BRAZILIAN FICTION TRANSLATED IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE 1940S

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Abstract: One strategy devised by the US government through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs was to strengthen its relationship with Latin-American countries during the Second World War (1939-1945) by translating Brazilian literature and exchanging other cultural products. This article aims at analyzing the American literary system of the 1940s into which the Brazilian literature was translated, focusing on aesthetic trends among the public and critics, as well as editorial and commercial standards. I will describe how the translated texts conformed to target system norms and outline the didactic function determined for the Brazilian translations. The theoretical and methodological framework of Descriptive Translation Studies was used to this end.

Key-words: Polysystem. United States Polysystem. Brazilian literature.

A FICÇÃO BRASILEIRA TRADUZIDA PARA OS ESTADOS UNIDOS NA DÉCADA DE 1940

Resumo: A tradução da literatura brasileira, juntamente com outros bens culturais, foi uma das estratégias do Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, do governo dos Estados Unidos, para estreitar os laços de amizade com os países latino-americanos durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial (1939-1945). O objetivo deste artigo é analisar o sistema literário estadunidense para o qual a literatura brasileira foi traduzida na década de 1940, abordando as tendências estéticas da crítica e do público e os padrões editoriais e comerciais do período. Demonstrarei a acomodação das traduções às normas do sistema receptor com destaque para a função pedagógica projetada para a literatura brasileira. Tendo



Esta obra utiliza uma licença Creative Commons CC BY: https://creativecommons.org/lice esse objetivo em mente, utilizei o arcabouço teórico e metodológico dos Estudos Descritivos da Tradução.

Palavras-chave: Polissistema. Polissistema estadunidense. Literatura brasileira.

In 1938, the Cultural Relations Division of the US Department of State was created to strengthen cultural exchange with Latin American countries. With the outbreak of World War II (1939-1945), cultural policy came to be seen as a means of promoting hemispheric union behind the Allied cause, and his effort was based out of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) beginning in 1940. During the ensuing period of cultural exchange known as the Good Neighbor Policy, the OCIAA's Latin American literature translation project was well received by authors, publishers and the academic community. By including some Brazilian writers, the translations would be an opportunity to expand the readership of Brazilian fiction. However, it cannot be ignored that the translation project also had a close relationship with the teaching of the Spanish and Portuguese for war interests.

When authors or publishers are interested in texts from other literary systems, there is usually a preference for innovative, cutting-edge materials to reinvigorate domestic canons. However, the OCIAA's translation project required a canon with a didactic nature, one directly linked with wartime political interests. I aim to demonstrate this based on an analysis of the American literary system of the 1940s, including the aesthetic trends of critics and the public, as well as of editorial and commercial standards, in the context of World War II. I will examine how Brazilian novels were conformed to the American literary system, which was receptive to foreign texts at the time, with democracy as a regulatory principle. The methodological procedure was based on Gideon Toury's *Descriptive Translation Studies* (1995/2012). Descriptive translation studies is concerned with the function performed by a translation in the target culture (i.e., its literary system).

The editorial context in the United States during the 1940s

Advances in book distribution and dissemination techniques helped save the US publishing industry from collapse between the Great Depression of the 1930s and the end of World War II. Compared to previous decades, there was a decrease in the launch of new titles, but publishers still provided novelties, although not always profitable or popular, thanks to the high sales of weekly or monthly literary magazines aimed at the general public. The profit of such magazines often compensated for the "loss" of books. Some publications with a reputation as quality literary journals were popularized and based an editorial claim that they also dealt with current affairs (Davis *et al.* 1949, 561-563).

The fact that many authors, due to the prospect of stability and good pay, were being attracted to the film industry and radio also led to a decline in new titles. Some tried to simultaneously impress both readers and the moviegoers by producing novels that were easily adaptable into film. Writers like Ben Hecht, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and John Steinbeck produced screenplays, while Archibald MacLeish and Stephen Vincent Benét preferred radio broadcasts. (Davis *et al.* 1949, 561-563).

The fiction market was also able to remain active due to the great demand for reading material in the army camps. A survey by the Modern Library revealed that soldiers spent more time reading than civilians. In addition to government remittances to supply public libraries near military bases, one war campaign exempted the postal costs of anyone mailing books to soldiers. Short stories, detective novel and light fiction were among the genres preferred by those fighting for their country, which became a gold mine to certain publishers, since these titles were sold out as soon as samples arrived at the bookstores (Tebbel 2003, 10).

After the attack on Pearl Harbor (1941), a major interest grew in books about Asia, such as Pearl Buck's novels, many of which were set in China. And then a new genre would enter the bestseller list, one to satisfy the curiosity of audiences that had not gone to the battlefields: stories written by war correspondents about Americans in combat. In addition, narratives of religious fiction or devotion, such as *The Robe* and *The Song of Bernadette*, continued to sell well (Tebbel 2003, 36).

During that same period, due to the struggles in Europe, a number of publishing houses moved to the United States, where they established their businesses and provided a cultural infusion of works to the new world. Translations of classics and new titles were added to the lists, including books printed in foreign languages. La Maison Française, established in New York, published only French authors such as André Maurois, Jacques Maritain, Pertinax (André Géraud), Philippe Barre, Ève Curie, Jule Romains and Geneviève Tabouis. Frederick Ungar, from Vienna, made authors such as Goethe, Schiller, Heine, and Rilke available in German. Wydawnicze Roj, from Warsaw, introduced a number of writers from the Slavic countries in English translation. J. P. Didier, Albert Einstein's publisher, was among the most successful of the exiled publishers, signing contracts with American authors such as Douglas Miller (Tebbel 2003, 43).

A History of Book Publishing in the United States shows that there was a total lack of commercial interest in the fiction of any Latin American country in the first half of the twentieth century. The indifference was expressed by the number of Brazilian titles translated by US publishers: three in the 1920s, two in the 1930s and nine in the 1940s (Barbosa 1994 and Morinaka 2017). Brazilian fiction fulfilled a primarily political and diplomatic role in the United States during this period, as Barbosa (1994) has previously mentioned. The texts of the Brazilian canon, whose aesthetic and social meanings were directed to the Brazilian context, were introduced into the American system through a foreign relations strategy to discover the culture of Latin American countries through their literature. The academic and aesthetic interest in cultural production only gained momentum in the 1950s.¹

In such terms, the American population took this opportunity to educate itself about other countries, transforming fictional

narratives into informative books on Latin American culture. The Brazilian literature project specifically privileged the representation of external spaces in various regions of the country, as opposed to universal or introspective representations. Due to this cultural policy of the 1940s, general academic interest in Latin America and its literature expanded and deepened in subsequent years, particularly after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, stimulating the formation of Latin Americanist academic groups and, later, of Brazilianists in the United States.

Brazilian fiction and the American canon

Given that the framers of the translation project had determined a set of texts from the Brazilian literary canon to suit their interests and had aspired to stimulate a reception consistent with their status in the original system, Table 1 compares US titles usually mentioned in anthologies or in literary history, together with bestsellers listed in *Publishers Weekly*, with the translations and translators of Brazilian fiction narratives. The contextualization of the Brazilian works within the US system clarifies certain aspects of their status and the possible domestic aesthetic criteria involved in their absorption.

TABLE 1 - The US target canon and translated Brazilia	n fiction
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Year	US titles	Translations of Brazilian titles
1940	Farewell, my Lovely, Raymond Chandler For Whom the Bell Tolls, Ernest Hemingway Native Son, Richard Wright Pal Joey, John O'Hara The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, Carson McCullers	

1941	Berlin Diary, William Shirer Ida, Gertrude Stein Mildred Pierce, James M. Cain The Last Tycoon, F. Scott Fitzgerald	
1942	Cross Creek, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Dragon Seed, Pearl Buck Dust Tracks on a Road, Zora Neale Hurston The Moon is Down, John Steinbeck The Company She Keeps, Mary McCarthy	
1943	A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Betty Smith Gideon Planish, Sinclair Lewis Number One, John Dos Passos The Fountainhead, Ayn Rand The Human Comedy, William Saroyan The Promise, Pearl Buck	<i>Crossroads (Caminhos cruzados)</i> , Louis C. Kaplan
1944	Dangling Man, Saul Bellow Strange Fruit, Lillian Smith The Razor's Edge, W. Somerset Maugham	The Bonfire (A Fogueira), Dudley Poore Rebellion in the Backlands (Os Sertões), Samuel Putnam
1945	Black Boy, Richard Wright Cannery Row, John Steinbeck If He Hollers, Let Him Go, Chester Himes Portrait of a Marriage, Pearl Buck Stuart Little (infantil), E. B. White	The Violent Land (Terras do Sem Fim), Samuel Putnam Inocência (Inocência), Henriqueta Chamberlain
1946	All the King's Men, Robert Penn Warren Delta Wedding, Eudora Welty Pavilion of Women, Pearl Buck The Street, Ann Petry	Anguish (Angústia), Louis C. Kaplan The Rest is Silence (O Resto é Silêncio), Louis C. Kaplan

1947	I, the Jury, Mickey Spillane Kingsblood Royal, Sinclair Lewis Other Voices, Other Rooms, Truman Capote Tales of the South Pacific, James A. Michener	Consider the Lillies of the Field (Olhai os Lírios do Campo), Jean Neel James Karnoff
1948	Intruder in the Dust, William Faulkner Seraph on the Suwanee, Zora Neale Hurston Story of the Negro, Arna Bontemps The Naked and the Dead, Norman Mailer The Young Lions, Irwin Shaw	
1949	The God-seeker, Sinclair Lewis The Grand Design, John Dos Passos The Man with the Golden Arm, Nelson Algren The Oasis, Mary McCarthy The Sheltering Sky, Paul Bowles	

Sources: FOERTSCH (2008), WorldCat and Publishers Weekly

Regardless of the position held in its source system, translated literature incorporated into a target system, follows the domestic norms (Toury 2012). In this context, *Crossroads* appears (1943) as the first publication of the OCIAA translation project. The translation, by Louis C. Kaplan, was of Erico Verissimo's *Caminhos Cruzados* (1935). It is a story of a group of characters belonging to different social classes whose paths intersect in the city of Porto Alegre. According to the OCIAA project guidelines, the translator was required to have, in addition to technical skill, sufficient cultural refinement to make the necessary adjustments to texts that were markedly regional so that they would be comprehensible to American readers.² The lack of prior knowledge about Latin America was seen as a barrier to understanding texts originating in the various countries and diverse cultures, justifying

the need for good translators (Further reference on the concept of Latin America *cf*. Bethell, 2010). Thus, its literary quality, accessible language, thematic universality and easy conformity to the American literary system favored *Caminhos Cruzados*. In addition, the writer had translated several English-language novels into Portuguese and publicly acknowledged the influence of Aldous Huxley's counterpoint technique on his own production (Torres 2012). A Portuguese translation of *Counterpoint* was published in 1935, the same year as *Caminhos Cruzados*.

The fact that *O Resto é Silêncio* (1938) and *Olhai os Lírios do Campo* (1943) are character studies in urban environments also simplified the process of conforming Verissimo to other literary systems. These novels were translated into English as *The Rest Is Silence* by Louis C. Kaplan in 1946 and *Consider the Lillies of the Field* by Jean Neel Karnoff in 1947, respectively. Similar American novels representing urban society, such as John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, were also published in this decade.

In 1944, a translation of A Fogueira was published as part of a group of Latin American texts selected through a competition at the beginning of the Inter-American relations program. The novel that won first place in this competition was El Mundo es Ancho y Ajeno by Ciro Alegria, which was translated into English as Broad and Alien is the World (1941) by Harriet de Onís. Unlike A Fogueira, it is considered a classic of Peruvian literature. It chronicles the struggle of the indigenous Rumi community against rich farmers for the right to remain on their land. Honorable mentions among this group included Gil Gilbert and Miguel A. Menéndez for Nuestro Pan (1942) and Nayar (1940), respectively, along with Cecilio Carneiro. Nuestro Pan, translated into English in 1943 as Our Daily Bread by Dudley Poore, chronicles the exploitation of rice planters in Ecuador, while Nayar, winner of the Mexican National Prize for Literature and translated by Angel Flores in 1942, fictionalizes the life and environment of the Cora tribe in the state of Nayarit.

Broad and Alien is the World, Our Daily Bread and Nayar are markedly regionalist and their narratives revolve around conflicts

between natives and Hispanic settlers. Unlike the indigenous theme of these novels, A Fogueira is the saga of a Syrian immigrant in Brazil. The first part of the book fictionalizes his life in a remote community in Syria; the second part, his arrival in Brazil and daily struggle in the city of São Paulo; and the third and final section of the book recounts his prosperity and decay on a farm in the state of Minas Gerais, which he bought with the proceeds of his labor. A Fogueira addressed a phenomenon in the New World that has existed from the beginning of colonization: the immigration of foreigners from different continents and their adaptation to the new environment. It could be said that this is more in sync with US literature than novels about the struggles of indigenous peoples. This translation was published a year after A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, which is the story of Francie, a second-generation Irish teenager. Also divided into volumes, the narrative is from the arrival of the girl's family in the United States until she entered university. This novel remained on the Publishers Weekly bestseller list for two years.

Although the Brazilian reception of *A Fogueira* was almost nil among both readers and critics, the novel nonetheless seems to have met the criteria set by the publishers organizing the contest. The Brazilian selection committee for the Latin American novel competition had the following to say:

This seems to us to be the case of an author with a decided vocation for the novel. It is a pity that his book is written so unevenly, giving the impression that it was done in a strange language and translated into Portuguese by some poorly skilled translator. There are excellent types: Alexandre Arbe, the Syrian, who became Elias Guerra in Brazil, Julia, Dr. Fróis, the Anatolian physician, the musician boy, and Elias' daughters and sons-in-law, etc.

We suggest that the author of *A Fogueira* carefully review the originals of his novel, or arrange for it to be done by a suitable person. Our opinion is that his most recent work – *A Fogueira* – for the true qualities that it reveals, despite being damaged by a very defective style, should be recommended to represent Brazil for the final jury of the Latin American novel competition by *Redbook*, Farrar & Rinehart, Inc. and Nicholson & Watson. From the Brazilian judges.³ (my translation)

Rebellion in the Backlands, Samuel Putnam's translation of Euclides da Cunha's Os Sertões (1902), was also published in 1944, whose theme was similar to the regionalist texts in the above-mentioned competition. Difficulties raised by da Cunha's description of plant life in the Caatinga ecoregion in Os Sertões were effectively solved by adding a glossary of Brazilian terms. Da Cunha's idea that individuals are strongly influenced by the environment can be found in another novel selected for translation: Chile: una Loca Geografia (1940) by Benjamin Subercaseaux. Translated by Angel Flores, it was published in 1943 as Chile, a Geographic Extravaganza. Both novels fit the OCIAA parameters, which, in general terms, favored novels that represented: "i) The psychology of the national character; ii) Its conditioning by human geography and by the living tradition; iii) Its most characteristic expression today - whether in architecture, regional fiction, social analysis; iv) The emerging character, content and rate of changes since 1920: persistent problems, prevailing purposes and conspicuous efforts." (Morinaka 2017a and b).⁴

These criteria were extrapolated into novels representing an agrarian, hostile and backward Latin American universe in radical contrast with the industrialization and progress of the US. At least in theory, American control was presented as necessary and obvious, since much of the population of neighboring countries seemed to live in conditions of geographic isolation and physical and social immobility. Prisoners to desert wasteland or floodplain, this population could not qualify for leadership of the New World (Morinaka, 2017a and b).

Also conforming to the above-mentioned criteria were Samuel Putnam's *The Violent Land* and Henriqueta Chamberlain's *Inocência*,

both published in 1945. Besides the Northeastern themes and settings common to The Violent Land and Rebellion in the Backlands, they also share a common type of narration, i.e., heterodiegetic, centered on a narrator who has total control of the events of the diegese and can express the feelings or thoughts of each character in the plot. The way in which such a narrator organizes, presents and conducts the narrative determines perception of the diegetic world, which thus has a great capacity to constrain the representation produced in the readers' imagination. In the translation of novels, which are often a gateway to knowledge about other peoples and cultures, such representations can form attitudes, references and stereotypes. Inocência, originally published by the Viscount of Taunay in 1872, was recovered from nineteenth-century Brazilian romanticism and recast in a 20th century realist-modernist context. The love story between Inocência and Cirino takes place in the backlands of Mato Grosso and, despite its aesthetic anachronism, helps complete the regional mosaic of Brazil. Taunay first encountered the Mato Grosso region during the War of Paraguay (1864-1870) and recorded its language and customs in his novel, which is now considered a classic of Brazilian literature.

In 1946, the publication of *Anguish*, translated by Louis C. Kaplan, served as a contrast to social realism novels focusing on external spaces. The anguish of the narrator-character Luís da Silva portrays his childhood in the parched interior of Alagoas, his daily life in the city of Maceió, his observations about the lives of his neighbors, his relationship with Marina, his friendship and rivalry with Julião Tavares, and finally, the crime he commits. A mixture of memories, sensations, feelings, daydreams and imagination produces the harrowing reality that overwhelms his life for a few moments. In an attempt to reconstruct the crime, the protagonist presents the physical evidence of Julião Tavares' murder while questioning his own sanity.

According to Irene Rostagno (1997)⁵, Latin American literature underwent major changes in the 1940s. Realist novels of social protest lost their hegemony, and several writers began to experiment with new techniques in line with the modern trend of more universal

appeal, without, however, leaving aside political and social aspects. Nevertheless, it was not these contemporary texts that were selected for translation into English. Rostagno's premise was that American writer Waldo Frank, undoubtedly the most vigorous proponent of Latin American literature in the United States, influenced how the translated Latin American canon would be defined through his personal preference for markedly regionalist works (Rostagno 1997).

Due to the growing public interest in current events, trade difficulties with the European market and the OCIAA translation subsidy, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. one of the most respected publishers in the US at the time, took an interest in Latin America as a source for new products. The publisher was interested in contemporary literature and was responsible for translating many European titles, including some with little prestige in their countries of origin. Despite being known for its cutting-edge editorial line, the publisher's stance towards Latin American texts was different, translating only the most traditional canonized novels. Although Blanche Knopf considered modern Latin American literature promising, she could not take great risks due to the shattered economy and paper shortages (Rostagno 1997). Regarding its Brazilian translations in the 1940s, Knopf contracted translations of the realist novel Terras do Sem Fim (1943) by Jorge Amado and Angústia (1936) by Graciliano Ramos, which is characterized as stream of consciousness. This was the publisher's first contact with Brazilian texts. They later published other Amado novels, including Gabriela, Cravo e Canela (1958) as Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon (1962), which topped the New York Times bestseller list for several weeks, assuring their position as Amado's main English-language publisher.

Among Knopf's Portuguese-to-English translators, Samuel Putnam worked for the company on several occasions, also translating from Spanish to English. After his death in 1950, he was replaced by Harriet de Onis, who played a key role in Knopf's Latin American literature project. Until the mid-1960s, it was she who decided which authors would be translated into English (Rostagno 1997, 31-34).

Although Rostagno claims that the history of Latin American literature in the United States was deeply influenced by Waldo Frank's taste for regionalist themes, the political interests present in the translation project created and implemented by the OCIAA must also be considered. Directly or indirectly, this project shaped the preference of both publishers and the public for an ethnic South American literature for didactic purposes.

Table 1 shows the similarity between the Brazilian and US texts published in this period, although there was a certain aesthetic and thematic distance between them, particularly the social themes focused exclusively on external space in the Brazilian texts. The themes of social injustice characteristic of the US canon between the 1920s and 1930s were gradually being circumscribed in narratives that plunged ever deeper into individual anguish and psychological disorders in the 1940s (a feature also present in Brazilian texts, according to Luís Bueno 2006).

When writers, agents or publishers from different countries come into contact due to common interests, there is usually a search for groundbreaking texts to reinvigorate domestic canons. However, in OCIAA's translation project, political interests led to the development of a social realist canon, strengthening the American canonical tradition of prior decades. The only innovation that appeared was the geographical theme.

Summarizing the themes of Brazilian novels translated in the 1940s by American publishers: *The Violent Land* and *The Bonfire* portray immigration, migration and the formation of new cities, very close to the US proletarian or migration novels of 1930s; *The Rest is Silence, Crossroads* and *Consider the Lillies of the Field* involve urban man and class distinctions, also very similar to the American canon; *Inocência* is an example of 19th century romantic regionalism; *Rebellion in the Backlands* represents the inner workings of Brazil using the War of Canudos (1896-1897) as a narrative lens; and, finally, *Anguish* represents the inner chaos of a man through the stream of consciousness technique made famous by writers such as Faulkner and Hemingway.

Grouping the novels chronologically, it is curious to note that along with the relatively contemporary books there was a nineteenthcentury novel, *Inocência*, and another from the early twentieth century, *Os sertões*. Finally, from a geographical point of view, a map of the different regions of Brazil can be drawn. The narratives of Euclides da Cunha, Graciliano Ramos and Jorge Amado were set in the Northeast, Erico Verissimo wrote about the urban space of Rio Grande do Sul, Visconde de Taunay desribed the region corresponding to the present state of Mato Grosso do Sul and Cecilio Carneiro presented the Southeast from the perspective of a Syrian immigrant. This regionalist representation is similar to proletarian novels widely produced in the United States in the 1930s.

Unlike the English, German, Russian, and French literatures that were, according to Even-Zohar (1990) and Toury (2012), translated "spontaneously" into the Hebrew system as models for establishing their own canon, the American system absorbed a set of texts that was predetermined by a foreign policy directives. And, despite all the effort to disseminate Latin American literature (Morinaka 2017a and b), these texts did not circulate widely, except among a class of scholars who envisioned future work possibilities if relations with southern neighbors continued after the war.

Final considerations

It can thus be stated, in broad terms, that the pedagogical function of Brazilian literature translated into English was also extended to the literary canons of other Latin American countries, representing an ideological device to regulate the choice of books for translation in the USA. In order to ensure greater effectiveness of the translations as a means of cultural dissemination, the OCIAA also: i) mediated the formation of an association of publishers; (ii) facilitated the exchange of Latin American books and journals in libraries and universities; iii) encouraged an award for the best Latin American literature; iv) strengthened Latin American centers in universities and intercultural institutes; and v) modernized American cultural institutes in Latin American countries (Morinaka 2017a and b). The joint project, which involved government, institutions, bureaucrats and intellectuals, provided a framework for disseminating the Portuguese language and Brazilian literary expression.

In descriptive translation studies, a translation is understood as a product of the target culture (Toury 2012). Thus, I have tried to demonstrate how the American canon could absorb Latin American translations in general, and specifically, Brazilian ones, which are still considered "minor" in the scheme of world literatures. Unlike the translations of previous decades, which were the result of personal or aesthetic interest, the 1940s translations came about through a cultural project aimed at reinforcing the ideological influence of the United States. Acting backstage in American culture, there was a specific war effort to forge a body of didactic texts about America's unknown neighbors. While American literature deepened in its psychology of the subject and in existentialism, the selection of Brazilian texts, for the most part, maintained a documentary function, to use Luiz Costa Lima's term (2007).

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Notes

1. The research of Débora Cohn (2012) also shows that American financial agencies were involved in literary magazines and the travels of Latin American authors during the Cold War.

2. National Archives of Records Administration II (NARA II). RG229, Office of Inter-American Affairs. Regional Division: Coordination committee for Brazil: general records, 1941-1945. Legal Archives. Box 1264. Report *The role of books in interamerican relations*.

3. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. YCAL MSS 599. Box 2 f. Farrar and Rinehart complete.

4. Source: NARA II. RG229, Office of Inter-American Affairs. Project authorizations, 1942-1945. Letter Archives, Box 536.

5. Her research focused more on the literature of Hispanic countries than of Brazil.

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