

Cristina Santos
University of Toronto
LASA 1998 Conference, Chicago

**The Cultural Politics of the Marginalized Giant:
Brazil in Latin American Literary History**

Literary history at its height in the nineteenth century tended to contextualize literature in history based on very specific and limiting models in which the "context" itself centered more on the philosophical, religious, legal, aesthetic and scientific and not on the social or political. Needless to say, this concept of literary history has come under severe scrutiny and suspicion. In today's academia, scholars have come under the influences of, to name a few, cultural anthropology, communications theory, cultural semiotics, hermeneutics, and critical legal theory which intrinsically manifest the wider socio-political contexts ignored by our predecessors in the field of literary history.¹

But why is such great importance put on literary history, and why would Brazil's inclusion/exclusion in Latin American literary histories become a concern for all Latin Americanists? It goes without say that literature is one of a number of expressive modes that constitutes not only people's response to life but also shape their lives and that history, as another integral component of our lives, serves not only to educate ourselves but also others. In essence, literary history should be approached as a dialectical exchange in which the past is interpreted by and in the present. Nevertheless, there have existed gaps of information in past literary histories, and in this case, concerning the inclusion of Brazil in Latin American literary histories, which now

¹A more detailed study can be found in the ACLS Occasional Paper "Collaborative Historiography: A Comparative Literary History of Latin America" by Linda Hutcheon, Djelal Kadir and Mario J. Valdés.

speak as loudly as those elements that have always been present.

In the 1960 third edition of Nueva historia de la gran literatura iberoamericana² Arturo Torres-Ríoaseco preambles his sixth chapter dedicated to Brazilian literature with the following:

A riesgo de parecer elemental es necesario iniciar el estudio de la literatura brasileña con una observación escolar: el pueblo brasileño habla *portugués*, idioma latino hermano del español. Desgraciadamente un hecho tan sencillo ha constituido una barrera para el más amplio conocimiento de las letras brasileñas. (211)

Torres-Ríoaseco goes further to explain that Brazilians pride themselves ("se enorgullece") of their linguistic difference from their Spanish speaking neighbours and refuse to be classified as Hispanic American. Therefore, the use of the term "Latin American" becomes the common denominator when speaking of both the Spanish and Portuguese literatures. Nevertheless, Torres-Ríoaseco cannot ignore that the term "Latin American" also becomes problematic since it tends to accentuate the important influence of French literature, to which the Hispanic Americans voice their own objections. Torres-Ríoaseco goes as far as to equate the lack of interest on the part of Hispanic Americans to learn Portuguese or to familiarize themselves with the Brazilian culture as analogous to the attitude of Spain towards a Portugal (211).

Whereas many of his contemporaries concentrated on writing literary histories of Hispanic America, Torres-Ríoaseco did not ignore the fact that this indifference to the Brazilian component was both "ilógica y desdichada" (211) since the literary development of Brazil followed almost the same stages as that of its Spanish speaking counterpart. Between 1945 and 1960, the dates of publication of the first and third editions of Torres-Ríoaseco's Nueva historia de la gran literatura

²First published in 1945 also by Emecé Editores, S.A.

iberoamericana³, twelve other literary histories are also published about Hispanic America, excluding Brazil. Ironically, one also finds that the Brazilian, Manuel Bandeira, published his Literatura Hispano-Americana for the first time in 1949 and had its second printing in 1960.⁴ During these same years one finds that fourteen literary histories were published dedicated solely to Brazil.⁵ Interestingly, in 1959 Joaquim de Montezuma de Carvalho publishes in Angola his four

³Anderson Imbert, Enrique. Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1954.

Aubrun, Charles Vincent. Histoire des lettres hispano-américaines. Paris: Armand Colin (Section de langues et littératures, 291), 1954.

Ayala Durante, Crispín. Resumen histórico crítico de la literatura hispanoamericana. Madrid: SAEFA, 1945.

Bazin, Robert. Histoire de la littérature américaine de langue espagnole. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1953.

_____. Historia de la literatura americana en lengua española. Buenos Aires: Editorial Nova, 1954.

Bellini, Giuseppe. La letteratura Ispano-Americana. Milano: La Goliardica, 1959.

Hamilton Depassier, Carlos. Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana. Vol. I: Colonia y siglo XIX. New York: Las Américas Publishing Co., 1960.

Henríquez Ureña, Pedro. Historia de la cultura en la América Hispánica. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1947.

_____. Literary Currents in Hispanic America. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1945.

Leguizamón, Julio A. Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana. Vol. I-II. Buenos Aires: Editorial Reunidas, 1945.

Perés y Perés, Ramón Domingo. Historia de la literatura española e hispano-americana. Barcelona: R. Sopena, 1947.

Sánchez, Luis Alberto. Nueva historia de la literatura americana. Asunción: Guaranía, 1950.

⁴Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fundo de Cultura, 1960.

⁵Amora, Antônio Soares. História da literatura Brasileira (Séculos XVI-XX). São Paulo: Saraiva, 1955.

Bandeira, Manuel Carneiro de Sousa. Brief History of Brazilian Literature. Trans. and ed. Ralph Edward Dimmick. Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union (Pensamiento de América), 1958.

Barreira, Dolor Uchoa. História da literatura Cearense. Tomo I. Fortaleza: Instituto do Ceará, 1948.

Calmon, Pedro. Historia da literatura Bahiana. 2a ed. Rio de Janeiro: Olympio (Col.

volume work entitled Panorama das literaturas das Américas, de 1900 à actualidade⁶, a work dedicated not only to the Latin American literature but also Canadian and American.

Yet, one cannot ignore that apart from their linguistic differences, both the Portuguese and Spanish countries of Latin America have experienced some similar cultural development, especially with respect to their European ties. One must remember that Latin America is essentially a cultural product of over 500 years and distinguishes itself as a development which incorporated other cultures aside from paralleling them. It can be said that, for both the Portuguese and Spanish sectors, a new culture was formed by either a voluntary or involuntary blend of ethnic and intercultural contact.

-
- Documentos Brasileiros, 62), 1945.
- Cascudo, Luís da Câmara. História da literatura Brasileira. Vol. 6: Literatura Oral. Rio de Janeiro: Olympio, 1952.
- César, Guilhermino. História da literatura do Rio Grande do Sul (1937-1902). Porto Alegre: Globo, 1956.
- Ferreira, Luís Pinto. Petite Histoire de la littérature Brésilienne. 2eme. ed. Caruaru, Brazil: Edition de la faculté de Droit de Caruaru, 1960.
- Lima, Alceu Amoroso. Quadro Sintético da literatura Brasileira. Rio de Janeiro: Agir, 1956.
- Martins, Mário R. A evolução da literatura Brasileira. Rio de Janeiro: Outubro, 1945.
- Melo Filho, Osvaldo Ferreira de. Introdução a historia da literatura Catarinense. Florianópolis: Faculdade Catarinense de Filosofia, 1958.
- Miguel-Perreira, Lúcia. História da literatura Brasileira. Vol. I. Prosa de ficção de 1870 a 1920. Rio de Janeiro: Olympio (Col. Documento Brasileiros, 63), 1950.
- Motta, Arthur. História da literatura Brasileira. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1930.
- Oliveira, Martins de. História da literatura Mineira. Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia, 1958.
- Osorio de Oliveira, José. História breve de la literatura brasileña. Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1958.
- Putnam, Samuel. Marvelous Journey: A Survey of Four Centuries of Brazilian Writing. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948.
- Romero, Sílvio. História da literatura Brasileira. 3a ed. Vol. I-V. Rio de Janeiro: Editorial José Olympio, 1943.
- Veríssimo, Erico. Brazilian Literature: An Outline. New York: Macmillan 1945.

⁶Angola: Edição do Município de Nova Lisboa, 1959.

One must keep in mind that the cultural centres of all Latin America have become more and more the crossroads in which ideas, images and concepts converge and reveal themselves in the dynamics of that centre's social relations and cultural production. One of the major influences has been that of the world market place and how it has shown itself in the complex reality of a continent whose wealth, for the most part, is not shared amongst the majority of its population. Inclusive, one must also note that there has also been a largely unrecorded history of cultural formations that have generated transnational zones of cultural interaction. Yet, these transnational zones are not synonymous with regional zones which tend to connote an association with ethnic purity and cultural authenticity.

It is important to note that in recent years there has developed a sense of transculturation stemming from the diverse and distinct cultural components of Latin America, as well as from its traditions to its interest in innovations. Furthermore, one cannot overlook the forces of communication, influence and dialogue within Latin America itself as conducive to this cultural dispersion. Consequently, literary histories have begun to attempt to reflect this distinct and internal cultural development no longer limited by a difference of languages, therefore the predominant use of the term Latin America in lieu of Hispanic America.

It has been in recent years that critics and historians have begun to develop the idea of literature not as an isolated phenomenon but as a shared experience, and this is the key to writing a literary history which includes, and not excludes, Brazil as part of Latin America. One cannot negate that both Portuguese and Spanish sectors have used their "literature" to "recognize themselves, their shared myths, visions, ideals as well as respond to the abuse of power in the relentless drive for wealth or political dominance" (Hutcheon et al. 6).

As a recognition of this change in concept of what constitutes a Latin American literary history Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker admit in their preface to their 1996 publication of The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature that:

Literature creates its own historical fictions, its own history being one of them.

Our *History*, while being as concrete and factual as possible, reflects the fullness and influence of that fiction. In this sense, too, ours is a history of the history of Latin American literature. (xv)

This self admission of the circularity of writing a literary history is significant not only because it reiterates the paramountcy of literature in the creation of a cultural identity but also in its ability to cross transcultural and transnational boundaries. Nevertheless, González Echevarría still finds it necessary to make a footnote in the first chapter in volume one, "A brief history of the history of Spanish American literature", that only when he writes "Latin America" does he include Brazil (7), whereas Spanish America or Hispanic America would refer only to the Spanish speaking sector.

Even though the editors of this Latin American literature dedicate the third and last volume solely to Brazilian literature, physically it is not seen as an intrinsic part to "Latin American" literature. The general consensus for such a division is based on the premise that although Brazil has shared some common experiences with its Spanish counterpart, there have been key differences. Special attention is brought to the fact that by 1960 the Spanish-speaking world contained enough "educated and sophisticated" (Cambridge II, 9) readers to not only support the authors of the *Boom* but also to project them onto the universal scene, whereas Brazil had yet to develop a market for its fiction, which included their best modern novelists: Clarice

Lispector and Nélide Piñón. In closing the introduction to this third volume the editors, along with David Haberly, write:

This volume...is the fullest and most detailed account of the whole development of Brazilian literature available in English. While its chief purpose is to assist both scholars and general readers, it also possesses, for both Brazilians and Brazilianists, a symbolic value that transcends its utility. It may not be entirely true that, as the Parnassian poet Olavo Bilac asserted, the Portuguese language is "the cemetery of literature," but the language has undeniably served as a barrier, limiting international recognition of the richness and originality of Brazilian literature and of its great writers. The publication of this collection of essays is an important step in achieving that recognition. (Cambridge II, 10-11)

Just as Torres-RíoSeco iterated in his Nueva historia de la gran literatura iberoamericana, González Echevarría and Pupo-Walker are of the same opinion, that in the end, language is the great dividing force which separates Brazil from its Spanish speaking neighbours.

WORKS CITED

- Bandeira, Manuel. Literatura Hispano-Americana. 2a ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fundo de Cultura, 1960.
- Carvalho, Joaquim de Montezuma de. Panorama das literaturas das Américas, de 1900 à actualidade. Angola: Edição do Município de Nova Lisboa, 1959.
- González Echevarría, Roberto and Enrique Pupo-Walker, eds. The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature. Vol. I: Discovery to Modernism. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- _____. The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature. Vol. III: Brazilian Literature and Bibliographies. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Hutcheon, Linda, Djelal Kadir and Mario J. Valdés. "Collaborative Historiography: A Comparative Literary History of Latin America". ACLS Occasional Paper, No. 35, 1996.
- Torres-RíoSeco, Arturo. Nueva historia de la gran literatura iberoamericana. Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, S.A., 1960.