

WORLDING LITERATURES IN PORTUGUESE

Mundializando as literaturas em português

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RESUMO: O caso das literaturas que escolhem exprimir-se maioritariamente em Português (Portugal, Brasil, Angola, Moçambique, Cabo Verde, São Tomé e Príncipe, além dos casos especiais de Goa e de Macau) permite aproximar a literatura-mundo de uma perspectiva mais complexa e enriquecedora do que a derivada do uso exclusivo do Inglês. São várias as ilações que podem ser mencionadas: o enriquecimento do conceito de cosmopolitismo; a necessidade de uma invenção da leitura que passa pela possibilidade de estranhamento; a revisão de uma ideia de Europa que não se resume a uma visão eurocêntrica. A consideração das literaturas em Português permite reequacionar alguns dos pontos de vista fundadores do comparatismo e da literatura-mundo.

Palavras-chave: Literatura-Mundo, Literaturas em Português, Cosmopolitismo Crítico, Dissonância, Estranhamento, Invenção da Leitura.

ABSTRACT: The case of the several literatures that choose to express themselves in Portuguese (Portugal, Brasil, Angola, Moçambique, Cabo Verde, São Tomé e Príncipe, next to the special cases of Goa and Macao) allows us to approach world literature from a more complex perspective than that derived

from the sole consideration of the English speaking world. Several corollaries may be mentioned: the enriching of the concept of cosmopolitanism; the need to invent a way of reading that is based on the possibility of estrangement; the revision of an idea of Europe that goes beyond eurocentrism. The consideration of the Portuguese-speaking literatures leads us to reconsider some of the foundations of comparatism and of world literature.

Key words: World Literature, Literatures in Portuguese, Critical Cosmopolitanism, Dissonance, Estrangement, Invention of Reading.

When one considers how current reflections on world literature as a discipline consider «the world», one is left with a discomfited awareness that it very much looks like a «world in English». This paper, and the special issue it opens in *1616: Anuario de Literatura comparada*, stems from this awareness, as well as the conviction that it is possible to view the problem otherwise –and that this change of perspective will enrich and diversify literary studies.

Worlding literatures in Portuguese has specific consequences that I would like to point out from the start. Writing in Portuguese means, to begin with, that one positions oneself within a world-scope of around 270 million people, spread over several continents: Europe (Portugal), America (Brazil), Africa (Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, São Tomé e Príncipe, in some instances also Guiné-Bissau), and Asia (Goa and Macau). The use of a common language (although diverse and rich in its regional manifestations) points to the fact that the expansion and the geographical roots of these different literatures in Portuguese have to be taken into account when one looks historically to how a non-English world becomes apparent in a world view. Furthermore, the recognition of a postcolonial and of a post-imperial debate also highlights how literatures in Portuguese may contribute decisively to a non-Eurocentric view of Europe. The European colonial and imperial past becomes part of Europe's present, and the historical divide between centre (the colonial capital) and peripheries (the colonies) is rearranged in a new way, thereby producing a different view of Europe: a world-view of Europe.

Hence, the contribution of literatures in Portuguese to the debates on world literature is multifold: it underlines the importance of widening the scope of the debates to linguistic spaces other than English; it develops the awareness of the extension and the geographical breadth of such linguistic spaces, producing different objects of reflection; and it rebounds on Europe, the historical centre from which Portuguese has stemmed,

combining both European and non-European roots and developments. This is not a small contribution to how world literature is currently viewed and understood: it implies a change of perspective that, in my opinion, enriches the discussion, which until now has been too much connected to the American debates and institutional positions in the academe, leaving aside the fact that a non-American and a non-English perspective on world literature may in fact open new and distinctive outlooks on the question.

One of these outlooks rests upon the understanding of how the relativization of a previously predominant national apprehension of literary phenomena, to which comparative literature has contributed in such a decisive way, may in fact be co-dependent of an historical awareness of literary practices. The case of literatures in Portuguese, and of their specific point of entry into world literature, addresses the vexed question of nationalism, by taking its cue not from a Herderian linkage between one language, one literature, and one nation, but on the contrary by manifesting how this triad may be rewritten historically, geographically, and politically. If there is more than just a nationalistic approach to modern cultural and artistic objects, world literature offers such an insight, based on a historical apprehension that becomes intrinsic to the way those objects are perceived and studied, through their mutual relations. This is all the more significant when we remember that one of the recurrent criticisms of world literature is based on a supposed bracketing of the historical fabric and context of literary phenomena. It may obviously be so in some instances –as, one should point out, is also the case with other approaches coming from quite different fields in literary studies, such as literary theory, comparative literature, or different area studies (including national literatures). However, it is not necessarily so in any of the aforementioned fields, world literature included. Cases such as the one at stake in this paper show that history is an integral part of the worlding world literature is involved in. This is also one of the reasons why world literature, such as it is practiced today, should not be confused with whatever concept of «universal literature» used in the pre-history of comparative literature. Much theoretical reflection has taken place since, and it seems impossible that the current practice of world literature could do away with both theory and history, as specific grounds of its epistemological awareness.

I would further like to argue that, when we take this view, the current debates around world literature also become debates about modes of reading, different modes of reading. That is, the essential item at stake is not the *nature* of a supposedly different discipline, but the way it promotes and invites different ways to activate what we do with texts: reading them. David Damrosch (2003) already defined world literature as a «mode of reading»,

in his seminal book on *What is World Literature?* –a mode of reading that he rightly connected with translation, and therefore with the texts' ability to survive (and change) outside their original system of production. The project that I currently coordinate at the Centre of Comparative Studies at the University of Lisbon, and which will be briefly described below, in Maria Graciete Silva's contribution to this issue of *1616: Anuario de Literatura comparada*, stems from a similar conviction, adding perhaps a stronger determination in trying to characterize such reading not just as another instance of what is usually being done but as a challenge to read in a *different* way.

It is an *invention of reading* that may be said to have two main characteristics: i) a comparative approach; ii) a constitutive awareness of what the Russian Formalist Shklovsky termed «defamiliarization» (*ostranenie*). The ability to compare sets of different, even dissimilar texts, from literary systems that do not necessarily belong to the same worldview, challenges our established modes of reading. It makes us try to *read otherwise*, and therefore to invent ways of approaching and reading texts that try to respond to strangeness, to defamiliarization, and to what *does not* belong to the same family to begin with. We have to be able to invent new forms of reading, and to accept that these new forms of reading change the nature of the texts that we are approaching, enabling us to capture what I sometimes like to refer to as their *wrongness*: new modes of reading affect the texts in unpredictable ways, as they deal with what remains unresolved in their interpretation.

We have therefore to approach texts that, through their relation to dissimilar ones, show off their non-conformity and challenge our established ways of reading. The grounds for comparison that we used to find in similarities we now have to be prepared to accept as dissimilarities, and yet be able to connect them: it is an experience that we might relate to what Aby Warburg termed the experience of «good neighboring» in the constant reinvention of his library (Buescu 2013): something which is never completed, and which offers challenging new perspectives each time that we move a book from one shelf to another. This invention of reading is akin to that gesture of moving a book from one shelf to another, sometimes one that had never been considered a possible shelf to begin with.

The recognition that there are readings that produce and promote «things gone wrong» in a certain text has a bearing on what the Portuguese poet Herberto Helder termed a «happy mistake» («erro feliz»), as he described the work he did with his translations of foreign poetry into Portuguese (*cf.* Buescu e Duarte 2007). One may of course connect this to the theory of misreading developed by Harold Bloom, although in Helder's view (and

my own) it is a misreading or a mistake that does not confine itself to the voluntary dialogue (and conflict) between two poets or two textual worlds. We may describe it, more aptly I think, as an idea of *mismatches*, elements that stand out (or are made to stand out) as dissonances in the bodies of texts. A reading from the perspective of a comparative world literature will have to be especially attentive to what stands out as an estranged, risky, or dissonant reading. By so doing, it highlights itself as an *awareness of displacement*, the «happy mistake» that makes the reader want to read again, and to read otherwise. Not that these «mistakes» have to be brought to closure. On the contrary, they have to be understood as a focal hermeneutic point that continues to pulse in the text and, as they manifest its strangeness, they also offer the possibility of new readings.

We are therefore facing the same kind of issue that Italo Calvino described when talking about what made a classic (Calvino 2001): among other things, a classic would be, in his view, a text that lived off the background noise from which it stemmed, and to which it conversely contributed. I am convinced that the invention of reading I am discussing is also a distinctive contribution to the production of classics outside their national framework or agenda. In this sense, it is not difficult to perceive how the debates on world literature are also debates on canon formation and negotiation, although in my view they do not restrict themselves to this particular problem, as I have previously indicated. It goes without saying that this mode of reading is also a dislocation of the texts read as well as of previous readings they fostered, however canonical. The consequences of such readings in the reconsideration of national canons have therefore to be taken into account as well.

The theoretical corollary of this hermeneutic process therefore tackles and unsettles different core problems of literary studies, this being the reason why it is at the centre of some of the debates around world literature.

The papers grouped in this issue of *1616: Anuario de Literatura comparada*, on world literature in Portuguese, offer what I consider to be a very clear insight into the set of problems I indicated. They study different literary objects and phenomena coming from quite different geographical areas, as well as historical contexts. They do however share a common view of a language that historically has grounded itself in quite different regions of the world, and has therefore evolved contextually in different ways, although retaining major links to the linguistic family to which it belongs. Portugal in Europe, Brazil in South America, Mozambique and Angola in Africa, come into view as major cases of these literatures in Portuguese, revealing both a sense of community and a sense of historic differentiation. Each of the papers grouped in this issue tackles one or

several of the problems I pointed out above. And, although they all share the awareness of a common language and of mutual historical connections, they also point to how diversity acts as a powerful historical differentiation. Some questions and problems may be similar in Europe, America, and Africa. But this similarity echoes in quite different manifestations, and the production of the literary past and present does not repeat itself independently of the historical grounds in which it appears. For instance, all papers tackle the question of how each one of these literatures bases itself upon the awareness of a distinctive cosmopolitanism. However, this cosmopolitanism does not shape itself the same way in Camões' epic poem *The Lusiads*, in the 16th century, in the reconstruction of the contemporary Brazilian novel according to a non-nationalistic paradigm, or in the world awareness that Mozambique offers in the wake of the 20th century. It is therefore the play between the concept of cosmopolitanism and the diversity of its historical manifestations in the different literatures in Portuguese that is at stake here. Not to be able to perceive (and to keep) this closely-knit negotiation between similarities and dissonances would be, I believe, to miss the point of what a comparative world literature proposes. And therefore the reading of these papers, and of the relations they point to, enhances our awareness of such negotiation.

The understanding of this cosmopolitanism as *critical* is an important issue in all the papers assembled here, and we will come back to it. Suffice it to say, at this point, that such critical cosmopolitanism models the different readings of the literary texts examined in the different papers. It also highlights the circulation of literary genres and texts in cultures outside their own culture of origin, as well as the movement through which texts outside the culture of origin are brought into it, producing the effect of estrangement that I pointed out earlier. There is a further point to be considered here, from a world literature perspective: the negotiation and combination between what travels outside the original literary system; and what comes into it, brought from that outside. Both cultural and literary movements produce distinctive forms of worlding, and none of them should be misapprehended or ignored. We could therefore describe world literature, with Paulo Horta's words, in the wake of critics such as Damrosch and Moretti (2000), as a negotiation «between the source and host cultures, which can be conceived as two foci within an ellipse». This negotiation, at least potentially conflictual, is at the same time the token of the incommensurable that is at the heart of each experience of reading (Buescu 2013, 24), especially when disciplines such as comparative literature or world literature appear as the paradigmatic insights at the heart of the hermeneutic experience. For instance, the consideration of *The Lusiads* as

a text of world literature comes from the careful dialogue of both issues, as Horta clearly shows. Its elliptical and potentially contradictory nature may be interpreted as one of the dissonances or even «errors» I mentioned, as indeed it was, as we shall see.

The five contributions gathered in this issue, around the main topic of *Worlding literatures in Portuguese*, all address, albeit in different ways, these central topics. Maria Graciete Silva's paper reflects on how the concept of world literature proposes a cosmopolitan reading that has to have consequences for literatures that are connected through different uses of a common language, such as those written in Portuguese. It is this «prismatic view» (Buescu 2013) of literature that underlines the fact that the national paradigm is, at the same time, an historical reality one has to account for, and a condition that does not accept any kind of universality or even generalization. Silva's examples, be they the Brazilian poet Drummond de Andrade or writers who, as they were translated into Portuguese, were inserted into a (national and cosmopolitan) literary system, such as Kavafis, Tranströmer or Tabucchi, emphasize another issue which is central to our considerations: the issue of translation, which brings into play the way different languages come to be reflected in one, as well as the resulting impossibility of having a restricted view of a national literature as something «pure» in itself. Silva recalls, quite aptly, Claudio Guillén's reflections on this instance, as he pointed out that even such basic concepts as literary genres are hardly comprehensible outside a comparative paradigm, and therefore require a reading that is aware of their foreign character. The play between foreignization and domestication, which Lawrence Venuti (1995) described as a major tension within the theory and the practice of translation, has to be accounted for, in this context, as one of the main issues at stake, and it certainly is not alien to our understanding of world literature not as «a set of texts» but as «a form of detached reading» (Damrosch 2003, 281). In the light of Maria Graciete Silva's proposal, the very idea of Europe and European literatures must be understood «in displacement», by intertwining a set of variable which are both local and exogenous. And this description goes a long way to concur with the proposal of a non-eurocentric view of Europe, which I mentioned earlier as one of the interesting and productive consequences of worlding European literatures and, in the case at hand, Portuguese literature.

Paulo Horta chooses to address by far the most canonical text in Portuguese literature, the epic poem by Camões, *The Lusiads*. His proposal concurs with Silva's: to displace a national (even nationalistic) reading of the epic poem and to view it as a work within world literature. The

poem's reception and translation first by the German romantics, and then by Richard Burton, opens up a set of hermeneutic problems that become part of the poem, or at least the way it has been received and therefore read. The conflict of interpretations is based on a supposed momentous «mistake» in the composition of the poem, one that the history of its readings was never fully able to integrate and with which it never came to terms: the perceived incompatibility between the avowed purpose of the poem as a heroic discourse about the Portuguese discoveries, especially the maritime way to India, as well as the expansion of the Christian faith, on the one hand, and on the other the unrelenting presence of a pagan mythical set of characters, whose presence in the poem is much more than just ornamental or episodic. The incompatibility between these two dimensions, which has been noted as of the poem's first publication in 1572, has been felt either as a deplorable mistake; or as a lateral question in the composition of the poem. As Horta shows, both interpretations rest on the assumption that this is a poem homogeneously heroic and imperial, reflecting a monolithic Christian project. The first interpretation finds that the «mistake» was a misconception and therefore a miswriting by Camões, and that the value of the poem must overlook it; the second interpretation considers that the huge presence of pagan mythology is «just» a literary device, and may be ignored. Both interpretations avoid considering any such heterogeneity as part of Camões' project, and by so doing restrict themselves to a partial view of the poem. *The Lusíads* are viewed, as Horta says, as having a «straightforward and unproblematic nature [...] as a –or *the*– foundational epic of modern European imperialism». What Horta proposes is to read otherwise: to read the «mistake» of pagan mythology as an integral part of the poem, possibly a way of reflecting an Eastern influence on a canonical Western text. The importance of Burton's translations and readings of the poem in this displacement, be they just a Romantic idealization or not, has a direct bearing on Horta's proposal: to read *The Lusíads* not just as the centre of a canonical nationalistic reading, but as a text that travels outside (through translation) and brings the outside inside (by the vast and heterogeneous amount of Western and non-Western, specifically Arabic, sources that it assembles). To put it in the terms I mentioned earlier, the reading of the epic poem in a dislocated way brings along the possibility of viewing Camões' mistake as a «happy» one, and therefore of making sense of it being not only in the poem, but an essential part of the poem itself. The contradictory nature of the epic poem is therefore seen by Horta as part of the different forms of dissonance recognized in *The Lusíads* by the readings it has elicited from the 16th Century onwards.

The dialogue between East and West is also at the heart of Alva Teixeira's contribution. Taking her cue from Brazilian literature, Alva Teixeira seeks to displace and read otherwise a central fact of canonical readings of Brazilian texts, namely the way they may reflect a fixation on questions of Brazilian identity, or «Brazilianness». In her paper, however, the question of a putative homogeneous Brazilian identity is sidestepped, and gives way to another line of questioning: the realization that the Arab cultural and literary inheritance has become, in recent decades, a vital substrate for the understanding of the contemporary Brazilian novel, thereby infusing a major Western genre with a distinctively Eastern influence. Alva Teixeira compares two sets of Brazilian writers of Lebanese descent, who have transformed their regional and cultural inheritance in a robust symbolic interrogation of their roots and their identity, as well as the cosmopolitan melting pot that makes up Brazilian history and reality. On the one hand, she takes up two consecrated novelists, Raduan Nassar and Milton Hatoum, who in their seminal works prolong the traditional memorialist tradition of Brazilian literature, rewriting it from a different perspective, imported from the Arab tradition to which they recur. To quote Alva, «these are narratives that reconstruct and bring to the fore the great literary epigonal themes, such as texts of biblical, koranic, and oriental traditions». These themes are intertwined with a strong reflection on exile, migration, and their central importance to understand the heterogeneity of Brazilian reality. Nassar and Hatoum are read through the constant dialogue they develop between their Arabic legacy, on the one hand, and its «westernization», by way of a South-American rewriting that finds its roots in Brazil. Alva Teixeira also reflects on a different group of writers, such as Alberto Mussa or Marco Lucchesi, who take up their Arabic roots and traditions as well but who, instead of making them the central guideline of themes such as guilt or symbolic violence within the family setting, as Hatoum or Nassar have done, seem more inclined to give a visible priority to those Eastern traditions, recognizing them as a cultural and literary patrimony that it is up to them to share and continue to develop. In this second group, «we find another tendency that does not cease to innovate, by perpetuating the patrimony of epic poems, of short stories, and of the poetry of Eastern culture, through the fusion of narrative and poetic Western modernity with mythological narratives or aesthetic principles of a stylized Arabia». Within the work done by this second group of writers, a major concern seems to be translation, and how Eastern texts and literary principles are brought into Western cultures and, specifically, into the Portuguese language and Brazilian culture. There is a commitment to an Eastern (Arabic) patrimony that does not cease to be reinvented, and which projects in the recognition

of the «arabization» of some major guidelines of the Brazilian heritage a source of displacement of Western roots. The literary space thus described by Alva is «singular and plural» at the same time, and again insists upon a heterogeneous cosmopolitanism that comes to be viewed as a major concern in these reflections.

In fact, it is indeed the cosmopolitan concern that is at the heart of Stefan Helgesson's paper on João Paulo Borges Coelho, who has come to be recognized, in recent years, as one of the major names in contemporary Mozambican literature. Helgesson begins by underlining how Coelho's novel *O Olho de Hertzog* «performs a complex act of worlding that exceeds the bounded colonial/national space of Mozambique, but resists synthesis». It is in this resistance to synthesis that we may find an analogy to the displacement or the dislocation that we have seen at work in the papers previously mentioned. All these critics look at texts otherwise, trying to locate in such deflection one of the criteria for the worlding of the texts and authors they read. In this case, Helgesson highlights the importance of critical cosmopolitanism for the composition of Coelho's novel. In fact, this novel, set in Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) in 1919, at the wake of the new era subsequent to XXI, brings together German, Afrikaners, Goan, and American characters and their stories. They all meet in the space of the Portuguese colony, gradually uncovering a mystery that also contributes to the construction of a substantial Mozambican character, João Albasini, and an oblique, though robust description of colonial unrest in Mozambique, already in the beginning of the 20th century. Helgesson is particularly interested in the juxtaposition of the cosmopolitan and the local, and he successfully contends that they come together in a specific refusal of synthesis that is at the heart of Coelho's literary practice –and which, more widely, he sees as a distinctive form of worlding Mozambican literature. This refusal of synthesis is manifested metaphorically in the novel by the contrasts and connections between the «two cities» that make Lourenço Marques, the city of stone and the city of straw. What is at stake in this reading of Coelho's novel, however, is that this contrast is not restricted to an essential metaphor of Mozambican national identity, although it also contributes to this question. On the contrary, Helgesson looks at it as both an expression «of the strained relations and constitutive hierarchies of colonial societies» and «of contemporary globalization». 1919 Mozambique is not *only* about 1919 Mozambique, but about a world scenario that comes into play in a specific region, with its own specific problems, enacted by a multitude of different actors, coming from different traditions and different regions in the globe.

This resistance to restrict an example of literature in Africa to the problem of the quest for identity and of autochthonous roots (however central it may be) is, to my view, a decisive step taken by Helgesson towards the hypothesis of a worlding of literatures in Portuguese –but also, by analogy, of other literatures that, like the Mozambican, share the same kind of ambiguous inquiry. Should cosmopolitanism be recognized only as part of literatures located in the centre of literary systems? Or are there other forms of being cosmopolitan that have to be taken into consideration, thereby not only enriching the concept of cosmopolitanism but also avoiding the danger of once more «exoticizing» such literatures in the peripheries of the system? A reflection such as that conducted by the Brazilian critic Silviano Santiago (2004), as he posits the need of an awareness of «the cosmopolitan of the poor», comes to mind here: any nation's history is not necessarily a national history only, and a history of its nationals. It has to include the stories of those who, even if they did not *belong* to a given space, also contributed to its existence.

This therefore becomes a task akin to what Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008) termed «provincializing Europe», when one considers how concepts originally European, such as cosmopolitanism, may be renewed and enriched by experiences and intellectual contributions coming from the peripheries. This is the point of departure of Inocência Mata's paper, who looks at the group of the African literatures mainly written in Portuguese (Angola, Mozambique, Cape-Verde, S. Tomé e Príncipe) and tries to locate the displacements and the transformations that a world literature view brings to the description of their history and their dynamics. One of her starting points is the awareness that a comparative insight has only quite recently been recognized as providing a major basis for the study of this group of different national literatures. This change inevitably produces readings that gradually consider what is happening in different but analogous cultural and literary systems. In this case too, then, the comparative approach once more offers a fruitful perspective from which to observe what kinds of changes have occurred in recent decades in those African literatures that have explicitly chosen to primarily express themselves in Portuguese.

Mata's wide insight and ability to draw analogies and perceive differences between different African literatures in Portuguese, as well as between diverse historical periods, both colonial and postcolonial, allow her to give us a sustained description of the ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions that these different literatures have undergone in recent decades. One of them is the set of shifting ideological and literary connections between what once was the metropolis (Portugal) and the colonies, both before and

after the latter's independence in 1975. This process, whose dynamics she describes in Portuguese literature as well as in Portuguese-speaking African literatures, is an integral part of what she designates as part of «a painful process of recollection», and in her opinion manifests the «predisposition to pack up the ruins of History» –if one is aware that this packing up obviously means that those ruins will always be part of all historical awareness. Mata draws our attention to the need to bypass a binary representation in the description of such literatures (ex-colonizer vs. ex-colonized), which is, of course, the point where disciplines such as comparative and world literature may come into full view as insights that help to avoid such dichotomist (and traditional) representation. Portuguese-speaking African literatures have to build upon a complex self-description that is based on a complex set of relations, and a point of view that incorporates world literature and a comparative approach offers an exciting renewal of perspective and of the readings it makes possible. The importance of such literatures, coming from the «margins», to a world view of literature, is emphasized by Mata as she recalls how they may contribute to the dislocation of a hegemonic representation, and to the development of a true literary dialogue with other series in other cultural geographies.

The five papers collected here all stem from a common set of concerns: how to look at literatures written in Portuguese and, on the one hand, maintain the tension they embody between affinities (the use of a common language) and divergences (culturally and geographically embedded). But also, on the other hand, they all address the question of how to make such an approach foster the awareness that the connections between such literatures project a specific world view of literature that has to be recognized and valued, if we are to accept that the world is not only an English-speaking world, read by Anglo-American critics, using an hegemonic, immovable Western vocabulary. To *read otherwise*, as in the understanding of what kind of dissonances are at work in a given set of texts (Horta; Mata); or in the conjunction of discordant traditions (Alva Teixeira; Silva); or in the recognition of a complex dynamics of cosmopolitanism that highlights its critical standpoint (Helgesson), therefore becomes, in the papers published in the present issue of *1616: Anuario de Literatura Comparada*, a common response to a common problem. It is quite clear, though, that this common response may be given through quite different configurations, and this is perhaps something that all comparatists and world literature critics must keep in full sight.

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