

SOME NARRATOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON HISTORY AND LITERATURE

ALGUMAS REFLEXÕES NARRATOLÓGICAS SOBRE HISTÓRIA E LITERATURA

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ABSTRACT: In the field of narratology, this paper promotes some reflections on the interface between history and literature. Based on theoretical premises from philosophy of history and literary theory, two basic and divergent views are approached: one that comprehends historical narratives in a positivist-scientist way: as authentic reproduction of historical events and therefore distinct from literary narratives for being fictional (COHN, LAMARQUE, OLSEN, GINZBURG, among others). The other view identifies similarities (narrator, plot, space, time, figures of speech and rhetoric, etc.) between the two narrative realms, defending a relativist (postmodernist) position regarding the (im)possibility to emulate reality through language (CERTEAU, VEYNE, WHITE, HUTCHEON, among others). This essay concludes that there are both certain subjectivity into historical narratives and some historical extraction into literary narratives, thus, it turns literary works with historical content into an important historical knowledge source.

KEYWORDS: History; Literature; Narratives.

RESUMO: Este ensaio promove algumas reflexões no campo da Narratologia a respeito da relação entre historiografia e literatura. Com base em pressupostos teóricos da Filosofia da História e da Teoria Literária, duas visões basilares e divergentes são mobilizadas: uma que enxerga a narrativa histórica de modo positivista-cientificista: enquanto reprodução autêntica de eventos e, por isso, como distinta da narrativa literária, que trilha pelo terreno ficcional (Cohn, Lamarque, Olsen, Ginzburg, entre outros). A outra visão identifica similaridades (narrador, enredo, espaço, tempo, figuras de linguagem e de retórica, etc.) entre os dois universos narrativos, defendendo uma visão relativista (pós-modernista) em relação à (im)possibilidade de emular a realidade pela linguagem (Certeau, Veyne, White, Hutcheon, entre outros). Este ensaio conclui que há certa subjetividade na precisão das narrativas históricas, bem como matéria de extração histórica em narrativas literárias, o que torna obras literárias de conteúdo histórico importantes fontes de conhecimento histórico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: História; Literatura; Narrativas.

*“History is an account of events: all else flows from that”
(VEYNE, 1984, p. 04)*

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Introduction

The interface between history and literature has accompanied these two narrative forms since their genesis. A brief foray into Western foundational literary productions is enough to clearly notice that history and literature have been interwoven and interdependent. In Antiquity, biblical narratives² introduced Abraham, a character who represented the origin of a people (and a religion). The classic epics (the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*) narrated the destruction and foundation of emblematic cities: Troy and Rome, respectively. In the Middle Ages, the epic poems *El Cantar del Mio Cid* in Spain and *La chanson de Roland* in France unfolded the adventures and misfortunes of two historical characters: Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar and Count Rolando. We can also add the Scottian historical novel or, within the scope of Brazilian literature (which will be included throughout this essay), the Alencarian historical novel, both from the nineteenth century. The list of examples is long and uninterrupted until today.

Before the advent of the "scientific history" of Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century, history and literature were not even differentiated, seen as "branches of the same tree of learning" (HUTCHEON, 2003, p. 105). The overlap between historical and literary narratives is revealed in many ways: sometimes as mutual research sources for both historians and literary writers, other times, in a more peculiar way, as a fusion identified into their narratives themselves.

Over time, historiography has frequently been serving as a source for literary writers when they create historical characters, events and periods. We can illustrate it with the famous English writer Charles Dickens, who found in the historian Thomas Carlyle's work the main source upon French Revolution to create his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. This phenomenon seems to also happen in the historiographical field, when we verify that several literary works have also been grounding and inspiring many historians, as Burckhardt (1955, p. 136) writes: "History finds in poetry not only one of its most important but also one of its purest and finest sources".

In the case of Brazilian literature, the novel *Os Sertões* (Backlands: The Canudos Campaign) by Euclides da Cunha became an important source for historians when studying the War of Canudos³. This novel has even integrated the curriculum of several master's and doctoral programs about the history of Brazil in Brazilian universities. Lima (2006) identifies

² Regarding biblical texts as literary texts, see Magalhães (2009; 2008).

³ The War of Canudos was an armed conflict between the First Brazilian Republic and the people from Canudos, a former village in the backland of Bahia, Brazil.

in this novel a kind of hybridism between human sciences and arts, as he declares: this novel represents “simultaneously a work of science and literature” (LIMA, 2006, p. 374, free translation).⁴

In this line of thought, this essay proposes a brief theoretical reflection considering philosophy of history and literary theory in order to approach some tensions and congruencies that historical and literary narratives have demonstrated since their origin, focusing on the relativization of scientism, which seems to overestimate the representation of “reality” found in historical (as scientific) narratives, and to underestimate the historical potential promoted by literary narratives.

Historiography, literature and representation of reality

Probably the first (or one of the first) attempts to delimitate a possible difference between history and literature can be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In its famous chapter nine, he defines historiography as “what has happened” and poetry as “what may happen”. According to the philosopher, such distinction would not occur because of the narrative form (prose or verse), but due to the integrity of the content as reproduction of reality. As an example, Aristotle argues that even if Herodotus's work (a Greek historian from the fifth century B.C.) were written in verses, it would preserve its status of history. Lastly, Aristotle classifies poetry as being more comprehensive than history for its universal feature, while history would be reduced to the particular. Hence, the poet would be closer to a philosopher and, thus, with a supposedly more holistic view than a historian could have (ARISTÓTELES, 2011).

There certainly is a hierarchization in this Aristotelian perception, which places literary production in a privileged place. This kind of perspective has not been uncommon since Aristotle, nor is it obsolete today, as we can verify in the German theorist Eberhard Lämmert's study on historiography and the novel:

[...] fictional literature, at all times, has always had an advantage over historiography: novels can, with the imaginary strength of their texts, not only animate the dialogue between the past and the present of their readers in an ever new way, but they can also unraveling a vision of life relationships for which neither social institutions nor the sciences have ever found solutions, in the past or present, compatible with human dignity (LÄMMERT, 1995, p. 304, free translation).⁵

⁴ Original: “simultaneamente, obra de ciência e de literatura”.

⁵ Original: “[...] a literatura ficcional, em todos os tempos, sempre teve de vantagem sobre a historiografia: romances podem, com a força imagética de seus textos, não apenas animar o diálogo entre o passado e o presente de seus leitores de forma sempre nova, como podem também desentranhar uma visão de relações de vida para as

Although plausible in some cases, this overestimation of literary texts compared to historiography does not seem to be so consistent, especially if we consider contemporary historiographical productions. It is quite certain that such a perspective would not be verified even at Aristotle's time. The British historian Ste. Croix (1992) would have already observed that this Aristotelian presupposition is not fair to his own historiography, following the example of the *Athenian Constitution*, a work in which Aristotle presents a rich description of the Athenian political regime that transcends the "particular" attributed to historiography. In such a way, even being distinct areas, Ste. Croix places historical and literary narratives on the same level from the point of view of the knowledge that both domains can offer. Then, taking hierarchical positions in favor of either of the two narrative forms does not represent a verifiable or convincing conclusion. Furthermore, it is not the purpose of this essay.

However, when defining a historical narrative as "what has happened", the Aristotelian concept presupposes that "reality" or "historical events" are reproducible, or duplicable, by means of language. We consider it a rather narrow premise, not to say naive, especially if we consider some more recent linguistic-philosophical reflections, such as Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Since his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, this philosopher had relativized the language/reality isomorphism, mainly when he demonstrates the plasticity of language, whose meanings are continually elaborated and reworked according to discursive intents in the several and dynamical semantical contexts, phenomenon that he called "language-games" in his *Philosophical Investigations* (WITTGENSTEIN, 1999; 1968). Wittgensteinian philosophy of language would represent a kind of prognosis about the trends of fragilization and relativization of the historiographical scientism that would be contested with a greater impact in the twentieth century, notably by the French Annales school and relativists such as Paul Veyne, Hayden White and Linda Hutcheon.

Viewpoints like those of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1988), according to which the classics of anthropology have remained in people's mind not for their content, but for their writers' literary talent, or also of the philosopher Richard Rorty (*apud* LAMARQUE; OLSEN, 1994), according to which each reality is a great fiction, suggest the directions that the philosophy of history would follow from the twentieth century onwards. From then on, a trend emerges to comprehend historiography not like the reproduction of historical events, but like a narrative almost so literary (and even fictional) as the literary texts themselves. This

quais nem as instituições sociais nem as ciências jamais encontraram, no passado ou no presente, soluções compatíveis com a dignidade humana".

concept came to generate an English neologism: *faction*, which is the agglutination of the words *facts* and *fiction*. This term refers to texts in which the delimitation between the fictional and the real is inaccurate (is there any text in which such delimitation is possible?). This notion conducts us immediately to the words of Weber (1980, p. 14): “Nonfiction could no more chronicle reality than fiction since all forms of writing offer models or versions of reality rather than actual descriptions of it: consequently nonfiction [is] as inherently ‘irrealistic’ as fiction”.

Positions of this nature would not please positivist historians, even if this sort of thought holds a very reasonable principle. Being careful with the concepts of “reality” or “truth” is always important to avoid objectivist and totalizing perspectives inherent into the terms themselves. The “historical truth” has always been problematic and, therefore, “the aporia of truth must be understood with extreme caution” (LIMA, 2006, p. 155, free translation).⁶ Then, Lima also understands that the “historical truth” has ceaselessly maintained a “hidden side”, which has not been questioned. And the historian's craft appears to be closer to mimesis than to the historical account itself, because their reconstitutions of the past are always subjected to the social-place where they were produced, bringing its marks, limits and prejudices.

In the literary field, as Compagnon (2004) observes, taking into account the Aristotelian view (of literature as representation of reality), such an attempt would not surpass mimesis. And historiography would not get rid of that, either, because its attempt to tell “what has happened” makes the world its referent, what not always happens in literature, as Compagnon (2004) points out in a chapter called “The world”.

Literary critics, mainly the formalists, defended the autonomy of literature in terms of representation of reality, and they conceived it as self-referential and self-sufficient. In such a way, they ignored that, before textual elaboration, there is a context that makes it feasible, and in which it is imbricated. In this sense, the advent of cultural studies in literary theory, from the second half of twentieth century, would bring prominent contributions.

Overlooking a kind of “disability of language” to depict reality, with which Barthes would agree, Compagnon (2004) concludes that, although a significant does not make possible a direct access to a referent, or that a novel cannot reproduce “reality” faithfully (is there any medium that does it?), language even so is referential and literature continues to represent “reality”.

In the case of historiography, when unfolding his impressions on the postmodern view about historical narratives, Dewulf stresses the inconsistency of the Aristotelian delimitation

⁶ Original: “a aporia da verdade há de ser entendida com extrema cautela”.

between the poet and the historian. Considering the diversity of available narratives today, he states that “it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between fictional and non-fictional works, some even argue that the idea itself of trying to make this distinction is already a fiction” (DEWULF, 2004, p. 209, free translation).⁷ These notions ended up compelling historians to contest the scientificity, or the “historical truth” craved by historicists. In this sense, Chartier (2009, p. 11-12, free translation)⁸ explains that such a perspective “forced historians to abandon the certainty of a total coincidence between the past as it was and the historical explanation that supports it”. This historian also observes that historiography came to be seen by this new generation of relativistic historians as “a writing always built from rhetorical figures and narrative structures that are also those of fiction” (CHARTIER, 2009, p. 12, free translation),⁹ what is generally emphasized by one of the main representatives of the group that problematizes historiographical epistemology in the twentieth century: Paul Veyne. In *Writing History*, Veyne (1984, p. 04) posits that “Like the novel, history sorts, simplifies, organizes, fits a century into a page”. And, in a criticism of quantitative and deterministic historicism, he concludes that “the fabric of history is what we shall call a plot” (VEYNE, 1984, p. 32). This theorist believes, thus, that historiography would be just a literary narrative, with its characters, plots, time cut, ideologies, everything organized according to the author's purposes, or to the funders' interests. In sum, Veyne understood historiography as “a true novel”.

Emblematic historian in the twentieth century, precursor of the Annales school, Marc Bloch, in his text on the historian's craft, criticizes the scientificity of history, by affirming that “the very idea that the past, as such, can be the object of science is absurd” (BLOCH, 2001, p. 52, free translation).¹⁰ He classifies a historian as an “investigator striving to reconstruct a crime he has not witnessed” (BLOCH, 2001, p. 69, free translation).¹¹ It is important to emphasize that the result of the historian's craft, that is, this great literary plot named historiography is somehow a kind of “hostage” of the systems and institutions as observed by Certeau (1982). In his *The Writing of History*, this French theorist accuses the institutions of influencing the historian's craft, and that both the object and the sources selected by historians remain under academic tutelage, which would guide the narrative to the

⁷ Original: “passou a ser cada vez mais difícil distinguir entre obras ficcionais e não-ficcionais, alguns defendem até que a ideia em si de se tentar fazer esta distinção já é uma ficção”.

⁸ Original: “obrigavam os historiadores a abandonar a certeza de uma coincidência total entre o passado tal como foi e a explicação histórica que o sustenta”.

⁹ Original: “uma escritura sempre construída a partir de figuras retóricas e de estruturas narrativas que também são as da ficção”.

¹⁰ Original: “a própria ideia de que o passado, enquanto tal, possa ser objeto de ciência é absurda”.

¹¹ Original: “investigador que se esforça para reconstruir um crime ao qual não assistiu”.

final result. To illustrate it, Certeau stresses that, with the temporal distance and a more epistemological view, it is possible today to perceive “the prejudices that limited the most recent historiography. They appear both in the choice of subjects and in the determination of the objectives adopted in the study” (CERTEAU, 1982, p. 42, free translation).¹² Certeau also relativizes the historiographical description of reality by conceiving real and discourse as oxymorons.

Among several historians and philosophers of history from the twentieth century, Hayden White, with his metahistory, had the most visibility, and he probably is who better consolidated the bond between historical and literary narratives (despite being the one who received the most criticism). In his work *Metahistory*, White launches his study on the historical narratives of four great historians from the nineteenth century: Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, and Burkhardt, besides the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Croce. In his analysis, White identifies literary categories into these authors' texts, among which there are the tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony (typically literary figures of language). Moreover, based on Northrop Frye's fiction theory, White also points out four rhetorical archetypes: romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire. With such results, it would be possible to argue that the so-called historical narratives would be in the literary field rather than in the scientific field. According to White, historiography would not be more than “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them” (WHITE, 1975, p. 02). In other words, historiography would be nothing more than a narrative, a linguistic production with features similar to literature. Concluding his *Metahistory*, White asserts:

In my view, no given theory of history is convincing or compelling to a given public solely on the basis of its adequacy as an “explanation” of the “data” contained in its narrative, because, in history, as in the social sciences in general, there is no way of pre-establishing what will count as a “datum” and what will count as a “theory” by which to “explain” what the data “mean” (WHITE, 1975, p. 429).

With such blunt conclusions, which would place the positivist historicism near a nihilism (considering its aim to describe historical truths), no doubt that White would not escape criticism, being Ginzburg his main opposer. However, White himself would already warn about the limits of his work, when admitting: “I do not know whether the four interpretative strategies I have identified exhaust all the possibilities contained in language for

¹² Original: “os preconceitos que limitaram a historiografia mais recente. Eles aparecem tanto na escolha dos assuntos quanto na determinação dos objetivos dados ao estudo”.

the representation of historical phenomena” (WHITE, 1975, p. 429). And this is exactly one of the main criticisms of White: that there are many other figures of language and rhetoric categories into historiography in addition to those identified by him.

But criticism does not stop there. More recent scholars, such as Lamarque, Olsen (1994), and Dorrit Cohn (1999), contested White because the presence of literary categories into historiography would not be enough evidence to characterize it as a fictional, or literary work, what is somehow agreed by Lima (2006, p. 385, free translation) when he argues that “it is not the use of literary resources that favors or harms a historiographical work”.¹³ Lamarque, Olsen (1994), and Dorrit Cohn (1999) also suggest that White did not take into account what they called the “responsibility”, or “compromise” of the historian with the readers. This responsibility can similarly be understood with Lejeune's (2003; 1991) “autobiographical pact”. This theorist believes that the real border between a historical autobiography and a fictional work would reside just in the pact that the biographer makes with the reader. It is then the responsibility taken by the author to *a priori* announce the autobiographical, or fictional character of their work according to their purposes. In the same way, the historian would take such responsibility to elaborate a true narrative in respect to the pact with the reader. It would represent a kind of “historical pact”. Therefore, the pact is in the author's intent/effort rather than in the features of the narrative.

Moreover, the critics of White also emphasize that historiography is the result of a long search for documents, historical remains, archeological work, and others of which novelists, playwrights, and poets would be free. Cohn (1999) comprehends the historical narrative as being distinct from literature because the first is always controlled, restrained, subject to explanations by the historian, and questions by the reader: “with its obligatory correspondence to the happenings it narrates overtly displayed in the text itself. The novelist’s relation to his sources is free” (COHN, 1999, p. 114). In this context, literature would be free of scientific tutelages and the “proof” to which historiography is subjected. But this view appears to be an illusion, because what one can verify in mainstream historiography is a *history of the victors*, as argued by Benjamin (2003). Concerning literature, one must consider that it is not part of its nature to be subjected to the test of “truth”, or to the verification of the real. Using the terms of Todorov (1981), literature is neither true nor false. This question should not even be raised, since it is right there that resides its status of fiction. Reflecting if the control over historiography would place it in a position of advantage, or would make it more restricted than literary narratives, leads us back to hierarchical stances that we seek to

¹³ Original: “não é o uso de recursos literários que favorece ou prejudica uma obra como historiográfica”.

avoid here. Furthermore, it is not quite certain that literary works are so free of “control”, of interests, and of dominant ideological tutelages in the context in which they are produced, because, as asserted by Bakhtin (1990; 1981), every manifestation of language emerges from an ideological context.

The criticism to White's metahistory is also focused on the fact that he analyzed only authors from the nineteenth century, and excluded more recent historiographical works, which would be more engaged with the proof (GINZBURG, 2002). The Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg, avant-garde in what was called microhistory, tries to undo what would be, in his opinion, a radicalism of White, especially when bringing together the supposed separation between rhetoric and truth, or rhetoric and proof. For that, Ginzburg retraces the route of the Greek rhetoric, and he presumes that the skeptical understanding of the postmodernists on historiography is a misinterpretation, because they focused the starting point on Aristotle's *Poetics* instead of his *Rhetoric*, in which would be the rational core that represents the proof. Ginzburg conceives the rhetoric as the most realistic resource available, and he also observes that it was not noticed that the Aristotelian *Rhetoric* breaks with the sophist rhetoric, which was "the art of deceiving" (GINZBURG, 2002). Then, Ginzburg interprets that rhetoric and proof are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the proof represents the rational core of the Aristotelian *Rhetoric*. The notion of proof is centered in three types of oratory: deliberative, demonstrative, and judicial, being the latter more connected to historiography, because the judicial reasoning, or the legal rhetoric, deals with past events (GINZBURG, 2002).

Despite the criticism of White's metahistory, some preliminary notes are inevitable: first, the historical events consist of an inaccessible past, or paraphrasing Marc Bloch: “a crime without witnesses”. It is a past about which there are only “ruins” (BENJAMIN, 1984). The term “ruins”, which is a metaphor inaugurated by this Jewish-German philosopher, does not refer just to historical ruins, but to all the fragments, the shards, the marks left as vestiges of the past. In other words, the historical legacy is reduced to diffused fragments that are collected, organized, and rebuilt in a narrative form by the historian. Hence, it is possible to say that only "ruins" remain from historical events, and historiography – as well as literature – is just a planned, cropped, and oftentimes a forged narrative.

History and literature, as Hutcheon (2003, p. 105) asserts, “are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms”. Furthermore, historical and literary narratives have been influencing each other, and also remained in the collective imaginary in terms of historical characters and events. Lämmert (1995) notes that the scots of Walter Scott's time formed their view on the past based on his historical novels,

and “Only the novel would extract from legacy news the complete portrait of a past era, and would transform this for the reader into an immediate experience” (LÄMMERT, 1995, p. 290, free translation),¹⁴ even if characters and dates can be a little bit confused several times (SCHEFFEL, 1919, p. 20-25). Hutcheon (2003), in her study on the poetics of postmodernism, considering the historiographical metafiction, aims to demonstrate how plausible White's presuppositions are. Hutcheon ratifies that, connected to the proves or not, history materializes just in the text: “And in arguing that history does not exist except as text, it does not stupidly and “gleefully” deny that the past existed, but only that its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality” (HUTCHEON, 2003, p. 16). This finding is so evident – and maybe irrefutable – that it was not contested even by Ginzburg, who also identified historiography as rhetoric, therefore, as a linguistic practice.

Resuming the dialogue with Benjamin, despite this philosopher have not developed a systematized philosophy on history, in his text *On the Concept of History*, precisely in the seventh “thesis”, he classifies historiography as a historicism of “the victors”, that is, the historical narratives have usually presented just the victors' version, they are the victor's history, what connects to the “control” to which Cohn (1999) referred, or to the submission to institutions denounced by Certeau (1982). When using the term *victors*, Benjamin refers not only to victors of battles or wars, but to victors in the class struggle, to victors in the battles against or for social justice, as agreed by Löwy (2005) (who is one of the greatest specialists in Benjamin's work). In order to overcome this problem (of a biased historiography), Benjamin concludes his seventh thesis evoking that it is necessary “to brush history against the grain” (BENJAMIN, 2003, p. 392). It is one more Benjaminian metaphor, which implies going against the flow, that is, making a different sense from the official version of history in order to transgress the victor's perspective, and thus giving voice to the oppressed, revealing the invisibles, bringing up the several hidden ideologies and angles on past events.

As an illustration of how some groups can be silenced both in historical and literary narratives, Hutcheon (2003, p. 107) inquires: “where are the women in the traditional histories of the eighteenth century?” Hutcheon points out the historiographic metafiction as a novelistic subgenre that contests the official historical versions, or it even elaborates different plots (from other angles) for existing literary works. She illustrates it with the novel *Foe*, published in 1986 by the South-African writer Michael Coetzee. In this novel, a female character, Susan Barton, who also had shipwrecked on the same island of Robinson Crusoe, brings to Daniel

¹⁴ Original: “Somente o romance extrairia de notícias legadas o retrato completo de uma época passada, e transformaria esta para o leitor em uma vivência imediata”.

Defoe (the author of the previous novel) her version of the history (story) to be narrated. In other words, Robinson Crusoe's plot would be just a certain view of the events, but Susan Barton presents a different perspective on the same or different events. This would be a kind of history *against the grain*, as Benjamin wanted, but, in this case, in a literary narrative. It is certain that the characters and the events narrated both in Defoe's and Coetzee's novels are completely fictional, but it represents a kind of craving for multiple views of events, a trend of postmodernists.

Just to illustrate it with a Brazilian historiographical case, one can search the voice (narrative) of the native Indians, or the Africans in the Brazilian colonial system, and nothing will be found. Who narrates the history of Brazil? In this regard, a great observation is made by Ribeiro (2006, p. 27, free translation): "we only have the testimony of one of the protagonists, the invader".¹⁵ And he concludes: "What the very copious documentation tells us is the version of the dominator" (RIBEIRO, 2006, p. 27, free translation).¹⁶

Therefore, one can notice that historiography and literature can silence or exclude people, events, and especially speeches. The attenuation of this problem seems to have been one of the purposes – not the only one – of the notion of Ginzburgian microhistory, which, based on the trajectories of subordinate characters, tries to demonstrate a different version, the perspective of the despoiled on certain historical events, such as presented in his work *The Cheese and the Worms*, in which he narrates a different version of the Inquisition in northern Italy from the perspective of a miller (GINZBURG, 2006).

The historical novel: a literary subgenre that narrates history

Taking into account the discussion about the interconnection between history and literature, it is important to promote a brief reflection on the historical novel and its subcategories: historiographic metafiction, regionalist novel, foundational novel, and formation novel, as striking examples of this interface. Since its origin is attributed by most researchers to *Don Quixote*, by Cervantes, the Romanesque genre would be relatively new, a product of Modernity¹⁷. In this sense, it would represent a kind of modern bourgeois epic (LUKÁCS, 2000). This literary genre has always presented an indescribable hybridism and a

¹⁵ Original: "só temos o testemunho de um dos protagonistas, o invasor".

¹⁶ Original: "O que a documentação copiosíssima nos conta é a versão do dominador".

¹⁷ It is important to emphasize that it is a eurocentric classification, because there are other literary works of this kind in other continents, like the Japanese work *Genji Monogatari* (History of Genji), which is attributed to the writer Murasaki Shikibu, and this work presents features of the modern romanescque genre. Published in the eleventh century, it would be the first novel in history.

notable multivocality (BAKHTIN, 1993). It is an unfinished genre, and, at this point, Lukács and Bakhtin are in agreement.¹⁸

Among the features that make the novel a new literary genre is the fact that it has abolished the classic division of literary genres: dramatic, epic, and lyrical; which have become insufficient to define it. The novel proves to be more free and multilingual than its predecessors, by making simultaneous use of different textual genres, such as narration, description, drama, essay, commentary, monologue, fable, history, apology, idyll, chronicle, short story, epic, etc. (ROBERT, 2007). Among the various characteristics of the novel, especially the historical novel, there is a notorious matter of historical extraction, which leads Lukács (2000) to perceive it closer to the epic, precisely because he identifies the historical element in both genres (the epic and the novel), although these narratives mostly resort to mythical, legendary, and imaginary fields. Bastos (2007) agrees with this point by seeing in the novel and in the epic achievements of the same literary genre: the epic. This theorist believes that the role of the epic for the ancients was the same as that played by the novel for the bourgeois society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the novel, even when it deviates from the matter of historical extraction, a fund of reality is always needed to be accepted. This background would be printed on the verisimilitude that its narrative construction provides, as well as on the credibility that the characters must transmit, as identified, for example, in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, or in Dostoevski's *Raskolnikov* (DÖBLIN, 2006).

In his study on the historical novel, Bastos (2007) explains that, while the epic is structured in two planes (the historical and the marvelous), the novel preserved the historical plan, but replaced the marvelous (which would be the mythical) with the fictional. The permanence of the historical plan and the substitution of the marvelous for the fictional would reveal in the novel a mimesis that provides a convincing narrative. And the quintessential example of this type of mimesis would probably be the historical novel.

With Walter Scott, Alexandre Dumas, and Leon Tolstói (in Brazil, José de Alencar) as the main precursors, the historical novel has bypassed the collective imaginary (ESTEVEZ, 2010). It was during the nineteenth century that it emerged in Brazil, out of the romanticists' ambition to build a national identity and to register the historical processes that the country was going through. In such a way, one can understand that the Brazilian novel was born paired with the historical novel. *Um roubo na Pavuna* (A robbery in Pavuna [1843]), by

¹⁸ They converge in this point, but they disagree about the origin of the Romanesque genre, seen by Lukács as the modern epic, but pointed by Bakhtin as a new genre, which would be not linked to the classic epic.

Azambuja Suzano, was pointed by Antonio Candido (1971) as the first Brazilian historical novel, although it is in the Alencarian work that this genre finds its consolidation, with *O Guarani* (The Guarani [1857]), *As Minas de Prata* (The Silver Mines [1865]), *Iracema* (1865), *Guerra dos Mascates* (War of the Peddlers [1871]), and *Ubirajara* (1874). Writers such as Machado de Assis, Euclides da Cunha, Graciliano Ramos, Érico Veríssimo, among many others, would continue to work on this subgenre.

However, precisely delineating the elements that turn a narrative into a historical novel becomes a thorny task, given the diversity of characteristics that have accompanied this subgenre since Walter Scott, which leads Bastos to conclude that “the term historical novel is no longer able, today, to account for the fictional utilization of historical extraction material” (BASTOS, 2007, p. 78, free translation).¹⁹ However, while recognizing the essential hybridism of the historical novel, this theorist tries to outline some of its characteristics: the narrated content must include matter of historical extraction, including both the action and the characters. Both must necessarily affect and be affected by a historical event. Furthermore, the post-Scott's historical novel has brought a combination of historical and fictional characters, but the latter are condemned to fiction, while those, although reinvented, always evoke the respective historical figure. In other words, fictional characters will always be recognized as a fictional creation, but historical characters in fictional writing tend to be associated with their respective historical character. Bastos adds that, to be a historical novel, the narrated material must refer to a time before its writing.

Still on the historical novel, Esteves (2010) retraces the path of this Romanesque subgenre based on the Scottian model, identifying its ramifications and demonstrating the complexity to define it. The theorist agrees with Bastos by verifying in the Scottian model an action that occurs in a past prior to the writer, and a balance between fantasy and reality in the narrative structure, which promotes an illusion of realism at the same time that it represents an escape to an unsatisfactory reality. In this model, there are fictional characters, even if the action is related to historical events. However, this model changes its composition as one can observe in subsequent historical novels, following the example of *Cinq-Mars*, published in 1826 by the French poet Alfred de Vigny, in which there is a rescue of historical characters and a greater concentration on individual actions instead of the collective movement.

With Flaubert, the historical novel receives new characteristics, when the writer offers, in *Salambó*, published in 1862, detailed descriptions of the historical environment, including

¹⁹ Original: “o termo romance histórico já não é capaz, hoje, de dar conta do aproveitamento ficcional em prosa da matéria de extração histórica”.

habits, clothing, weapons, but in distant and exotic places and times, with no connection with his private life. A peculiar example of the change in the configuration of the novel is Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, consecrated as a masterpiece of universal literature for offering a fusion between fiction and history in a more “fluid and vital” way (ESTEVEES, 2010, p. 33). With a realism and richness of details that are incomparable, this voluminous novel – with its hundreds of characters and more than a thousand pages – refers to the Napoleonic period in Russia, focused on portraying the Franco-Russian relationship from 1805 to 1820.

It becomes evident, therefore, that the nuances of the historical novel are always connected to the tendencies of its “literary school”, if one can call it that. While the romantic historical novel, for example, emerges as a forger and legitimizer of nationality, which was the main aspiration of Brazilian romantics, the realistic historical novel, in turn, as in Tolstoy, usually brings chronicles, or a mimesis more focused on reality.

Esteves (2010) also suggests the advent of a “new historical novel”, a product of postmodernity, linked to a critical reinterpretation of history. It is a narrative that challenges the official versions of the history and provides multiple perspectives. This new model would be stamped on what Hutcheon (1991) classified as historiographic metafiction, already stated in the previous section. *João Abade* by João Felício dos Santos would be aligned with this subcategory, by removing the episode of the Canudos War from the usual perspective of the “civilized” white man and placing it from the view of the vanquished. The novel breaks with the traditional version portrayed in the Euclidean work, and it unveils the version of the “fanatics” of the Canudos community. A novel that also follows this same line is *Viva o Povo Brasileiro* (Long Live the Brazilian People), by João Ubaldo Ribeiro, by offering a parodic rewriting of Brazilian history, capturing its essence through carnivalization, in Bakhtinian terms. The Ubaldian novel reframes the false heroes acclaimed by the history of the victors. With its Portuguese, Dutch, black, and native Indian characters, the plot denounces the mentality of the model of the *casa-grande e senzala* (big house and slave quarters), and it brings the slave struggles to end this system, in addition to miscegenation based on rape. In these conflicts, the work brings together the Lusitanian and Brazilian cultures, the so-called erudite and popular cultures. Tensions of this nature can also be identified in *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (The Devil to Pay in the Backlands), by Guimarães Rosa, whose conflicts in the (lack of) dialogues between the literate and the non-literate are among its main themes (BOLLE, 2004).

It is precisely this social criticism, this chorus of the many, that would provide a primordial character for the constitution of a genuine historical novel, according to literary

critic Carpeaux, when declaring that “The authentic historical novel performs a 'revision of values', resurrecting the losers, giving a voice to those that History, this *fable convenue*, silenced” (CARPEAUX, 2005, p. 449)²⁰. He believes, therefore, that only a historiographic metafiction would reveal an authentic historical novel, which implies a more social and political than a critical-literary position, as if literature always had the duty to challenge the social conjuncture and to assume an (considered as) ethical attitude. Such a perspective would most belong to the social sciences (at least as an intent), but it would not always apply to the arts. One should notice that the notion of ethics is also historically and geographically variable. It is as quick-moving as philosophy, or human thought itself. Thus, the “revision of values” sought by this critic would not be free of ideological perspectives.

Within the subgenre of historical novels, the term 'regionalist novel' has also been used frequently – mainly in the textbooks adopted by schools in Brazilian basic education – to refer to works in which the action is located in the backlands, or peripheral regions of the country. If this concept is considered, the Franklin Távora's writings would fit this definition, in novels like *O Cabeleira* (The Head of Hair), from 1876, which narrates the “history” of the bandit José Gomes in the environment of the drought of the Brazilian northeastern backland; or *O Matuto* (The Rustic Man), from 1878, and Lourenço, from 1881, both contextualized in Recife during the period of the War of the Peddlers. Novels such as *Os farrapos* (1877), by Luís Alves Leite de Oliveira Bello, and *Vida e Morte de Natividade Saldanha* (Life and Death of Natividade Saldanha [1932]), by Argeu Guimarães, would also fill in this subcategory. However, this conception does not seem very appropriate because it carries a value judgment that discriminates some places and/or subjects as peripheral, or marginal, by calling them “regionalists”. We argue that this view is inappropriate because, in the context of a large country like Brazil, with not only an ethnic-racial complexity, but also geological and socio-organizational, as can be seen in the presence of ruralisms in coastal areas and urbanization in the backlands – and this could not be a criterion for this distinction –, what would be the periphery or the backlands in the sense of classifying some literary works as regionalist and others not? The assumptions that generate these distinctions seem to be based on a pre-judgment without convincing foundations, characterizing them as prejudiced.

Some historical novels may refer to a subcategory named foundation novel, characterized as “narratives that are linked to the theme of the constitution of nationality”

²⁰ Original: “O autêntico romance histórico realiza uma ‘revisão de valores’, ressuscitando os vencidos, dando uma voz aos que a História, essa *fable convenue*, silenciou”.

(HELENA, 1991, p. 20, free translation).²¹ As in João Ubaldo's *Viva o Povo Brasileiro*, the reflection is intimately linked to the “examination of contamination between literature and society” (HELENA, 1991, p. 22-23, free translation).²² In clearer terms, the founding novel resorts to the past in search of the founding elements of a nation. Thus, the concept of a foundation novel is based on the imagetic-discursive construction of a national identity. When dealing with the theme of identity construction, we can observe that the concept of the Brazilian nation and its specific features have in the literary creations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries not only one of their main sources, but also a strong catalyst. Works such as *Iracema*, *Macunaíma* and *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, among many others, played a decisive role in the invention of what we could call *Brazilianness*. In *Iracema*, for example, there is a founding novel, by elaborating – even though in a romantic way – the legend of the foundation of (the state of) Ceará. The work concentrates on the native indian Iracema the metaphor of a still unexplored, virgin place, as Brazil was before colonization. The character Moacir, son of Iracema and a white warrior, establishes creolization as one of the foundations, especially interethnic, of Brazilian identity.

There is no doubt that the Brazilian romantic literary project of invention of national identity had strong European influences, as it should be remembered that the French Ferdinand Denis, who had lived in Brazil at the time, encouraged Brazilian writers to follow the same themes addressed by Chateaubriand: the wild nature and the Indians. It should also be remembered that the work of Gonçalves de Magalhães and Araújo Porto-Alegre in the romantic Paris in 1836, through *Nitheroy, Brasiliense Magazine of Sciences, Letters and Arts*, boosted the romantic movement in Brazil (PERRONE-MOISÉS, 2007). However, this phenomenon would be pointed out by Antonio Candido (1971) as a way of showing Europe that, on the one hand, Brazilian ancestors were as noble as the knights of the European Middle Ages, and, on the other hand, that the natural landscape of this new continent would be more beautiful and imposing than that of the Old World. Thus, a romantic Frenchism characterized as “emulation” is identified in this antagonism (PERRONE-MOISÉS, 2007, p. 58).

Still on the construction of national identity, although with very different views from romantic novels, the modernist novel *Macunaíma*, by Mário de Andrade, with its set of myths and popular traditions, places in the figure of its protagonist (Macunaíma) a mix of the three Brazilian ethnicities (the native Indian, the black, and the white), and the (de)construction of identity of a hero, that is, an upside-down hero. Characterized by ambivalence (intelligent and

²¹ Original: “narrativas que se vinculam ao tema da constituição da nacionalidade”.

²² Original: “exame da contaminação entre literatura e sociedade”.

passionate, but lazy and sensual), this anti-hero represents the multiplicity of identities, if not the absence of an identity, given the hybrid nature of Brazilian culture also identified in the romantic novel *Iracema*, although *Macunaíma* differs significantly from the romantic project by abandoning what we could define as a fanatical pride – identified in many Brazilian romantic novels – in favor of a universal and innovative view for the time: a comic, ironic, linguistic innovative narrative, among other aspects. Perrone-Moisés (2007, p. 73) recognizes Mário de Andrade as “a great thinker of Brazilian identity”, who turns away from both galophilia and galophobia, taking, instead, a “realistic and lucid” stance. Although the writer has firstly seen in *Macunaíma* a work of entertainment, it became an icon not of Brazilian identity, as the theoretical essays usually place it, but of a “national entity”, an expression used by the writer himself. As interpreted by Perrone-Moisés (2007, p. 191), the use of this expression is more appropriate, since the term “identity” presupposes the existence of an “essence” and an “origin”. But *Macunaíma*, as a “national entity”, consists of a contradictory being that still is under construction.

Returning to the case of the founding novel, very close to what is identified in this subcategory are the foundational elements elucidated by Bolle (2004) in his analysis of *Grande Sertão: Veredas*. In his study, the theorist points out this narrative as a formation novel (*Bildungsroman*) from Brazil, because it narrates the development of an individual hero (Riobaldo), but with remarkable characteristics of the social novel, by recovering the founding bases of the country established in the classic essays of history and social sciences, so-called portraits of Brazil, by Paulo Prado, Darcy Ribeiro, Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Caio Prado Jr. In Bolle's terms, the Rosian novel stages social antagonisms, such as “the archeology of serfdom, the history of labor, the relations between the city and the hinterland, the regime of evictions, the social problem and the identity of a 'people' and a 'nation' ”(BOLLE, 2004, p. 377, free translation).²³ In these antagonisms, there would be the basic elements of the country's formation. If the *Bildungsroman* has in the individual hero the central guide to reach the autonomy aspired by the individual in their conflicts with the laws of society, the founding novel, in turn, unveils the social tensions in the collective movement and the founding elements of a people and a place. In other words, the founding novel does not invest in a specific hero. Thus, the concept of *Bildungsroman* has proved to be quite loose, fitting only in its founding work: Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (OLIVEIRA, 2013).

²³ Original: “a arqueologia da servidão, a história da mão-de-obra, as relações entre cidade e sertão, o regime de desmandos, o problema social e a identidade do ‘povo’ e da ‘nação’”.

Therefore, the historical novel (alongside historiography) can offer a significant record of the past, by preserving memories of historical events and places, and by instigating the examination of social relations that "has happened" or "might have happened" in the interdiscursive dialogue with both other literary works and the historiographical essays.

Conclusion

When recognizing historiography as nothing more than a linguistic construct full of stylistic-literary resources, and literature, in turn, especially the historical novel, as having some freedom in the face of scientific dogmas, we argue that literary narratives can promote a prominent and impacting portrait of history for both researchers and readers in general.

Taking into account the relativization of the scientificity of historiography, we should also conclude that this essay consists of an attempt to bring historiography and literature together as confluent narrative forms. In other words, if historiography and literature are so close in their textuality, there is both an informative and reflective historical value contained in literature and a plot, aesthetics and literariness in historiography.

Thus, there is a matter of historical extraction in some literary texts that can sometimes coincide with historiography, and other times extend it, as we can verify in some classics of literature such as *The Three Musketeers*, by Alexandre Dumas, *Eurico, the Elder*, by Alexandre Herculano, *War and Peace*, by Leon Tolstoy, *Memorial do Convento*, by José Saramago, *Minas de Prata* and *A Guerra dos Mascates*, by José de Alencar, *Os Sertões*, by Euclides da Cunha, among many other titles that have left a historical legacy in literary form.

Under such a position, one should not lose sight of the fact that, if on the one hand the notion of "reality", or "historical truth", is on a slippery and diffuse ground, being inaccurate its boundaries with the fictional, on the other hand, this is not limited to the fictitious. That is, the terms fiction and fictitious are not synonymous. "The only reason that the phrase 'fictional truth' is not an oxymoron, as 'fictitious truth' would be, is that fiction is a genre whereas lies are not" (RIFFATERRE, 1990, p. 01).

Hence, different from lying, fiction does not imply mere falsehood, even if it does not transmit "accurate" information. The fact that Riobaldo from *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, by Guimarães Rosa, or Fabiano from *Vidas Secas*, by Graciliano Ramos, are nothing more than fictional characters does not imply a lie, or a deceit, because they represent a kind of metonymy of subjects from the real world. They represent the many "Riobaldos" and "Fabianos" scattered in the society. Thus, fictional means "contained in a work of fiction", and fictitious means "inaccurate" (PAVEL, 1990, p. 18).

The conception that fiction presupposes the unreal or the fictitious does not help today. The dichotomy between fiction and reality is broken by a third dimension: the imaginary (ISER, 2002). This triadic vision, in addition to establishing the imaginary as a dynamic element of fiction (and certainly of historiography), reveals that the possible does not end in reality, but can act in fiction through the imaginary. There are many literary works that have offered excerpts of the real: “The literary fictional incorporates, albeit in a veiled or esoteric way, portions of reality” (LIMA, 2006, p. 282),²⁴ but they go far beyond it with the field of the imaginary.

Finally, we presume that the relativization of narratives as a representation of reality is somehow a result of an era of uncertainty, a moment that questions the truths of the past, which would be a position symptomatic of postmodernism, but that, at the same time, fragilizes the place of science as a specific area, or as a given kind of method to achieve consistent results.

²⁴ Original: “O ficcional literário incorpora, ainda que de maneira velada ou esotérica, parcelas da realidade”.
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