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Cultural Journalism and Criticism Tradition in Brazil of 1900

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Alejo Carpentier, in his speech at the First Congress of Cuban Artists and Writers, in Havana —1961, comments on the reception of Latin-American artists, musicians and writers of the 19th century. According to him, painters and musicians have submitted their work to the exclusive judgement of the European public, since the local people didn't seem to be able to evaluate the quality of their works. An analogous tendency is observed among the writers, with the sole difference that Latin-American intellectuals have frequently maintained a richly documented dialogue through letters and newspaper articles. Therefore *as soon as they became aware of their nationalities, their nativism and its volitions, they tried to exchange messages (...), set a dialogue, being beforehand united by a number of common essential concepts* that would transcend the time⁴. Mutual acceptance as well as the adhesion to certain ideas have triggered some century-long polemics and public discussions. As they stated ideological questions such as nationality, South America's unity or the River Plate region unity, poverty in the pampas and interests of the leading social classes, the Latin-American intellectuals of the 19th century manifested the contradictions of a century that imitated in order to understand and define.

In the political context, the North American constitution, though copied by many countries, was dissociated from the social-historical conditions of each nation. In literature, *the models stood there: available, prestigious, having an already approved and fixed course*⁵. This happened not only to Argentine, but to

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⁴ CARPENTIER, Alejo. *Literatura y consciencia política en América Latina*. Madrid: Alberto Coón, 1969. p. 47.

⁵ '(...) los modelos estaban allí, disponibles presigiados, con un rumbo ya probado y sacralizado' - 'the models were there: available, prestigious. ALAZRAKI, Jaime. Los nuevos modos de Expresión: la novela. El caso de Argentina. In: PIZZARRO, Ana.(Org.). *América Latina: palavra, literatura e cultura*. São Paulo: Memorial; Campinas: UNICAMP, 1994. v.2, p. 341-357.

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Uruguay and Brazil as well. We may also quote Antonio Candido, who has brilliantly defined relations of dependence; according to his *dialectics of sectionalism and cosmopolitanism*⁶, not only Brazil has a placental relation with French literature: other American and European metropolises were, at that time, deeply frenchified⁷.

On the other hand, in those days the newspaper discourse, which was the most important means of spreading ideas, mixed up political, journalistic and literary instances. Even when transferred to books, the journalistic discourse would preserve the rhetoric marks that aimed at a stronger effect on readers. Just to mention two of them: first, the use of vocative, as a constant appeal for commitment, and second, the utopian vision of a glorious and safe future, as a result of the natural resources of the place from where this kind of discourse was uttered.

The exchange of ideas would often take place on pages of newspapers and magazines. There was for instance the "Semana Literária" or "El Mercurio". From Santiago, where Domingos Faustino Sarmiento and Andrés Bello would discuss the subject "civilization versus barbarism". It also happened in the Brazilian newspapers that dealt with topics related to sociology and literature. Therefore the search -frequently mistaken- for a critical consciousness in Latin America would allow those writers to debate questions that would BE REFLECTED IN THE CONCEPTION of **literariness**. It would also allow Alcides Maya, a Brazilian writer from Rio Grande do Sul of the beginning of the century, to discuss philosophy and sociology with the Jesuit clergy of the time, intermediating the ideas of Spencer and Comte⁸ through the press.

We should also underline the existence of common cultural problems among the Latin-American countries which became independent in the first decades of the century. So as to mention some, there are: the definition of both their nationality and intellectual independence; the pursuit of different alternatives to think about these matters critically; the dialect movement between the attraction and the rejection of the imitation and the influx of European cultures, usually recognized as dominant over the local substratum.

⁶ One may say that this process is dialectic because it consists of a progressive union between literary and spiritual experience, by means of the tension between the local data (...) and the models inherited from the European tradition (...). CANDIDO, Antonio. *Literatura e sociedade*. São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1965, p. 131.

⁷ CANDIDO, Antonio. *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*. In: *A Educação pela noite e outros ensaios*. 2. ed. São Paulo: Ática, 1989, p. 140-162.

⁸ Alcides Maya wrote to the most important newspapers of Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil. As a politician, he was a federal deputy who represented the interests of his state. Enjoying polemics, he published in 1898, on *A República* and *Correio do Povo*, newspapers of Porto Alegre, a series of 17 articles entitled "*O Vademecum filosófico do Padre Gustavo Locher*". In those articles, the writer opposed Comte's positivism and Spencer's evolutionism to the dogmas of Catholic Church, represented by the clergy of Jesuits in Rio Grande do Sul.

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Carlos Real de Azua, in his anthology entitled **Uruguai y sus problemas en el siglo XIX**⁹, presents texts that register parallel cultural directions both in the River Plate region and in Brazil. In '*Declaración de independencia intelectual*' (Declaration of Intellectual Independence - 1855) by Andrés Lamas; in '*Civilización y barbarie*' (Civilization and barbarie) by Bernardo P. Berro, and his polemic on a newspaper called **El Cerrito**, with Manuel Herrera y Obes, from **El Conservador**, published in Montevideo; in *La Unión del Plata*, by Juan Carlos Gómez, under the article entitled '*Capital: Montevideo*', from the newspaper **El Siglo** (1867) and in *Las alternativas de la nacionalidad*, from an Uruguayan positivist called Angel Floro Costa (1899)¹⁰. In all these articles one may identify the same concerns and similar subjects to those that have originated in Brazil the initial criticism by the publicists, repeating therefore a procedure that mixed sociology, history and literature.

Though Brazilian writers such as Silvio Romero, José Veríssimo and Araripe Júnior¹¹, criticism takes form, branching out into the definition of trends and limits of literariness, which were still quite cloudy. The press will play, from then on, a decisive role on the process of criticism systematization. Considering criticism as '*a general activity of interpretation and evaluation of culture*'¹², mingling it with '*the key-ideas of that time*'¹³, or conceiving '*the critical text as literary text*'¹⁴, these three Brazilian writers shared a concern for the national literature as a common referent, from which different forms of thinking and evaluating Brazilian authors and works came out.

In Latin-American countries the interest for the national will be the dominant trend. Rejection of the colonizer and, on the other hand, the impossibility for recognition and legitimacy of the local culture, leave space for the insertion of the French element. Turning to France would assure to Latin-Americans the necessary transgression of their original culture, offering, at the same time, paradigms for the definition of a culture of their own. Here lies the paradox: by denying their Portuguese or Spanish origin, the Latin-American intellectuals adopt

⁹ AZUA, Carlos Real de. **Uruguai y sus problemas en el siglo XIX**. Montevideo; Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina. 1968.

¹⁰ Many texts from Carlos Real de Azua are gathered in his anthology **Uruguai y sus problemas en el siglo XIX** which consists on fragments of polemics, that were launched through press by Uruguayan intellectuals and politicians. It also includes some mailing among public men, conferences and book chapters as well, showing the nearness of both political and literary discourses.

¹¹ Silvio Romero, José Veríssimo and Araripe Júnior constitute 'the critical trinity' of Brazil, and are known as 'the critical generation of 1870'. Their works represent the main references from the 19th century, being used for the discussion of concepts and literary theories in Brazil.

¹² CANDIDO, Antonio. (org.) **Silvio Romero: teoria, crítica e história literária**. Rio de Janeiro: Livros Técnicos e Científicos; São Paulo: EDUSP, 1978.

¹³ BOSI, Alfredo (org.) **Araripe Júnior: teoria, crítica e história literária**. Rio de Janeiro: Livros Técnicos e Científicos; São Paulo: EDUSP, 1978.

¹⁴ BARBOSA, João Alexandre (org.) **José Veríssimo: teoria, crítica e história literária**. Rio de Janeiro: Livros Técnicos e Científicos; São Paulo: EDUSP, 1977.

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the French culture as a model, and appropriate its paradigms. From Romanticism on, paradigms were ruled according to ideals of originality and representativity. Nevertheless, triggered by the desire to enhance the difference, they reveal paradoxes of a mistaken view, against which voices are raised. In 19th century Brazil, it was Machado de Assis who pointed out this 'instinct of nationality', observing that the local aspects would not be enough to determine the national character of a given literary work¹⁵.

In Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost Brazilian state, near the borderline with Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine, the literary activity practiced in the newspapers has also preceded critical essayism. Following the tendency of Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Brazil at the time and hegemonic center, newspapers and magazines were founded, manifestoes were published registering the process of assimilation of foreign models, stressed by the desire for originality and difference. *Paris is reflected in thousands of eyes and objective lens*¹⁶, and among them the intellectual project of these writers would promote the fatherland's evolution towards the expected positivist progress. The introductory trend of these texts reveals the expectation for the qualification of the local culture to approach imported European models. Despite scientificism and theories applying determinist formulas to literature, as Taine's paradigms of race, environment and moment, at the same texts implicitly questioned this pursuit for legitimacy.

As an assiduous reader of European thinkers, Alcides Maya's essays resumed the ideas about nationality assimilated from his readings of Machado de Assis. As a journalist, Maya participated of the main polemics of his time. In addition, he contributed to the modernization of the province, intermediating the reception of European texts and discussing the main trendy ideas from cultural centers of Latin-America. Identified with most Latin-American intellectuals who were in the same manner dedicated to journalistic and political militancy, Maya represents a class of men formed under the light of French culture, to whom the Press should be of service to the country. His journalistic militancy had a didactic purpose, aiming at the reader's both ethic and aesthetic formation and qualification.

Despite some well-known mistakes which transformed his critical posture into deceit, Alcides Maya wrote and published essays in newspapers¹⁷ and magazines, and later, in anthologies.¹⁸ Besides intermediating foreign works and theories, thus contributing to the fixation of the canon, he was concerned about relations among the regional, the national and the universal. By studying authors

¹⁵ ASSIS, Machado de. *Obras Críticas*. Rio de Janeiro: Jackson, 1957.

¹⁶ BENJAMIN, Walter. *Rua de mão única*. Rio de Janeiro: Brasiliense, 1987. p. 197.

¹⁷ Maya collaborated with the main newspapers of his time, among them *A Reforma*, *A Federação*, *Jornal da Manhã* and *Correio do Povo*, all from Porto Alegre, besides *O País* and *A Noite*, both from Rio de Janeiro. Among his final publications, there are studies about Coelho Neto, Humberto de Campos and Arthur de Oliveira in *Correio do Povo* by the end of the 30s.

¹⁸ Three of his books of essays, *Pelo Futuro* (1897), *Através da Imprensa* (1900) and *Crônicas e ensaios* (1918), present texts that were published in the press of Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro. *Cadernos de Tradução*, Porto Alegre, n° 11, p. 19-24, jul-set, 2000.

such as Machado de Assis, Aluisio Azevedo and Escragnolle Taunay, his essays added to the definition of the literary criticism statute in Rio Grande do Sul, through an explicit dialogue with France¹⁹. For one thing he implicitly joined Latin-American writers, developing a type of discourse which, by means of intertextual analysis, allows for the identification of passages and links between the River Plate region and the Brazilian cultures.

His essays allow the reading of the passage both from a wide form of criticism, predominant in his first texts, that touched emergent social aspects, and from perspective of the literary criticism itself as well. Published between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th, these texts intermediate deterministic models and theories, contributing to the fixation of the canon. Curiously, the European writers canonized by the Brazilian criticism are the same which are included in the literary system of the River Plate countries (Rio de la Plata region). For instance, Maya analyses and discusses on the work of Emile Zola, though preceded by the center of Brazil, Uruguay and Argentine, which can be verified in the text *La novella experimental*, of Juan Carlos Blanco²⁰, an Uruguayan writer.

Once the contours of criticism are defined, Alcides Maya concludes his project by publishing fictional texts, in addition to his essays and books²¹. As a fictionist, he assimilates elements of the French culture and metabolizes in through the contact with the pampas of Rio Grande do Sul, which is the subject of his novels and short stories. In literary criticism, he produces an anthological study about Machado de Assis²²; what is more, he writes about Aluisio de Azevedo, a naturalistic novelist. His first essay focuses on *humor* as a differing and individualizing trait in style. With this text, he both contributes to renew the abundant criticism on Machado de Assis and expresses his rejection to the sternness of Taine's method. In **Romanticism and Naturalism**²³, he questions the

¹⁹ Primary sources of the time such as the catalogue of Livraria Americana in Rio Grande do Sul register the translation of French novels, mostly the works of Zola, Vitor Hugo and Dumas Filho, besides Paul Bourget, Maximine du Camp and the Russians Dostoiewsky, Tolstoi and Turgueneff. There are in addition the works of Portuguese writers as Teófilo Dias, Brazilian novelists as José de Alencar and Joaquim Manoel de Macedo. In: RODRIGUES, Alfredo Ferreira (Org.) **Almanaque literário e estatístico do Rio Grande do Sul**, Pelotas, Rio Grande e Porto Alegre: Carlos Pinto & C., Sucessores, 1901.

²⁰ BLANCO, Juan Carlos. *La novela experimental*. In: AZUA, Carlos Real de (org.) op. cit., p. 107-118.

²¹ The following texts take part in his essayistic work: **Pelo Futuro**. Porto Alegre: Franco & Irmão, 1897; **O Rio Grande Independente**. Porto Alegre: Agência Literária. 1898; **Através da Imprensa**. Porto Alegre: Octaviano Borba & Irmão, 1900; **Machado de Assis**. Rio de Janeiro: Jacinto Silva, 1912; **Crônicas e ensaios**. Porto Alegre: Globo, 1918; **Romantismo e Naturalismo**. Porto Alegre: Globo, 1926.

²² The essay **Machado de Assis: alguma notas sobre o humor** will motivate the entrance of the writer in the Academia Brasileira de Letras, in 1914.

²³ **Romantismo e Naturalismo**, published in 1926, had originally been Alcides Maya's discourse at his entrance in the academia Brasileira de Letras, in 1914.

arbitrary division of the literary periods, showing in the textual practice the overlap, continuity and rejection of literary tendencies. What is more, in this manner he anticipates the modern notion that tradition does not represent continuity but rupture, which was half a century later developed by Octavio Paz.

In this sense, the awareness of his critical work allows the writer to understand the local process of Americanization more clearly, through the European orientation. His texts deal with questions that will be dear to modernity. While demanding from writers *'the authentic, undeceiving mark of miscegenational originality in the works that were produced here then, signed up by writers and poets who looked at (Latin) American landscapes in European eyes and provided our rude people with European feelings'*²⁴, the writer comes to the following conclusion: *'America's history is about white people who are condemned to live parasitically on the European mind.'*²⁵

Despite this dishearted view, resulting from the comparison between the European theoretical progress and the intellectual delay of his country, Maya's work has contributed to set concepts such as identity, assimilation and transculturation²⁶, making us think about the coincidence of European influxes upon both the River Plate region and the Brazilian culture, as well as the several creative responses that makes Latin-American literature quite peculiar.

²⁴ MAYA, Alcides. Op. cit. 9, p. 134.

²⁵ Id. ibidem, p. 137.

²⁶ According to RAMA, Angel. **Transculturación narrativa en América Latina**. 2. ed. Montevideo: Fundación Angel Rama, 1989.

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O que há de 'interessante' nos Estudos Culturais na América Latina.

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1. Em qualquer parte da América Latina, a pesquisa acadêmica no campo dos estudos culturais é cercada por uma profusão de práticas para as quais poderia voltar sua atenção profissional. Tal pesquisa poderia analisar a dinâmica dessas práticas, identificando a lógica através da qual são reproduzidas e os fatores que influenciam suas transformações.

Poder-se-ia esquadriñar o significado que elas possuem dentro do grupo social que as mantém e a relação que têm com a vida diária, as necessidades, a visão de mundo e, talvez, os ideais utópicos desse grupo. Poder-se-ia, igualmente, observar como essas várias práticas se relacionam umas com as outras ou com outras práticas sociais, através de quais mecanismos elas são produzidas, disseminadas, manipuladas, excluídas ou marginalizadas pelas estruturas de poder.

Políticas culturais sensíveis às desigualdades dessas sociedades só são concebíveis dentro de uma estrutura de conhecimento produzido por um estudioso da cultura que leva adiante o estudo dessas práticas. Nenhum projeto político que se origina dentro dos grupos menos favorecidos pode ser considerado viável, a não ser que considere o conhecimento obtido através desse tipo de estudo.

O estudioso da cultura pode encontrar esse grupo de práticas na interação informal ou em contextos específicos; na mídia ou na rua; em locais públicos ou privados; durante o lazer ou no trabalho; no campo, no interior, na periferia ou na cidade.

Os desejos, insatisfações, expectativas e contradições de homens e mulheres das sociedades nas quais vivemos circulam entre esses complexos caminhos que têm sido mapeados durante o curso da história e que são a chave para nossa identidade e desenvolvimento. Os estudiosos da cultura deparam-se com essas mesmas práticas e participam delas, a partir do momento em que se levantam

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