

Travel Narratives in Portugal in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract. Maria de Fátima Outeirinho analyzes the cultural phenomenon of travel narratives published in the *feuilleton* section of Portuguese newspapers, prominently from the 1860s onwards. Based on extensive original archival research of the newspapers of the time, this essay examines the genre of these texts, their inner codification, the use of self-reflexive commentary, the dialogic with their readership, and the cultural para-discourse surrounding these literary narratives.

*El viaje no es pretexto
de saber, o de entendimiento,
sino de escritura y reescritura.*
Claudio Guillén

The adherence to a cultural practice of travel writing, already long sustained in other European countries, became highly prominent in Portugal in the decade of 1860. In 1869, Júlio César Machado, in the chronicle series published in the newspaper *A Revolução de Setembro*, states the following with regards to *Impressões de viagem* by Ricardo Guimarães:

Ricardo Guimarães published a travel book, Cadiz, Gibraltar, Paris and London. A series of very elegant chapters where the author tells of his wanderings through

those lands, easily going from one subject to another with great skillfulness, describing the customs and the types, mentioning the scenery on the way, the novelties, the art masterpieces, the character features, the historical reminiscences, neither conceiving nor constructing the work with an arid plan that would condemn it to uniformity, but rather varying it each step of the way through diversity of tone, feeling and style. [...]

It is an elegant book, clever, witty and alive, that rejuvenates the reader; *Impressões de viagem* is its title, and believe me, it is not only the title that during the reading will bring to mind the famous Dumas père, but the humorous vein, the spontaneity of the quips, the beauty of ideas, the brilliant improvisations, and the lively and picturesque descriptions [...]. ("Revista," 1)¹

In 1890, Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho, under the pseudonym Valentina de Lucena, comments, in *O Português*, on *Viagens na Galiza* by Silveira da Mota, referring to the author's concern with the picturesque in the narrative:

There are scientific journeys or journeys of exploration like those of Darwin, Stanley or Capelo and Ivens and Serpa Pinto; there are artistic journeys like those of Taine and Ramalho Ortigão; purely impressionist journeys like those of Loti, etc., etc.

The Journeys dealt with [here] are for everybody, and everyone will find great pleasure in reading them. They reflect the impressions of a very distinguished observer, at the same time a scholar and a poet, who knew how to see, how to relate, and who, without aspirations of leaving an immortal masterpiece, succeeded in achieving that rare joy of getting us interested in the external aspects, historical traditions, myths, customs, literature, and religious monuments of the region he traveled through. (1)²

The comparison of these two passages—separated by approximately twenty years and written by literary figures most likely familiar to the readers of the time—is relevant in this discussion as it brings to the forefront different issues that crossed the nineteenth-century literary and cultural scene in which these travel narratives are inscribed: the role of the press, the acute awareness of the importance of the reader, and, lastly, a strong element of foreignness.

Travel Narratives and the Portuguese Press

Most notably from the decade of the eighteen-sixties onwards, travel narratives, both abroad and in Portugal, were commonly published in the *feuilleton* section of the newspapers, which welcomed, throughout the entire nineteenth century, a variety of texts following the French model.³ It was not by chance that in June 1836 the French newspaper *Le Siècle* identified the “Voyages” section amongst the different topics that the *feuilleton* offered, such as “Théâtres,” “Littératures étrangères,” “Industrie-Modes,” “Variétés” and “Mélanges.” The multiplication of travel narratives in the Portuguese *feuilleton* is not surprising, and it is well known that several Portuguese travel books of the nineteenth century only appeared in the editorial market after first being published in the periodicals. This is the case of *Recordações de Itália* (1852) by António Pedro Lopes de Mendonça, a work that is also an example of the same travel narrative being subsequently published in several different periodicals (*Recordações de Itália* appeared in *Revolução de Setembro*, in *Revista universal lisbonense* and in *Semana*);⁴ it is also the case of *Viagens na terra alheia. De Paris a Madrid* (1863) by António Augusto Teixeira de Vasconcelos and *De Lisboa ao Cairo* (1876) by Ricardo Guimarães, Visconde de Benalcanfor, which were previously published in *Comércio do Porto*; *Em Espanha. Cenas de viagem* (1865) by Júlio César Machado, initially appeared in *Revolução de Setembro*, and *A Holanda* (1883) by Ramalho Ortigão in *Gazeta de notícias* in Rio de Janeiro.⁵ To name but a few.

In the *feuilleton* section of the newspapers, the publication of relatively long narratives substitute or exist alternatively with the *roman-feuilleton* of the weekly magazine, giving clear evidence of a discursive practice that portrays the newspaper as an appropriate vehicle to promote travel writing.⁶ In fact, present since the 1830s in the Portuguese press, the *feuilleton* had long functioned as an open space that welcomed the work of diverse writers, on the one hand enlarging its readership and on the other maintaining their loyalty.

The circulation of travel narratives, first in periodicals and then in book form, was immediately the object of critical commentary in the pages of the newspapers themselves. The above-mentioned examples are evidence of this: Júlio César Machado and Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho (Valentina de Lucena) discuss travel narratives in the daily press rather than in literary reviews or essayistic work. Many other travel books would receive critical attention in the *feuilleton* or in other sections of the periodicals. Among many examples, I will mention *Em Espanha* (1865) by Júlio César Machado and *Em Paris* (1868) by Ramalho

Ortigão, reviewed in the *feuilleton* of the *Diário de Notícias, Jornadas* (1873) by Tomás Ribeiro, discussed by Cristovão de Sá - pseudonym of António da Cunha Belém - in *Diário Ilustrado*, or *Viagens. Espanha e França* (1874) by Luciano Cordeiro analyzed by António Enes and Teófilo Braga in *Diário de Notícias*.

As the above illustrates, travel literature is present in the periodical press not only in the form of the narratives themselves, but also through the literary reviews that, while discussing contemporarily-published travel books, give evidence of the importance occupied in literary circles by this type of narrative. Moreover, these literary reviews put the reader in contact with opinions that define the poetics of the genre and reveal the expectations of the public, conditioned above all by the entertainment value of the texts.⁷

The Codification Process of the Travel Genre

If we take as a starting point the opinions of Júlio César Machado and Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho, indicative of the poetics of the genre, we verify that one of the factors that seems to constitute a common denominator to the nineteenth-century travel narratives is the constant preoccupation with the act of reading. César Machado refers to the work of Ricardo Guimarães as “an elegant book, clever, witty and alive, that rejuvenates the reader” (“Revista,” 1). Amália Vaz de Carvalho, under her nom de plume Valentina de Lucena, comments on *Viagens na Galiza* by stating that “everyone will find great enjoyment in reading it” (1). Indeed, the positive reviews of travel narratives frequently and simultaneously emphasize the pleasant, light and entertaining character of this form of instructive recreation.⁸ To meet what seem to be the expectations of the readers, the nineteenth-century travel narrative adopts, in a rather lucid way, that which Jean-Claude Berchet refers to as “a practice of discontinuity” (11). Or, in the words of Machado, the nineteenth-century travel narrative aims to please its readers by going “easily from one subject to another with great skillfulness,” without “an arid plan [...] that would condemn it to uniformity,” sustaining a “diversity of tone, feeling and style” (“Revista,” 1). Thus the “itinerary” in the travel narrative is not limited to a spatial dislocation but is also draws on a wide diversity of themes and forms of writing. This “discontinuity” is not only based on the numerous themes covered in the narratives, but also results from the seamless fluctuation between historical and mythical facts, the description of nature versus urban landscapes, or, in some cases, the inclusion of romantic passages to captivate the reader’s attention, in a dubious game between fact and fiction. The entertainment element of nineteenth-century travel writing, superimposed to the genre’s “useful-

ness," gave way to a rhetoric similar to that of the chronicle writings of the time, bringing travel narrative to be considered "light literature" [literatura amena] (Ortigão 135). One of the purposes of travel literature was unquestionably to provide a form of leisure through delightful reading.

It is interesting to emphasize several other features that the travel narrative and the chronicle share in common. For example, both genres tend to establish, early on in the narrative, a reading and writing protocol, something that occurs frequently in *feuilleton* writing. Indeed, when authors such as Camilo Castelo Branco, Ramalho Ortigão, Pinheiro Chagas or Alexandre da Conceição began to collaborate with a certain periodical, they would set the stage from the start in order to ensure a successful dialogic relationship with the reader. Such strategies, it is important to note, are not exclusively Portuguese since they also occur in travel narratives of other national literatures.⁹ Travel writing, like the chronicle in general, emphasizes the act of reading and it is this colloquial dialogue that the author constructs with the reader and that propels forward the discourse of the text.

Another important aspect that merits our attention is the importance of self-reflexive commentary within the travel narrative, a feature shared with the chronicle *tout court*. This form of "self-commentary" reveals the need to elucidate the poetics of the genre, establishing its specifics through the repeated presence of forms that clarify and popularize that which can be considered a most unusual genological code. Curiously and significantly, the critical discourse that takes as its object travel literature also makes its contribution to the legitimization process of a literary or paraliterary activity such as travel writing. This self-commentary technique went through considerable development and was widely cultivated by prominent chroniclers whose style was often viewed as the norm to emulate within Portuguese literary circles.¹⁰

The social value of the authors' self-commentary lies in the legitimacy of judicative writing. Indeed, what the readers come to expect from travel writing is the proof of the writer's first-hand experience. The autobiographical and memorial side of the narrative constitutes one of the most appealing elements of travel literature in the nineteenth century, and it is from this diversity that the wide-spread interest in travel writing stems. When the Portuguese traveler writes to the reader of that time, what s/he has to offer is not so much a novel view of the information found in travel guides—although at times such information may appear in the texts—but the uniqueness of his/her experience.

The fact that the "informative" value of the narrative is not its most essen-

tial trait is also apparent in its classification as a literary genre. The combination of a fictional/auto-biographical memoir in which authorial entity and the act of reading are prominent, a memoir constructed on literary and non-literary references that could be either Portuguese or foreign, created a common basis of understanding that preceded the act of reading by drawing on a shared heritage and set of cultural practices. Moreover, as already studied elsewhere, this hybrid literary process was well-received and recognized, conferring to the travel narrative a sense of genealogical belonging that brought the reader to engage with the presence of foreignness in national culture and literature, a concept to which I shall now turn.¹¹

Foreignness as a Telling Element in Travel Narratives

The importance of foreignness present in Portuguese travel literature of the nineteenth century shows that each narrative belongs not only to a nuclear family but also to an extended one that expands throughout different national spaces, an aspect that is extremely protean since it permeates a variety of literary genres, such as drama, narrative fiction and poetry. In regard to this "genealogical" literary family, the Portuguese narratives seem most closely related to the French tradition that sets the dominant trends. Likewise, we can see that the presence of foreign elements in travel writing is not confined to travel narratives in foreign lands, in so far as the travel narratives themselves in one's own national territory commonly draw from the same models and express intertextual links.

This "porosity" between cultures that situates the travel narrative in a wider cultural horizon and allows the discovery of transnational models also prominently appears due to the construction, reproduction and frequent perpetuation of cultural representations of foreign elements. The travel narrative situated in the Other's country naturally represents a fertile ground of images about that foreign land, and draws from a process of alterity where, inevitably, issues of identity are at play. If, literally speaking, the discourse is an "I" discourse (the "I" of the traveler), it can also be perceived as a "we" discourse, the reader playing the role of the narrator's traveling companion in this cultural itinerary.

The flourishing of travel writing fueled by its greater circulation and the fact that it progressively reached a wider readership, inscribes that strong foreign presence on the Portuguese scene. This permits the detection of a collective Portuguese imaginary world, which also makes it possible to recognize

its inscription on a European one.

Whilst a source of cultural representations, the travel narrative is rich in the construction and diffusion both of self-images and hetero-images, and makes it possible to transpose onto the national cultural space the relationship between Portugal/Europe and vice versa.¹² The circulation and perpetuation of a social discourse about the Other and “foreignness” is clearly revealed in the reproduction of stereotypes that bring Portuguese and foreign narratives closer.¹³ If the images of foreign cultures and people result from the relations that a country has with the Other and countries visited, in this regards Portuguese travelers tend to adopt and put into circulation commonly accepted and diffused images.

Thus, for example, the cultural images of Spain that are found in the works of Mérimée and Gautier are very similar to those circulated in Portuguese travel books. *Em Espanha* by Júlio César Machado or *De Lisboa ao Cairo* by the Visconde de Benalcanfor (that calls to mind a chivalric imaginary world), respectively portray the religious intolerance of the *autos-da-fé* of the Inquisition and exotic images of the Orient.¹⁴ The portrayal of the Orient in Portuguese national narratives is not particularly different from that found in French narratives, both pointing to an exotic representation that is sexualized and imbued with eroticism. Emblematic of this is the description of the dances performed by the Indian woman in *Jornadas* by Tomás Ribeiro and the belly dancers in *De Lisboa ao Cairo* by the Visconde de Benalcanfor. Another widely-circulated example is the way the Englishmen are portrayed, and in particular the intrusive figure of the English tourist abroad, a representation that is not exclusive to Portuguese travel narratives since similar narratives can be easily found in other literatures. The Visconde de Benalcanfor observes: “How can an Englishman exist, whatever the altitude where he lives, without a horse to ride, a bottle of Port or at least brandy, a cup of black tea, a copy of the *Times* and a fireplace, even if unlit, just to console himself with the idea of a fire?” (34).

In short, when comparing the transposed imaginary literary world to the observed empirical reality, both author and reader are accomplices in the diffusion and perpetuation of images about the Other and foreign lands.

Conclusion

The publication of travel narratives and the critical discourse surrounding this genre that appeared in the Portuguese periodicals make the press the privileged means for the circulation and commentary on travel literature dur-

ing the nineteenth century. The importance of travel writing in the national press, that was then undergoing rapid changes and broadening its readership, also gives evidence of a cultural practice that responds to the desire that many felt to travel. Since going on such journeys was the prerogative of a privileged few, these highly sought-after texts provided a literary sense of evasion when physical travel was not possible.¹⁵ In both cases the valorization of a hedonist dimension is significantly present: a considerable part of the journeys abroad by Portuguese men of letters were made for the pleasure of traveling and whoever read their work no doubt did so with great pleasure. From this perspective, and within these parameters, the role of the nineteenth-century periodical press was fundamental since it filtered the travel narratives and the genre's critical discourse, and simultaneously created its reading public.

Within the general scope of the study of journalism in Portugal, the attention given to the travel narrative in the nineteenth century is extremely significant. Indeed, travel narratives are at the crossroads of a transnational genological horizon, a process of literariness and the socialization of cultural representation. This representation, that inscribes Portuguese travel literature in an asymmetrical dynamic in relation to other countries and France in particular, also attaches it to a European tradition.¹⁶ The Portuguese travel narrative provides a collective imaginary world that inscribes a foreign presence that should not be disregarded when we consider nineteenth-century literary texts. By offering a double journey through time and through space, these narratives circulate an interrogation *about* the Other, on the one hand, and *for* others, on the other hand. It is a literature of mediation that creates a better understanding of intercultural relations, in a fruitful and stimulating manner, and contributes to the re-creation of some of the most telling dynamics that traverse Portuguese nineteenth-century literary culture.

Notes

¹ The translation of all Portuguese quotes is the author's responsibility.

² Significantly, Valentina de Lucena states: "The less technical the subject of the travel book, the greater the number of intelligences and fantasies it will touch; the simpler and less *tourmenté* the style, the greater the probability of it pleasing a larger number of readers—and the greater its usefulness" (1).

³ On the importance of the *feuilleton* in the Portuguese literary tradition of the nineteenth century see Ernesto Rodrigues, *Mágico folhetim. Literatura e jornalismo em Portugal* (Lisboa: Editorial Notícias, 1998) and Maria de Fátima Outeirinho, "O folhetim em Portugal no século XIX: uma nova janela no mundo das letras," diss., Universidade do Porto, 2003.

⁴ A similar process is visible in France with *Voyage en Espagne* by Théophile Gautier. It is definitely a common practice at the time.

⁵ Likewise *Do Chiado a Veneza* (1867), by the same author, would be previously published in *Revolução de Setembro*. Of the newspapers I consulted, *O Comércio do Porto* e *A Revolução de Setembro* are the periodicals that publish the greatest number of travel narratives, over a longer period of time.

⁶ Examples of this are the series “De Paris a Madrid” by Teixeira de Vasconcelos that *O Comércio do Porto* published from March to May, 1861, in about 20 *feuilletons*, and the narratives of the journey to Spain by Júlio César Machado published in *Revolução de Setembro*, from May to September, 1864, in over a dozen *feuilletons*.

⁷ It is the travelers themselves who give evidence of this through self-commentary as in the following example: “I am very sorry that I cannot entertain the reader who loves danger with the description of many extraordinary cases that happened to me in the mountains [...]” (Machado, *Em Espanha* 251).

⁸ Likewise, Cristóvão de Sá states that *Jornadas* belongs to the gallery of books “that simultaneously promise a varied lesson and light entertainment” (1).

⁹ See the following examples: “Avant de commencer le récit de ma triomphante expédition, je crois devoir déclarer à l'univers qu'il ne trouvera ici ni hautes considérations politiques, ni théories sur les chemins de fer, ni plaintes à propos de contrefaçons, ni tirades dithyrambiques en l'honneur des millions au service de toute entreprise dans cet heureux pays de Belgique [...]” (Gautier 7). Or : “Ceci n'est ni un livre, ni un voyage; je n'ai jamais pensé à écrire l'un ou l'autre. [...] Quant à un voyage, c'est-à-dire à une description complète et fidèle des pays qu'on a parcourus, des événements personnels qui sont arrivés au voyageur, de l'ensemble des impressions des lieux, des hommes et des mœurs, sur eux, j'y ai encore moins songé” (Lamartine 2).

¹⁰ It is certainly telling that Eça de Queirós' notes on his journey to Egypt were only published posthumously.

¹¹ See Fátima Outeirinho, “A viagem a Espanha. Em torno de alguns relatos de viagem oitocentistas,” *Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto. Línguas e literaturas* XIX (2002): 293; 295.

¹² Lopes de Mendonça in *Recordações de Itália* clearly illustrates such occurrences.

¹³ As Daniel-Henri Pageaux states: “Porteur d'une définition de l'Autre, le stéréotype est l'énoncé d'un savoir minimum collectif qui se veut valable, à quelque moment historique que ce soit. Le stéréotype n'est pas polysémique: en revanche il est hautement polycontextuel, rém-ployable à chaque instant” (63).

¹⁴ See the following example: “[A] thousand struggling ideas pass through my mind, some speak to me of feudalism, the inquisition, others of castanets, timbrels, *cachuchas*, serenades, poetic and picturesque customs” (Machado, *Em Espanha* 20). See also Visconde de Benalcanfor, *De Lisboa ao Cairo. Cenas de Viagem* 2, 3 and 20.

¹⁵ As Luciano Cordeiro writes: “When I arrived I was asked for the travel album. They expected, I believe, a record, a diary, a very regular, very detailed, very methodical *memorandum* of the impressions, the observations, the adventures, the surprises, the amazement of their fellow-countryman who had dared to exceed a little the already bold undertaking of a journey to Paris [...]” (1).

¹⁶ Here we are naturally echoing the expression by Eduardo Lourenço in “Portugal—França ou a comunicação assimétrica,” *Les rapports culturels et littéraires entre le Portugal et la France* (Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian—Centre Culturel Portugais, 1983) 13-21.

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