

## EÇA, MACHADO, AND WORLD LITERATURE

EÇA, MACHADO E A LITERATURA MUNDIAL

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I wish to consider how our two great writers, Eça de Queirós and Machado de Assis, might be promoted in the context of World Literature. As we know, World Literature, which stems from Goethe's original concept of *Weltliteratur*, is fast becoming an international phenomenon. It is also one in which our many outstanding Luso-Brazilian writers should play prominent roles.

Personally, I have some reservations about the growth of World Literature as a new discipline. Though I laud and support its basic goal – increased international understanding – I am concerned that, in the long run, it will only increase the hegemony of English as a global language, the hegemony of English Departments within the humanistic side of the Academy, and the political, economic, and cultural hegemony of English-speaking nations, most notably the United States.

Another reservation I have about World Literature is that, except for texts already written in English, it will be a function of texts in English translation. This means that only literatures that are extensively translated into English will benefit from the World Literature programs that are springing up in the United States and elsewhere. As our friend and colleague, Nelson Vieira, has noted, this could well

be a problem for Luso-Brazilianists, and especially for our contemporary writers, the bulk of whom have not, as yet, been translated into English (Vieira, 2014: 6-7).

While this situation (a heavy dependence on English language texts and readings) is entirely beneficial for departments of English, it is potentially damaging for departments of foreign languages. And for programs in Portuguese, where the struggle for enrollments is both constant and one that is closely watched by the Dean's Office, this is a serious concern. As celebrated Portuguese novelist and intellectual José Saramago, has aptly said, "Os autores escrevem as suas respectivas literaturas nacionais, mas a literatura mundial é obra dos tradutores"/"Authors write their respective national literatures but world literature is the work of translators" (*apud* Vieira, 2014: 6).

It is not hard to imagine both Machado and Eça agreeing with this statement. Although one could argue that while Eça and Machado do exist in good to serviceable English translations, and so are to some extent available to readers of World Literature, the larger – and more urgent – question of how much of our Luso-Brazilian, Luso-African, and Luso-Asian literature is also available in good English translation is very much a moot point. If, as is the case with Portuguese-language literature, a literary tradition exists that has brilliant, innovative writers in it, but is not well known by the outside world, how will it be treated by scholars making up reading lists for courses in World Literature? I, for one, am skeptical.

At any rate, this question about how well Machado and Eça fare in their English-language recreations is one each of us must consider in our scholarship, for, as Saramago has warned, it will largely determine how well, or how poorly, they will do in developing World Literature programs internationally.

Nevertheless, World Literature is a coming thing, as a spate of recent books, articles, and new academic programs prove. It is a part

of our collective future, and we need to prepare for it. This means that the real question before us is how, as Luso-Brazilianists, we can take advantage of it, how we can promote our authors and texts within the World Literature movement.

I think we have to be pro-active and aggressive here. But we should also take heart, because there is some good news for us. Although we face many obstacles (principally, I would say, the fact that the rest of the world has largely ignored Luso-Brazilian literature), we also have some great opportunities to showcase our many brilliant authors, as the cases of Machado de Assis and Eça de Queirós so vividly demonstrate.

First of all, we should remember that Portuguese was one of the languages that Goethe himself regarded as fundamental to his vision of *Weltliteratur*. As a language and literary system, Portuguese was a basic part of Goethe's original concept, and it would not hurt to remind our colleagues outside of the ken of Luso-Brazilian studies of this important fact. While he did not write much about Portuguese literature, Goethe was keenly interested in Portuguese popular culture, particularly the folksongs of the Portuguese people. Fascinated by what he termed the *Volksgeist*, or the spirit of a people, Portuguese songs and popular poetry were of great interest to the German writer. While scholars today would likely not wish to concern themselves with such issues as the supposed "spirit of a people", in Goethe's time this was a topic that was taken seriously. And it played a significant role in Goethe's own thinking about the value of international literary study.

The point I want to emphasize here is that, from its very inception, Goethe's understanding of *Weltliteratur* included Portuguese as a major component. Interestingly, as we today read such scholars as Roberto Schwarz, Mariano Siskind, David Damrosch, and Héctor Hoyos, we see proof that some of the most vocal promoters of

World Literature are still citing the importance of writers who work in our beautiful, quirky, and ever evolving Portuguese language. Our Luso-Brazilian writers, moreover, have long tended to cultivate both the local and the universal, and to root the one in the other. This very quality, I believe, explains part of the appeal Portuguese-language literature has for the proponents of World Literature. Machado de Assis actually made this very point in his well-known 1873 essay, “Instinto de nacionalidade” / “Instinct of Nationality”, though it has been elaborated more recently by Mariano Siskind in his 2014 book, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America*. Siskind points in particular to the deeply rooted Luso-Brazilian tradition of being conscious of the larger world and argues that in Brazil this global consciousness developed at the same time as did Brazil’s powerful nationalist movement. Something similar can be said about the evolution of Portuguese national identity and its own literary history. And, in *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel* (2015), Hoyos comes to a very similar conclusion. Though Hoyos references Brazil and not Portugal, his main argument most certainly applies to Eça and the writers in his Lusitanian tradition as well.

And, as we need to constantly remind people (including our editors, colleagues in other disciplines, and academic Deans), Portuguese is still a major global language. Indeed, by some measures, it ranks as the world’s sixth most spoken tongue. More people speak, read, and write Portuguese than French and German combined. So Portuguese is far from the minor, or “invisible”, language that too many people erroneously think it is. In our classes, lectures, and publications, we need to correct this misapprehension.

Now it is true that Goethe was overwhelmingly Eurocentric in his thinking about *Weltliteratur*, and that he was forming this concept very early in the nineteenth century. It is also true that today’s think-

ing about World Literature differs considerably from that of Goethe. Globalization and instantaneous global communication, along with the rise of English as a global language and the ever more crucial role played by translation, have made the world of the early twenty-first century vastly different than anything even Goethe could have imagined.

But I also believe that now, as we extend the original importance of Portugal and of the Portuguese language to other parts of the world – notably Asia, Africa, and Brazil – we who work in Portuguese have a real opportunity to promote writers like Eça and Machado in this new and global context. I think we should seize the moment and do so.

The question is, how? How do we do this? And it is in response to this question that I wish to devote the remainder of my space.

For me, the most effective way of bringing our writers and texts to the attention of the World Literature community is to avail ourselves of the comparative method. The judicious comparing and contrasting of our texts against those of other cultures is still the most efficacious way I know of to make scholars from other traditions aware of our literature. We Luso-Brazilianists have always compared our writers with the more established, or recognized, models, and so we have a lot of experience with the comparative method. We know how to use it. This, too, is a big advantage we have.

We also have an abundance of high quality writers and texts. This point is also a huge strength for us. If we did not have an abundance of high quality writers and texts, we would be in trouble. But we do. And so we are in a much stronger position, vis-à-vis our entry into the World Literature game, than we might think.

What we need to do more of now, I believe, is promote writers like Machado and Eça in critical venues that we have not traditionally cultivated. By this I mean that we should publish our scholarly work

not merely in the journals that have historically been interested in material from the Luso-Brazilian world but also in those that are more comparative in orientation. Some of these include *Comparative Literature Studies*, *Comparative Literature*, *The Comparatist*, and the *Revue de littérature comparée*. There are many others of this sort as well.

I would say, too, that we also need to publish in journals that are geared more specifically to World Literature. I plead ignorance here. Because I do not know the names of these journals or what the online journals are. But I am sure they exist, or that they soon will. The point is that we must become involved with them, not merely as authors but also as outside evaluators and editors. This is a very direct way of getting our Luso-Brazilian authors and texts brought to the attention of the World Literature world, and we would do well to pursue it energetically and enthusiastically.

I also think that we need to make more of an effort, in our book-length projects, to integrate our authors into the corpus of World Literature. A splendid example of this kind of work comes to us from another of our friends and colleagues, David Jackson, whose recent book on Machado de Assis, *Machado de Assis: A Literary Life* (2015), does precisely this, that is, demonstrates how and why Machado deserves recognition not merely as a great Brazilian writer but as one of Western literature's great modern masters and narrative theoreticians. Ignacio Infante's *After Translation: The Transfer and Circulation of Modern Poetics across the Atlantic* (2015) does much the same thing except for Fernando Pessoa and Sousândrade, both of whom are brought into mainstream twenty-first century poetics.

The time is right for new studies of Eça that perform a similar service, that is, that cast him in the contexts of modern narrative theory and the nature and form of the modern European novel. Eça's many contributions in these areas have long been underappreciated, and it is high time he got the international acclaim he so richly deserves.

It seems to me that we could do the same thing with writers like Saramago and António Lobo Antunes, just to name a couple of obvious choices from modern Portuguese literature. And with respect to Brazil, we have writers like Guimarães Rosa and Clarice Lispector who still need, in my opinion, to be better, more productively integrated into these larger, more established comparative contexts.

The case of Rosa, especially, reminds us once again of the critical role that translation plays in the global dissemination of our writers and texts. What I mean by this is that of all the Luso-Brazilian writers I can think of, it is Rosa who is, perhaps, the one who is most defined by his extraordinary – and extraordinarily inventive – use of the Portuguese language. His defining work, *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956), is a “language novel” in ways that few, if any, other narratives are. Only Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* comes to mind as an adequate parallel. If, as in *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, Rosa cannot be translated successfully, he and his great narrative will be, I fear, less likely to participate successfully in the World Literature game. This, I think, is also true of another Brazilian classic, Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaíma* (1928).

And since we’re now considering Modernism, or modern literature generally, let me conclude my essay by citing, once again, the words of Nelson Vieira. In a recent essay on the internationalization of Brazilian literature, Nelson reminds us that one of World Literature’s most avid and convincing promoters, David Damrosch, has already recognized the unique contributions that writers like Machado and Eça (and their compatriots) are making to this new field. Although in his book, *What Is World Literature?*, Damrosch speaks only of Oswald de Andrade’s 1928 “Manifesto antropológico” as an exemplary demonstration of “international modernism”, the supporting arguments he makes in favor of more interactions between different people and cultures around the globe can easily be applied to Portuguese Modernism as well and, more generally, to the very

global Portuguese historical experience (Vieira, 2014: 9). We bring a lot to this table. Our Luso-Brazilian writers are not only in the world, they are very much of the world, and they have been for a long time. Although we know this, it is nevertheless a point we would do well to emphasize in our publications.

In an age when the value of linguistic and literary study is being challenged, writers like Machado de Assis and Eça de Queirós are prime examples of artists who make literature relevant. In particular, Eça and Machado show us the value of maintaining a healthy skepticism in the face of competing ideologies and the importance of knowing how to perform honest, open minded, and ideology free interpretation – in all aspects of life, and not just in literature. Their best texts connect art to political awareness and action. And they both make the case that the good, careful, thinking reader will likely become the good, careful, thinking citizen – not just of their respective countries but of the world. Luso-Brazilian literature is full of writers who do this same thing, and they are doing it all over our ever more closely connected global culture, from Asia to Europe and from Africa to the Americas.

Let me close by reiterating something I said earlier. In our Luso-Brazilian literary tradition, we have a great many writers like Eça and Machado, that is, marvelous, inventive, and thought-provoking artists who deserve much more attention on the world stage than they have so far received. The arc of brilliance that connects Machado and Eça also applies to a great many other writers, critics, and theoreticians who work in the Portuguese language all around the globe. We Luso-Brazilianists are true literary globalizationists, and this fact alone gives us a tremendous advantage with respect to the contributions we can make to the emergent discipline of World Literature. What we need to do now is take advantage of the comparative method and use it to promote our writers in the proper critical venues.

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## ABSTRACT

This essay discusses Machado and Eça in the context of "World Literature," the advent of which is of great importance for the promotion of Luso-Brazilian writers on the global stage. It emphasizes that Luso-Brazilianists have many outstanding writers to offer this new approach to Goethe's old idea of *Weltliteratur*. This study argues that, by working with Portuguese language texts, scholars of Portuguese and Brazilian literature must work harder and more strategically than most to gain for these writers the exposure and international respect that they deserve. This essay highlights prominent Portuguese and Brazilian literary figures and their role on the global stage. Issues of translation will now become more critical than ever, as will how skillfully we wield the comparative method in our critical commentaries and the venues in which we aim to publish our work.

*Keywords:* Eça de Queirós; Machado de Assis; World literature; Goethe; Comparative literary studies

## RESUMO

Neste ensaio, discute-se a obra de Machado e Eça no contexto da “Literatura Universal”, cujo estabelecimento é de grande importância para a promoção de escritores luso-brasileiros em um contexto global. O ensaio enfatiza que os estudiosos da literatura luso-brasileira contam com vários escritores de talento, capazes de oferecer uma nova abordagem ao antigo conceito de *Weltliteratur*, proposto por Goethe. O estudo argumenta que, ao trabalhar com textos originalmente escritos língua portuguesa, os estudiosos da literatura portuguesa e brasileira devem trabalhar de forma mais intensa e mais estratégica do que os estudiosos que trabalham com línguas comumente faladas, de forma que os escritores lusófonos obtenham a divulgação e o respeito internacional que eles merecem. Este ensaio lança luz a escritores de renome no contexto luso-brasileiro, assim como ao papel destes no cenário global. Questões relacionadas à tradução agora se tornarão mais essenciais do que nunca, assim como a forma como se usa o método comparativo nos estudos críticos e nos veículos em que pretendemos publicar nossos trabalhos.

*Palavras-chave:* Eça de Queirós; Machado de Assis; Literatura universal; Goethe; Estudos de literatura comparada