

Brazilian Literary Historiography: Its Beginnings¹

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We can say that the establishment of Brazilian literary history as a discipline takes place in the period situated between 1805 and 1888. The former date corresponds to the publication of the fourth volume of the work *Geschichte der Poesie und Beredsamkeit seit dem Ende des 13*, entitled *Geschichte der Portugiesischen Poesie und Beredsamkeit*, by Friedrich Bouterwek, in which the presence of Brazil—then still a Portuguese colony—is restricted to the mention of two writers born in the country, Antônio José da Silva and Cláudio Manuel da Costa. The latter date corresponds to the publication of *História da Literatura Brasileira* by Sílvio Romero, a work whose extension and conceptual grounds attest to the consolidation of the discipline. Between these widely separated dates, several contributions took place, varying in importance and nature, and produced by both Brazilian and foreign authors. We will present here a generic description of these contributions, beginning with those made by foreign authors. For practical purposes, we will classify them in five categories.

First of all, we have works that mention authors born in Brazil in historiographic studies about Portuguese literature. Besides the above-mentioned work by the German Friedrich Bouterwek (1766-1828), we might include in this category *De la Littérature du Midi de l'Europe* (1813), by the Swiss Simonde de Sismondi (1773-1842) and “História Abreviada da Língua e Poesia Portuguesa”—later published under the title of “Bosquejo da História da Poesia e Língua Portuguesa”—an introduction to *Parnaso Lusitano* (1826), by the Portuguese João Batista Leitão de Almeida Garrett (1799-1854). In this category we can also include the *Dicionário Bibliográfico*

Português, which stands out for its dimensions and the fact that it grants equal space to both Portuguese and Brazilian authors. Subtitled *Estudos Aplicáveis a Portugal e ao Brasil*, the publication of its twenty-two volumes began in 1858 and ended in 1923, under the aegis of Inocêncio Francisco da Silva (1810-1876), succeeded by Brito Aranha, Gomes de Brito and Álvaro Neves.²

In a second category, the history of Brazilian literature becomes the object of a more extensive and autonomous treatment, although it still remains an addendum to Portuguese literary history. This category is represented by a book written in French by Ferdinand Denis (1798-1890), entitled *Résumé de l'Histoire Littéraire du Portugal, Suivi du Résumé de l'Histoire Littéraire du Brésil* (1826).

In a third category, only Brazilian authors are studied. The essay that represents this group—"De la Poesía Brasileña" (1855)—was written by the Spaniard Juan Valera (1824-1905). Originally it was published in *Revista Espanhola de Ambos os Mundos*, and it deals only with poetry, as indicated in its title.

A fourth category contains essays whose content is more critical than historiographic, such as a chapter of the book *Rio de Janeiro wie es ist* (1829), by German C. Schlichthorst, and work by two Portuguese authors, José da Gama e Castro—who wrote an answer to a reader, published in the *Jornal do Comércio* (Rio de Janeiro, 1842)—and Alexandre Herculano de Carvalho e Araújo (1810-1877), who wrote "Futuro Literário de Portugal e do Brasil," an article included in the *Revista Universal Lisbonense* (1847-1848).

Finally, a fifth category is represented by the work *Le Brésil Littéraire—Histoire de la Littérature Brésilienne* (1862), written by the Austrian Ferdinand Wolf (1796-1866), the first book completely dedicated to Brazilian literary history.

Some of these foreign contributions stand out, namely those of Ferdinand Denis and Ferdinand Wolf. Denis exerted a great influence on Brazil's Romantic authors, with exhortations to literary nationalism, and by recommending, with the authority of an European writer, severing ties with the Old World. Denis' *Résumé* presents several passages such as the following: "America, fiery with youth, must sport new and strong thoughts just like her own essence; our literary glory cannot enlighten her forever as a focus that weakens on crossing the seas, being bound to extinguish itself thoroughly when faced with the primitive aspirations of a nation full of

strength... America must be free in its poetry as well as in its government” (36). Wolf, in his turn, besides having also influenced the Brazilian literary scene with his encouragement to adopt a nationalistic view both in the production and appreciation of literary works, became an important didactic reference, because his work—originally written in German, afterwards translated into French and published in Berlin under the patronage of the Emperor Pedro II—was among the textbooks adopted in Brazilian schools in the nineteenth century.

Now let's proceed to the examination of the works produced by Brazilian authors, starting by establishing a division of this corpus into its various modalities. First of all, we have poetry anthologies, then called *parnasos* or *florilégios*, preceded by prologues that sometimes reach the size of historiographic syntheses. There are also essays that constitute statements of principles concerning the idea of Brazilian literature, implying reconstitutions and evaluations of the past as well as projects for the productions both of the present and of the future. Another modality is composed of studies about the lives of the writers, constituting the so-called *galerias*, collections of biographies of *varões ilustres* (“eminent men”) or *brasileiras célebres* (“renowned Brazilian women”). There are also critical editions of texts with biographical information about their authors and explanatory notes. A fourth specific category, consisting of a bibliographical dictionary, can also be distinguished. Last, we have literary histories *stricto sensu*, that is to say, books aimed at establishing literary periods and historiographic syntheses, concerned with presenting the panorama of successive epochs rather than with covering individual authors, books which were then called *cursos* (“courses”) or *resumos* (“summaries”). Let's proceed to the examination of some outstanding works in each modality.

Among the anthologies, *Parnaso Brasileiro* (1829-1832), by Januário da Cunha Barbosa (1780-1846), is the earliest work in this genre. It has two brief introductory texts of little importance in terms of historiographic information. Afterwards, other anthologies appeared, better organized and endowed with more extensive and informative prologues: a second *Parnaso Brasileiro* (1843-1848), by João Manuel Pereira da Silva (1817-1898); the *Florilégio da Poesia Brasileira* (1850-1853), by Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen (1816-1878); the *Mosaico Poético* (1844), by Joaquim Norberto de Sousa Silva (1820-1891) and Emílio Adet (1818-1867). The list of anthologies also includes the following works: *Meandro Poético* (1864), by Joaquim Caetano

Fernandes Pinheiro (1825-1876), without a prologue of historiographic content, but presenting information about selected authors; *Curso de Literatura Brasileira* (1870)—an anthology, despite its title—and *Parnaso Brasileiro* (1885), by Alexandre José de Melo Morais Filho (1844-1919), both poor in historiographic content.

Among the texts that it is possible to include in the category we have termed “statements of principles,” there are true Romantic manifestos, concerned both with evaluating the country’s literary past according to nationalistic premises by stressing the growing identification of our production with the specific character of Brazilian nature and history, as well as with projecting a future in which the last signs of colonial submission to Europe would have been definitively overcome. The paradigm for this kind of work is the “Ensaio sobre a História da Literatura do Brasil” (1836), whose title afterwards would have its first word changed to “Discurso,” by Domingos José Gonçalves de Magalhães (1811-1882), a writer considered by his contemporaries as the “leader of the Romantic school.” This work, an essay originally published in the first number of the periodical *Niterói*, was published in Paris in 1836 aimed at promoting Romanticism in Brazil.

Although the usual tone of these essays is characterized by a nationalistic boastfulness, it is important to point out two works that are dissonant. One of them was written by José Inácio de Abreu e Lima (1794-1869), an interesting revolutionary and intellectual, who joined Simon Bolívar’s army and reached the rank of general. The chapter “Conclusão: Nosso Estado Intelectual,” from the book *Bosquejo Histórico, Político e Literário do Brasil* (1835), in which the author reveals an extremely disillusioned viewpoint about the possibilities of a Brazilian literature, constitutes an example of his conclusions, expressed in a direct and rough language that contrasts with the cheerful euphoria of other Romantic historians: ... as we are descendants of the Portuguese, we find ourselves in a much more underdeveloped position as to knowledge than our neighbours, and because of this we are *the most ignorant people of the American continent...* (74). The other essay that escapes the prevailing paradigm of the epoch is “Literatura e Civilização em Portugal,” by Manuel Antônio Álvares de Azevedo (1831-1852), one of the main representatives of the second Romantic generation. Written about 1850, and therefore during a period dominated by nationalistic ideals, the essay conveys the poet’s disdain for nationalism as a criterion for the definition of literature. Thus, the author expresses his conviction that

Portuguese and Brazilian poets, as members of the same linguistic community, are part of the same literature: "... I ignore whoever would profit ... from refusing to pour our hands full of jewels into this native literature's abundant coffer; because of Durão, can't we call Camões ours?" (340).

In the modality of *galerias*, the following works stand out: *Plutarco Brasileiro* (1847), by the previously mentioned author João Manuel Pereira da Silva, a book re-published subsequently in substantially altered versions under the title *Varões Ilustres do Brasil Durante os Tempos Coloniais* (1856 e 1868); *Biografias de Alguns Poetas e Homens Ilustres da Província de Pernambuco* (1856-1858), by Antônio Joaquim de Melo (1794-1873); *Brasileiras Célebres* (1862), by Joaquim Norberto de Sousa Silva (1873-1875); and *Panteon Maranhense* (1873-1875), by Antônio Henriques Leal (1828-1885).

Among the critical editions, there are the works of two authors already mentioned, Joaquim Norberto de Sousa Silva and Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen. The former is responsible for several editions of poets of his century and of the eighteenth century: Gonzaga (1862), Silva Alvarenga (1864), Alvarenga Peixoto (1865), Gonçalves Dias (1870), Álvares de Azevedo (1873), Laurindo Rabelo (1876), and Casimiro de Abreu (1877). Varnhagen produced editions of poems from the eighteenth century by José Basílio da Gama (*O Uruguai*) and José de Santa Rita Durão (*Caramuru*), collected in the book *Épicos Brasileiros*, as well as texts from the colonial period by the poet Bento Teixeira and by the prose writers Vicente do Salvador, Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão, and Gabriel Soares de Sousa. One must also mention the edition of the first volume of the works of Gregório de Matos—until then a poet published only in anthologies—that was published in 1882 under the direction of Alfredo do Vale Cabral (1851-1896).

The category of bibliographical dictionaries is represented by the *Dicionário Bibliográfico Brasileiro*, by Augusto Vitorino Alves Sacramento Blake (1827-1903), a work in seven volumes, published between 1883 and 1902.

At last, with the most extensive narratives of the literary process, the literary histories *stricto sensu*, which were conceived with a didactic purpose explicit in their titles, we find the works by Joaquim Caetano Fernandes Pinheiro (1825-1876) and Francisco Sotero dos Reis (1800-1871).

Fernandes Pinheiro is the author of *Curso Elementar de Literatura Nacional* (1862), which, in spite of its title, does not deal solely with Brazilian

literature but with Portuguese literary works as well, to which the largest portion of the book is devoted. In effect, according to Pinheiro's viewpoint, Brazilian literature would be distinct from Portuguese literature only after the country's Independence and after the Romantic movement, because, until then, although "... certain specific features... characterized American poets and... distinguished them from their overseas brothers, these differences, proceeding from the influence of climate and customs,... were not sufficient to constitute an independent literature" (493). Pinheiro is also the author of *Resumo de História Literária* (1872), in which he remains faithful to the thesis expressed in the *Curso* concerning the late dissociation between Portuguese and Brazilian literatures. The book has the pretension, due to its Romantic historicism that today seems so ingenuous, of comprising the literature of all epochs and countries. So its first volume, besides the usual prolegomena, presents chapters dedicated to Eastern, Hebraic, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, English (completed by an appendix dedicated to what Pinheiro calls "Anglo-American literature"), German and Spanish literatures (with an appendix dedicated to "Hispanic-American literature"). The second volume covers literatures in Portuguese and is divided into two parts: Portuguese literature and Portuguese-Brazilian literature.

Francisco Sotero dos Reis is the author of *Curso de Literatura Portuguesa e Brasileira* (1866-1873). Contents related to Brazilian literature are found in chapters of the fourth and the fifth volumes, and the author begins his narrative and analyses with poets from the eighteenth century, considered by him as "forerunners." Thus, according to him, only the writers of the post-independence period fit in what he calls "Brazilian literature in a proper sense."

Among the works concerned with establishing periodization and tracing general panoramas of the literary process, we must still mention the *História da Literatura Brasileira*, whose project was conceived by an author noted above, Joaquim Norberto de Sousa Silva. Unlike other similar works mentioned previously, this one has no didactic purpose, constituting rather an impassioned defense of Romantic ideas about the concept of Brazilian literature. Thus, it exalts the magnificent and Edenic Brazilian nature as well as the primitive inhabitants of the country—the Native Brazilians—, considering nature and the natives as favorable elements for the development of an original and authentically Brazilian literature. Published between 1859 and 1862, in chapters in successive numbers of a Romantic periodical from

Rio de Janeiro—the *Revista Popular*—the work was never actually concluded, and failed to become the book that the author had intended to organize afterwards.

We can add still another type to the five modalities of historiographic production that we have tried to distinguish—anthologies, statements of principle, biography collections, critical editions, and literary histories *stricto sensu*—essays not properly historiographic, but of a critical nature, linked with literary history by the circumstance of dealing with the *leitmotif* of nationalism as a reference for an analysis that involves a judgment of value. In this kind of essay, Antônio Joaquim de Macedo Soares (1838-1905) excels. We can also include in this type the extensive and important contribution of José Martiniano de Alencar (1829-1877)—the most eminent Brazilian Romantic novelist—, which consists mainly of a reflection about the meaning of his own works in the collective effort to construct a genuinely national literary expression.

In conclusion, it is convenient to mention the new directions that critical and historiographic studies began to take from the end of the 1860s, but which were better defined in the 1870s and 1880s. By then the Romantic perspective had been gradually surpassed, and its declamatory and informal style replaced by a more analytic language that tried to support its objectivity in the great philosophical systems that simultaneously derived from Romanticism and promoted its contestation, such as Positivism, Evolutionism, Determinism, and Transformism. From the authors of this post-Romantic period, we will briefly present the most important.

First there is with Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908), considered by many critics to be the best Brazilian writer. His critical thought, besides other contributions, did not adhere to the anti-Romantic attitudes mentioned above, but tried to reconsider the Romantic principle of “local color,” arguing that the national character of literary manifestations does not define itself through exterior evidence, such as, for instance, the representation of typical landscapes, but through inner properties endowed with a universal scope. Machado de Assis synthesized these properties with the word *instinct*, which reaches an outstanding position in the title of a famous essay: “Notícia da Atual Literatura Brasileira: Instinto de Nacionalidade” (1873). Besides Machado de Assis, we must still mention: João Capistrano de Abreu (1853-1927), Tristão de Alencar Araripe Júnior (1848-1911), Sílvio Vasconcelos da Silveira Ramos Romero (1851-1914) and

José Veríssimo Dias de Matos (1857-1916). Capistrano de Abreu abandoned literary studies in favor of history early in his career; Araripe, Sílvio e Veríssimo, in their turn, became the principal Brazilian references in the field of literary studies in the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. We shall point out, at last, that Sílvio and Veríssimo—the former in 1888 and the latter in 1916—, in publishing their respective *Histórias da Literatura Brasileira*, offered decisive contributions to the process of consolidation of the discipline.

Notes

¹ My special thanks to Prof. Peonia Vianna Guedes for a thorough revision of the first English version of this text.

² If we want to take into account the origins of seventeenth-century Brazilian literary historiography, we must mention another dictionary, entitled *Biblioteca Lusitana* (1741-1759), by Diogo Barbosa Machado (1682-1772), which also includes Brazilian authors.

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