographical questions.

Two others must be acknowledged here for their generous willingness to help to underwrite the cost of this publication: Mr. T. Kimbell Brooker of Chicago, a fellow member with José Mindlin of both the Board of Governors of the John Carter Brown and of the Association Internationale de Bibliophilie, and Mr. Vincent J. Buonanno, also a Library Board member and a friend and admirer of Mr. Mindlin.

It is our wish above all that Mr. Mindlin will be satisfied and pleased with this effort at bookmaking. Since it is a personal gift to him the guardian of books, as well as to all who love books, we have not undertaken the task lightly.

NORMAN FIERING
Director & Librarian
The John Carter Brown Library

The book begins here, where you see God ordering the angels to create the world. At first there is nothing; then you see the stars, the birds, the trees, the sea, the fish; then Adam, Earth, Water, Air, Fire, the planets, the wind; Eve coming out of the rib, the temptation, the expulsion.

This is one of many possible entrances into José Mindlin's library. In this case, Mindlin, who has been called a guardian of relics by the critics, is speaking while leafing through a copy of Hartmann Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum* (Nuremberg: A. Koburger, 1493), popularly known as the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, an important rare book. The *Nuremberg Chronicle* narrates the creation of the world and mixes sacred with profane history. Mindlin's description above simply gives one an idea of how the book is illustrated in a rich, varied, and creative way. Because of the illustrations, it is possible to read page after page of the book without knowing a single word of Latin.

But the *Nuremberg Chronicle* is only one of an infinite number of entrances into the dizzying universe of more than 20,000 books belonging to Mindlin (who thinks of himself more as the caretaker than the owner of them all), out of which almost 10,000 may be properly regarded as rare.

The publishers of *Bric-a-Brac* entered Mindlin's bibliographic sanctuary three times. After endless hours of conversation, of leafing

1. Guilhermino César and Francisco Inácio Peixoto: Founders of *Series Perdis*, a modernist journal published from 1927 to 1939 in Cataguases, a small town in the state of Minas Gerais.
through books, of listening to Mindlin recount fascinating details about so many rarities, it is impossible not to notice and appreciate the vision of this “cartotaker.” Yet there is much more than vision. Mindlin steps back and forth through time, and is able to give life and voice to the books, inscriptions, documents, and diaries, that leap off the endless shelves that line his living-room as well as two adjacent buildings. Intense and serious sounds are heard through the centuries of printed pages. The interview that follows is based on a series of letters exchanged over a period of months, from January to June, 1990.

Jôao Cabral de Melo Neto was once Mindlin’s guest and was intrigued to find in the collector’s library three seemingly identical copies of Machado de Assis’s complete poems: “No, they are not identical.” A mistake in the introduction resulted in three different books. In the first, a v was changed to an a, forming the word cagara (form of the verb to deface) instead of caga (form of the verb to blind). The second copy contains Machado de Assis’s correction in his own handwriting. In the third, final version, the error has been corrected in print. “I don’t know how Machado de Assis did not have an apoplectic fit,” says Mindlin. A small detail thus makes a rare book.

And then there is the first illustrated edition of Petrarck, from 1488. In another edition, from 1555, one of Petrarck’s sonnets against the Pagan was censored after printing. The condemned verses were covered with black ink. Later on, the ink faded and beneath it the censored verses reappeared. “Time was stronger than censorship,” Mindlin observes.

Jôao Mindlin has the knack of being able to link peculiarities found in a dedication or in some last notation to incidents in his own life and in conversations with friends who are writers. In Europe once, Mindlin encountered Guimarães Rosa, the author of Grande Sertão: Veredas. Rosa confessed that he needed to get rid of a collection of erotic books. He was returning to Brazil and couldn’t take the books home because of his daughters. He tried to convince Mindlin to buy the books. This was in the 1940s. Today Mindlin regrets refusing the collection, but at the time he used the same argument Rosa had given him: “And my daughters—In those days, it would have been scandalous. But today...”

Mindlin’s passion for books has brought him into close contact with many writers, above all with Drummond de Andrade. He is proud to own Drummond’s erotic book, O Amor Natural, the sole copy originally printed. On the eve of Drummond’s death, Mindlin met him in his apartment in Rio. He was perhaps Drummond’s last visitor. “We spoke for three hours and, as never before, told me details of his private life,” recalls Mindlin.

From Petrarch and Montaigne, to the Revista Verde published in Cataguazes and Oswald de Andrade’s unusual manuscripts, it is possible to pass on to more mundane things: the diary of the Countess of Verval, for instance. The Countess was governess to the children of Dom Pedro II and apparently his mistress.” She kept a diary in delicate notebooks that every once in a while she submitted to him. Mindlin owns twenty-nine of these little notebooks. In one of the passages the Countess describes a place that they had visited together and asks: “Do you remember?” Dom Pedro added a penciled note: “Oh, I do remember, and how I remember!” Through Mindlin’s voice it is possible to recapture the Emperor’s sight.

Mindlin is an insatiable reader, admittedly undisciplined. His love for reading and his passion for rarities guided the direction of the collection. He reads more than one book at a time, taking advantage of small breaks. Because he has a driver, he doesn’t get upset in São Paulo’s traffic jams: he allows him to get a few more pages read. When he leaves the car he takes the books with him. “If the car is stolen it won’t interrupt my reading,” he says.

His library’s first two thousand books are kept in the living-room of his house. The seats are arranged in such a way as to place the visitor with a full view of Mindlin to his left and the book shelves to his right. If, after an

2. Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (b. Rio de Janeiro, 1839; d. Rio de Janeiro, 1908). One of the most important Brazilian writers of the post century.
3. Jôao Guimarães Rosa (b. Minas Gerais, 1908; d. Rio de Janeiro, 1967). Brazilian writer that renewed regionalist fiction and language. Grande Sertão: Veredas was his most important novel. Published in 1956, it has been translated into English under the title, The Devil to Pay in the Backlands.
4. Carlos Drummond de Andrade (b. Minas Gerais, 1902; d. Rio de Janeiro, 1987). One of the most prominent Brazilian poets of this century.
5. Oswaldo de Andrade (b. São Paulo, 1890; d. São Paulo, 1954). One of the most potent and creative Brazilian modernist writers.
6. Dom Pedro II (b. 1825; d. 1891). Brazilian emperor from 1840 to 1889.
hour or so, the visitor shows no interest in the books, "doesn't even give
them at least a curious glance," he will see Mindlin snap his two hands
on his knees and say, in a rather firm manner: "Well, I think we have
already discussed everything... An hour is more than enough if it
doesn't include books. For books, however, there is no time limit. And, at
the end of hours of conversation, Mindlin concludes: "Here you have
seen an example of a gentle madness."

"Julio Cortazar was another famous visitor to this guardian of relics."
He once wanted to know the name of a flower growing in the small
garden that links the three buildings of the library. "He wasn't disturbed by
my wife Guita's confession of ignorance. 'No importa,' Cortazar said;
'la flor tampoco lo sabe.' It doesn't matter; the flower doesn't know either." The flower, wistful madness, on that day, in that place.

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES? What type of reader is João Mindlin?
These shelves, filled with thousands of individual rare books, also include
effects of the same book in an enormous diversity from a cultural
as well as an editorial point of view. This leads one to believe that beyond
the book itself Mindlin is obsessed with the book as an object. What answer
would you give to an anonymous person who, on some street corner, hap-
pened to ask: What makes someone own more than one hundred different
editions of OS LUSÍADAS?

MINDLIN: This question can be broken down into many
different considerations: the type of reader; the attractiveness of
a book for its physical qualities as well as its content; the dif-
tference between owning a book and owning a collection; and,
finally, the most important consideration, the act of reading.

lived in Paris for a long time as a refugee and is considered to be one of the most
important voices of modern Latin American fiction. He visited Brazil on sev-
eral occasions.

9. João dos Reis Borges is one of the editors of REVISTA BRAZIL, the magazine in
which this interview first appeared.

10. THE JUINN by Luis Var de Camões (1524-1580) is generally regarded to
be one of the most important Portuguese epic poems ever written. It has been trans-
lated into English several times.

11. The mother of the famous German writer Thomas Mann, Julia da Silva
Brüll, was Brazilian.
gaycé.12 If I come across any difficulties in my reading, I do not bite my nails over them. After one or two attempts, I let it go. If I were to persist, I should waste both my time and my health, because I have an impulsive mind. That which I do not see in my first attempt, I am less likely to see by persisting. I do nothing without joy.

I feel the same way. That is why I consider myself undisciplined, and my book collection follows the same pattern. At times some effort is required, and I relent, but I only do this when I have good reason to believe it will be worth the effort, or when someone whose opinion I respect recommends a book. I don’t recall ever reading to the end a book that after the first twenty or thirty pages I failed to understand, due either to its rough or its pedantic style. Of those I mentioned as difficult, Proust and Guimarães Rosa have lent themselves to constant readings and re-readings after the initial effort. Joyce too as much, but that is certainly due to my own shortcomings. I first read the French translation of Ulysses, which is very good and has the advantage of dispelling many mysteries; then I read the original, and, after that, Antônio Houaiss’s Brazilian translation,13 which is a remarkable accomplishment. I liked many passages, but I had little empathy with the book, so I don’t think I will re-read it. At least I tried.

I like fiction, biography, essays, history, travel (especially about Brazil), literary criticism, and, of course, poetry. Drama also, beginning with the Greeks, through Shakespeare and Molière, up to the present time; screenplays, film scripts, and occasionally a good detective or erotic novel are also included on my reading list which, as you can see, isn’t small. But I must confess that I read in a disorganized fashion, going from one subject to another, or even reading two or three books at the same time, without worrying whether or not that should be done. I don’t have any preconceived notions about reading. In fact, I generally try to avoid prejudices. I forgot to mention art books, but then, I confess I look at them much more than I read them.

Let me see, however, if I can address the entire question. It is true that, beyond its contents, or the edition, the physical book is attractive to me: the binding, the design, the illustrations, and the quality of the paper. To look at a book in a shop window and not be allowed to touch it does not satisfy me at all. My theory is that one must be allowed to touch what one likes, to feel the object (or the person, as the case may be) . . . I enjoy the craft of bookmaking, even though my knowledge of it is empirical. Naturally, however, by spending my whole life among books, reading about typography and printing, book design and illustration, visiting libraries, studying catalogues and bibliographies, talking to friends who suffer from the same “madness,” one ends up learning something, and even develops an instinctive critical sense—the sixth sense which comes from experience.

A good example of this is something that happened to me in England, when I asked a rare book dealer if he had an edition of Rabelais printed in the sixteenth century. The dealer proudly removed from the shelf a copy dated 1558. I took it, leafed through it, and a bit hesitantly told him that the book seemed to me to be from the seventeenth century, and was probably pre-dated. “Why do you say that, sir?” the book dealer inquired, showing concern. I had to tell him that I didn’t quite know the reason, because it was the result of a feeling I got from touch, from the book’s composition, its typography or whatever. We consulted a bibliography and in it we found my suspicion confirmed. It was a 1627 edition, pre-dated, but distinguishable because of a few details evident in the copy in question. I couldn’t convince the book dealer that I wasn’t an expert on Rabelais, but the fact is I wasn’t one then and I’m not one now, and I knew nothing previously about the existence of that particular edition.

How would I respond to the person on the street asking me why anyone would want to own one hundred editions of Candies? My answer would depend on my sense of the inquirer’s ability to understand the intricate reasons that might compel

13. Antônio Houaiss is a renowned Brazilian philologist and translator of James Joyce.
someone toward the apparent insanity suggested by the question. In my case, the Camões collection began small and grew gradually, including the acquisition of critical editions and commentaries that are essential to a serious reading of Camões's works. As a significant collection began to develop, it inevitably encouraged my desire to acquire the first and other early editions, either because of textual variations, or because of the special characteristics of an edition—a commentary, illustrations, design—and, finally, why not confess, because of the rarity, which is an important element in the pleasure of collecting. In addition, there are the translations, and beyond those that I can read, there is a thrill in acquiring a Japanese translation, for example. And that is how a collection grows.

Of course, my initial interest developed out of a liking for Camões. Fortunately, in school I was required to read only short excerpts. I wasn't forced to analyze his work, a task that turns many people against Camões, who then never learn what they are missing by not re-reading him.

The same process applies to other topics, in which an initial interest develops over time into a collection. Camões is just one example. Although it may seem odd, I should say one last thing: in spite of owning valuable editions, especially by many authors from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and even some contemporary ones, I usually read only the current edition of a work, which I can carry around with me without worrying about its condition. The rare editions I open only occasionally, and then mostly for the physical pleasure, enjoying certain pages as one would enjoy other pleasures: for example, a vintage wine, to be discreet. . . . I get such pleasure from this that a charming female friend of mine once told me—it is in fact a funny thing, and a source of teasing in my family—that I have more female than male friends—that the manner in which I hold a book inspires jealousy!

I said that this was to be the end of my answer, but in order to give you a better idea of the type of reader I am, I will add a final detail: I like to risk reading works by writers who are entirely unknown to me, but whose work attracts me for reasons that are sometimes hard to pinpoint or explain. And I have made thereby discoveries that have given me immense pleasure. It is another type of prospecting, different from the search for rare books in which one knows what one is looking for. As examples of such discoveries I would mention three books that attracted me without my knowing why, yet the reading of which I highly recommend. One is O Evangelho da Incerteza, published by Nova Fronteira. It is by Vanda Fabian, a writer from the state of Minas Gerais of whom I had heard nothing, but who fascinated me over twenty years ago, and whose book I re-read last year with the same delight.

Another book was a diary written by a Japanese court woman in the tenth century—Sei Shonagon—which shows that emotions, intrigues, and basic human desires are similar throughout time and space. Another example is the correspondence of a young Dutch woman in the eighteenth century, Belle de Zuylen, later known as Mme. de Chahrain— as you can see, I have researched the subject a little— a fascinating character for her intelligence, style, vivacity, lack of inhibition, sense of humor, and beauty (I think that these suffice as seductive elements, don't you?). She was a woman who in our time would be considered outstanding. Imagine then how she must have appeared in her own time.

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES: Your passion for books has led to your meeting many writers. How do you perceive the distance between a page in a book and the life of its author? What were your conversations with Carlos Drummond de Andrade like? It is common knowledge that your admiration for Guimarães Rosa developed rather late. Why?

MINDLIN: This question brings up a problem that I haven't yet been able to solve; does a relationship necessarily have to exist between a text and its author, or is one independent of the other? In other words, is it possible to read and enjoy a book that was written by a fascist or a contemptible person? It isn't always easy in the case of contemporary writers, but I believe that, as a

rule, one must try to separate the author from the work, and thus try to overcome resistance or prejudices. This has been necessary with good writers who were collaborators during World War II, as, for instance, Robert Brasillach, an author of wonderful books, who was shot to death, or now with Vargas Llosa, who, although a great writer and literary critic, seems to me to have become rather too much of a rightist. We would even have to stop reading Jorge Luis Borges's work if we assigned more importance to his political opinions than to his writings, which would be ridiculous. Of course, time reduces the problem. Who cares now if Shakespeare was a good or bad husband, if he happened to beat his wife, or if he stole from his friends, though these may be important considerations in other contexts?

Of course it is better if the writer is a nice person as Drummond was without question. My relationship with him was one of the best things in my life. I think I can say that we were good friends, without ever being truly close. His conversations and letters were full of camaraderie. In the course of our friendship there were interesting periods in which he resisted some request of mine, such as his refusal to allow the publication of a facsimile of A Revista,16 which he considered a folly of his youth, or his reluctance to be a signatory on a letter addressed to President João Figueiredo,17 calling for the creation of the Yanomami Indian Reservation, already signed by Antônio Candido and myself.18 Drummond said he could not sign it "because it would imply his recognition of the legitimacy of General Figueiredo's Presidency." Overcoming his resistance required a lot of creative persuasion on my part. With regard to A Revista, I told him that even if it did represent youth's silliness, any silly thing by Carlos Drummond de Andrade would be of great interest to his many readers. And in the case of the Yanomami, the line of argument I used was that if he didn't sign it, it would look bad for us who did, for it would imply that we approved of the military regime, while he was the only politically pure one. In both cases, my reasoning succeeded in winning him over: A Revista was published, and he showed his approval in an article in the Jornal do Brasil,19 and the letter to Figueiredo was signed—although the Yanomami Reservation did not get established during that administration.

We often met either at his house or in the famous "sabadoyes."20 I was then working on the original edition of Drummond's A visita,21 which I published with the help of Maureen Bisilli,22 Antônio Marcos da Silva,23 and my daughter Diana, who has inherited my taste for printing and has more talent for book design than I do. This project took a year. Since Drummond also liked book design, we spent six months discussing options regarding format, typefaces (we ended up choosing Bodoni), layout, and illustrations, weighing different alternatives, before we reached an agreement. Then we spent another six months carrying it out. Sometimes Drummond had to rewrite several lines in order to fit them on the page. It was a fascinating experience, which brought us closer together. We both liked writing letters, not being satisfied with phone calls, which from the point of view of preserving memories are deadly. Because we wrote to each other, our relationship is now documented, and I have dozens of letters from Drummond filled with interesting anecdotes that it would have been a shame to lose.

Regarding my belated admiration for Guimarães Rosa, this is the story. I met him in Paris in 1946 through Luiz Camilo de Oliveira Neto, a great intellectual from Minas Gerais, who was one of the best friends I ever had. Rosa was a member of the

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15. Brazilian literary review, founded in 1924 as an expression of Modernism in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. It lasted three issues.
17. Antônio Candido (b. 1918), the most important Brazilian literary critic today, taught literary theory at the University of São Paulo.
18. Jornal do Brasil is one of the most important nationwide newspapers, published in Rio de Janeiro.
19. "Sabadoyes," a combination of the Portuguese word for "Saturday" (sábado) and the sponsor's last name (Doyle), refers to intellectual gatherings at Plínio Doyle's library in Rio de Janeiro.
20. "The Visit." This beautiful poem refers to the visit in 1919 of Mário de Andrade (then a young Brazilian modernist poet) to Aplonias de Guimarães (b. Minas Gerais, 1870-d. Mariana, 1920), a Brazilian symbolist poet.
21. Maureen Bisilli is a renowned Brazilian photographer.
22. Antônio Marcos da Silva is a young Brazilian graphic designer.
Brazilian delegation to the Peace Conference, and I was buying for the Livraria Parthenon, an antiquarian bookstore that I had opened in 1946 with a book collector friend, Claude Blum.25 Rosa and I enjoyed each other's company, and for a month we wandered through Parisian bookstores, talking endlessly during our walking, but, if I remember correctly, about nothing of any importance. We became good pals, as I said, but he didn't impress me very much, even though he was without question intelligent and possessed of a good sense of humor.

He never conveyed the impression that he was a writer. He was concerned with his clothes and his appearance, a small, ever-present bow tie suggesting frivolity and vanity. It's true that Oscar Wilde claimed that those who don't concern themselves with their appearance shouldn't be taken seriously, but I thought Rosa's concern was excessive. In short, he struck me as a pleasant fellow, with cultural interests, but not someone who from the start inspired admiration and enthusiasm.

It was, therefore, with the utmost skepticism that, upon my return to Brazil, I learned of the publication of Sagacidade.26 The announcement of the work didn't spur my interest, and although I was startled to discover that Rosa was a writer, I left it at that. I didn't think I needed to read the book, all the more because it became an immediate best-seller and a prize winner. Ten years passed without my thinking about it when Corpo de Baile came out,27 shortly followed by Grande Serião: Perdidos. Then things started to change. Sagacidade was re-issued at the same time, and I began to think that a period of ten years between one book and another was a sign of literary seriousness. Also, an old friend, Julio Tinto, gave me the push I needed, insisting that I "had to read" these books. I finally conceded, and it was one of the greatest surprises and joys life can offer. I read all three books in rapid sequence, and never again let go of Guimarães Rosa. In my opinion, he and Machado de Assis are our two best writers. The recognition was late, I admit, but I have recovered Le tempo perdido.

Recovering lost time doesn't happen just with books. I had the same experience with the visual arts. It took me a long time to assimilate and truly appreciate the great artists of the twentieth century. I resisted Picasso, whom I thought to be simply extravagant and provocative. It was only in 1966, when I saw a retrospective of his work in Paris, that I became truly awed by Picasso's genius. Braque's work, which fascinates me so today, also took me some time to learn to enjoy. Interestingly enough, I had no problems with Matisse, Rouault, and Chagall. Such blindnesses as I have alluded to are flaws in ourselves that we must humbly admit to. Art appreciation does not come of itself; it requires preparation, experience, and maturity, and in general, when we don't find certain talented artists worthy of our admiration, it is usually our fault, not theirs. On the other hand, once we arrive at an understanding of their work, what pleasure it affords us!

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES: Where do the paths cross between Mindlin the businessman, concerned with the practical applications of technological innovations in the manufacture of engine parts, and Mindlin the intellectual, book publisher, collector, and cultural promoter? Could this Mindlin, the devourer of books, foster another Mindlin who would write his own book? What type of work would it most likely be? And what would be the least likely?

MINDLIN: This is an interesting generalization, that cultural interests are not compatible with business. I never had any trouble combining multiple interests and activities. Business I entered by chance and relatively late, because before that I had been practicing law for fifteen years, whereas my cultural interests had begun many years earlier. However, law is comparable to business in the sense that both require administrative skills. I thus began to acquire practical experience first as a lawyer, for whom commonsense and a well-rounded outlook are needed as
well. Our firm, Metal Leve, is made up of people with different personalities, skills, and knowledge, and collectively these have led to the growth of the company. I never took, nor take, myself too seriously, but I do take my work seriously. Yet, once I stop working, whether in the middle or at the end of a workday, I can move easily to other interests, which are numerous and varied.

As shocking as it may sound, I confess that I am not a businessman who is in love with business. A corporation, as I see it, is not an end in itself. It is an instrument of social development. It should also serve the community and does not exist simply for the benefit of its owners. Beyond its commitment to its own specific goals, any company must respond to social obligations, including cultural ones.

I have devoted myself, both in speech and on paper, to promoting Brazil’s technological development, but since at Metal Leve all of us emphasize this point, I don’t deserve individual recognition. To perceive the role of technology in Brazil’s progress doesn’t mean that I am familiar with technology or that I know how to apply technological innovations. Quite the contrary is true: I am a complete failure at fixing anything mechanical. Worst of all, don’t even mention a car. If it breaks down and I’m alone, forget it! But let’s be more specific regarding business and books: it is amongst books that I feel most at home, like a fish in the water.

Now, you asked me where do the different paths I have taken in my life—and still follow—meet. I can’t tell you if they meet or are parallel. I would be inclined to say that they are parallel, but at the same time it is possible that some of my interests reciprocally influence other interests.

As to writing a book, I find it improbable, though not impossible. The book world is divided into writers, who are relatively few, and readers, who are much greater in number. Since I have always seen myself on the readers’ side, I find it hard to envision changing camps. If this were to happen, however, there are several books I could write: I could describe all that has happened

26. The company of which Mindlin was one of the founders in 1970 and is the President.

OS LUSÍADAS
de Luis de Camões.

COM PRIVILEGIO REAL.


1572.

LUÍS DE CAMÕES, 1524-1582. Os Lusíadas. Lisbon: Antonio Gonçalvez, 1572. On the title page of this printing, the pelican faces toward the reader's right. It is sometimes suspected that this edition was not really printed in 1572.
EXPLICACION DE EL CATECHISMO EN LENGUA GUARANI POR NICOLAS YAPUGUAI CON DIRECCION DEL P. PAULORESTIVO DE LA COMPANIA DE JESUS

En el Pueblo de S. MARIA La Mayor.
ANO DE MDCCXXIV

NICOLAS YAPUGUAI. Explicacion de el catechismo en lengua guarani.
Pueblo de S. Maria la Mayor [Paraguay], 1724. Printed by Indians under the Jesuit rule.

to me since I can remember, which might be of general interest; I could talk about books, bibliophilia, and the development of a book collection; or I could translate poetry. The least likely would be, perhaps, to recount romantic incidents, which one is reluctant to divulge, even though I can say safely that I have more regret for the things I did not do than for those I did.

**João dos Reis Borges:** You said that Machado de Assis and Guimarães Rosa are the two greatest Brazilian writers. Where do you place Drummond, Manuel Bandeira, João Cabral de Mello Neto, the Campos brothers, and so many others? Where do you place, and to what extent are you attracted to, poetry?

**Mindlin:** I was referring to prose, of course. Poetry belongs in a separate category and occupies a very large space in our home. To talk about “the greatest,” however, is not fair, because there is no sure standard by which to judge. It is more a matter of taste. But the great do exist, certainly. In Brazilian poetry I would mention Bandeira, Drummond, João Cabral, Vinicius de Moraes, Cecília Meireles, Mário de Andrade, or the recently discovered Manuel de Barros, to name just a few among many. Good Brazilian poets would make a very long list and would include some virtually unknown figures who wrote wonderful poems. For instance, Maria Isabel could be mentioned as author of one of the most beautiful Brazilian poems, “A

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28. See note 2, above.
29. Haroldo (b. 1920) and Augusto (b. 1919) de Campos are two of the leaders of the Concrete Poetry movement, a post modern development in Brazilian poetry. They are also remarkable translators.
30. See note 2.
31. Vinicius de Moraes (b. 1913; d. in Rio de Janeiro, 1980), brilliant Brazilian poet and composer of popular music.
32. Cecília Meireles (b. 1901; d. in Rio de Janeiro, 1966), one of the most important Brazilian women poets of this century.
33. Mário de Andrade (b. 1893; d. in São Paulo, 1947), a prominent participant in the Brazilian Modernist movement, he has left a vast oeuvre, including novels, poetry, essays, and a huge correspondence.
34. Manuel de Barros (b. 1916 in Mato Grosso), Brazilian contemporary poet, who first published in 1937 with Poesias (São Paulo, 1937), and most recently, Gramática Expositiva de Golfe (1999).
in the fifteenth century, before Gutenberg's invention, or, may have been spurred by it. But the fact is, the demand for books increased tremendously with printing. Suffice it to say that in a world much smaller than it is today, with knowledge of books practically limited to Germany, France, England, and Italy, and even there with only small literacy, about 3,000 titles were printed during the first fifty years!

If we allow an average of three hundred copies per title, that would represent almost ten million individual books for a very small reading public; if we applied the same percentage to today's world, billions of books would probably have to be published! Isn't that amazing? Furthermore, the level of technical perfection reached during the first hundred years in the history of printing is remarkable; I consider those years unsurpassable, or at least extraordinary.

The art of printing attracted typographers and illustrators who rivalled one another in the creation of veritable works of art. Typefaces and book designs were all handcrafted, with an obvious concern for quality, which is surprising, especially when we consider the conditions under which much of that work was done. Many beautiful books were of course published after this first century, but they had the benefit of easier techniques and thus may deserve a bit less praise, though there have always existed and still exist great printers and publishers. Eventually, as the process of bookmaking became more industrialized, it also became less refined and great books became the exception. Without including Gutenberg's Bible, there are many impressive incunabula, such as The Divine Comedy, illustrated by Botticelli in 1481, Polypho's Dream (Hypnerotomachia Poliphili), in the Aldine edition of 1499, one of the most beautiful books of all times, or, as already mentioned, The Nuremberg Chronicles, published in 1493 in a printing shop where Dürer worked as an apprentice. These books are, in the realm of printing, equivalent to the great paintings and sculptures of the Renaissance in the realm of visual art.

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, very beautiful creations could already be found in Portugal, Spain, Belgium,
and Holland, thus considerably enlarging the world of printing, which had been practically limited, in the fifteenth century, to the countries I mentioned above. Great printers, such as Plantin, Elzevir, Creasbeeck, Baskerville, Didot, Ibarra, or Bodoni, to name only a few among many—and of whose work I have good examples in my library—left remarkable editions. Since then, the quantity of books, if not the quality, has obviously increased, even in our own day in spite of the growing use of television and computers. Let’s be optimistic. If we succeed in encouraging the younger generations to read (with the help of TV and computers) as well as to love books for the aesthetic pleasures they may offer, the future of books will not necessarily turn out to be grim. In my unshakeable optimism—which another good female friend of mine calls irritating—I envision that in a more democratic world, in which education and culture reach increasingly larger portions of the population, the number of readers will also increase significantly. Anyway, if we believe that books are under threat, that’s all the more reason to be on the alert. One thing I can say for certain, I would not like to live in a world in which books no longer existed.

**João dos Reis Borges:** Ten mentioned the importance of the invention of printing in Europe. What can you say about printing in Latin America and, more specifically, in Brazil?

**M-endlin:** The influence of this invention was considerably different in Spanish America than it was in Brazil. Whereas in Mexico and Peru books began to be printed already in the sixteenth century, printing in Brazil began very late, only in 1808. As a matter of fact, we owe a great debt to Napoleon: had he not invaded Portugal, and had the Portuguese kings, John VI, not transferred the Court to Brazil in 1807, I do not know when printing would have begun in our country. Portuguese colonial policy was strictly against anything that might spur ideas of independence; and printing, as a matter of course, could be a dangerous subversive influence. No industrial activity was permitted, only religious schools existed, but all this changed, fortunately for Brazil, with the presence of the Court. John VI brought with him a fully equipped printing plant, as well as an important part of Portugal’s National Library, both of which remained in Rio de Janeiro after his return to Lisbon and the declaration of independence by his son, Pedro I.

An example of this strict control was the seizure, in 1747, of the sole book printed in Brazil before 1808, a very harmless description of the arrival of a bishop. Harsh though it was, not only the book was seized, but the whole press as well, and the printer, Isidoro da Fonseca, was arrested and sent back to Portugal. After 1808, however, there was quite a growth of book production. The Royal Press, the Imprensa Real, alone printed more than 1000 titles before 1822, the year of independence.

In Spanish America, on the other hand, printing flourished almost from the time of the Conquest, and universities were established in Mexico City and in Lima already in the sixteenth century. Early in the eighteenth century printing even reached the remote region of the Jesuit settlements, which covered most of Paraguay, the north of Argentina, and most of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in the South of Brazil. The books in these settlements were printed by Indians, with types cast by them, but only in very few copies, to be used exclusively by missionaries. This explains the extreme rarity of these books, because most of the few copies printed, when not lost, were worn out by usage.

I am fortunate to own two of these books, which probably were never used, if only to be in the excellent condition they are in. Yampay’s book actually was written by one of the few Indians who learned Spanish and writing. Generally, the Indians were good copyists, but illiterate. Literacy, as well as printing, could be a dangerous subversive instrument.

**João dos Reis Borges:** What was your experience as Secretary of Culture of the state of São Paulo? Was it worthwhile to be part of a non-democratic government? In your opinion, what should be the role of the state in cultural affairs?

**M-endlin:** It was an unexpected challenge for me. I accepted it because I thought it would be the beginning of a political “libertação,” an opening up, otherwise I would not have cooperated with the authoritarian regime. I conferred with my family
and a few friends about the matter, including Antônio Cândido. I remember his advising me to accept the post because at that time if someone who supported the "abertura" refused the post it would be assigned to someone who didn’t favor it.

Cândido said he didn’t hesitate in giving this advice because he was certain that if it didn’t work out, I would resign. And that is exactly what happened after I had begun to be pressured by the right-wing radicals, though I must say, it isn’t easy to abandon a job when you feel that the work you are doing is worthwhile. In making up my mind to resign, I imagined two possible scenarios: if the "opening up" occurred after I resigned, I would regret my resignation; but if I remained, and the "opening up" did not occur, I would regret even more having stayed. Faced with these alternatives, the decision was an easy one, because between the two regrets I obviously chose the first. But the experience was fascinating, to see what one can accomplish when one puts the work above any personal ambition.

In my opinion, the role of the state should be that of preserving the cultural heritage and of promoting culture, without trying to direct it. It is important to stimulate an awareness of cultural values and to support enduring projects that will grow roots, rather than being content with short-lived triumphs, although these, too, have their place. It is also important not to base cultural funding solely on government patronage. All society should participate, in union, along with the state.

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES: You said that you are not the owner, but the caretaker of your library. What plans do you have for it?

MINDLIN: Well, I still haven’t solved this problem. I am concerned that it should not be dispersed; at least the substantial collections on Brazil and Portugal should remain intact. If we lived in the United States or Europe, I could leave the books to a reputable university or rare book library and be assured of proper preservation forever. Here, unfortunately, there is no such guarantee, because even the best institutions aren’t assured of administrative stability. A friend of mine, while director of the

Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros at the University of São Paulo—an excellent institution, I might add—suggested that I donate my collection to the Institute. I told him that I would ask one question and base my decision on his response. The question was, simply, whether he could guarantee proper care and preservation of the collection into the infinite future. He pondered for a moment and then said no, which, no doubt, would be the answer given by directors of other Brazilian institutions.

In 1983 I founded, along with Rubens Borba de Morais, a good friend of mine and a book expert like no other, the International Center for Luso-Brazilian and Bibliographic Studies. Our goal in forming this Center was to create an efficient instrument for preserving our collections, as well as those of other libraries through donation or deposit. It doesn’t make sense, however, to create an organization that only preserves the collections as they exist today. Such a Center should be alive, should be able to make acquisitions, to publish books, to sponsor seminars and exhibitions. In short, it should be an active institution rather than a static one. But substantial financing and human resources are needed to achieve this goal, as well as a staff that will devote itself to such an institution, and all this is not easy to find.

For example, I am a member of the Board of Governors of the John Carter Brown Library, at Brown University in the United States. This private library was started in about 1840 with John Carter Brown’s personal collection, and today it is one of the most important rare book collections about the Americas in the world. My dream is to set up something similar to the JCB. For this purpose, I am in touch with some Brazilian and foreign foundations and universities interested in Brazilian and Portuguese studies, and I hope that this will work out. Our basic aim is to preserve the collections, not only Borba de Morais’s and mine, but those of others who may join the Center, as well as to encourage scholars from all over the world to come to the Center to do research. It may be in the beginning a small institution, but it only makes sense if it continues to grow and remains vital.

Some research has already been carried on by scholars in
our library, but only occasionally, since the books are in our home and we must in some way protect our privacy.

After his untimely death, Rubens Borba de Moraes's library was moved to our home. At this point I must mention that he is the author of the standard bibliography of early Brazilian, **Bibliografia Brasileira**, a masterly description of rare books about Brazil and a monument of scholarship. He was an outstanding individual, a pioneer in library science in Brazil, director of São Paulo's Public Library, later of the National Library in Rio de Janeiro, and finally, of the Library and Information Services of the United Nations. Along with Mário de Andrade and others, he organized the **Semana de Arte Moderna**. Unfortunately, he came down with the flu just before its opening and spent that week in bed! He was a wonderful person, a walking encyclopedia, and a close friend whom I miss a great deal. But let me return to the idea of the Center.

First of all, a building would have to be constructed, and a financial and administrative structure put in place that would continue to function after my death. To insure this, many difficulties have to be overcome, and thus time keeps passing without my reaching a decision. We delude ourselves into thinking we will live forever, and so we keep letting things slip even though we know better. Nevertheless, I hope to arrive at some solution pretty soon. A grandson of mine, Pedro, who has heard us many times talking about a foundation, said to his mother when he was nine years old (he's eighteen today), "Grandpa will never establish this foundation. First of all, he is lazy—see what an impression he has of me—and secondly he can't stand to part from his books."

To a certain extent, he is right about the laziness, but even so, I hope this matter won't be resolved posthumously. Since I already mentioned my grandson Pedro, I think it is appropriate to add something about my family's interest and involvement in the library. My wife, Guita, whom I married in 1938 (you must find it phenomenal for a marriage to last this long, right?), has shared actively in this lifetime passion, and fortunately I never had to hide books before bringing them into the house (as happens to some collectors). . . . On the contrary, she has encouraged many of my extravagances, for which she has made domestic sacrifices. Not only does she like books, she has become herself a specialist in restoration—both of bindings and of paper—and has done interesting work in this field. My four children grew up amidst books (Betty, an economist and anthropologist; Diana, an architect, who specializes in the graphic arts and arts communication; Sérgio, an engineer; and Sônia, who has a social sciences degree but is pursuing a singing career). They share our love for books and do not want to see the collection broken up. They also don't consider the effort it took to establish the collection as madness—quite the contrary, I think—and they have passed on to my grandchildren the love and respect that they themselves have for books. I consider this a rare joy.

**JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES**: What is one's reaction upon finding a rare book, after a forty-year search?

**MINDLIN**: The heart beats faster. One feels emotion, but you can't let this emotion show in front of the book dealer or the price is likely to rise . . .

**JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES**: Is there a book you have wanted but haven't been able to acquire?

**MINDLIN**: There are several. For example, *A Cultura e a Opulência do Brasil* by Antonil.1 Have had this book in my hands, but the owner didn't want to sell it. That copy got away, and to this date I haven't found another. The work is a description of Brazil's resources, published in 1711. There are very few known copies in existence, because the Portuguese government was anxious to hide these findings, so as not to encourage other countries' ambitions, and therefore destroy the edition.

I have acquired, however, many works that are the dream of other collectors, such as first editions of *A Morrosinha*,26 of *O

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42. **Semana de Arte Moderna**, a festival of vanguard music, painting, sculpture and poetry held in São Paulo in February 1922, which is considered the official start of Brazilian Modernism.

43. Antonil is the pen name of João Antônio Andrade (b. 1670; d. 1715), the author of *The Cultura and Opulência of Brazil* published in 1711.

44. The Latin brevissimis or The dark-complexioned girl. Published in 1844 this is the
Guarany, and of Hans Staden’s Travel. But one can’t wish for the whole world, for if one acquired everything one searched for, what would be left? No doubt one would have to quote Drummond, and ask, “E agora, José?” As I said before, seeking is a pleasure in itself, and I still spend time reading dealers’ catalogues and going to bookstores whenever I can.

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES: What was going through the head of a thirteen-year-old boy who decided to purchase his first rare book?

MINDLIN: I think it was love at first sight, but I believe I directed to books the love my father felt for the visual arts. I have been buying books since I was seven or eight years old, when my brother Henrique and I would go to bookstores and buy children’s books (which, unfortunately, I did not have the foresight to keep). But later I had a serious problem, which I managed to solve as follows.

I didn’t want to ask my father for money to buy books that weren’t for school, neither had I monthly allowance, something that simplifies a child’s life. While I was in high school, every afternoon I would scout all the secondhand bookstores in São Paulo, and I made an important discovery: each dealer lived in his own novel, not knowing what the others had. Sometimes one would sell for 5,000 reis what another would sell for up to 40,000 or 50,000. This became a gold mine for me: I would buy most popular novel written by José de Alencar (1829–87) in São Paulo, and I made an important discovery: each dealer lived in his own novel, not knowing what the others had. Sometimes one would sell for 5,000 reis what another would sell for up to 40,000 or 50,000. This became a gold mine for me: I would buy

the books costing 5,000 at one store, take them to the other and say: “Look, I’m not interested in cash: I’m going to leave these books here on consignment, and when you sell them, please charge your fee and credit the balance to me, which I will spend on books.” In order to do this I had to ask for some money from my father to begin with, but after five or six months I had credit with various dealers in São Paulo and could buy the books I wanted without disturbing any money. Today this would be hardly possible, because the dealers know what they and the others have, which is unfortunate for book collectors. But even so, dealers and collectors are usually friends, because the trade in rare books is very special.

I was attracted to the first rare book I bought because it was old. It was the Portuguese edition of Bossuet’s Discours sur l’Histoire universelle published in Coimbra in 1746, which, as a matter of fact, I never got around to reading thoroughly. Later on, I came to understand that age alone isn’t that important. The contents of the work, its historical significance, the edition’s features, and its rarity are the most important factors, though there are others. Sometimes when an edition is riddled with mistakes even those mistakes may be of bibliographic interest (as was the case already mentioned of Machado de Assis’s complete poems), especially if they were corrected by the author in another edition. Book collecting requires study and lifetime dedication. But it is rewarding.

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES: Both the Modernists’ work and Concrete poetry employ graphics as an instrument of language. How does this relate to your experience? And, another question, As far as limited editions are concerned, aren’t they elitist?

MINDLIN: I find Modernist experiments quite attractive and valid, but in general, they do not pertain to current reading. Insofar as they relate primarily to poetry, I would say they are more exercises in graphics than poetry, though I don’t mean this to be a criticism of the Concrete Poets, for what they have done is very praiseworthy. “Shaped” poetry in Brazil, for instance, is
of very high quality, and the work of the brothers Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, for instance, although they have already attained quite a solid reputation, deserves to be more widely known both in Brazil and abroad. I think there is a renaissance today in the field of finely printed books. In fact, this supports a theory that I defend in frequent discussions with my friends in the publishing business, which is that an attractive book is not more expensive to produce than an ugly one. This goes for commercial books as well. A well-designed book, after all, adds an element of attraction for the reader.

You ask whether limited editions are inherently elitist. This is a loaded question, because you combine the bibliophile's concern for aesthetic pleasure with a political criticism, in this case the charge of elitism. From a collectivist point of view, the only relevant question is, How many people will be able to read the text and see the illustrations? Every book, according to this argument, should be reproduced in such a way that it is broadly accessible. But should this critique eliminate the pleasure of owning something unique? A painting, for instance, is by definition, singular. Printmaking is a method of multiplying an artist's work, both by a limited edition or a much larger number. It is important that art be reproduced and that access to knowledge of the work of art not be restricted to its owner. Still, to search for a rare or one-of-a-kind book, or to produce one, is a perfectly acceptable human frailty.

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES: How many books have you published or sponsored?

MINDLIN: All together, I believe about twenty-five. The first book I published was a translation by Dora Ferreira da Silva of Rilke's Duino Elegies, in 1950.14 I did it with my friends Mário da Silva Brito,15 Oswaldo de Andrade Filho,16 called Norê, and Hernani Campos Seabra.17 It was an edition of 125 copies, with two original drawings by Norê in each copy. We wanted to include four etchings, but we could not afford prints, so we had to be satisfied with drawings, and then with two only. After this, I published a few books with Gastão de Holanda,18 a friend from the Northeast, and others on my own, or under the imprint of Metal Leve, which were all designed by my daughter Diana.

The first book published by Metal Leve was the Revista de Antropofagia in 1975,19 by which we celebrated the company's silver anniversary, a less ephemeral form of celebration than a cocktail party or a dinner. We continued in this vein by reprinting other Modernist periodicals, such as Verbo, A Revista, and RASMA by Flávio de Carvalho,20 which are all rare, because when published, they weren't taken seriously enough to have been preserved.

I did not include my co-sponsoring of around twenty books, if I remember correctly, produced by the Ministry of Culture, Science, and Technology during the year I served as Secretary. I still dream of publishing some private press editions with Diana, of the kind produced by my friends Fernando Pereira or Pedro Moreyra, in Bahia (Edições Macauina and Edições Dinâmica) and Cleber Teixeira in Santa Catarina (Edições Nova Nova). I don't know if I was a designer in a previous life or if I am going to become one in a future life, but one thing is certain: I like graphic design very much.

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES: And what about the single copy of Drummond's Amor Natural, which you safely keep under lock and key in your library. When will those erotic poems be published?

MINDLIN: The story is simple. For several years I received as a birthday gift from Gastão de Holanda a book made especially for me; sometimes it was a single copy edition, other times a very limited edition. In 1977 I was surprised to receive Amor Natural, with a note stressing that it was the only copy. Gastão had asked

13. Gastão de Holanda was born in 1919 in Recife.
14. Review of Antropofagia, which launched literary cannibalism as a program for Brazilian literature.
15. The only issue published of the Revista Atual de Arte de Mato, edited by Flávio de Carvalho, famous vanguard architect, writer and painter. For the other periodicals, see nn. 1 and 13, above.

16. Oswaldo de Andrade Filho (Norê) is the son of Oswaldo de Andrade, one of the most creative of Modernist writers.
17. Hernani Campos Seabra was a book collector.
Drummond’s permission to publish these hidden erotic poems, to which Drummond agreed only because they were for me. At that time, Gastão offered to make two copies, one for Drummond as well, but Drummond said only one copy was needed, since he was not a book collector. He wrote a few verses at the beginning, dedicating the copy to me. You can imagine how pleased I was! Later, in talking to Drummond about the possibility of a larger edition, he told me that he hadn’t reached a decision: “If I publish them now, I might be accused of being a mad old carouser. But if I leave them to be published later, perhaps they’ll have become fairytales.”

Because of his indecision I have kept the copy discreetly hidden, resisting intense pressure to make the text public after Drummond’s death. I believe that the decision should be exclusively up to his heirs, though the poems are certainly publishable and they are undoubtedly an important part of Drummond’s works. Many of them have actually been published since Drummond’s death, by permission of his family.

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES: What is the secret to amassing so many rare books? Persistence? Luck? Did you consciously decide to create a library, or was it simply the result of all your reading?

MINDLIN: There is no great secret. First one needs to know what one wants; then study, get to know books, read catalogues—my brother Henrique, in fact, used to tease me that I acquired culture through catalogues, which is partially true—search, keep your eyes open, explore all possibilities, because one never knows what might appear, and, finally, have some luck, if, in fact, luck does exist. We hunt for a book and, at the same time, the book hunts for us. This has happened to me many times.

Regarding the decision to develop a library, I don’t really remember what took place. I grew up in a cultural environment, and I think that I inherited my father’s sixth sense for finding and judging paintings and painters, but transferred to books, even though other cultural areas interest me also. I began reading seriously at an early age, as I mentioned, and I must have been a precocious, or a pretentious, boy, or both (at least I am neither of these anymore...), because at a young age I had already read Orpheus, the History of Religions by Salomon Reinach, and had begun reading Shakespeare after seeing A Midsummer Night’s Dream on film, directed by Max Reinhardt. I also read Jules Verne, but, on the other hand, only at the age of sixty did I read myself to The Three Musketeers and The Count of Monte Cristo. In this manner, I seem to have acquired a reasonable balance in my life.

The collection began growing almost on its own and only a few sections, such as my holdings of “Braziliana,” were planned. I don’t think that from the beginning I intended the library to be a lifetime project. Later, certainly, it became one, but initially it just happened as did almost everything in my life. I had never decided, for example, to become a businessman, or to be Secretary of Culture. What I can say is that I always tried to weigh events and opportunities carefully, to see whether or not they suited my life. Looking back, my impression is that I succeeded. My biggest complaint against life is that it is too short. But we have to accept this, extracting from life that which gives us the most satisfaction. That is what I have always tried to do, and continue doing. All’s well as long as it lasts.

JOÃO DOS REIS BORGES: “He owned the largest private library in the city. He always carried some books with him. His passion as a bibliophile was the only one he allowed himself in his severe life; it burdened him with work and forced him to be cautious. But he was tempted to buy any book even a bad one.” This is a description of Peter Kien, the main character in Elias Canetti’s great novel, AUTO-DE-FE. Kien is the owner of a 25,000-volume library and is consumed by his books that he has lost all contact with the real world, as well as the ability to face contradictions and dilemmas. For him, life’s door led only to his library. What is the difference between Peter Kien and João Mindlin? In exchange for what would you relinquish your library?

MINDLIN: I found you reference to Elias Canetti’s AUTO-DE-FE interesting, because I read this book a long time ago, during the 1960s. Thirty years later he received the Nobel Prize for

38. Originally published in German in 1935 as Die Blendenung.
literature. First of all, the difference between Peter Kien’s accumulation of books and José Mindlin’s is one of degree. Deep down, I think that I, too, have a pathological compulsion to buy andread books, although this is simply a part of my life, not all-consuming. In Kien’s case, his book collecting is an extreme and total absorption. Book collecting can become an obsession if you are not careful, but in my case, this “pathological trait” gives me pleasure instead of pain; doesn’t harm anyone, and, above all, is incurable, so I don’t worry about it. Furthermore, you must have noticed that I maintain contact with the real world, try to face its contradictions and dilemmas, and, above all, enjoy its

le ne fay rien
sans
Gayeté
(Montaigne. Des livres)

Ex Libris
José Mindlin

many wonders. It isn’t by chance that in designing a bookplate for me, my daughter Diana chose Montaigne’s saying: “Je ne fay rien sans gayeté.” I do nothing without joy. That isn’t always possible, but at least I try.

To answer your question more seriously, however, I believe that the differences between Peter Kien and José Mindlin are far greater than the similarities. The similarities refer only to books, and even so, in a very superficial way. Canetti’s character was crazy; he pathologically devoted his life to his library, and it transformed him into its slave, without ever making him happy.

My case is quite the opposite. I have a private life, of which the library is a part, but only a part. I am able to see beyond it.

With regard to books, I don’t think I have an obsession for ownership. I have amassed books more as a curator, or caretaker, than an owner, with the aim of preserving the inheritance of our past, maintaining what is being done well today, and especially aiming to pass it on to the future. I have tried to promote cultural activities on many fronts, to encourage scholars to use the research facilities of my library, to initiate new publishing projects as well as to re-issue important out-of-print books; in short, to pursue projects that are in themselves reasons for living.

As you can see, Peter Kien’s personality is, ultimately, the opposite of mine. As I see him, he is extremely unhappy. I, on the other hand, am very happy, and as I said earlier, if I have one complaint about life, it’s that it is too short. Regarding your question about the terms under which I would relinquish my collection, I can say that I would gladly trade two-thirds of it for half my age. This, of course, only to start all over again...
A NOTE ON FURTHER READING

Curiosity about Brazilian poetry will be at least partially satisfied for the English-speaking reader by consultation of either An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry, edited by Elizabeth Bishop and Emanuel Brazil (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), or Brazilian Poetry: 1950-1980, edited by Emanuel Brazil and William Jay Smith (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983). Specific details concerning Brazilian literature may be found in Irwin Stern, ed. Dictionary of Brazilian Literature (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983).