

## **The “rise of the Russian novel” as an alternative model for intellectuals on the periphery: the case of Brazil (1887–1924)**

The works of Dostoevskij and Tolstoj started to be discussed in Brazil at the end of the 1880s. This occurred during the wave of international diffusion unleashed by France, especially by the book manifesto *le Roman Russe* (1886) by catholic viscount Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, *primus inter pares* in placing the Russians on a different symbolic level. They were transformed together and posthumously (with the exception of Tolstoj in this last respect) into a compassionate and humanitarian alternative to the surgical coldness associated with the French naturalist novel. Given this bipolar argumentation, and helped by a favorable socio-political conjunction, the Russians entered in a decisive way into debates of *fin-de-siècle* esthetics and culture.

My objective will be, initially in a brief manner, to present the features of this debate in Brazil and the elements that contributed to the international critical paradigm. To follow, the more substantial part of the paper will comment on the peculiarities present in the peripheral point of view of the Brazilian intellectuals. At first sight, texts such as “*Dostoievski – naturalismo russo*” (1888) by Clóvis Bevilacqua, the essays of José Carlos Júnior published between 1887 and 1888, and the texts by Vicente Licínio Cardoso on Dostoevsky (1924) are variants on the polarization between the “Russian” and “French” models; but a closer reading reveals that the Brazilian essayists frequently saw in the inception of the novel in Russia, and in the type of “alternative literary modernity” that it represented, a *possible solution* to the problem that had obsessed generations of Brazilian writers: the creation of a national literature that was desired to be inspired with authentic traits, possessed of a greater degree of freedom in the recreation of European genres and, at the same time, esthetically relevant.

The Russian novel was the first significant case in 19<sup>th</sup>-century European fiction of the appearance of a literature from a country until then considered by the public and critics outside of Russia to be “without literature”. While studies have already addressed the reception in countries such as France, England, Germany and the United States, there is still a void concerning peripheral scenarios and their specific cultural tensions.

My hypothesis in this paper, which will be corroborated by Brazilian critical texts, is that the arrival of the Russian novel served as a powerful parameter (and source of enthusiasm) for many intellectuals and literary experts who at that time were investigating the existence or viability of their respective national literatures, and that the study of the Brazilian case would find parallels in other Latin-America countries and possibly in other contexts on the margins of the international literary system.