

BRAZIL IN THE WORLD MAP OF TRANSLATION: THE FRENCH CASE¹

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Abstract: This article is the result of analyses developed within the Translation History Research Group (CNPq) of which the authors are part. The main interest of the article is the position of Brazil in the world map of literature and translation, with France as the main parameter. Thus, the political, economic, colonial, and literary relations between the countries are the basis for the “atheist” (Casanova) position of Brazil on the world map and for the invisibility of its literary discourse in French letters

Keywords: Brazilian Translation History; World Map of Translation; Translated Brazilian Literature; France

BRASIL NO MAPA MUNDIAL DA TRADUÇÃO: O CASO FRANCÊS

Resumo: Este artigo é resultado de análises desenvolvidas no âmbito do Grupo de Pesquisa História da Tradução (CNPq) do qual as autoras fazem parte. O artigo tem como interesse principal a posição do Brasil no mapa mundial das literaturas e da tradução, tendo como principal parâmetro a França. Dessa forma, as relações políticas, econômicas, coloniais e literárias entre os países servem de base para o posicionamento “ateu” (Casa-

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nova) do Brasil no mapa mundial e para a invisibilização do seu discurso literário nas letras francesas.

Palavras-chave: História da Tradução Brasileira; Mapa Mundial da Tradução; Literatura Brasileira Traduzida; França

Placing literary Brazil on the world map of literatures demonstrates how the great Brazilian writers translated into French throughout the 20th century managed to bring together all the characteristics necessary for Brazil to become one of the major centers of the Portuguese-speaking linguistic area contradicting the collective discourse in France as we will show later.

First of all, it is important to show how the historical, political and intellectual connections between Brazil and France have fostered the survival and knowledge of Brazilian literary works in the French literary system, one of the major literary centers with the British and North American systems. We will see why Brazil is not recognized as such by these centers, even if it has the necessary characteristics, and how the collective discourse of the major journals has made it, in a way, invisible.

Seduction and cultural colonization: France

According to Carelli (46), specific relations have always united Brazil and France, not only historical and colonial ties — France having tried several times to colonize Brazil in the 16th century — but above all ties of friendship and intellectual, scientific, and cultural cooperation. These unsuccessful colonization attempts disappeared from the collective memory, but relations between France and Brazil had yet to take a new turn. Shortly after the arrival of the Portuguese in Brazil, the French benefited from the favors of the natives, to the great displeasure of the Portuguese, according to Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques* (67). However, thanks to king John VI of Portugal, who settled with the Portuguese court in Rio de Janeiro, relations between Brazil and France

intensified. The king brought to Rio de Janeiro, for the foundation of the Royal School of Sciences, Arts and Crafts in the tropics which later became the National School of Fine Arts, the French Artistic Mission in Brazil in 1816, composed of painters, sculptors, engravers, architects, writers, engineers, among others. Their influence was decisive for the evolution of the arts and influenced many other French people from different regions and professions to also come to Brazil: bakers, pastry chefs, cooks, goldsmiths, music teachers, French teachers, etc.

The phenomenon of Gallicization of the Brazilian elites was very strong, according to Wyler (57), because French culture had developed in Brazil through the Jesuits and had been reinforced by the prohibitions on founding universities and printing books on Brazilian territory until 1808. French was even advocated, in the 1823 Brazilian Constituent Assembly, as a national language besides Tupi and Portuguese languages. The substantial shipment of French books to Brazil also had a profound impact on the Brazilians mentality. This book trade developed mainly with *Editions Garnier Frères*, which settled in Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro for 90 years, from 1844 to 1934.

The 20th-century Brazil will gradually break away from the French model with its cultural and identity emancipation — propelled particularly by the modernists — and it will redesign its connection with France. Thus, Brazil, thanks to the intervention of Paul Claudel, then French ambassador in Rio de Janeiro, sent a fleet of ships to France during the First World War. Primary seduction metamorphosed into relationships of exchange, cooperation, and homage.

The French travelling writers, among others, Anatole France, Darius Milhaud, Blaise Cendrars and Benjamin Péret, to name only the most famous, have allowed a (re)discovery of Brazil. And, in the hope of spreading French culture, George Dumas, a physician and psychologist, was sent to Rio de Janeiro in 1908 as spokesman for the *Groupement des Universités et Grandes Écoles de France* to develop cooperation with Brazil. Then there was a series of

conferences at the Sorbonne on April 3, 1909, with Anatole France, Victor Orban and Manuel de Oliveira Lima entitled “*Fête de l’intellectualité brésilienne*” whose main objective was to pay tribute to the Brazilian writer Machado de Assis, who had died the previous year, and to publish the translation of his works in France. This was a true endorsement of the Latin ties that united the two countries, or rather of the Latin genius of these two cultures.

These academic festivities reaffirmed mutual cooperation with the creation in 1911 of a Chair of Brazilian Studies at the Sorbonne and later that of the *Institut des Hautes Études de l’Amérique Latine* in Paris, as well as the sending of a mission of French academics in 1934, including Claude Lévi-Strauss who introduced University of São Paulo to ethnology. Gradually, Brazil acquired an identity in France, not only through the Academy, but also through encyclopedias, newspapers, and magazines, disclosing a representation of Brazil, in order to present it again and in a different way.

The Greenwich meridian and Brazil’s “atheist” positioning

The concept of atheism proposed by Pascale Casanova (b) is linked to linguistic dominance (along with cultural, economic and literary) and is developed from the collective belief of asymmetrical values attributed to languages. A language considered universal would ideally play the role of uniting diverse cultures and of propagating knowledge in a “democratic” way, when, in fact, it leads to the dissolution of “dominated” languages. According to her:

It is also the language of power which ‘insinuates itself’ into all the others, colonizes them and threatens them with extinction. Indeed, the characteristic of the world language is that it spreads faster than the others (in particular through ‘translation operations’) and imposes the categories of thought associated with it. (15).

The position of atheism arises precisely from challenging common sense that attributes value to languages. Casanova (b) says:

That is why, in order to preserve the diversity of languages and cultures, and not for nationalist reasons, we must fight, by all possible means, however difficult this may be, including an atheist stance in the face of this belief, against linguistic domination (15).

Translated Brazilian literature occupies a paradoxical place in what Casanova (a) calls the *World Republic of Letters*. José Lambert, from the descriptive school of Leuven, also refers to what he calls the “cartes mondiale des littératures”, established according to the principle of the multiplication of maps and the renewal and/or (re)center of our literary representation (109). According to Casanova (a), there is a “Greenwich meridian” of the world literary universe whose capital is Paris, from which the novelty and modernity of the works are measured (21). Brazil is not part of this Greenwich meridian and its literature belongs to what Casanova (a) defines as poor or minor literature, as opposed to dominant literature. They are “minor” in relation to the position occupied by a language and literature that lacks prestige, seniority and authority and that do not belong to one of the hegemonic cultures (21-22). However, even if Casanova considers Brazilian literature as a “minor literature” on the world map of literatures, she nevertheless treats Brazil as a special case, as it has managed to achieve “a real literary independence” (356).

In this sense, in addition to the problem of creating a language (Brazilian Portuguese) in the well-established language (Portuguese from Portugal, a colonial metropolis), the question of the development of literature must also be taken into account with regard to the formation of Brazilian national and literary identity. According to Casanova (a),

a culture peculiar to Brazil, transmitted and created through a language that is itself Brazilian, therefore proceeded from a resolve not only to put an end to linguistic dependence upon Portugal but also, more broadly, to literary (and cultural) dependence with regard to Europe as a whole (285).

And if translation, as Casanova (a) stated, “is the great authority of specific consecration of the literary universe” (169), why is Brazilian literature, independent and autonomous, not more widely translated and changing its status or position in relation to the Greenwich meridian?

In French translations, literary Brazil faces resistance to informality, particularly in terms of orality, which is characteristic of the Brazilian language and culture. Translations of authors such as Alencar, Machado de Assis or Euclides da Cunha have been written in “good French” (Berman, 47), in Berman’s words, with little or no transgression of the French language, even in the translation of Brazilian texts in which the creation of a language (Brazilian Portuguese) in the language (Portuguese) is part of the project of the aesthetic conception of the work (*Grande sertão veredas* by Guimarães Rosa translated in 1965 and 1995/*Macunaíma* by Mário de Andrade translated in 1979 and 1996).

Translations somehow pasteurize the texts, annihilating the original oral model (regionalism, neologism, syntax, ungrammaticality, rhythm, sonority), in order to respect the French grammatical norms in force (simple past, perfect syntax, timid neologisms and rare creations/inventions of language). These translations reflect, unlike the projects on the language of Brazilian authors in their texts, an effective naturalization of the Brazilian language-culture that the creative transgression of language does not penetrate, in favor of the rigidity of the French language. Deforming the genius loci (especially for Jorge Amado’s translations), the translations become transparent, as written from the beginning in French and transforming the spoken language of the characters from the people into a (translated) refined language. Foreign marks and

traits are reduced, since, in general, the translators of Brazilian letters into French are not very bold about the subversion of the French language — from a syntactic, neological, dialogical, creative point of view — and end up producing translations that annex Brazilian literature and culture to the French language and culture.

However, Brazil's position on the world literary map has changed considerably since the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Far from this meridian of Greenwich, which is dominated by literary institutions in Paris, London and New York, Brazilian literature has nevertheless become independent and autonomous. Thus, to become a “dominant” literature, a “dominated” literature necessarily requires innovation, invention, or the creation of a language.

Brazilian claims for a proper language led to the creation of a Brazilian language within the Portuguese language itself, starting in the 19th century and increasing in the early 20th century (*Macunaíma* was published in Brazil in 1928). “The only true material for the creation of writers,” says Casanova (a),

allows literary innovations and revolutions. Thus, writers can use this new literary language in their own language, since they deviate from literary practices, grammatical and literary correction rules to claim the specificity of a language to remove popular quotation marks (309).

What France conquered throughout the 17th century, namely the standardization of the French language, Brazil, regarding the creation and development of Brazilian Portuguese and the literarization of its oral practices, took place more than two centuries later.

Thus, to be perceived, “dominated” writers must produce and display a certain difference, whether by assimilating their literature to another literature, or by dissimilating it, which is, in our opinion, the case of Brazilian literature. More than a century and a half ago, the Romantic writer José de Alencar claimed the

regional and national identity of Brazilian literature. Brazilian writers have imposed their language and grammar, their rupture of narrative (narrative discontinuity) and have found, in short, literary, narrative, technical, formal, and stylistic solutions that are idiosyncratic.

Brazil has had and still has today an “atheist” position in relation to the hierarchy of languages and the domination of the English language that continues at the beginning of the 21st century in the world. The world language, that is English, enjoys a prestige recognized by other world languages, hence its universality. Casanova (b) argues, quoting Brazilian professor and critic Antonio Candido, that language inequality can inhibit the recognition of writers, as was the case with Portuguese language writers such as Eça de Queiróz and, in Brazil, Machado de Assis, practically unknown or poorly known (343). In this sense, she is in dialogue with the theories already present in *The World Republic of Letters* to challenge this asymmetrical relationship that only exists if others believe in its strength. This is an enticing statement to say the least. She advocates “unbelief” (Casanova (b), 345), that is, the adoption of an atheist position, to no longer believe in the prestige of the world language (English). A kind of disobedience, not civil, but linguistic and, basically, political and ideological.

The role of translation would be to measure the degree of domination, the presence of translation reducing domination. Brazil, which translates a lot, therefore has the behavior of an independent language-culture. Basically, translation is a form of resistance and we would even say that translation is more and more a political fact and act. Thus, and this has already been developed in the *World Republic of Letters*, through translation, the dominated writer intends to access or move closer to the center (formed by France, England and the United States) to be legitimized. This would mean that keeping one’s language is a form of resistance to domination, contrary to what is generally believed. In fact, the maintenance of one’s language is normally perceived as a manifestation of cultural and human diversity that may run counter to the linguistic

hegemony of a dominant language. The country-culture that uses English at all levels of society is a dominated country. The country-culture that does not use English or uses it very little is a dominant country-culture. We are thinking here of Brazil, among others, which has not allowed itself to be dominated by any argument for a hypothetical internationalization.

Invisibilization of literary Brazil in the collective discourse

Let us now turn to the anti-propaganda of the collective discourse in France about Brazilian literature and translated Brazilian literature, based on our research conducted within the Research Group in the History of Translation (Grupo de Pesquisa em História da Tradução) about the discourse on Brazil and Brazilian literature in major encyclopedias and dictionaries. This discourse has evolved slowly since the end of the 19th century as there is no cultural reference to Brazilian literature there until the end of the 20th century. The image depicted of a primitive, indigenous, distant country over which France has little knowledge, dominated until the 1930s. The invisibilization of Brazilian literature continued even after the publication of Orban's anthology (1910-14) on Brazilian literature and translations of Brazilian works in France thanks to the translation policy of Éditions Garnier Frères. The French colonial vision of Brazil, inherited from the writings of Jean de Léry and Montaigne, will continue until the end of the 20th century.

The "*Revue des Deux Mondes*" has the same colonial attitude as observed in the encyclopedias of the same period since it omits any reference to translations of Brazilian works (Alencar, Euclides da Cunha, Taunay, Graça Aranha, Machado de Assis) or to Parisian tributes (*la Fête de la Latinité*) in 1909, after the death of Machado de Assis.

As for the articles in the *Mercure de France*, they follow the entries about Brazil in encyclopedias and major dictionaries, even though it has been dealing with Brazilian literature since the early

20th century. The discrepancy between Brazilian publications and articles published in France on Brazilian literature indicates ignorance, indifference or the withholding of information so as not to reveal to French readers the emergence of an autonomous literature whose specificities (language-country-culture) are not those of a colonized or even assimilated literature.

It is interesting to note that “Lettres Brésiliennes” (1901-1965), a section in *Mercure de France*, where Brazilian chroniclers wrote about Brazilian literature in a completely autonomous way, was written by Brazilians until 1948 and then it was taken over by French critics who saw Brazilian literature dependent on France. Therefore, Brazilian literature was once more read through French lenses. Discourses on Brazil and Brazilian literature in French encyclopedias and journals tend to deny, obscure or assume (belatedly) the existence of an autonomous Brazilian literature that Brazilian chroniclers had claimed from 1901 to 1948.

Despite this work against the current of criticism of Brazilian literature and culture in France, literary Brazil has finally emerged and imposed itself on the world map of Literatures as a literary center of the Lusophone linguistic and cultural area.

Conclusion

Literary Brazil has been historically neglected and silenced by Greenwich meridian. In this article, we deal specifically with the French case, but the neglect, unfortunately, is no exception. In Spain, for instance, “this literature [Brazilian] is little known and above all not very representative of the diversity and reality of Brazil” (Rodríguez, 96); however, in exceptional cases when authors break through the blockade of “pure” literature, they go through a process of universalization that is inconsistent with their own nationality.

In dealing with the case of Kafka’s consecration, Casanova (a) says,

With Kafka's entrance into the international literary world that anointed him after 1945 as one of the founders of literary modernity, the criteria that were then current at the literary Greenwich meridian — the criteria of the literary present, reactualized by each generation in appropriating texts for its own use: autonomy, formalism, polysemy, modernity, and so on — were applied to his work. Kafka thereby lost all of his national and cultural characteristics, now obscured by the process of universalization (353).

In Brazil, we can think of Clarice Lispector who in the last decade, but more specifically in the last five years, has had international conferences² dedicated solely to her, has been mentioned in periodicals, newspapers, and has had her first novel adapted into a play in the United States³. In general, these records speak of female writing, feminist studies, Jewish studies, migration, but Lispector is rarely mentioned as a Brazilian writer, something she herself declared a number of times.

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³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/11/theater/near-to-the-wild-heart-review-lispector.html>.

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