

# How to narrate the voice of the other? A conversation about the portrait(s) of nineteenth-century Brazilian regionalism with Ana Karla Canarinos

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It is with great enthusiasm that we announce the national interview of issue number 50 of *Palimpsesto* – the journal of the graduate student body of the Graduate Program in Letters at UERJ – with Professor Ana Karla Carvalho Canarinos.

Ana Karla Canarinos holds a Bachelor's degree in Portuguese Language and Literature from the Universidade Federal do Paraná and a Master's degree in Letters (Literary Studies) from the same institution, as well as a Master's degree in Études Lusophones from Université Lumière Lyon 2. She also holds a PhD in Literary Theory from UNICAMP. She works as an Assistant Professor of Brazilian Literature at UERJ, where she conducts research in literary theory and Brazilian literature, serves as coordinator of the Specialization Program in Brazilian Literature (UERJ), and currently coordinates the project “Regionalismos e ensino de literatura brasileira”. She published the book *Além da Formação: teoria e crítica literárias no Brasil em chave comparativa (anos 1960–1980)* (2024) and has participated in the organization of several volumes, such as *Questões linguísticas, literárias, artísticas e históricas em países de língua portuguesa* (2025), *Leituras do Brasil: Literatura, teoria e sociedade* (2025), *Literatura Brasileira em Foco XI: cânone, crítica e revisão* (2025), *Há mundo por vir? Sousândrade pela crítica contemporânea* (2025), and *Literatura brasileira em foco X: cânone: margens e rupturas* (2024). In addition, she has published numerous articles and book chapters in the field of Brazilian literary studies, including “Um debate sobre a

intraduzibilidade do regionalismo brasileiro”, “Regionalismo revisitado: linguagem, narração, tradução” among many others.

Professor Ana Karla’s contribution to this space represents not only an honor, but also a valuable opportunity to deepen several important critical reflections in the field of Literary Studies – more specifically, Brazilian Literature. In this interview, we are invited to reflect on a set of issues surrounding the representation of certain characters present in nineteenth-century Brazilian regionalist novels. Above all, the conversation focuses on the varied forms of translation of this regionalism, the role of the narrator in these texts, and the problematic elaboration of poor characters in these works, all considered within a broader historical, cultural, and literary context that shapes narrative construction. Drawing on an impressive theoretical foundation, the professor demonstrates the complexity of the *sertanejo* portrait found in Brazilian novels of the 1870s, encouraging us to analyze these works from a different literary perspective.

We are deeply grateful for Professor Ana Karla Canarinos’s generous willingness to share her experience, perspectives, hypotheses, and the results of her research project with us. Without a doubt, her remarks greatly enrich this issue of the *Miscelânea*, reaffirming *Palimpsesto*’s commitment to academic excellence and in-depth dialogue. We hope readers will enjoy it!

## **PALIMPESTO**

1) You propose, in your article “Um debate sobre a intraduzibilidade do regionalismo brasileiro” (Canarinos, 2024), a rupture with the Brazilian critical and historiographical tradition that treats regionalist aesthetics as “um déficit formal que precisa ser superado” (p. 162) and, consequently, as a symptom of the country’s “underdevelopment”. Through your reading – grounded in the perspective of translation (as opposed to acclimatization) – we observe that you propose another mode of analysis for the role of realism and the formal strategies used to represent the voices of *sertanejos* and marginalized characters in regionalist novels. In your view, as a researcher and scholar of Brazilian literary criticism, what is the critical weight of this singular reading for contemporary studies of regionalist aesthetics?

## **ANA KARLA CARVALHO CANARINOS**

Before answering the question, I would like to thank the editors of *Palimpsesto* journal for their kind invitation. Likewise, I find it important to revisit part of my intellectual trajectory in order to explain how I arrived at the theme of regionalism – my current object of research. I began reading nineteenth-century Brazilian regionalist novels when I was still in undergraduate research at UFPR. During my doctoral studies, the theme returned as a problem, but from a distinct perspective: that of the history of criticism. In my doctoral dissertation *Além da formação* (2024), I selected three axes through which to think about the critical and theoretical convergences and divergences between Roberto Schwarz, Silviano Santiago, Luiz Costa Lima and José Guilherme Merquior: the structuralism, the regionalism and the modernism. The discussion of structuralism was highly controversial, particularly because the theoretical debate became entangled with political conflicts due to the repressive context of the Military Dictatorship. Flora Sussekind, in *Literatura e vida literária*, discusses in detail the viewpoints concerning the arrival of literary theory in Brazil, as well as its political relations.

Returning to the question of regionalism, critical positions largely converge, especially with regard to Romantic regionalism. Lúcia Miguel Pereira, in *Prosa de ficção (de 1870 a 1920)*, points out that “a haver, com efeito, uma constante na nossa literatura, será a da predominância da observação sobre a invenção, pouco inclinados às abstrações, os nossos escritores, ainda os românticos, lidaram [...] com a realidade” (Miguel-pereira, 1988, p. 175). The deficit of regionalist prose “cai frequentemente num artificialismo quase teatral: a língua, os gestos, os sentimentos típicos demais emprestam às figuras aparência de atores” (Miguel-pereira, 1988, p. 176). Agrippino Grieco, in *Evolução da prosa brasileira*, emphasizes that “em geral, são os nossos regionalistas de um realismo primário, que deve representar não só a ingenuidade, mas também a preguiça, horror à cultura, aversão à língua e à arte de escrever” (Grieco, 1947, p. 102). Antonio Candido, in the well-known essay “Literatura e a formação do homem,” also characterizes regional aesthetics as a symptom of underdevelopment. When Agrippino Grieco asserts that our regionalists aesthetically elaborate a “primary realism,” he is reiterating the existence of a mismatch between European realism and what is in fact formalized in the nineteenth-century Brazilian novel. The formal deficit arises both from the excess of observation,

whose action hinders the strengthening of imagination, and from the disjunction between the language of the cultivated narrator and that of the illiterate character. From this perspective, the acclimatization of the novel form, as well as of realism, presupposes an aesthetic hierarchization in which the nineteenth-century regionalist novel is always demoted, whether as primary realism, as underdeveloped, or as deficient.

By contrast, thinking in the translation – both of the novel form and realism – makes it possible to view the regionalism as an aesthetic that values the differences, precisely because it encompasses the coexistence of multiple languages – the cultivated narrator’s and the illiterate character’s – within the same. The intervallic position between the narrator’s culture and the *sertanejo* culture would be precisely the element that reveals the very fictionality of regionalism, while at the same time exposing the inventiveness of Brazilian literature. The intraduzibility of regionalism – that is, its multiple possibilities of translation – breaks with the documentary criterion and foregrounds difference and invention.

## **PALIMPSESTO**

2) The considerations of Jacques Rancière (*O fio perdido: ensaios sobre a ficção moderna*, 2017), regarding the realist novel, are fundamental to understanding the aesthetic effect produced by the entry of subjects considered insignificant and socially marginalized into fiction. According to his analysis, when these subjects appear as characters in regionalist novels, this issue becomes even more compelling. Considering the connection you establish between the notion of “literary democracy”, proposed in Rancière’s reflection, and the formal strategies used to represent the voices of *sertanejos* characters, could you assess the extent to which Brazilian regionalism has a singular effect through this literary configuration?

## **ANA KARLA CARVALHO CANARINOS**

One of the major impasses of regionalist aesthetics lies in the problem of representation. How can a poor character be given a voice? According to Jacques Rancière’s politics of fiction, realism was responsible for including the “trabalhador rural, palafrenero, mendigo, ajudante de cozinha, ajudante de boticário, coveiro, vagabundo e a mulher que lava a louça” (Rancière, 2017, p. 23). Antonio Candido, in *Formação da*

*literatura brasileira*, states that “quanto à matéria, o romance brasileiro nasceu regionalista e de costumes; ou melhor, pendeu desde cedo para a descrição dos tipos humanos e formas de vida social nas cidades e no campo” (Candido, 2012, p. 586). The critic assumes that the beginnings of our fiction are traversed by the massive presence of the poor, *jagunços*, *matutos*, especially in rural novels. As previously mentioned, it is common sense to consider Romanticism as the precursor of regionalist aesthetics, whose function is permeated by the description of “tipos humanos, paisagens e costumes considerados tipicamente brasileiros” (Candido, 2012, p. 87) through a veristic and picturesque notation. This may lead us to think that Brazilian fiction was born within the aesthetic order, according to Rancière’s theory of the politics of fiction.

However, the distinct temporality regarding the consolidation of the capitalist regime in Brazil complicates the problem. Our poor characters are not petit-bourgeois, as is the case of the rural worker in France, and one of the “knots” is obviously the persistence of slavery. The problems arising from the impasses surrounding the “bourgeois revolution” in the country bring linguistic, formal, and structural questions to the national novel form, and literary criticism, to a large extent, interprets regionalism as an excess of nationalism, whose characteristics would be detrimental to the full development of the genre in Brazil. Both an excess of universalism and an excess of regionalism are analyzed by Candido as consequences of underdevelopment. In *Para além das palavras: representação e realidade em Antonio Candido*, Anita de Moraes highlights that the main objective of *Formação* would be the integration of the national literary system into the Western literary system, “sem simplesmente depender dos países-fonte (metropolitanos, imperialistas, desenvolvidos), mas também os influenciando (mesmo que não por meio da criação autóctone de formas, apenas por meio de seu refinamento)” (Moraes, 2015, p. 134). For this reason, in order for this relationship of reciprocity between the Western system and the national system to take place, it is necessary to overcome economic and, consequently, cultural underdevelopment. Beyond the excess of particularization, regionalist literature oscillates between an idealization of the *sertão* and a kind of caricature of human types. Both idealization and caricature generate the reification of social relations: “[o regionalismo] tende a anular o aspecto humano em benefício de um pitoresco que se estende também à fala e ao gesto, [...] É uma verdadeira alienação do homem dentro da literatura, uma reificação da sua substância

espiritual” (Candido, 2012, p. 617). The reification of spiritual substance to which Antonio Candido refers seems to point to the perennial dialectic between the local and the universal, since regionalism most often functions – except in the prose of Guimarães Rosa, or in a certain Alencar, or even in the production of Afonso Arinos – as an overflow of the particular at the expense of a supposed universality of form, so strongly advocated by our critics since the nineteenth-century.

Poor characters and linguistic duplicity lie at the core of the problem. The need to be accepted as Western and to enter the ranks of the great universal literatures has consistently diminished regionalist aesthetics due to the supposed dehumanization of its characters. Although the European historical context, addressed by Jacques Rancière, is entirely distinct from the Brazilian slaveholding reality, it is interesting to consider that one of the central aspects of the passage from the representative order to the aesthetic order lies precisely in the entry of common and poor people into the center of dramatic action. According to the theorist, in nineteenth-century plots we find “a descoberta de uma capacidade inédita de homens e das mulheres do povo de obter formas de experiência que lhes eram, até então, recusadas” (Rancière, 2017, p. 19). In Brazil, returning to the citation from *Formação* that “quanto à matéria, o romance brasileiro nasceu regionalista e de costumes; ou melhor, pendeu desde cedo para a descrição dos tipos humanos e formas de vida social nas cidades e no campo” (Candido, 2012, p. 586), that is, Brazilian literature was born from the representation of those from below, and this can be read through an aesthetic lens that accounts for our specificities and the modernity of our prose. Nevertheless, it is not possible to think about literary democracy or the politics of our fiction detached from our historical specificities.

### **PALIMPSESTO**

3) In “A literatura e a formação do homem,” Antonio Candido proposes a reflection on a possible formative function of an educational nature attributed to literature. Starting from the idea that “civilized countries”, in Candido’s words, base their instruction on letters, the author points to the possibility that literature may have a function of humanizing man. For the purposes of the discussion, by way of example, several excerpts from regionalist texts that chose to represent their characters in different ways are mentioned. Throughout the exposition, Candido seems to “save” the short story by Simões Lopes Neto for having

“humanized” the character, whereas Coelho Neto’s text would offer a picturesque and exotic representation. How do you understand this humanizing function proposed by Antonio Candido through literature, and to what extent do nineteenth-century regionalist novels approximate or distance themselves from this idea?

### **ANA KARLA CARVALHO CANARINOS**

One of the questions that Anita Moraes poses in her book, *Para além das palavras: representação e realidade em Antonio Candido* (2015) is how does the humanization of the human occur in Antonio Candido's work? Throughout his work, Candido reveals his image of the nation, one that is removed from any difference capable of destabilizing the unified image of Brazil advocated by Rio de Janeiro’s urban novels. The annulment of the human aspect, denounced by the critic in regionalist literature, ultimately points to the desire to erase this Other who would supposedly hinder a representation of Brazil more adequately aligned with European universal standards. The raw base reality of Romantic regionalism does not achieve sufficient elaboration because it fails to work adequately form, style and literary expression. Regionalist writers grope the country, creating different metaphors and images of discovery and interpretation of Brazil, and with each new work, Brazil incorporates more of its reality and consequently becomes more aware of itself.

Candido seems to emphasize a vision of the nation distinct from that of different theorists of nationalism, such as Benedict Anderson in *Comunidades Imaginadas*, Eric Hobsbawm in *Nação e nacionalismo*, and Craig Calhoun in “O nacionalismo importa.” Despite the differences among these three theorists of the nation, all agree that nationalism invents the nation, and not the other way around. For Candido, Brazil exists prior to artistic elaboration, but is unconscious of itself. Therefore, the task of novelists is to give consciousness to this Brazil that already exists prior to literature. For Calhoun, as well as for Anderson and Hobsbawm, “o nacionalismo é uma formação discursiva que dá forma ao mundo moderno [...] que ajuda a constituir nações como dimensões reais e poderosas da vida social. As nações não existem ‘objetivamente’ antes de existirem em termos discursivos” (Calhoun, 2008, p. 37). Fischer’s critique of Candido’s unitary Brazil – “Primeiro de tudo, é um Brasil unitário, considerando o que ele diz sobre a história da literatura” (Fischer, 2021, p. 119) – also coincides with the idea of Brazil as an *a priori*

concept. According to Candido, Brazil already exists, it merely needs to gain space in the consciousness of our writers so that we may finally achieve universality. From this perspective, everything that diverges from this preconceived and unified Brazil must be marginalized or civilized in order to conform to the demands of European literary form. This vision articulated in *Formação* becomes clearer in the essays “Literatura e subdesenvolvimento” and “A literatura e a formação do homem”.

Brazilian regionalism, while it gains on the one hand from the emphasis on Brazilian raw material, on the other hand often fails to properly acclimatize the European form. The attempt to represent Brazil’s interior undertaken by José de Alencar, Franklin Távora and Bernardo Guimarães introduced important elements in the self-identification of the inland Brazilian, however, while this identification may humanize, it also alienates, precisely because of the underdevelopment and lack of cultivation that prevail in Brazil’s rural regions. The idea is to think about the representation of poor characters in regionalist novels detached from the idea of humanism, civilization and progress.

#### **PALIMPSESTO**

4) Still with regard to the idea of function, the nineteenth-century Brazilian regionalist novel also seems to invest in this conception insofar as authors often appear to be “attached” to their narrators. In *Til*, a novel from 1872 by José de Alencar, for example, we find the following passage: “Não era ele desses que lançavam à conta dos ricos e fartos a culpa da sua pobreza, e se despeitam contra o mundo da ingratitude da fortuna. Aceitava sua condição como um fato natural e com certa filosofia prática, rara em mancebos” (Alencar, 2012, p. 107). In this passage, we can perceive that, beyond simple narration, there is a kind of intrusion, an attempt to moralize the reader. Could you comment further on this characteristic and on how it relates to the idea of attributing a certain pedagogical function to literature?

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In the fiction of the 1870s there is a recurrent presence of the intrusive narrator with a pedagogical and moralizing function. Fernando Cerisara Gil, in *A matéria rural e a formação do romance brasileiro: configurações do romance rural*, characterizes the narrative form of nineteenth-century regionalism as hypertrophic: “Um narrador que se

poderia chamar de narrador hipertrófico. Com isso quer-se referir à presença excessiva, muitas vezes desmedida e desproporcional do narrador com relação aos outros elementos de composição (personagens, relatos de ação, processos descritivos etc.). Ele contém o narrador intruso, aquele que comenta ou opina, mas o ultrapassa” (Gil, 2020, p. 63). It is not merely a matter of intrusion, it goes beyond that, configuring itself in an excessive and disproportionate manner, which is related to the specificity of our historical formation, to the ideological movements between urban and rural spaces and to the violence that permeates social relations in Brazil. Everything is controlled by the narrator’s voice: characters, space, plot and time.

In this respect also lies our particularity in relation to European realism. Franco Moretti, in the well-known essay “O século sério”, argues that seriousness is formally configured in fiction through the emergence of fillings (*preenchimentos*). According to Moretti, “a bifurcação é um ‘possível desdobramento da trama; o preenchimento não, é aquilo que acontece entre uma mudança e outra” (Moretti, 2009, p. 826). The realism, from this perspective, was the aesthetic responsible for the proliferation of fillings, while bifurcations (*bifurcações*) decreased drastically. In Brazil, bifurcations are predominant and function as the *modus operandi* of prose in the rural space. The aim of this research is to continue mapping these characteristics in order to develop a characterization of a Brazilian peripheral realism.

## **PALIMPSESTO**

5) Still considering the concept of “literary democracy”, proposed by Rancière, we observe that, despite the entry of popular characters into fiction, the treatment afforded to them in nineteenth-century Brazilian regionalism is not uniform. In the novel *Escrava Isaura*, by Bernardo Guimarães, the main character is described as follows: “Acha-se ali sozinha e sentada ao piano uma bela e nobre figura de moça” (Guimarães, 1875, p. 9). The passage continues with a description of Isaura’s various qualities and beauty. Later, in the same novel, the gardener Belchior is portrayed as “um monstrengo afetando formas humanas, um homúnculo em tudo mal construído” (Guimarães, 1875, p. 44). We therefore note that the main characters, even when poor, are most often represented through romanticized descriptions, whereas others are described through a typically naturalistic

and violent prose. How do you perceive the relationship between this idea of literary democracy, realism and violence in the nineteenth-century Brazilian regionalist novel?

### ANA KARLA CARVALHO CANARINOS

Great question! It is precisely this issue that I have been trying to address since I developed the project at UERJ. My hypothesis regarding this duplicity of the nineteenth-century regionalist narrator can be approached through Brazilian social thought, in its different interpretative possibilities. The analysis of Brazilian social and political formation proposed by Oliveira Vianna offers a very interesting thesis for thinking about the conjunction of literary democracy, realism, and violence. In *Populações meridionais do Brasil* (1920), one of the central arguments was that Brazil was not predominantly shaped by class struggle, but by conflict between the public and the private spheres. André Botelho, in *O retorno da sociedade: política e interpretações do Brasil* (2019), argues that the foundation of this particular configuration of Brazilian political domination “estaria numa ambiguidade histórica que nos singularizaria: os mesmos processos que tornavam as relações de solidariedade entre a ‘aristocracia senhorial’ e a ‘plebe rural’ frágeis, frouxas, instáveis, desnecessárias no plano econômico (e secundariamente militar ou religioso), concorreriam para fortalecê-las para efeitos políticos” (Botelho, 2019, p. 38).

Returning to Rancière’s concept of literary democracy, within the logic of the sensible, the characters who perform actions in fiction follow a hierarchy: “há homens que simplesmente veem a coisa lhes acontecer, uma depois da outra, porque vivem na simples esfera da reprodução da vida”, referred to as passive or mechanical men, and therefore excluded from novelistic action. Likewise there are the “active men” or “os que vivem ao nível da totalidade porque são capazes de conceber grandes fins e de tentar realizá-los enfrentando outras vontades e golpes do acaso” (Rancière, 2017, p. 21). This would constitute the political core of the representative order: the Aristotelian organization of actions based on a division between active and passive men. In turn, according to Rancière, this way of organizing fiction also corresponds to the socioeconomic and moral position of the character who occupies the center of action. The realist novel would be precisely a point of inflection in this state of affairs, by introducing what the theorist calls “literary democracy”: “A democracia literária quer dizer gente

demais, excesso de personagens semelhantes a todos os outros, indignos, portanto, de serem distinguidos pela ficção” (Rancière, 2017, p. 22).

Rancière is thinking about the development of French capitalism, whose social organization of production is structured around class struggle. In the Brazilian case, considering our patrimonial structure, the conflict between the public and the private spheres constitutes the social forms assumed by landownership since colonization, and this alters the formal plane of fiction. I believe that violence, the intraduzibility of the language of the *sertanejo*, the *jagunço* and the *matuto*, as well as the massive presence of the poor in fiction, structured through an excess of bifurcations, are some of the defining characteristics of our peripheral realism in the regionalism of the 1870s.

## **PALIMPSESTO**

6) In view of your academic interest in the literary forms of Brazilian regionalism, seeking to break with the traditional paradigms that have sustained negative judgments about regionalist aesthetics in Brazilian literature, we would like to know how your interest in the study of regionalist novels emerged in your trajectory as a researcher and professor of Brazilian Literature and Literary Theory.

## **ANA KARLA CARVALHO CANARINOS**

I believe I ended up anticipating this question and answering it earlier. In any case, my interest in the regionalist novel emerged during my undergraduate studies, when I conducted undergraduate research under the supervision of Professor Fernando Cerisara Gil, at UFPR. For some personal reasons, my academic trajectory then shifted toward poetry. I therefore completed my master’s degree on Sousândrade, under the supervision of Professor Sandra Stroparo, and the aspect that most captured my attention was the critical controversies surrounding the poet. I believe that my master’s research awakened my interest in metacriticism, and for this reason, during my doctoral studies, I examined the disputes within Brazilian literary criticism in the 1970s and 1980s, at Unicamp, under the supervision of Professor Fabio Durão.

I began my doctorate in 2018, so a substantial portion of my thesis was written during the pandemic. As everything was operating remotely, I was able to take a course at UERJ with Professor and friend Nabil Araújo, entitled “Nação, narração e

disseminação” (which is amusing, because at that time I had no idea that I would later become a professor of Brazilian literature precisely at UERJ). The course was extremely important for the writing of my thesis, especially because we read several regionalist authors from the perspective of translation, something that Nabil develops very thoroughly in the article “Nacional por tradução” (2025), published in *Gragoatá* journal. It was in this course that I wrote my chapter on *Bildung* and the critique of regionalism. For this reason, after passing the public examination, I decided to return to researching the topic through the articulation between Brazilian social thought and literary theory.

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