

## **The Reception of Machado de Assis and Clarice Lispector in the United States and Beyond**

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The reception of Machado de Assis and Clarice Lispector in the United States is complicated. And it reflects the larger problem of how Brazil is understood here. In both cases, confusion and ignorance reign supreme. Stereotypes still prevail, and Brazil is often lost in what is an already vague sense of what Americans think of as “Latin America.” Even today, too many readers in the United States define “Latin American” literature in terms of Spanish-America and typified by a kind of writing known here as “magical realism.” While once regarded as a literary technique that could free a writer from the constraints of rote realism, “magical realism” has now become, for too many critics in the United States, a kind of prison, a requirement that all literature from “Latin America” must have in order to be “authentic.” Brazil, where “magical realism” has been little cultivated and to the extent that it is included at all in discussions about “Latin American” literature, has been rendered invisible, less marginalized than simply ignored. This makes the reception of its rich and diverse literature all the more difficult.

The literature of Brazil is exceptional. Since its beginning, in 1500, Brazil has produced a steady stream of authors and texts characterized by a distinctive literature of discovery and settlement, by a powerful narrative tradition (one possessed of a strong sense of self-awareness about itself and its place in the world), by the writing of a modernist movement that is both inventive and politically aware, by a vital tradition both of women writers and of male writers interested in the social, political, and economic position of women in society, and, finally, its

long standing history of race-related writing (see Fitz, Brazilian Narrative Traditions, 181-187). To Brazilianists, foreign and domestic, it is no surprise that, in The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature, volume 3, scholars Roberto González Echevarría, Enrique Pupo-Walker, and David Haberly write that “Brazil’s is the most independent, and perhaps most original, national literature in the New World” (1). I argue a similar point in The Evolution of Literature in the Americas: A Timeline and Commentary, though I maintain that, of all our several American literatures, Brazil’s is the one that most exemplifies the New World experience (22-35; 36-50; et al). The salient point must therefore be emphasized: Brazilian literature is exceptional, and it deserves to rank among the outstanding national literatures of the world.

And with each passing year, it is becoming more and more so recognized. A new global audience is emerging, one less encumbered by old hegemonic thinking and cultural disdain and more interested in learning about Brazil, its people, its culture, and its history. So, to be more precise, we should say that although the reception of Brazilian literature is proceeding, it is not proceeding as rapidly as it should be, given its high quality, its diversity, and its originality. To be sure, this deplorable situation has to do with the amount of Brazilian literature that has been translated. But, until now, it also has to do with simple prejudice, a feeling that Brazil and its literature were not worthy of the world’s attention. From the perspective of readers here in the United States, one has to wonder, moreover, if part of Brazil’s still fraught reception here, has to do with the racism that has long infected U.S. culture. The case of Machado de Assis is particularly vexing in this regard, though it is also true that, particularly with the appearance, in 1962 and in a lively translation by James L. Taylor and William L. Grossman, of Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon, Jorge Amado did enjoy a notable popularity in the United States. More perplexing to me was the relative lack of attention given to Amado’s Tent of Miracles, which, deftly translated by Barbara Shelby, appeared in the United States in 1971 and which makes several explicit comparisons between the racial situation in the United States and Brazil. Machado, on the other hand, is lauded by Harold Bloom who, having initially read Machado as a

“white” writer, came to learn that he was of a mixed race heritage and, consequently, that he was to be regarded as “the supreme black literary artist to date” (Genius 675; 674).

But, in terms of his reception here in the United States, would this racially based judgement have helped Machado or hurt him? It is not at all clear. While I am confident that Bloom meant to praise Machado, I am not sure he did him any favors. Is it that Bloom wants Machado to be recognized as a genius, a “supreme literary artist,” or as “the supreme black literary artist to date” (674)? One assumes both, that Bloom is trying to give a deserving but egregiously ignored writer his due, but to invoke race in any discussion involving the history, culture, and politics of the United States is to enter a critical debate that can be as imprisoning as it is liberating.

As comparatists used to like to say, Brazil’s literary *mirage*, the way its writers were perceived by outsiders, has not been as compelling as it should have been. And one would be naïve to believe that Brazil’s African heritage isn’t a factor in terms of how U.S.-based readers and critics respond to its writers, artists, and thinkers today. Race, many feel, is always involved. Even now, as we begin the third decade of the twenty-first century, Brazilian poetry, narrative, and drama are, beyond the ken of Luso-Brazilian scholars, hardly known in the United States, much less praised. Why? This is the question, and its answer explains why two of its greatest writers, Machado de Assis and Clarice Lispector, have, up until very recently, had such a difficult time gaining the respect and admiration they deserve. To understand this better, we need to look at the 1960s in the United States and its response to the phenomenon known as “The Boom,” the period when what was routinely referred to as “Latin American” literature first began, via translation, to gain the attention of American readers and the American critical establishment.

## **“The Boom” and Brazilian Literature**

Up until the time Borges was being celebrated in France, the U.S. literary establishment had long disregarded writers from Spanish America and Brazil. Latin American literature was widely considered not worthy of serious attention. But there were exceptions. From his post at Yale University, Uruguayan critic, Emir Rodríguez Monegal denounced “the blind literary prejudice” that prevented Americans from embracing the new writing from Spanish America and Brazil that, in translation, was beginning to become available in the United States (“The New Latin American Literature in the USA” 3). But this prejudice against all things from Spanish and Portuguese America was real and it was deeply rooted in American culture. Apropos of this, Monegal reminded his readers that “Edmund Wilson, the brilliant and indefatigable polyglot, has steadfastly refused to learn Spanish, because he was and still is convinced that nothing has been written in the language that would justify his exertions” (“The New Latin American Literature in the USA” 3). Much the same, sadly, could have been said of Portuguese, which was even less widely studied in U.S. schools than was Spanish. As another example of American disdain for Brazil and Spanish America, Monegal adds that prominent critic and professor of English at Columbia University, Lionel Trilling, “once told one of his students that he had read Latin American literature, and that in his judgement it had only an anthropological value” (3). Noting the enthusiasm with which such writers as Borges, Neruda, Paz, Fuentes, Rosa, Machado, and Lispector were being received in Europe, Monegal then laments that, here in the United States, things were different (3).

Scholars interested in both Spanish American and Brazilian literature were painfully aware of this discrimination. And yet, seeing the excellence of writers like Borges, Julio Cortázar, Machado de Assis, Clarice Lispector, and Guimarães Rosa, we persevered. And the more we did, the more we saw the value of the comparative method. This is why, in my case, Monegal’s work was so influential. Knowledgeable about both Spanish American and Brazilian literature, he was clear about the danger of homogenizing them, of making them seem to be the

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same, when we know how different they are. As Monegal wrote, in the “General Introduction” to volume 1 of the Borzoi Anthology, “Despite their common peninsular origin, Spanish America and Brazil have always been separate and apart, since the first days of the discovery and conquest of the New World” (xiii). This fact explains why, with very few exceptions, “Spanish American and Brazilian literature progressed in parallel but separate lines of development” (Monegal xiii). While comparatively trained Latin Americanists know this, our colleagues here in the United States may not, and this makes it very hard for them to appreciate how distinctive Brazilian literature, culture, and history really are.

It dismays me, but even today students and faculty in American English departments rarely, if ever, cite Monegal or his groundbreaking comparative work. I take this as a sign of a lingering lack of interest in Latin America. Had my colleagues done some reading beyond their particular areas of expertise, they would have learned how excellent Brazilian literature was and how relevant it was to their own interests. They would have realized, for example, that the early settlers of Brazil were, in the main, “less confrontational” in their “contact with native populations” than either the Puritans or the Spanish were” and that, in contrast to 1492 Spain, the Portuguese of 1500, who had learned to live with the Muslims, were “not absorbed by questions of doctrinal and racial purity,” as the Puritans, and, though to a much lesser degree, the Spanish were (González Echevarría, “Introduction,” The Oxford Book of Latin American Short Stories, 10). Had our specialists in what they view even as hemispheric “American” literature ventured beyond their intellectual comfort zones, they would have realized that Brazil was quite different, that it “was more open to European influence” than Spanish America was and, even more broadly, that it was receptive to “the commerce of ideas with the rest of the world” (González Echevarría, “Introduction,” The Oxford Book of Latin American Short Stories, 10; 15).

In the more specifically literary vein, they would have already known, as González Echevarría would later have to point out, largely for their benefit, that Machado de Assis “the best Latin American fiction writer” of the 1900s and that his innovative “techniques and grasp of the social world are more attuned to those of contemporary literature than any of the nineteenth-

century writers mentioned before. Not only does he usher in the twentieth-century, but in many ways he anticipates and exhausts it” (“Introduction,” The Oxford Book, 16). Thinking more globally, they would have also known that Machado ranks as “one of the best of all time anywhere,” and that In the Americas he is certainly on the level of Melville, Hawthorne, and Poe. No one in Spanish comes close to his polish and originality. A master of subtle psychological intrigues and of dramas involving the great questions vexing mankind” surpassing in this, I believe, his U.S. contemporary, Henry James, “Machado was devoted to Shakespeare, who, he said, wrote in ‘the language of the soul.’ He was also deeply influenced by biblical stories. Machado painted Brazilian society with elegant, satirical flair. He anticipates and equals Borges’ penchant for ironic detachment and authorial self-effacement, but his skepticism was less corrosive and more compassionate” (González Echevarría, The Oxford Book, 95). As we can clearly see from our more global, more comparative, and less prejudiced perspective in 2020, *mestre* Machado was the literary *craque* of his era, but, beyond the world of Luso-Brazilian scholars, he was denied the international acclaim that he is finally beginning to receive today.

Then and now, those here in the United States who specialize in U.S. literature still struggle, I fear, with an insularity that warps their reception of Spanish American and Brazilian literature. A new and more open-minded generation of students and scholars is doing better, but this old problem still persists. As John Brushwood put it in 1987, we Americans “are an intensely provincial people, in spite of the lives and money we have scattered around the globe. We resist foreign literature in general, and this basic position is exacerbated with respect to countries that are not financially or militarily powerful” (14; see also Rabassa, in Guzmán, 140-141). Unfortunately, this is still true today, though the times are slowly changing.

But back in the late 1959s, as French intellectuals began to hail Borges, American critics started to take notice of him, too. However, because structuralism had not yet been embraced by scholars here in the States, it was difficult for them to appreciate what Borges was doing. As they began to consider the to them strange Argentine writer, their attitudes about the value of what was suddenly and carelessly being referred to as “Latin American” literature began to

change. More even than before, however, the distinction between Spanish America and Brazil was simply lost on most Americans, literary critics included. It was with the appearance of the *Ficciones* in English translation, that the “Boom” established itself in the United States. It lasted, roughly, until the early 1970s, when, with the appearance of García Márquez’s 1967 novel, *Cien años de soledad* (brilliantly translated by Gregory Rabassa in 1970 as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*), it reached its apex. Rabassa’s role in the dissemination of both Spanish American and Brazilian literature cannot be overestimated, though it was the former that made an impression on Americans, not the latter. The sudden concern for Latin America (read Spanish-speaking America) undoubtedly had to do with the general anti-Communist tenor of the time and, more specifically, with the Cuban Revolution of 1959-1960. This event, coupled with the fact that Borges could now be read in English, led Americans to identify what they thought of as “Latin America” as Spanish America only. Except for those few people in academia and those many people in the U.S. State Department who paid attention to it, Brazil was lost in the shuffle.

Its language was not, however, as the U.S. government (keenly aware of the strategic importance of Brazil) declared Portuguese to be a “critical language,” and funded its study in many colleges and universities.<sup>1</sup> This led to a sharp rise in the number of young Americans who began to study Brazilian Portuguese and Brazilian literature. I was one of these.

To the extent that Brazil registered at all in the American consciousness of the 1960s, it was largely because of the lilting rhythms of the “Bossa Nova,” which had become immensely popular here. But its fascinating literature, with all it could have contributed to discussions of our roiling culture, was roundly ignored. As I look back on it now, this was a shame, since we Brazilianists and comparative Latin Americanists could have been adding a great deal to efforts to better understand and deal with the racism and violence that lashed the United States during that torturous period. Though it is no excuse to say this, the problem, I think, was that to be

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note in this regard that while Latin Americanists in general and Brazilianists in particular were aware, from what was being published in the newspapers, that the U.S. government was involved in the 1964 coup that ousted then President João Goulart, it was the Cuban Revolution, and by extension, Spanish America, that continued to occupy the attention of most Americans. Although Brazil was much more important to the United States than Cuba, it was overshadowed in the popular imagination.

studying Portuguese and Spanish (as opposed to English, French, or German) and Brazil and Spanish America (rather than focusing on the United States and Europe) at that time was considered to be wasting one's time on languages, literatures, and cultures that were held to be inferior and of little value.<sup>2</sup> As a result, those of us who did study these things, and who did so with great enthusiasm, were made to feel that we were second-class citizens in the American academy and that we lacked the authors and texts that would allow us to have anything of value to add to the great social, political, and economic discussions of the time. Even American programs in Comparative Literature, which were still too tethered to English, French, and German, could not see the value of allowing students to select Spanish and Portuguese as their primary languages and literatures. I am proud to say, however, that my Ph.D. program at the City University of New York, where I was able to work with a cohort of comparative scholars that included Gregory Rabassa, Raymond Sayers, and Ernesto Guerra da Cal, stood as a liberating exception to this reactionary and elitist tendency.

Although I was an undergraduate student from 1964 to 1968, I should have realized that writers like Machado de Assis, Clarice Lispector, and Guimarães Rosa were not inferior to anyone and, indeed, that it was we Americans who should have been paying attention to them! People certainly were in Europe, as Monegal pointed out. In the years since that time, I have often thought about how much light Machado, Clarice, and Rosa could have added to discussions of race, poverty, gender, and power structures in the United States of that era. As could a host of

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<sup>2</sup> For American Brazilianists of the 1960s, the importance of Rodríguez Monegal cannot be overstated. It was Monegal, more than anyone else, who first demonstrated the value of both Spanish American and Brazilian literature and of thinking of them comparatively, as the components of what he thought of as an integrated but not homogenized Latin American literature. Two of his books, *El Boom de la Novela Latinoamericana* and *The Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature*, brought Spanish American and Brazilian literature together and proved how they could be profitably compared and contrasted. These two publications were immensely important for comparative Brazilianists of the period, though they were less so for specialists in Spanish America, who, at that time, were, with only a few exceptions, such as Monegal and two of my farsighted professors at the University of Iowa, Oscar Fernández and Mary Lou Daniel, still being encouraged to focus on Spanish and Spanish America only. What startled me, then and for many years afterwards, is that people in English departments paid no attention to Monegal's work, which, had they done so, would have opened up a wide range of teaching and research possibilities. The "Boom," for as important as it was, did not produce great numbers of students in English departments who were training to become "Americanists" to seriously engage with either Spanish American or Brazilian literature. This explains why, even today, the most insightful work on comparative and inter-American literature is still coming from Brazil and Spanish America. I have long argued, in fact, that, because of its unique history, Brazil has long been the leader in comparative hemispheric studies (see my *The Evolution of Literature in the Americas*).

other Brazilian narratives, poems, and dramas. But it did not happen. As far as I know, Machado was, with two exceptions,<sup>3</sup> never even mentioned in non-specialist commentaries about the important literary texts of the time. And Machado had existed in good English translations since 1952, when, here in the U.S., the highly regarded New Directions Press brought out William Grossman's very serviceable translation, Epitaph of a Small Winner (see Fitz, "Reception," 33). The masterly and innovative Machado was elided in discussions of the "Boom." It was not until 1990 that a major American writer, Susan Sontag, would proclaim in the very influential journal, The New Yorker, that as marvelous as he was, she had relegated Borges to being only the second best writer ever produced by Latin America; for her, Machado de Assis, whom she had just discovered (in translation), was now the greatest (see Sontag). Seemingly surprised at how few Americans knew his work, Sontag also posited that Machado was even less known among Spanish language writers and readers than he was among English language writers and readers. While she was likely wrong about this point,<sup>4</sup> her comment does underscore how egregiously underappreciated Machado was, even in 1990, outside of Brazil.

For better or worse, One Hundred Years of Solitude has become the embodiment of what Americans regard as "Latin American" literature. Even today that is the case, at least here in the United States, where his sprawling, foundational, and deeply mythic novel is still popular. Had Rabassa, who was fluent in Spanish, been a less skillful writer, the successful, if sometimes grudging, reception of Latin American literature in the U.S. would not have taken place. Or, if it had, it would have taken many years longer. His brilliant recreation of Gabo's great novel not only established the Colombian author as a literary figure of the first rank; it also secured for

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3 The lone exceptions are John Updike, who wrote book reviews for The New Yorker magazine and who admired Spanish American and Brazilian literature, and, especially, the U.S. writer, John Barth, who happily acknowledges the liberating influence Machado's novels had on him when, in 1956 and as a fledgling author, he was struggling to complete his first novel, The Floating Opera (see Barth, Further Fridays 44-45; 165-167; 290; also Fitz 1986; and 1987; for more on the Machado/Barth connection, see also Barbosa).

4 The acclaimed Cuban writer, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, refers enthusiastically to Machado (and to the need to consider Brazilian literature as part of Latin American literature) in an interview conducted with Rita Guibert in 1972 (see Guibert 422-423).

Spanish American literature a permanent place in the American consciousness, one that has lasted to the present day.

But for those of us who are interested in the reception of Brazilian literature abroad, the important point is this: Rabassa, who had spent time in Brazil on a Fulbright grant, loved Brazilian literature and sought always to promote it. His Ph.D. from Columbia University was, in fact, in Portuguese (a language for which he had a special affection) and not Spanish. Greg was an early champion here in the States of several Brazilian writers, notably Nélida Piñon, Dalton Trevisan, Osman Lins, Machado de Assis, and Clarice Lispector, whom he had met during his sojourn in Brazil. Deeply impressed by her talent, he rendered her great 1961 novel, A Maçã no Escuro, as The Apple in the Dark, which, in 1967, the prestigious publishing house, Alfred A. Knopf, was pleased to publish. But, alas, it has been to little or no avail. With two notable exceptions (which I shall discuss in a moment), Brazilian literature continues to be little studied here in the United States, even by scholars who think of themselves as Latin Americanists or as Americanists in the more hemispheric sense.

This is a shame, since, as we know, much of the best literature in the Americas comes from Brazil. Its long literary history sparkles with some real gems, including (just to name a few) Gregório de Matos, Gonçalves Dias, Castro Alves, Machado de Assis, Oswald de Andrade, Clarice Lispector, and Guimarães Rosa. And, indeed, this fact gives us hope for better days ahead. A new generation of Latin Americanists is recognizing the worth of Brazilian writing and seeking to study it, along with Spanish American letters, in a comparative context. My home, Vanderbilt University, in fact, offers a Ph.D. track that combines the study of Brazil and Spanish America. As I have shown in much of my own work, such a comparative approach allows for Brazilian literature to become the basis for a larger, more hemispheric sense of American literature in general.

This new and exciting field is widely known as inter-American study, and those who focus on Brazil, its literature, history, and culture, are leading the way in its development. Spanish Americanists tend more and more to see the value of including Brazil in their studies,

though American English departments continue to think only of Spanish and Spanish America when imagining the rest of the Americas. This has greatly complicated the development of inter-American literary studies here in the United States, where students and scholars concentrating in American literature (still too often defined by American English departments only as the literature of the United States) must free themselves from the binary, English/Spanish, yoke and begin to read more deeply in the literature of Brazil. Even if it has to be in translation. In the meantime, comparatists from Latin America and even Canada, who have a less exclusive and possessive view of what it means to be “American,” are doing the cutting edge work. In this context, the name of Brazilian scholar, Zilá Bernd stands out, along with that of Márcio Bahia, as do those of Canadians Hugh Hazleton, Albert Braz, Amaryll Chanady, Gérard Bouchard, and Jean Morency<sup>5</sup>. This makes sense, because, after all, who understands the larger American experience, the good, the bad, and the ugly of it, than the Spanish Americans, the Canadians, and the Brazilians? Involving a wide range of disciplines, including history, economics, political science, and environmental studies, the inter-American approach is a big part of our collective future, and Brazil is key to it.<sup>6</sup>

## The Translation Question

Although the question is moot, I would say that, overall, Brazilian literature has fared reasonably well in translation. While it has still not been translated in depth as much as it needs to be, its most defining texts have been. There are some exceptions to this view, but these can be explained partly by the fact that the original texts were so original, and so deeply rooted in their

<sup>5</sup> Morency, building on the work of Zilá Bernd and Wlad Godzich, integrates Brazil into the inter-American context by comparing and contrasting it to the Canadian situation, including both its English and French traditions (15-18).

<sup>6</sup> As scholars Silvia Spitta and Lois Parkinson Zamora point out, “The most powerful comparative literature association in the hemisphere is located in Brazil. Founded in 1986, ABRALIC now numbers more than two thousand members and publishes the *Brazilian Review of Comparative Literature* and the bulletin *Contraponto*” (204).

language, that they make their translations into English, at least, all but impossible. Two prose fiction texts of this sort, both canonical, come to mind immediately: Mário de Andrade's Macunaíma (1928) and Guimarães Rosa's Grande Sertão: Veredas (1956). Clarice Lispector's Água Viva (1973) might be considered in the same vein, though, as one of the people involved in the original English translation of this extraordinary text, I would say that, on balance, it can be reproduced more faithfully in English than can these other two also extraordinary narratives.<sup>7</sup> The role of language in Água Viva is different from its role in Macunaíma and Grande Sertão: Veredas, though it does exude an ontological and epistemological affinity with Rosa's epic text. More than Mário's fabulous yet comic epic, the poetic and philosophic language of Água Viva and Grande Sertão: Veredas pushes always in quest of understanding, of seeking answers to the eternal questions of human existence: who are we and how do we know?

Of these three novels, one, Água Viva, has been re-translated by Stefan Tobler, while the other two, Macunaíma and Grande Sertão: Veredas, are said to be undergoing re-translation. One hopes that these new translations will be successful and that they will inspire new interest in Brazilian literature, here in the United States but globally as well.

But if The Stream of Life did not appear in time to be considered part of the "Boom" period, Clarice's The Apple in the Dark, which, in 1967, appeared in Rabassa's pitch perfect English translation, most certainly did. And yet it did not receive any acclaim as a "Boom" novel. Why? The answer, I believe, has to do with how different it was in comparison with the Spanish American novels that were appearing around the same time. Lispector's dense, probing narrative simply did not demonstrate the kind of "magical realism" writing that, in the U.S. critical establishment, had already come to define what "Latin American" literature was. Neither did the work of Machado de Assis. American critics had gone from ignoring literature from Spanish America and Brazil completely to suddenly thinking that it was all "magical realism" and nothing else. Brazilian writers, for whom this kind of writing had never been much cultivated, were shunted aside for being different, for not fitting the now firmly established but

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<sup>7</sup> In 1989, Elizabeth Lowe and I translated Clarice's text as The Stream of Life.

quite restrictive stereotype that “magical realism” had come to be in the American critical community. Here in the United States, our intellectual establishment simply does not know what to make of Brazilian literature.

## **Brazilian Literature and the Advent of World Literature**

While it still needs to have more of its writers translated, there can be no doubt that today, in 2020, Brazilian literature is rapidly gaining status as a major World Literature. The times, as I said before, are changing, and this time in favor of Brazil. For those who do not know Brazilian literature, this phenomenon is startling, but for those of us who do know it, it is no surprise at all; indeed, our question is this: Brazil has been a global player since 1500, so what took the rest of the world so long to see us as such? From the very beginning, Brazil, thanks to its oceanic Portuguese heritage, was plugged into a global system of commerce and the circulation of ideas. Unlike Spain, which, in 1492, chose to close itself off from what it feared would be corrupting influences from abroad, Portugal was, by 1500, already in the process of opening itself up to “the Other” and embracing what we today would term globalization. This process had a dark and bloody side, of course,<sup>8</sup> and this must never be minimized, but it also gave Brazil a taste for the international and a desire to be part of the global experience. It is no surprise, therefore, that its writers, artists, and thinkers would be so receptive to ideas from beyond their borders. We can see this receptivity to foreign modes of thought throughout Brazil’s literary and cultural history. Indeed, one can trace this tendency back to colonial times, when, in contrast to Spanish America, Brazil kept its ports open to world traffic and new modes of thought. In his widely cited What Is World Literature?, David Damrosch highlights the synthesizing ethos of Brazilian *Modernismo* to support his argument about the viability of world literature as a new discipline, while in Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel, Héctor Hoyos argues that Latin America, which,

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<sup>8</sup> I refer here to Brazil’s long struggle with the consequences of colonialism, racial discrimination, and exploitation.

importantly, he defines as including Brazil, finds itself today in a position to teach the world much about our common need for justice, mutual respect, and environmental awareness. While Hoyos does not elaborate on Machado de Assis as a global novelist, he might well have, since, as K. David Jackson writes, Machado already ranks as “one of the greatest writers produced by the Americas,” though he is also fast becoming “one of the fundamental authors of world literature” (6; 7).

The same thing can now be said of Clarice Lispector, who, like her Brazilian countryman, Machado de Assis, has gained a world-wide following. If Machado had been read here in the States as a “black writer,” along the lines of Bloom’s designation, he might well have gained a renown that has otherwise so far largely eluded him. On the other hand, being stigmatized a “black writer” as opposed to being a “writer,” might well have worked against him, limiting him in ways that would be counterproductive to his general reception and to his status as a pioneer theoretician of the modern novel form (see Fitz, Machado de Assis and Narrative Theory). This sort of straitjacketing categorization is not uncommon to writers, artists, and intellectuals here in the U.S., where people are often labeled as “Black,” “Jewish,” “Native American,” “Marxist,” or “Feminist” and nothing else, and it could easily have hurt Machado’s reception here.

The case of Clarice Lispector is a little different. After being praised by French critic, Hélène Cixous and hailed as the progenitor of *écriture féminine*, Lispector quickly became a staple of Women’s Studies programs here in the United States.<sup>9</sup> According to Verena Andermatt Conley, “Cixous begins her reading of Lispector with” Água Viva, a text she says “overwhelmed” her” (vii). “In it,” Cixous “finds the finest practice of *écriture féminine*,” a kind of writing that, for Cixous, “leads to an undoing of the hierarchies and oppositions that determine the limits of most conscious life” (Conley vii). While all Brazilianists rejoiced at the new international recognition that was being lavished on Clarice, some of us also felt that Cixous was denaturing Clarice and making her appear to be more nurturing than she often was. As Lispector

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<sup>9</sup> Between 1980 and 1985 especially, Cixous promoted Lispector in the seminars she taught at the Université de Paris VIII – Vincennes at Saint Denis and at the Collège International de Philosophie.

scholar, Marta Peixoto, wrote, “The ‘truth’” Cixous “finds in Lispector is compromised and limited by Cixous’s own need for her to typify a feminine libidinal economy manifested in traditional feminine stereotypes of the Nurturing Woman: woman as mediator, as benevolent nature, as Good Mother” (47). While this line of interpretation is not without its textual evidence, it is far from the only way, or even the most accurate way, to read Clarice. But to take Cixous’s approach only is to come away from the Brazilian writer with an interpretive stance that “diminishes and restricts the more ample dynamics of a text that can observe just as intensely harsh interactions and can itself be unsparing and aggressive toward the reader” (Peixoto 48). As a result of Cixous’s rather appropriative reading of Lispector, a difference of opinion now exists between readers who base their opinions on what the esteemed and highly influential French critic has opined rather than on the more complicated and more complete picture a great many Brazilian and American critics have offered. But this is often what happens when, limited by the number of works that exist in a translation they can read, commentators in a foreign culture respond to a writer who comes to them from a very different culture.

In Women’s Studies Programs here in the United States Clarice was being read in English translation, but as her reputation grew, and especially as it grew among American devotees of French feminist theory, her fame also began to spread to American English departments, where today she has gained status as a female writer who plumbs the depths of the modern woman’s experience. She is all of that, and more, however.

As I try to explain in a new book, Clarice’s appeal to the global audience today has to do with the many different but always intensely human voices she presents to her readers (see Fitz, Clarice Lispector: From Brazil to the World, unpublished ms.). We have, in her works, a Clarice who, in her own unique way, is feminist, though we also have other Clarices who are political, erotic, funny, poetic, and philosophic, and it is this multiplicity of identities that attracts people, women as well as men, around the work.

## Conclusion

The question of influence and reception, so central to comparative literature as a discipline, is today more important than it has ever been. In an age of almost instantaneous communication, the speed at which writers and texts from around the world intermingle with each other has broken down old hierarchies and opened eyes to new possibilities. With its rich and diverse literature, Brazil is a culture that is already benefitting from this seismic shift in global awareness. Much of this will have to do with the number and quality of translations that its literature can inspire, but of even greater importance will be the number of critical studies we write that integrate Brazilian letters into the mainstream of world literature. A generation of brilliant writers, including Regina Rheda, J. P. Cuenca, and João Gilberto Noll, among many others, are making their names known to readers everywhere. Brazilian literature has an abundance of outstanding writers and texts and it is the comparative method that will allow us to bring them to the attention of the global audience.

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