

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 it inhabits.

In the 18th century, the novel emerged as a new literary form, primarily in England. It was a response to the rise of the middle class and the desire for a more realistic and engaging form of fiction.

Lecture

The early novelists, such as Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, focused on the lives of ordinary people, often in a picaresque or epistolary form. This was a departure from the traditional epic and romance, which focused on heroic figures and fantastical events.

By the 19th century, the novel had become a dominant form of literature. It was used to explore the complexities of human nature and society, and to critique the social and political structures of the time.

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

Sandra Guardini T. Vasconcelos *

"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.

supplied its small consumer market. The opening of the Brazilian ports to trade with foreign nations in 1808 was, therefore, most convenient. With Napoleon's imminent invasion of Portugal, and the Portuguese monarchy under threat, the Prince Regent Dom João had been convinced by Great Britain's diplomatic envoy Lord Strangford to flee to his Brazilian colony, where, soon after his arrival in January 1808, he complied with the clauses in the treaties he had signed with the British government, by not only facilitating trade between Brazil and England but also ascertaining to England and her citizens advantages and privileges granted to no other foreign country.

Britain wasted no time in offering the tropical site of the Portuguese monarchy her merchants' regular supply of merchandise and manufactured goods, like chinaware, glass, pots and pans, cutlery or tools, from then on easily found on the shelves of shops and warehouses in the city of Rio de Janeiro. But not only hardware and utensils were made available to the inhabitants of the still small and provincial Brazilian capital. Books and periodicals in general, and novels in particular, also found their way into the country, accompanying the introduction of new habits of consumption, new fashions and a certain refinement of manners even today attributed to the British presence in Rio de Janeiro's everyday life after 1808. With the foundation of *Impressão Régia* in the same year, the cessation of censorship in 1821 and the growing settlement of French booksellers in Rio de Janeiro, books became more easily available and, little by little, ads began to appear announcing the sales of "novels", at the "Gazeta shops". By the 1820's the shops adjacent to the daily newspapers were already selling and renting books, whereas in the 1830's circulating libraries similar to the English and French ones were founded as commercial enterprises responsible for making available in the province the packages of novels sent from the metropolis. Booksellers and circulating libraries took on the responsibility for the diffusion and circulation of novels, playing as

central a role as shapers and mediators of taste⁴ as their counterparts in England and France. Not only *best sellers* but, one presumes, also leftovers or editions specially made for the French circulating libraries, ended up having Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro as their destination, some of which already translated into Portuguese. British novels are known to have continually crossed the English Channel throughout the 18th century and taken France by storm. Fashionable and popular among French readers, it was only natural that they should become the common fare of French circulating libraries and booksellers. French catalogues of the time abound in novels “traduit de l’anglais”, almost a cliché expression in book-lists and advertisements. Translated into French, they acquired what was believed to be at the time an extra layer of varnish and sophistication. And this was how dozens of them arrived in Brazil, giving origin, most certainly, to the common critical mistake of taking them for what they were not. The fascination for and “exceptional receptivity towards the ornaments of French culture”, which according to Laurence Hallewell were seen by Brazilians as tokens of modernity and progress,⁵ may be a reasonable explanation as to why French versions and editions of English novels were favourites. A bait or commercial strategy to make the latter easier to rent and sell, the expression “translated from the French”, which appears in a great number of novels that circulated in Brazil, is often a false clue, hiding their English origin.

⁴ Nelson Schapochnik records the existence of Cremière’s circulating library, on Rua da Alfândega, and those of Mongie, Dujardin and Mad Breton, on Rua do Ouvidor. See “Contextos de Leitura no Rio de Janeiro do século XIX: salões, gabinetes literários e bibliotecas”. In: Bresciani, Stella. *Imagens da Cidade. Séculos XIX e XX*. ABPUH/São Paulo, Marco Zero/FAPESP, 1993, p. 147-162.

⁵ Laurence Hallewell. *O Livro no Brasil (sua história)*. São Paulo: T.A. Queiroz/EDUSP, 1985, p. 117.

Pigoreau's *Petite bibliographie biographico-romancière*⁶ and Harold Streeter's compilation, in *The eighteenth-century English novel in French translation*⁷, can be very useful sources in any search for the true origin of many of the novels which were listed in the catalogues of circulating libraries in Rio de Janeiro. The comparison between the bibliographical information available, which includes the translator's name or initials, shows that often the edition that came to Brazil, or served as the original text for the translation into Portuguese, was exactly the same that circulated in French circulating libraries. This is the case, for example, of *L'Italien, ou le confessional des pénitents noirs*, by Anne Radcliffe, or *Alberto, ou o deserto de Strathnavern*, by Mrs. Helme⁸. Hence Marlyse Meyer's claim that the novelistic paradigms which came to Brazil were always English, though mediation was French⁹.

Since its foundation on 10 September 1808 up to 22 June 1822, when its publication was discontinued, the *Gazeta do Rio de Janeiro* adopted the habit of announcing in its section "Loja da Gazeta" (Gazeta shop) the arrival of what it used to describe as "moderníssimas e divertidas novellas" (very modern and amusing novels): anonymous works; old favourites like Lesage's *Diabo Coxo*¹⁰,

⁶ A.N. Pigoreau. *Petite bibliographie biographico-romancière, ou Dictionnaire des romanciers tans anciens que modernes, tant nationaux qu'étrangers; avec un mot sur chacun d'eux et la notice des romans qu'ils ont donné, soit comme auteurs, soit comme traducteurs, précédé d'un catalogue des meilleurs romans publiés depuis plusieurs années, et suivi de tableaux propres à en faire connaître les différents genres et à diriger dans le choix des ouvrages qui doivent faire la base d'un cabinet de lecture*. Paris, Pigoreau Librairie, 1821-1828 (including supplements).

⁷ Streeter Harold W. *The Eighteenth-Century English Novel in French Translation. A Bibliographical Study*. New York, Institute of French Studies, 1941.

⁸ Respectively *The Italian, or the confessional of the black penitents* and *Albert, or the Wilds of Strathnavern*.

⁹ See Marlyse Meyer, "O que é, ou quem foi Sinclair das Ilhas?" *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*. São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo, 1973, n. 14.

¹⁰ First novel published by Imprensa Régia (the Imperial Press founded in Brazil), in 1810, from the original *Le diable boiteux*. See Rubens Borba de Moraes, *Liros e Bibliotecas no Brasil Colonial*. Rio de Janeiro, LTC, 1979.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paulo e Virgínia* and *A Choupana Índia*; Chateabriand's *Atala, ou Amores de Dois Selvagens*; Marmontel's *Belizário*; and, sharing space with the French, English fiction: Mrs. Elizabeth Helme's *Luiza, ou o casal [sic] no bosque* (21 September 1816), Jonathan Swift's *Viagens de Gulliver* (15 March 1817), Daniel Defoe's *Vida e Aventuras admiráveis de Robinson Crusoe* (9 April 1817), Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones, ou O Engeitado [sic]* (10 May 1817), the anonymous *Vida de Arnaldo Zulig* (4 July 1818) and the complement to *Historia da infeliz Clarissa Harlowe* in 8 volumes, by Samuel Richardson (8 March 1820).¹¹

This practice was equally followed by *Jornal do Comércio*, founded by the French editor Pierre Plancher-Seignot in Rio de Janeiro in 1827, which resumed the habit of advertising the sales of novels and romances available at the apothecaries and bookshops that had become part of the landscape of the city of Rio de Janeiro. And, although bookshops and circulating libraries took a bit longer to come to other provinces of the Empire, it was not completely impossible to come across novels in the interior of the country, even if they could be found only at homes and private libraries, as is the

¹¹ Respective original titles in French and/or English: *Le Diable Boiteaux* (*The Devil on Two Sticks*); *Paul et Virginie* (*The History of Paul and Virginia; or The Shipwreck*); *La Chaumière Indienne* (*The Indian Cottage*). *Atala* (*Atala; or The Love and Constancy of two Savages in the Desert*); *Bélisaire* (*Belisarius, a tale*); *Louisa or the Cottage on the Moor*; *Gulliver's Travels*; *Robinson Crusoe*; *Tom Jones*; *Arnold Zulig: A Swiss Story* (attributed to Eliza Kirkham Mathews); *Clarissa Harlowe*. The information between parentheses refers to the dates when the novels were first advertised in the newspaper.

Since 1801, there is evidence of license requests made by the bookseller Paulo Martin, Junior, to the Portuguese Real Mesa Censória for the shipment of the French versions of Defoe's and Richardson's novels: *Aventures de Robinson Crusoe* (Paris, 1799); *Histoire de Clarisse* (Venice, 1788); *Histoire de Grandisson* (Amsterdam, 1777). For the circulation of books in the colonial period, see Márcia Abreu. *Os Caminhos dos Livros*. São Paulo, Mercado de Letras/ALB/FAPESP, 2003, pp. 95-7.

case of the Portuguese translations of Defoe, Walter Scott and Anne Radcliffe mentioned by Gilberto Freyre¹².

English novels were, obviously, the common fare of the Rio de Janeiro British Subscription Library, a circulating library with a good provision of European novelties the British had opened in 1826 to attend on the British community living in the town. There, one could find most British novels in the original, in editions that are also recorded by the Catalogues of the Real Gabinete Português de Leitura do Rio de Janeiro (founded in 1837) and of Biblioteca Fluminense (founded in 1847). Generally, however, the novels that made it to Rio on the packet boats had already been translated into Portuguese, usually from versions in French. There were also the French bookshops¹³ which, gathering from the 1820's onwards round the Rua do Ouvidor, centre of elegant life in the city, rented and sold novels to a very small literate population, to whom novel-reading became part of the code of good manners to be followed and imitated. The truth is that packages of English novels actually called at Rio de Janeiro harbour since the first three decades of the 19th century, almost always through Paris or Lisbon, translated from the French. And they kept flowing in throughout the century, as records in circulating library catalogues testify. (The volumes still extant on the shelves of the Real Gabinete Português de Leitura in Rio de Janeiro are good evidence of the popularity and longevity of these novels.) Besides the works of the so-called founding fathers of the English novel – Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Sterne –, among the books that came to Brazil one could find all the different types of novels

¹² Gilberto Freyre. *Inglês no Brasil*. Aspectos da influência britânica sobre a vida, a paisagem e a cultura do Brasil. Rio de Janeiro, Liv. José Olympio, 1948. Both Freyre and Hallewell inform that already in 1832 the Tipografia Pinheiro, Faria e Cia. published the novel *A Caverna da Morte* (*The Cavern of Death*) in Olinda. Both, however, wrongly attribute its authorship to Anne Radcliffe.

¹³ Bookshops belonging to Villeneuve, Didot, Mongie, Crémière, Garnier, Plancher, Dujardin.

current in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England: Horace Walpole's and Anne Radcliffe's Gothic, Fanny Burney's novel of manners, William Godwin's novel of doctrine, all of Walter Scott and a lot of sentimental novels and of Charles Dickens, just to mention a few. There was still a considerable amount of less famous or anonymous works, of little literary relevance and mainly destined to feed the novel market and meet the demands of the reading public in England and, doubtlessly, in France, sure destination of a significant amount of the English novelistic production at the time¹⁴. These are the novels that came to equally constitute the collections of the Imperial capital's circulating libraries.

Once the ports were opened to the free trade of European goods and censorship was abolished, the country was literally invaded by novels. Perhaps not so much in numbers of copies, since there were few readers, but the variety of titles and authors is quite impressive. A quick look into the catalogues will bear testimony. One can imagine, therefore, the effect on the extant Brazilian readers and men of letters of the almost concomitant arrival of these books and the virtually simultaneous contact they provided with everything the English and the French had taken about two centuries to produce: Defoe and Dickens, Richardson and Walter Scott, Radcliffe and Charlotte Brontë, Sterne and Bulwer-Lytton. And, obviously, Lesage and Chateaubriand, Marivaux and Dumas, Fénelon and Paul de Kock, Rousseau and Eugene Sue. In other words, this simultaneous availability of such diversity of authors and works produced a temporal compression and offered a variety of themes, forms and techniques which were sufficient to amaze any reader or writer-to-be.

Without much ado and delay, booksellers, merchants and circulating libraries put into circulation both the latest publications and renowned works, famous novelists together with popular authors,

¹⁴ The complete list of novels can be accessed at <http://www.unicamp.br/iel/memoria/Ensaios/index.htm>.

thus helping with this move to break off a centuries-long isolation and include Brazil into the nineteenth-century literary market. And, if there are no testimonials of readers or about reading – José de Alencar¹⁵ is a famous exception –, one must go beyond the mere evidence as to the availability of these novels and investigate what may have been the modes of appropriation of these models, of what Machado de Assis once described as “external inflow”¹⁶ in an essay about the new generation of Brazilian poets of his time.

Alencar was one of those for whom the reading of European novels contributed to “imprint on [his] spirit the moulds of this literary structure”¹⁷. These were the novels which crossed the oceans, carrying within them some recurring themes – marriage, private and domestic life, usurpation of rights and inheritance – all of them imbued with strong and exaggerated emotions, often expressed in the ornate, high-sounding language characteristic of the time. Similarly, the different kinds of novel (domestic, sentimental, Gothic, historical, of manners, of doctrine), current in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, circulated in Brazil, offering suggestions to our first fiction writers. If we consider the distinction between *novel* and *romance* made by Clara Reeve in her *The Progress of Romance* (1785), we can say that, to a great extent, the romance repertoire is undoubtedly present in the Brazilian forerunners’ initial novelistic production: unbridled passion, seduction, kidnappings, betrayals, terrible villains, disrepute, last-minute revelations, absence of half-tone, lack of causal

¹⁵ José de Alencar (1829-1877), novelist and politician, played a central role in the consolidation of the novel in Brazil.

¹⁶ Machado de Assis. “A nova geração”. In: *Obra completa*. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Aguilar, vol. III, p. 813.

¹⁷ José de Alencar. “Como e porque sou romancista”. *Obra Completa*. Rio de Janeiro, José Aguilar, 1965, vol. 1. Marlyse Meyer calls our attention to references to *Sinclair of the Isles*, by Mrs. Helme, not only in Alencar but also in Machado de Assis and Guimarães Rosa. See “O que é, ou quem foi Sinclair das Ilhas?” *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*. São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo, 1973, n. 14, pp. 37-63.

link between events, stereotyped characters (depicted as either extremely good or extremely evil), etc. Some texts, however, begin to attach more importance to verisimilitude and plausibility, presenting more life-like language and scenes and bringing the story closer to the life of common people, avowedly the novel's primary material. It seems that to the *enbourgeoisement* of manners and to the changing role of women in Brazilian society there was a corresponding and growing preponderance of the novel in detriment of romance, although the latter would never completely disappear from the work of Romantic novelists.

Apart from the works of those we call canonical novelists today, the survey of English novels in circulation in Brazil also allows us to testify to the presence of a group of female novelists who had become well known and widely read in England in the eighteenth century: Fanny Burney, Mrs. Inchbald, Sophia Lee, Anne Radcliffe, Elizabeth Helme with her *Sinclair das Ilhas* (*St. Clair of the Isles, or the Outlaws of Barra*), and Regina Maria Roche, with *Amanda e Oscar* (*The Children of the Abbey*)¹⁸, apart from the lesser or anonymous works I have already referred to. Judging from the number of circulating libraries established in several regions of the country mainly in the second half of the 19th century, one presumes that the habit of reading novels became increasingly more widespread. A study by Ana Luiza Martins, *Gabinetes de Leitura da Província de São Paulo: A Pluralidade de um Espaço Esquecido (1847-1890)*, surveys, only in the state of São Paulo, almost twenty circulating libraries scattered throughout the province, in whose collections novels predominated, especially *feuilletons*, corroborating the massive presence of foreign authors in translation, among whom she mentions Walter Scott and Charles Dickens. The expansion of reading sites and the facilitated access to books in general, and novels in particular, was bound to become an

¹⁸ It was Marlyse Meyer who first discovered Helme's and Roche's works, by pulling the loose threads left by Alencar and Machado.

object of concern, since the seclusion of Brazilian women, their scarce education and the limited world in which they lived made them a privileged public as far as the consumption of *feuilletons* and popular novels is concerned. This condition, so very similar to that of eighteenth-century English women, might explain the novelist Júlia Lopes de Almeida's complaint, still at the end of the 19th century, about the pernicious effects that the reading of novels could have over women, her warning against "detrimental, unwholesome novels, filled with romantic adventures and dangerous heroes", and her recommendation of works of moral edification¹⁹.

Everything indicates that in Brazil, too, there was the same need to justify the lack of theoretical dignity of the new genre which, according to Antonio Cândido, made seventeenth-century French writers – and, I would add, eighteenth-century English novelists as well – avail themselves of the artifice of the "sweet remedy" (Horace's *utile et dulcē*) to hide the complex of inferiority fiction suffered from in the face of the noble tradition of the tragedy and the epic. On arriving in Brazil as an already consolidated genre in Europe, nonetheless, the novel did not have to struggle so hard to achieve recognition and Brazilian novelists could soon take care of other matters. Indeed, when compared to its English counterpart, the Brazilian novel quickly got rid of its "state of ashamed shyness"²⁰ and of the blemish of being a minor and bastard genre. Likewise, it was quicker in accepting the "validity in itself of mimesis" and the "free play of creative fantasy"²¹.

¹⁹ Júlia Lopes de Almeida. *Livro das Noivas*, 1895, p. 36. ["novelas prejudiciais, insalubres, recheadas de aventuras românticas e de heróis perigosos"].

²⁰ In the original: "estado de timidez envergonhada". The phrase is Antonio Cândido's, in his essay, "Timidez do romance" in *Educação pela noite e outros ensaios*. São Paulo, Ed. Ática, 1987, pp. 82-99.

²¹ *Id.*, *Ibid.*, p. 88. In the original: "validade em si mesma da mimese" and "livre jogo da fantasia criadora", respectively.

As Marlyse Meyer points out, “the fictions imagined by eighteenth-century ladies and spinsters lulled Brazilian nineteenth-century imaginations”²², which seems to be a valid comment and include writers and readers alike. In her extraordinary study of the *feuilleton*, she shows not only the remarkable penetration of the “romance-folhetim” (counterpart of the popular English novels) in Brazil in the 19th century, but also its further ramifications, in the melodrama and in the soap opera. The formula is not at all different from the one we find in the most popular English novels: kidnappings, treachery, dishonour, virtue in distress, terrible villains, seduced and abandoned heroines. All of this accompanied by the realistic painting of scenes of daily life, the valorisation of the domestic space and of the new role of women in the bourgeois family, as educator and reformer of manners and morals.

In Brazil, as in England, the interest in novels and romances can very well have been related to the changes that were taking place in Brazilian society. As Nelson Werneck Sodr e stresses, writing about the 1860s,

If the great majority of the public was constituted by marriageable young ladies and students, and the privileged literary theme must be, exactly because of that, marriage, a little blended with the old love motif, the press and literature, closely connected then, would be led to meet this demand. Women began to free themselves, little by little, from colonial confinement and submitted themselves to the patterns of European fashion, appearing in the drawing rooms and a little on the streets.²³

²² Marlyse Meyer. “Mulheres Romancistas Inglesas do S culo XVIII e Romance Brasileiro” in *Caminhos do Imagin rio no Brasil*. S o Paulo, EDUSP, pp. 47-72. In the original: “as fic es imaginadas por senhoras e solteironas inglesas do s culo XVIII embalaram as imagina es novecentistas brasileiras”.

²³ Nelson Werneck Sodr e. *Hist ria da Imprensa no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, Civiliza o Brasileira, 1966, pp. 227-228. In the original: “Se a parte mais numerosa do p blico era constitu da pelas mo as casadouras e pelos estudantes, e o tema

Although schooling in Brazil was very deficient and the first official survey about rates of literacy, made in 1872, informed that only one-fifth of the free population all over Brazil could read, it is necessary to recall the habit of reading aloud at family evening reunions and add “circles of listeners” to the numbers of those who could, occasionally, take advantage of the circulation of books in the country, which includes Brazilian women, whose lack of education was abundantly remarked and documented by foreign travellers who travelled all over Brazil. The testimonial of the English traveller Maria Graham, however, presents an alternative version and testifies to the existence of some women (even if few of them) who were habitual readers even of philosophy and politics, as was the case of a Dona Maria Clara, mentioned by her. Likewise, the publication of periodicals aiming specifically at the “fair sex” evidences a female readership. It is necessary, therefore, to revise the myth of women’s illiteracy and make its extension more relative, since, according to Delso Renault, the *Gazeta do Rio de Janeiro* already in 1813 published ads announcing the establishment of the first lay boarding schools for girls, like Dona Catharina Jacob’s.²⁴ The frequency and regularity of these ads, informing the opening of schools for young women, with sewing, embroidery, languages, dancing and music in their curriculum, allow us to presume that there was a clientele for the services they offered. It is true that the level of education was not very high, since many girl students seemed to give up their studies before their conclusion. The warnings against the dangers of reading

literário por excelência devia ser, por isso mesmo, o do casamento, misturado um pouco com o velho motivo do amor, a imprensa e a literatura, casadas estreitamente então, seriam levadas a atender a essa solicitação premente. A mulher começava a libertar-se, a pouco e pouco, da clausura colonial e subordinava-se aos padrões da moda europeia exibindo-se nos salões e um pouco nas ruas.”

²⁴ Renault, Delso. *O Rio Antigo nos Anúncios de Jornais (1808-1850)*. Rio de Janeiro, José Olympio, 1969.

fiction, however, clearly indicate that there was also a female reading public for those novels that arrived continuously on board European steamboats. At the same time, the insistence on the supply of edifying or instructive reading denotes the existence of an educational project that aimed at preparing Brazilian society for the times to come. An Enlightenment project, similar to that which had taken place in England and France throughout the whole of the 18th century, and which, in Brazil, was embodied in the foundation of colleges, in the role played by the press and in the interest in the diffusion of knowledge.

The press did play a major role in the instruction of its readers. The newspapers and periodicals, with their sections of varieties, miscellanies, and *feuilletons*, seem to have constituted “a kind of local version of the *Encyclopédie*”²⁵, thus decisively contributing to the process of formation of its public. The option for edifying stories seems to have been the obvious course. What was new was that, side by side with the long-lasting habit of translating foreign narratives, which filled the leisure hours of a readership eager for European novelties, there was also the desire to create a national literature, represented by the experiments of the forerunners of Brazilian fiction in several periodicals.

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In the wake of the Independence movement, in the Brazilians' desire to build a nation and create a national literature, foreign novels and novelists most certainly suggested paths, inspired themes and techniques, and offered solutions to those who first ventured into the territory of fiction. However, if it is true that the appropriation by Brazilians of the European novel tradition did not actually work as “imitation” or “mechanical reproduction” but as “participation in

²⁵ Süssekind, Flora. *O Brasil não é longe daqui. O narrador. A viagem*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1990, p. 79.

the resources which became common assets by means of our dependency, contributing to make it into an interdependency”²⁶, it is also true that the historical ground which determined the invention and use of these resources was completely different from ours.

My interest, as may have already become clear, is limited to the English contribution to this process. The presence of the English novel in the intellectual and artistic life in Brazil proven²⁷, the next move should be to investigate its participation in the making of the Brazilian novel. But this is a step that forces us to face a conceptual and historical problem of considerable importance, that of the reciprocal determination between form and content. In other words: if the novel rose in Europe as an answer to the need to configure new contents, which could no longer be exposed in the existing literary forms, one should ask what were the consequences of adopting a European literary form – the epic of the bourgeoisie, in Georg Lukács’s terms – in a country whose mode of production was still based on slave work and where there was not yet a bourgeoisie, at least not comparable to the European, as far as its degree of organisation and complexity are concerned. This is the opinion of a scholar like Nelson Werneck Sodré, or of Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, who remarks: Until recently, there was not in Brazil an organised bourgeoisie, aiming to mould the State apparatus, and structure society according to the logic of the market. Of course there were the bourgeois, there were the capitalists, but there was not a bourgeois class as a political actor approximately from 1850 to 1950, when a peculiar market society was anyhow in the process of constituting itself, at the mercy of the logic of circumstances.²⁸

²⁶ Antonio Cândido. *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*. In: *A educação pela noite e outros ensaios*. São Paulo, Ática, 1987, p. 19.

²⁷ I refer the reader once more to the complete list of English novels available in nineteenth-century Brazil. See note 13.

²⁸ Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos. *A práxis liberal no Brasil: propostas para reflexão e pesquisa*. *Ordem burguesa e liberalismo político*. São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1978, pp. 65-117 (p. 110).

That and also what Sérgio Buarque de Holanda claims, that the novel only “rose and prospered naturally where bourgeois society rose and could prosper”²⁹, actually pose a problem, in the examination of the Brazilian case: how does the genre behave, once transplanted to the periphery of the capitalist system? The task faced by prospective writers was not small, since it meant absorbing the European models and acclimatising them, by adjusting them to the local matter. The problem began to be dealt with by our first prose fiction writers in the 1830’s, albeit with very unsatisfactory and rudimentary results. As a matter of fact, this initial production can be described, almost without exception, merely as fictional exercises that, however, evidence the level of difficulty that the challenge implied. It is once more Sérgio Buarque de Holanda who offers an explanation for such precariousness. According to him, there were not, in our provincial milieu, raw materials for the novel; that is, Brazil lacked the forms of everyday life characteristic of the European societies. For lack of talent or social conditioning, our first prose fiction writers did not hit upon a literary form that could actually fit the materials they had at their disposal. Or, contrarily, the lack of complexity of our social life made their materials too thin to enable them to produce works of literary relevance. The wish to write Brazilian fiction was a necessary but not sufficient condition and the misfit between form and content in their work is evident. Only those men of letters’ engagement in the building of a national literature justifies that we acknowledge their production. In spite of their limitations, however, these minor, secondary writers paved the way for their successors, decisively collaborating with the making of the Brazilian novel.

By the same token, they abundantly recurred to the same artifices, so common in the English novel, in order to emphasise the

²⁹ Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. “Melville”. *O espírito e a letra: ensaios de crítica literária* (1948-1959). Org. Antonio Arnoni Prado. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1996, vol. II, p. 266. Article originally published in *Diário Carioca*, 8 October 1950.

moralising nature of, and lend an air of truth to their stories. In England, the novel's permanent need of self-justification was undeniably sedimented historical material. Under diverse historical conditions and with a miniscule reading public, it remains to be explained why the forerunners of Brazilian fiction made equal claims to the truth and faithfulness of their narratives, while resorting to strategies in search of verisimilitude. It can only be supposed that in a nation still in the making, whose material base lay on slave work, with a society still in process of structuring itself, the recourse to these procedures must have attended other purposes.

After all, there is nothing more distant from the European bourgeois family than the organisation of the manorial houses in Portuguese America, where masters, relatives, slaves and dependents all lived under the same roof. On this side of the Atlantic were still at work the tyrannical power of patriarchs, an overall lack of education, the confinement of women to the domestic space and their subjection to rigid morality and exemplary punishment (lavishly witnessed by the foreign travellers who roamed the country), whereas at least some of these impediments to the renewal of men's and women's roles within the family and to the insertion of women in the world of education had already been removed in England, during the period of consolidation of the bourgeois sphere. No doubt, there was still fierce control over what youngsters, women and workers read but the novel had already consolidated as a genre and had become more widely accepted, while in Brazil it was just beginning to more decisively enter the educated circuit of Rio de Janeiro.

The gradual re-europeisation of the Imperial capital during Dom João VI's reign, showing the crucial need to introduce more civilised habits, brought about significant changes in people's ways of life, modified colonial habits, and made available to the rising political, economic and cultural elite better education, theatres, books, bookshops and printing presses, and the latest tokens of European civilisation in the shape of manufactured goods and commodities. With the settlement of the Portuguese Court in the

small colonial capital and its transformation into the site of Vice-Royalty first and Empire later (with Brazil's independence in 1822), there was a visible investment in the urbanisation of the city and a deliberate campaign in favour of the polishing of manners, the refinement of habits and the normatisation of conduct, with the clear intent of educating the people and building a national culture.³⁰

Literature would once more take on a central role in this true civilising march and in the project of building a national consciousness, with the help of the several literary periodicals and miscellanies that were launched and unceremoniously discontinued, and of the prose fiction which began to be produced in the country. The novel, as a matter of course, did engage in the movement although it was late to come, the first Brazilian novel being Teixeira e Souza's *O Filho do Pescador*, in 1843.

This civilising mission intended to fight backwardness, rudeness, ignorance and the closure of colonial society, aiming at the shaping of a civilised world and of a nation. The English novel, from the point of view of content, lay an emphasis on the confrontation of moral values and played an important role as an imaginary site of conflict but also of conciliation between bourgeois and aristocratic interests and values, soon allied against a new historical actor who emerged from the deepening of the process of urbanisation and industrialisation – the working class. In Brazil, the nineteenth-century novel functioned rather as an instrument of discovery and interpretation of the country³¹, its people, history, geography, customs and regions. Likewise, it served as a weapon to build an idea of nation, in the hands of the ruling class, which treated with arrogance,

³⁰ See Jean Marcel Carvalho França, *Literatura e Sociedade no Rio de Janeiro oitocentista* (Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional/Casa da Moeda, 1999), where these arguments are competently developed and to whom I owe the ideas in this paragraph.

³¹ The phrase is Antonio Cândido's. *Formação da Literatura Brasileira*. São Paulo, Martins, 1959.

cynicism and prejudice the other sectors of this country in the making: the free poor workers and the slaves. The moralising intent, albeit present and clearly directed towards the elite, is less pervasive than in the English novel and shares the reader's interest with the purpose of developing and stimulating feelings of patriotism and diffusing knowledge of the country. The precept *utile et dulci*, that is, the maxim that guides the writing of books which can be read with profit and delight is thus differently translated in the practice of English and Brazilian novelists. Patrick Brantlinger reminds us of how mass literacy was considered a "menace", as medicine that could very easily turn into poison³². Because of the rise of the working class, reading in England had avowedly become a question of class.

With the usual delay with which ideas used to come to and circulate in Brazil, it is no surprise that in the full light of the 19th century Brazilian men of letters still defended classical precepts and norms already discarded in Europe. Notions like decorum and the *utile et dulci* maxim were familiar to educated Brazilians, not only because the sons of well-off families went to study in Europe – Fernando de Azevedo calls them "an intellectual elite of importation" – and received a classical education, but also because Brazilian education, at least until the end of the 18th century, basically included the Classical Humanities, with a stress on grammar, rhetoric and philosophy. Virgil, Cicero, Homer and Horace were not unknown to students and readers and could be studied in the dozens of Rhetoric and Poetics handbooks, textbooks, and compendiums for which, in spite of censorship, there was no restriction of importation, sale or circulation³³. However, the same Fernando de Azevedo considers them "a thin minority of men of letters, which floated, alien to and above

³² Patrick Brantlinger. *The Reading Lesson. The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Indiana University Press, 1998.

³³ See Márcia Abreu. *Os Caminhos dos Livros*. Campinas, Mercado de Letras/ Associação de Leitura do Brasil; São Paulo, FAPESP. 2003.



the social milieu.³⁴ These were the “minorities” which, when Dom João VI and his Court arrived in Rio de Janeiro, would take on the task and the mission of engaging in the “civilising crusade”³⁵ which intended to introduce more civilised and urban habits to replace those of the old local patriarchal society.

Similar procedures, different ends, diverse histories. Transplanted to Brazil, the European bourgeois novel would find an agrarian and proslavery country. In the place of the European bourgeoisie, by now economically powerful and socially prestigious, there was the Brazilian oligarchy which, supported by great landed property and slave work, had neither tradition nor nobility, but defined itself in terms of the size of its property, the number of its slaves, and its leisure and ostentation. The coffee barons did eventually succeed the sugar-mill masters of the 17th and 18th centuries but this represented no real change in the socio-economic structure of the country. Whether living in rural manorial estates or in urban mansions— with their different ways of living –, this moneyed aristocracy had at the other end of the social scale their slaves, cantoned in slave quarters on the farms or shanties in the towns. Between these two extremes, there was a population of free men, composed of merchants, peddlers, officials, civil servants. A social structure so unlike that in which the novel rose and flourished in Europe that one could ask whether the genre, once transposed to Brazilian soil, did not itself seem a “misplaced idea”.

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No one argues or denies the relevance of France as a model and reference to Brazilian culture. The English, on the contrary, were less famous for their cultural contributions and better known

³⁴ Fernando de Azevedo. *A Cultura Brasileira. Introdução ao estudo da cultura no Brasil*. 4^a. ed. São Paulo, Edições Melhoramentos, 1964, p. 278.

³⁵ The phrase can be found in Jean M. Carvalho França, *op. cit.*, p.10.

for their manufactured goods and their intromission in the political and economic affairs of the Brazilian Empire. Here, most probably, lies the reason for the almost complete erasure of the English presence in the nineteenth-century Brazilian novel. Notwithstanding all the admiration many entertained for the English political system and the debates around the *laissez-faire* policy, the often uneasy and notoriously tense relations between the Brazilian and British governments, in economy and politics, produced, to say the least, a certain degree of ambiguity in the way England was viewed in Brazil.

The intensification of the English moral pressure and even violence against the slave traffic, mainly as from 1839, only reinforced the Brazilian people's revolt against the British, a feeling openly acknowledged by the man of letters Justiniano José da Rocha in his newspaper *O Brasil*: "(...) if there is today in the country a common and eminently popular idea, that is that England is our most deceptive and tenacious enemy" (01 October 1843). The knots of this relationship and the reasons for its ambiguity are pointed out by José Murilo de Carvalho. He explains:

Considered as the leading country of the civilised world, as the richest, strongest, as the nation of civil, political and economic liberties, it [England] could not but be seen as a model by whoever judged these characteristics indisputable values. To begin with, the very condition of England as a more economically powerful country and, in particular, the history of its relations with Portugal and later with Brazil, placed it in a very dubious position. If there was admiration for its material progress and political system, there was also, on the other hand, a unanimous condemnation of its prepotence in relation to Brazil.³⁶

It may sound odd to talk about borrowings of procedures and techniques from the English novel in a period so ostensibly marked, on the one hand, by all these frictions and, on the other, by the strong presence of French culture, always viewed as a token of

³⁶ José Murilo de Carvalho. *Teatro de sombras: a política imperial*. Rio de Janeiro, Ed. Vértice, IUPERJ, 1988, p. 116.

refinement and civilisation by Brazilians. Moreover, this culture of importation coexisted with the open struggle in favour of national values and nationality waged by intellectuals, politicians and men of letters who put in their energy to draw and define the contours of a national consciousness. The process of acclimatisation of the novel in Brazil took place during a turbulent period, characterised by political turmoil, rebellions in the provinces, internal discussions and the circulation of republican and federalist ideas. Just like drama, seen as a "school of manners", the novel became imbued with a clear pedagogical and, to some extent, political mission, in so far as it became a tool for the debate of the national question, with a special predilection for themes like the aggrandisement of Brazil's natural beauties, the national versus foreign opposition and the discussion about what being Brazilian was all about.³⁷

Thus, with these concerns in mind, conscious of their mission to build a Brazilian literature, novelists were much less prone to engage in the usual moral justification, so common in the works of their English counterparts. Though much less vehement, it can still be found in prefaces, in intrigues, in narrators' discourse, or in the opinions and criticism of journalists who devoted their time to the novel. Maybe as a consequence of Puritanism, control over reading and the veto against fiction had been more strongly and persistently felt in England than in Brazil. In the former, literacy not only reached a larger amount of people (although there are controversies about numbers and percentages, in 1790 Burke estimated that there were 80.000 readers in a population of almost 8 million, whereas in Brazil the 1872 census counted 18,56% literate people in a free population of 8.490.910 inhabitants), but also the slow but gradual inclusion into the world of literacy of women and workers, who had always been on the margin, required surveillance over the types of reading at their disposal.

³⁷ The issue has a long history. Still in 1873 Machado de Assis was discussing the problem in his essay *Instinto de Nacionalidade*.

A common strategy among English novelists, the “true narrative” ploy also made its appearance both in the short novels by Brazilian forerunners and in the works of better known novelists, who insisted on the authenticity, didactic purposes and moral appeal of their stories. Their intent seems to have been to conquer the reader’s resistance and lend an air of seriousness to fiction reading. However, one does not find in these works voices as angry and arguments as conservative as those that can be read in English periodicals and in the correspondence of English readers. In a setting more complacent with the liberties of fiction, this attitude of defence, the evident need of self-justification, and the reactions against the dangers posed by novel-reading appear more timidly and are circumscribed to the very restricted circles of authors and critics. Horace’s *Omine tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci* is quoted, for example, in an article published in *Minerva Brasiliense*³⁸, reminding novelists of their pledge to offer readers “the image of virtue (...) and the horror of vice”. That would be, according to many of these critics, the noble mission of a bastard genre, whose redemption could be achieved through the relentless defence of moral principles wrapped in an interesting and entertaining story, as the classical precepts preached.

We know very little about what common readers thought of the genre that was beginning to make its appearance on Brazilian soil. Testimonials are rare and we practically ignore what responses it produced. In England, on the contrary, novel-reading mobilised readers who, in letters and diaries, also exercised what one could describe as amateur criticism. The newness of the genre and its inclination to probe into the private life of common men probably explain so much interest. Contemporary debate, therefore, moved beyond the limits of official criticism and discussions also invaded

³⁸ A.F. Dutra e Mello. “A Moreninha”, *Minerva Brasiliense*, years 1-2, vol. 2, n. 24, 15 October 1844, p. 747.

people's everyday life and the private sphere and was shared by all the actors in the circuit of circulation of the new literary form. Among Brazilians, responses against the dangers of novel-reading were much more timid and circumscribed. Perhaps that is why Horace's precept often sounds like a cliché. Besides, the mistrust and prejudice against the novel in England, when made explicit in Brazilian texts, appear conventional and empty, because disconnected from any historical imposition. While for the local elite morality was often a simple façade, for the population of free and poor men, a certain relaxation of customs and the slippage between the world of order and disorder³⁹, as shown in Manuel Antonio de Almeida's *Memórias de um Sargento de Milícias*, could make any moral exhortation and edifying lecturing misplaced and pointless. However, appeals to virtue, to moderation and moral principles were very convenient in a country where, since the beginning of colonisation, the Portuguese settlers had had black and Indian lovers and where the traces of racial mixture could be seen everywhere, and the consequences of miscegenation were feared.

Brazilian critics did not confine themselves to demanding that fiction take on its edifying role, but equally engaged in the discussion about formal problems and directions, and required that novelists write stories that were plausible and faithful to reality. José de Alencar's *Lucíola*, for example, recurs to his protagonist's correspondence, like Richardson in *Pamela*. In his prologue to one of his other novels – *Senhora* –, readers are told that the story is true and the narrative comes from a person who had been trusted with the circumstances and confidences by the main actors of “this curious drama”. Nothing to wonder at if one remembers that, though he never claimed to have read Richardson himself, Alencar had been as a boy an avid reader of the English novelist's followers, women writers like Mrs. Elizabeth Helme and Mrs. Regina Maria Roche. Some

³⁹ The reference is to Antonio Cândido's essay “Dialética da Malandragem” in *O Discurso e a Cidade*. São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1993.

important differences are worth noting, though. In a society concerned with the notions of decorum, appropriateness, modesty and virtue, as was the case of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century England, it would be unthinkable for a heroine like Richardson's or his followers' to let herself be touched even if slightly by a stranger inside a coach, as does Carlota inside a bus, in *Cinco Minutos*, one of Alencar's early works. Less strict about his heroines' virtue and modesty though he was, he was still very concerned about the consequences of their behaviour and their marriage prospects. Therefore, in the wake of so many English sentimental novels, marriage also becomes a crucial topic to him, mainly when, in his later novels, he turns to the merchantilisation of human relations – in the shape of marriage of convenience or prostitution – as a central element of his plots. *Senhora*, for example, deals with the complications and conflicts arising from a poor girl who becomes an heiress literally buying herself a husband, the man who had jilted her due to his ambition. By 1875, the date when this novel was published, the genre had become mature enough to face themes familiar to the European bourgeois world, and Brazil was reaching such a stage of social, political and economic development that writing a realist, bourgeois novel had become possible.⁴⁰

From the exercises of the forerunners of Brazilian fiction, so intent on creating a national literature, to the works of the two most important nineteenth-century Brazilian novelists (Alencar and Machado de Assis), Brazilian fiction went a long way, not so much in temporal terms, but from the point of view of everything that was learnt and incorporated thanks to the availability and circulation of foreign literary models, among which English novels did play a prominent role. It would be up to Alencar and Machado to resolve

⁴⁰ One should remember, however, Roberto Schwarz's reading of *Senhora*, pointing out its misfits, which of course does not diminish the interest it arouses. See his *Ao Vencedor as Batatas*. São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1977.

and overcome the formal impasses and misfits that had been the trademark of their predecessors. The adoption of techniques and procedures that responded to different social structures and historical processes could only give rise to those initial maladjustments. However, they represented an initial important preparation for the novelists who succeeded that first generation and enabled them take the following and decisive step, leave imitation behind and gradually reduce this “variance between representation and what [...] we know to be its context”⁴¹ until they could adjust artistic material and social process.

If, as Roberto Schwarz claims, “ideas are in their place when they represent abstractions of the process they refer to”⁴², the novel would only stop being a misplaced idea in Brazil when it was remade according to local conditions, which, in the critic’s opinion is what Machado de Assis would eventually accomplish in his greatest novels. And if Schwarz acknowledges that Alencar represented an important and decisive move in that direction, one should not minimise the contribution of British novels in this whole process.

⁴¹ *Id. ib.*, p. 21.

⁴² In the same interview referred to at the beginning of this essay.