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Rereading Brazilian Modernism

Randal Johnson

Department of Romance Languages
and Literatures
University of Florida

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Despite the title, "Rereading Brazilian Modernism," I have no intention of presenting a new interpretation of modernism. In fact, I am in essential agreement with the canon as it now stands in purely aesthetic terms, recognizing, of course, that minor quibbles are always possible. I do feel, however, that much of modernism warrants a reinterpretation, a rereading. But by this I do not mean that modernist texts should be reread with the purpose of incorporating certain ones into the canon or expelling others that are now canonized into a sort of literary limbo. That would result essentially in no more than a reshuffling of the canonical deck. I think it is unlikely—though certainly not impossible—that the canon will be substantially altered in the near future.

By suggesting that modernism needs to be "reread," I do not mean, furthermore, that texts should simply be reinterpreted in the light of some new critical methodology. That is a process that occurs constantly in the literary/critical field anyway, as new methods of literary analysis arise, become fashionable, and often fade into the background. In this regard Roberto Schwarz recently wrote the following:

Nos vinte anos em que tenho dado aula de literatura assisti ao trânsito da crítica por impressionismo, historiografia positivista, new criticism americano, estilística, marxismo, fenomenologia, estruturalismo, pós-estruturalismo e agora teorias da recepção . . . Mas é fácil observar que só raramente a
passagem de uma escola a outra corresponde, como seria de esperar, ao esgotamento de um projeto; no geral ela se deve ao prestígio americano ou europeu da doutrina seguinte.2

The theoretical apparatus now brought to bear on modernism is immense, the result being, in the best of cases, highly sophisticated analyses that truly shed new light on modernism's creative processes, and in the worst of cases, the simple imposition of methodologies that have little bearing on or relevance to the texts in question.

My concern here is less with modernism per se than with the presuppositions and implications of the way modernism is now understood in Brazilian literary criticism. Our understanding of modernism today is considerably different from the way it was understood in the 1930s, 1940s, or even the 1950s. What interests me is how this change came about, what its repercussions were in the development of modernist studies, and, perhaps most important, what ideological project is involved in this change. To put it another way, I am concerned with the institutionalization of modernism into a canon with very specific configurations.

Frederic Jameson suggests that isolated or discrete cultural analysis implies a theory of historical periodization, and that periodizing hypotheses often "tend to obliterate difference and project an idea of the historical period as massive homogeneity." The same may be said of literary history and canon formation. If the process of periodization or canonization frequently entails an obliteration of heterogeneity, it also implies what Jameson calls a "winner loses logic." That is, to the extent that a given historical or canonical vision wins out over others, establishing its authority, it also loses, "since the critical capacity of [its] work is thereby paralysed."3

From a similar perspective, Edward Said argues that differing critical and cultural perspectives are "competitors for authority" that attempt not only to earn a place for themselves but to displace others. Said posits the same kind of closure as Jameson. In his view, "to acquire a position of authority within the field is ... to be involved internally in the formation of a canon, which usually turns out to
be a blocking device for methodological and disciplinary self-questioning." A
canon is thus not only based on some sort of authority, but may also tend to be
authoritarian in its blockage of dissident voices.

Since the 1930s successive layers of critical interpretations of Brazilian
modernism have settled into a rather homogeneous canon. The current hegemonic
norm or cultural dominant of modernist studies centers on artistic or linguistic
rupture as the movement's central feature. Such a focus, which has evolved from
a broader view of the movement as a new mentality toward art and society and
which tends to overshadow other elements of the modernist project, has allowed
critics to establish a literary hierarchy of values according to the radicality,
creativity, or complexity of aesthetic propositions. This is perfectly reasonable and
perhaps inevitable, since it is one of the general characteristics of literary fields.
I am using the term "field" in the sense developed by French sociologist Pierre
Bourdieu, that is, a structured space in which human agents engage in competition
for control of the interests or resources that are specific to the field in question.
As a literary or critical field attains autonomy from external determinants, it
establishes its own criteria of evaluation based on the recognition of only certain,
and increasingly specialized, kinds of internal values (i.e., internal to the field).

Contemporary Brazilian literary criticism—and I do not suggest that this is
exclusive to Brazil, nor that it applies to all criticism in Brazil—tends to establish
rupture as an absolute value. I would even go so far as to say that there has
occurred a fetishization of rupture—fetishization in the sense of an extravagant
devotion—in the Brazilian critical field, whose discourse is permeated by terms
such as: ruptura, fratura, inversão, avesso, subversão, rompimento, recusa,
transgressão, estilhaçamento, revolução, plus the "D" words: dessacralização,
desmitificação, desconstrução, decomposição, desarticulação, desrealização, and
desmontagem, to mention only a few. These terms or concepts, all of which have
their value and their place in literary criticism, have become commonplace in
Brazilian critical discourse, yet they are rarely if ever examined critically. They
constitute, in other words, a new orthodoxy and thus tend to lose their potential
critical force. Perhaps more important, linguistic rupture is sometimes seen as necessarily progressive in political terms, the logic being (and here I am obviously oversimplifying) that language is an instrument of power, and that to "deconstruct" that instrument in a literary text represents an indirect challenge to power itself. I would suggest that the overvaluation of such criteria in the process of canon formation and preservation tends to misrecognize the objective position of the literary/critical field in the broader field of social relations.

The first question, then, is how did this come about? It would be fairly easy, if time-consuming, to empirically trace the development of the modernist canon along the lines I have outlined. Its roots are to be found, first of all, in the internal differentiation within the modernist movement in the 1920s and, second, in the increasing autonomization of the literary field that occurred in the mid-1940s after the extreme politicization of the 1930s. At that time there occurred a general return to more cosmopolitan or more purely literary concerns, evident in the emergence of the poetic generation of 1945 as well as in the criticism of such writers as Sérgio Milliet and Mário de Andrade (despite his increased political commitment). Equally important, for reasons that I hope to make clear, was the delegitimation of the right in cultural discourse as a result of the war in Europe and the struggle against fascism in all its forms, including the Vargas dictatorship. (I am fully aware that the Estado Novo was not in a strict sense fascist, but I am also aware that Vargas' opposition tended to identify him and his regime with fascism.)

The next step occurred in 1948 when Afrânio Coutinho returned from the United States armed with the baggage of New Criticism, with its focus on the text and the denial of external determinants on the literary work. An essential part of Coutinho's often virulent campaign, particularly against Alvaro Lins, the "emperor" of criticism in the 1940s, was the idea that the university, not the newspaper, was the proper site for the development of a "scientific," professional literary criticism. Flora Süsskind is absolutely correct when she suggests that Coutinho's campaign attempted to establish new relations of power in the literary field, based no longer on the personality, articulateness, or rhetorical eloquence of the journalistic
reviewer, but rather on aesthetic criteria and textual analysis by specially trained critics.\textsuperscript{10} Despite the often heated responses he provoked, Coutinho's campaign was, in the final analysis, successful, and by the late 1950s the critical field had been irreversibly transformed. This transformation can be analyzed, I would suggest, in terms of the relationship between criticism and the public sphere.\textsuperscript{11}

The decisive moment in the ultra-valorization of rupture came in the 1960s and early 1970s, especially with Haroldo de Campos’ brilliant analyses of Oswald de Andrade and the impact of formalism, structuralism, semiotics, and, eventually, poststructuralism on the critical field. Despite the self-serving component of the Concretists’ project, the very least one can say is that they—and especially Haroldo—indelibly altered the terms of debate in Brazilian critical discourse, taking it to unprecedented levels of theoretical sophistication. It was with the Concretists that rupture itself became canonized. Rather than tracing the particulars of this process, I think it is important to discuss its repercussions on the development of modernist studies.

The theoretical intensification and the increasing valorization of rupture coincided chronologically with the beginnings of archaeological or documentary research on modernism itself, exemplified most perfectly by the work carried out in the Arquivo Mário de Andrade at the Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros in São Paulo. It was in 1969 that Nites Terezinha Feres published \textit{Leituras em francês de Mário de Andrade} and Maria Helena Grembecki published \textit{Mário de Andrade e L'Esprit Nouveau}. And it was around the same time that the Instituto's project to study modernist reviews got under way.

The solidification of a modernist canon based on rupture shaped the direction of documentary or historical research in a number of ways. Through their formidable theoretical sophistication and polemical bent, the Concretists and others exerted what might be called a "censorship of erudition" on the critical field, passing judgment on which writers were deserving of study. In addition, the increasing importance of theoretical elaboration tended to create a hierarchy of values within the critical field itself, providing more prestige to those who were up-to-date with recent critical trends in Europe and relegating the kind of archival
research undertaken at IEB to an inferior position. This has an impact on the kinds of research graduate students are inclined to undertake since career interests are frequently at stake and some areas are clearly more profitable than others. As Roberto Schwarz has put it, "O gosto pela novidade terminológica e doutrinária prevalece sobre o trabalho de conhecimento, e constitui outro exemplo, agora no plano académico, do caráter imitativo de nossa vida cultural."12

Telê Porto Ancona Lopez was, I think, clearly aware of the implications of this situation when she wrote, in the introduction to Mário de Andrade: Ramais e Caminho (1972), that Brazilian criticism "não pode ainda se dar ao luxo europeu da interpretação pura, enquanto a documentação continuar arqueologicamente sepultada." Although I would not want to deny Brazilians or anyone else the "luxury of pure interpretation," Telê had a very good point that is still valid today, in that the most basic kind of research necessary for a complete evaluation of modernism is still incomplete. In this sense, before modernism can be reread, it first needs to be more thoroughly read. The canon was established, in short, before all of the necessary documentation was in place and critically examined.

For example, studies have yet to be undertaken of such reviews as Ariel, which Mário de Andrade directed for at least a short period in 1924, and the Revista Nova, founded by Paulo Prado, Antônio de Alcântara Machado, and Mário de Andrade in 1931. A figure like Cândido Motta Filho has been totally ignored, despite the fact that he was an early proponent of modernism through his literary columns in the Diário de São Paulo and the Correio Paulistano. An active participant in the Semana de Arte Moderna, he was a cofounder of Klaxon (1922) and a contributor to Novíssima (1923–1926) and Terra Roxa e outras terras (1926). In the midst of the nationalist fervor of 1926 he published his first book of literary/intellectual history, titled Introdução ao pensamento nacional (O romantismo), which traces the development of a Brazilian national identity through literature. And yet the only reference one ever sees to him or to this particular work is a rather flippant dismissal published in the Revista de Antropofagia. Since Antropofagia's flippant dismissals are frequently accepted as gospel, works such as Motta Filho's have been deemed unworthy of even the most elementary forms
of consideration.

The same might be said for the Verde-Amarelo/Anta faction of modernism as a whole. The participants of Verde-Amarelo, notably Menotti del Picchia, Cassiano Ricardo, Plínio Salgado, and Motta Filho, left a vast body of literary, critical, political, and cultural writings that still await analysis. I have compiled a listing of over 120 texts published in the Correio Paulistano as part of the Verde-Amarelo campaign, only two of which have since been reprinted. A work as important for the ideological development of modernism as the collective O Curupira e o Carão (1926) has yet to be republished. Likewise the early modernist poetry of Cassiano Ricardo. What he calls Vamos Caçar Papagaios in the 1957 edition of his Poesias Completas is substantially different from the 1947 edition and has very little resemblance to the original 1926 edition. Besides such purely textual problems, to this date there have been no thorough studies of such works as Ronald de Carvalho’s Toda a América and Guilherme de Almeida’s Raça, both of which are important for a complete understanding of modernism’s nationalism. I could go on, but I don’t think anyone would disagree that much remains to be done, even in relation to writers such as Oswald and Mário.

The failure to complete basic archival research on modernism has had two consequences. First, a considerable amount of misinformation circulates as fact. In the recently published Dictionary of Brazilian Literature (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1988), for example, there are two references to modernist reviews titled Verde-Amarelo and Anta [sic]. A well-known critic from the University of São Paulo refers to the same reviews in a book on Oswald and Girondo. In fact, such reviews never existed.

Second, the vagueness of empirical data has facilitated the development of a modernist mythology accepted as truth. For example, standard literary historiography states that Verde-Amarelo arose in response to Oswald’s Pau-Brasil. I was thus surprised to learn, while reading the columns of the verdeamarelistas in the Correio Paulistano, that in the six months prior to the formation of the Verde-Amarelo group per se in July 1926, there is only one reference to Oswald, and that in a February column by Menotti del Picchia dedicated primarily to a
critique of Mário de Andrade’s intellectualism. An examination of the chronology and circumstances of events belies the canonical version that Verde-Amarelo was merely a conservative response to Pau-Brasil.

Oswald’s manifesto appeared on 18 March 1924. In his memoirs, Cândido Motta Filho recalls that Oswald had read the manifesto, "entre risadas," in Motta Filho’s house in São Paulo. The only response it provoked from the future members of Verde-Amarelo was Menotti’s "Manifesto anti-pau-brasil," published on 13 April 1924 in the Correio Paulistano. Menotti’s complaint concerned what he saw as Oswald’s attempt to discipline and control modernism’s poetic processes through the creation of a literary school, much as the Academia Brasileira de Letras, the great nemesis of the modernist revolt, attempted to do with the literary field generally. Menotti rejects "todos os que se acaudilharem a definidas bandeiras, cheirando assim a academismo dentro da nossa própria corrente libertária." He considers "incuravelmente contaminados de passadismo-assu os que não forem pessoais e insubmissos, originais e rebeldes." He did not propose a counter school or movement.¹³

Between March 1924 and July 1926, when Menotti announced the founding of Verde-Amarelo, Oswald contributed regularly to Cassiano Ricardo’s review Novíssima. In fact, Oswald published more poems in Novíssima than anyone except Cassiano. In the review’s seventh issue (September/October 1924) Plínio Salgado published a favorable review of Oswald’s Memórias Sentimentais de João Miramar, especially praising the author’s "sense of Brazilian-ness."

The opposition to Oswald in Novíssima came primarily from Menotti del Picchia, who criticized him for his primitivism, arguing instead (this in August/September 1925) that Brazilian culture owes little to its "barbarians" (Indians) and that its values derive from the European tradition that had developed in Brazil since the discovery. His emphasis on such traditions is far from the Verde-Amarelo nationalism of mid-1926. One does note, however, a marked change in Menotti’s orientation as the Novíssima group’s nationalism begins to intensify in 1926, especially with the publication of Cassiano’s Borroes de Verde e Amarelo early in the year. This intensification, however, has little if anything to
The first mention of Pau-Brasil after the formation of Verde-Amarelo came in September 1926, when Cassiano described modernism as being divided into three groups: Mário’s desvairismo (seen negatively as a "reflection of European renovation"), Oswald’s pau-brasilismo (viewed favorably as "a sort of presentation and enumeration of motifs for the higher task of construction . . ."), and Verde-Amarelo. References to Oswald intensified only in early 1927, when Menotti, in a public response to a letter from Oswald, began referring to Pau-Brasil as "Pau . . . Paris" because of what he saw as Oswald’s excessive European affinities. But Menotti also predicted, mistakenly as it turned out, that Pau-Brasil and Verde-Amarelo would reach an accord in which "será hasteado o Verde-amarelo no Pau-Brasil." They simply represented two ways of looking at Brazil, "um de dentro e outro de fora, um do Brasil-Brasil, outro de bordo do ‘Marselha’." Oswald, Menotti continued, "é o santo do meu altar." The fact of the matter is that, conceptually speaking, the differences between Pau-Brasil and Verde-Amarelo were not as great as contemporary criticism makes them out to be.

What interests me, and what I would like to explore in future research, is how and why this sort of myth is perpetuated. I suspect, in this particular case, that the idea that Verde-Amarelo constituted a response to Pau-Brasil originated with Oswald de Andrade himself in an attempt to reestablish his own precedence and authority in the field and that it has been perpetuated as part of the ideological project I referred to earlier, and to which I now turn.

Implicit in the view of modernism as rupture is a certain reductionism that operates with oversimplifications of the movement’s aesthetic proposals, political affiliations, and ideological contradictions. As now constituted, the literary canon tends to equate the initial phase of modernism with those factions seen as aesthetically progressive and more specifically with Mário and Oswald. This has occurred by way of a rather curious ideological separation of the wheat from the chaff in which certain figures who were in the forefront of the movement in the 1920s are denied the status of "modernist." As Sérgio Miceli puts it,
Por força dos interesses em jogo em conjunturas posteriores do campo intelectual, a história literária passou a operar com simplificações grosseiras segundo as quais o leme da inovação recaiu sobre Oswald, Mário e, em menor medida, sobre Alcântara Machado e outros elementos filiados à oposição democrática, ao passo que os demais foram recobertos pelos mantos da ideologia, quer dizer, do passadismo e do obscurantismo.19

In other words, the term "modernist" has frequently been reserved for the movement's most "advanced" participants, while the others have been banished to a sort of literary purgatory.

The reduction of the modernist project to the question of rupture, experimentation, or linguistic subversion has entailed in at least two ways the distortion of the movement's political and ideological affiliations (again, I am referring here to the 1920s). On the one hand, the rejection of less-than-progressive modernists on artistic grounds has permitted the concurrent exclusion of undesirable political positions from "pure" modernism. That is, it has permitted the expulsion from mainstream modernism of authoritarian thought, which began to gain force in the 1920s. This is one aspect of what I referred to earlier as the delegitimation of the right in cultural discourse.

On the other hand there has occurred a highly questionable retrospective projection of political radicalism onto those, such as Oswald de Andrade, who were aesthetically daring, as if advanced and frequently radical artistic positions necessarily implied radical politics.20 In an essentially eschatological interpretation, some critics have tended to equate his artistic and cultural views of the 1920s with his political views of the 1930s, when he was a member of the Communist party, although there is little evidence, textual or otherwise, that would permit such an interpretation. This explains, I think, how a normally astute critic such as Benedito Nunes can hyperbolically refer to Pau-Brasil as a "revolutionary social praxis."21 Eduardo Jardim de Moraes more convincingly argues that "intuition" and "integration" are the fundamental categories underlying both Pau-Brasil and Verde-Amarelo, and they are hardly revolutionary.22 The confusion of certain of
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Notes

1. This paper should be read as a rather long hypothesis intended to guide future projects instead of a polished, refined piece of work. Unless otherwise indicated, when I refer to modernism, I do so in a very narrow sense, that is, Brazilian literature in the 1920s. Modernism does of course find continuity in the 1930s, especially in the work of those who had been engaged in or who established affiliations with the movement in the 1920s. My own view—and this goes against the grain of conventional classifications—is that the social novel, which became dominant in the hierarchy of genres in the 1930s and which is often called the "modernist" novel, represents an essentially different literary project within a cultural field possessing a different configuration and a logic different from that of modernism.


9. The terms were culled from some of the papers given at the conference "Luso-Brazilian Literature: A Socio-Critical Approach," University of Minnesota, 21–22 October 1988.


11. See Peter Uwe Hohendahl, The Institution of Criticism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), especially chap. 1, "Literary Criticism and the Public Sphere," 44–82.

12. "Que horas são?," 30.


17. Miceli, 22, n. 27.

18. Hélio R. Silva, "Modernoismo hoje," Revista do Brasil II, no. 5 (1986), 90–97. In her study of the review Novíssima, Maria Lúcia Fernandes Guelfi writes the following: "Não importa, aqui, dizer se Menotti del Picchia foi ou não modernista . . . De qualquer modo, afastando-se dos modernistas radicais pela linguagem rebuscada e conservadora, Menotti apresentava um modernismo de fachada. Renovou assuntos, atualizou o vocabulário e pregou o Modernismo sem ser verdadeiramente um modernista [stress added]." See Novíssima: Estética e Ideologia na Década de Vinte (São Paulo: Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros / Universidade de São Paulo, 1987), 152. Similar expulsions abound in the critical literature on modernism. See, for example, Maria Eugênia da Gama Alves Boaventura's comments about the "falsely modern" propositions of the review Movimento Brasileiro in Movimento Brasileiro (Contribuição ao Estudo do Modernismo) (São Paulo:
14


19. Miceli, 22, n. 27. Although referring to another context and situation (the permanence of a naturalist aesthetic in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Brazilian literature), Flora Sussekind perceptively notes that "the construction of a literary history, like that of a family tree, takes place through the effacing of differences and discontinuities. Nothing that diminishes the beauty, renders comical, or undercuts the profile of its great artists receives emphasis." See Tal Brasil, Qual Romance? (Rio de Janeiro: Achiamé, 1980), 33. Writers like Menotti del Picchia tarnish the image many critics have of modernism and are thus discounted.

20. See, for example, Gilberto Vasconcelos, Ideologia Curupira: Análise do Discurso Integralista (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1979), 144-158; also David George, Teatro e Antropofagia, translated by Eduardo Brandao (São Paulo: Global, 1985), p. 22. Oswald's political radicalization did not occur until at least 1930, although throughout the 1920s he revealed an iconoclastic, irreverent attitude toward bourgeois society.

21. Benedito Nunes, "Antropofagia ao alcance de todos," in Oswald de Andrade, Do Pau-Brasil a Antropofagia e às Utopias, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1970), xxi. Nunes conveniently fails to define the terms employed. If we understand the term praxis as a mode of action informed by theory, which would seem to be implied by the adjectives "revolutionary" and "social," then Nunes is clearly mistaken in his interpretation. Pau-Brasil's "revolution" was largely confined to the artistic production of a single individual, Oswald de Andrade himself, and involved no forms of action outside of the artistic field.


23. See, for example, Francisco Iglesias' "Modernismo: Uma Reverificação da Inteligência Nacional."


26. These basic presuppositions are deeply indebted to the work of Pierre Bourdieu.
