

LECTURE 1: THE HISTORY OF THE NOVEL

The history of the novel is a long and complex one, spanning centuries and cultures. It is a genre that has evolved and changed over time, reflecting the social and cultural changes of the world.

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Lecture

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NOVELS ADRIFT: BRITISH CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAKING OF THE BRAZILIAN NOVEL

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"Nothing is foreign to us, because everything is."
(Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes)¹

In an interview given in 1977 to a Brazilian periodical, one of Brazil's leading literary critics, resuming a debate brought about by his 1973 essay "Misplaced Ideas", argued that not only do ideas travel but, in the case of Brazilian nineteenth-century literature, they travelled by boat, "coming from Europe every fortnight, on board steamships, in the shape of books, magazines and newspapers".²

Books, magazines and newspapers which, with the suspension of censorship in 1821, started circulating more freely and constantly in the bookshops, libraries and circulating libraries established in Rio de Janeiro, mainly from the 1820's and 1830's onwards. Among these books – available for purchase or rental –, there were novels and romances. They came mostly from Lisbon and Paris and were in their majority Portuguese or French. Until recently, there was not much evidence as to the existence of English novels among the books

* Universidade de São Paulo–USP. This essay presents the preliminary results of a research project still in progress, sponsored by two Brazilian funding agencies, FAPESP and CNPq.

¹ *Cinema, trajetória no subdesenvolvimento*. Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 1980, p. 77.

² Roberto Schwarz, *Movimento*, 26 July 1977. The essay was published as "As idéias fora do lugar" in 1973 and later included in *Ao Vencedor as Batatas*. São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1977.

sent to Rio de Janeiro. Brazilian literary historians and critics tended to consider this presence and their impact on Brazilian novel writing and novelists small and irrelevant. What a more thorough investigation about those books reveals, however, is that Britain and British novelists were much more prominent and played a much more important role in the making of the Brazilian novel than previously thought. As a matter of fact, a considerable amount of the novels that had Rio de Janeiro as their destination did actually hide their true origin, challenging the claim that French novels and novelists were foremost as models in the making and consolidation of the Brazilian novel.

There is plenty of evidence – the ads in newspapers and circulating library catalogues provide telling proof – that the scant Brazilian reading public also had a considerable amount of British authors and novels at their disposal. This essay is an attempt to reconstruct the history of the circulation of those British novels in Brazil.

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Throughout the whole of the colonial period, Brazil faced the structural impossibility of having books circulating in its territory; without its own press, submitted to previous censorship³, with a small number of booksellers, the country, even after the opening of its ports in 1808, depended basically on the illegal trade carried out by the English, French and Dutch, and on the small publishing industry of books in Portuguese which, from London and Paris,

³ Rubens Borba de Moraes informs that *Gulliver's Travels*, by Swift, and *Sentimental Journey*, by Sterne, could only be read by special licence, because they had been included in the list of books forbidden by the Real Mesa Censória (the Portuguese censorship committee). See *Livros e Bibliotecas no Brasil Colonial*. Rio de Janeiro, LTC, 1979.

