

Boris Schnaiderman: translation issues on the pages of a newspaper

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THE HISTORY of the reception of Russian literature in Brazil dates back to the late nineteenth century and involves many characters. There is no doubt, however, that the beginning of Boris Schnaiderman essay and translational activity is the highlight of our contact with the multifaceted Russian experience.

Delving into Boris Schnaiderman's biography is unnecessary, since he is one of the country's best-known intellectuals. It is a life that touches the strengths of twentieth century history. We might just mention his birth, in 1917, between the revolutions of February and October; his childhood in a bustling Odessa, where he witnessed, in a famous event, the filming of the key scene of *Battleship Potiômkin*; his emigration experience in 1925; the troubled life of a Russian Jewish during the New State dictatorship; his participation in the FEB campaign as a gunnery sergeant - to mention only the period preceding his effective job as a commentator of Russian themes, started from the second half of the 1950s.

But it is a life path that also includes "minor" nuances, activities that border anonymity: the work as an agronomy professor in Barbacena, the writing of encyclopedia entries, the first translations under an alias. Since his arrival in Brazil, the arduous process of conquering his own voice amid Russian and Brazilian experiences, a process whose anxieties Boris Schnaiderman always highlighted in interviews.

The hesitation between showing up and hiding is present in the choice of the pseudonym under which he translated his first works for Vecchi publishing in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-1940s. The Boris Solomônov who appears as the translator of *The Brothers Karamazov* keeps the translator's given name and turns his patronymic (Solomônovitch) into a surname. It is not, therefore, a "total" pseudonym. It stems from the ambiguity of a young translator who oscillates between acts of courage - the translation of one of the most important novels of all time - and introversion, aware that intellectual work should always be rigorous, and of the colossal difficulties involved in the undertaking. The work of Boris Schnaiderman will always be marked by such a tension between

a bold, explosive extreme, and another more restrained, meticulous, implosive. Perhaps the titles of several of his books, which generally form semantic oppositions, somehow reflect this variation, underpinned in the way the author sees the universe of literature: whirlwind/seed, war/secret, poetry/prose, clamor/silence, myth/wreckage, excess/translation.

These books with resonant titles are but a small fraction of Boris Schnaiderman's invaluable contribution to Brazilian culture. Equally important is his scattered work, about 350 texts published in the press almost uninterruptedly since late 1956. I propose, next, a brief comment on some key themes that appear in those texts, with an emphasis on the role of reflection on translation.

Contextual factors have created an environment conducive to the discussion of Russian and Soviet themes and contributed to the beginning of Boris Schnaiderman's literary activity with translations and articles on the pages of newspapers, especially in the "Russian Literature" column of the Literary Supplement of *O Estado de S. Paulo* newspaper. His first article, a review of the book by the Turkish writer Nazim Hikmet – *But Was There an Ivan Ivanovich?* was published in December 1956, ending a year started by Khrushchev's "secret" speech in February, and still under the mark of the Hungarian uprising crushed by the Soviet invasion in early November. The dozens of articles published by Boris Schnaiderman in subsequent years reflect the broad international interest aroused by Soviet "feats" - in a sense they are tributaries of the Sputnik, the satellite whose signals sent to Earth had the unprecedented effect of creating Russian courses all over the world (and strengthening existing ones, as was the case of many American universities, which were endowed with hefty funding and robust specialized libraries). After the Cuban revolution in 1959, Latin America became a priority for the Soviet Union. Books by Latin American authors - some already old acquaintances of the socialist bloc and others new to the Russians, like Machado de Assis - were published. The professional study of Brazilian culture gained momentum in the Soviet Union; here and there cultural missions, dance and film festivals, and possibilities for research trips were promoted.

Also contributed to the context the fact that between 1956 and 1964, when Boris Schnaiderman published a large number of translations and articles, released his first book (*Guerra em surdina*) and participated in the creation of the Russian course at USP, Brazil was experiencing a rare intermission between authoritarian regimes, when anti-communist trends, which never vanished, were at least weak. In the years that followed the military coup, the pace of Boris Schnaiderman's publications in newspaper decreased considerably. After an article about Ricardo Ramos' short stories ("*Caminhos da rua desfeita*," *O Estado de S. Paulo*) published on March 21 (the same day of the note on E. Etkind mentioned below), the next text would only be published in a newspaper a year later, in a hitherto unprecedented interval in the pace of publications. A total of

105 articles were published between 1956 and 1964; between 1964 and 1971 the number dropped to 35. The large number of classes that Professor Boris taught at USP was certainly responsible for the reduction in the pace of his cultural journalism, but it is quite plausible to assume that the political context played a decisive role.

Amid these hundred initial texts we can see themes and lines of force that will cut through the work of Boris Schnaiderman until the present day. These original texts may be his initial work, but are not the work of a beginner, as they were published by a relatively mature author, already in his forties, who was making his debut in literature with his own signature work. The scope ranges from short reviews and informative notes to true essays, high-quality studies that could appear in any anthology of literary criticism on Russian themes produced in the world.

The set entails certain preferences that will continue in Boris Schnaiderman's work. Authors like Chekhov, Gorky, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky would always be in the spotlight. Gogol and Turgenev, not so much. Important articles on Brazilian literature and literary theory appeared frequently. And, above all, Soviet literature emerged with a profusion of names unknown to Brazilian readers: Grin, Panova, Katáiev, Paustóvski, Oliécha, Fiédin, Khlebnikov, Tzvietáieva, Mandelstam. Even authors known around here re-emerged, now addressed at a much more professional level. The 1959 article on the author of *Red Cavalry* ("The return of Isaac Babel") exemplifies the huge difference between this new production and the average of Russian essayism in Brazil. The same applied to Ehrenburg, Mayakovsky and many others. Boris Schnaiderman purifies the clichés and the lofty rhetoric that traditionally characterized Russian literature. The result merges the streamlined and objective text with the warm tone coming from the ethical commitment to and personal experience with the topics addressed. The value of that work in the choice of authors and in the way they were studied gains even greater relevance the difficulty to obtain Russian materials abroad at the time is considered.

There are four constants in these initial texts that were maintained in Boris Schnaiderman's subsequent work: 1) praise to the modern factor in art and concomitant criticism of outdated, nostalgic aspects; 2) Russian literature should be seen first for its aesthetic character (but this should not entail disregard for historical, biographical and existential implications). The title given to a book translated by Boris Schnaiderman in 1967 gathering studies by the Soviet critic Leonid Grossman, *Dostoevsky the Artist*, sums up this spirit; 3) Soviet culture is not a monolith. It is much richer and more varied than it was believed at the time, and is not limited to the Vulgate promoted by socialist realism. Boris Schnaiderman, incidentally, has always observed in a bold position that this literary model was not necessarily bad in itself: the biggest problem was its transformation into orthodoxy. In its best moments, therefore, the new Soviet literature

owes nothing to the great Russian literature of the nineteenth century; 4) literary translation is always a task that requires a complex balance between rigor and boldness.

A substantial portion of Boris Schnaiderman's first newspaper articles is about translation. They are texts written exclusively on the subject or commenting on it in a lateral way.

One of the highlights is the criticism of Russian literature translations existing in Brazil. In "*Traduções do Russo*" (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 02/07/1959), Boris Schnaiderman praises the "criminal activity" of many translators from the past, in several countries, but suggests that the future is promising:

It must be stressed, however: at present, there are conditions in Brazil for rendering good translations of Russian authors. Besides the greater ease in obtaining excellent editions in different languages, there have been some direct translations that seem really promising. We had the opportunity to compare with the original the translation of the story "Anguish" by Chekhov, (*Sea of Stories*, OJ, 1958, 3rd vol.), rendered directly from the original by Paulo Rónai and Aurélio Buarque de Holanda, and we were pleasantly surprised by the ability of the translators to convey the spirit of the book, the typically Chekhovian atmosphere of the story. Also very good and faithful seems to be Tatiana Belinky's translation of another story by Chekhov ("The Pharmacist's Wife"), included in *Maravilhas do conto universal* published by Cultrix, 1958. In short, although there are conditions for the emergence of good translations of Russian authors, publishers, however, need to be more careful. Referring to the liberties of many French translators in relation to Tolstoy's work, Romain Rolland wrote in the preface to the second edition of his study on the writer: "Tolstoy needs to be very big to even look it after all these outrages". The same could be said of Russian literature in general, so widespread in the world, but whose authentic face is often so difficult to perceive through the ridiculous distortions to which it has been subject so often.

Boris Schnaiderman with his usual demure did not mention his own translations of Chekhov, then to be published, which evidently were among the highlights of the process described.

Remarks on existing translations also appeared in the review of a book by I. S. Bunin (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 06/21/1958), in which Schnaiderman praises the versions of the story "The gentleman from San Francisco" contained in anthologies of the 1940s and 1950s. "Tchékhov novelista" (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 11/07/1959) contains a brief overview of Chekhov's novels available in Portuguese and a brief note on their little dissemination, which would give rise to the need to prepare a "methodical set edition" (what Boris Schnaiderman himself would do some time later).

There are several comments on the specific difficulties of poetic transla-

tion. In an article about a new Russian edition of a classic of children's literature, "The Humpbacked Horse" by Piotr Ierchów, a text from 1834 praised by Pushkin, Boris Schnaiderman suggests that it

Very much deserves a translation into Portuguese. It is true that poetic translation presents serious difficulties.

Traduções do russo

A pesar das inúmeras edições de autores russos que existem no Ocidente, a literatura russa é, sem dúvida, uma das mais sacrificadas por traduções criminosas. Elsa Triolet escreveu, no preâmbulo de seu *L'Histoire d'Antoine Tchekhov*: "Parler d'un auteur étranger, dont le nom est célèbre, mais l'oeuvre mal connue d'après des traductions souvent imparfaites, est comme parler couleurs à un aveugle de naissance". Realmente, nada há de exagerado nessa afirmação.

No caso das edições brasileiras, a situação foi agravada pelo uso generalizado do francês e do espanhol como línguas intermediárias, geralmente sem um controle eficaz das edições utilizadas para tal fim. Realmente, devido a certas dificuldades do meio, não se pode esperar que os editores apresentem sempre traduções diretas. O importante, agora, é evitar certos erros, e bem graves, cometidos às vezes em boa-fé, simplesmente com o uso de algumas edições francesas ou espanholas, precedidas, mesmo, de uma fama de seriedade.

Na seleção das traduções de clássicos, o maior cuidado deve consistir em evitar, com raras exceções, as mais antigas, devido a certas particularidades da grande difusão da literatura russa no Ocidente, a partir de fins do século passado. Depois que Melchior de Vogüé apregou a grandeza dos escritores russos, os editores franceses interessaram-se particularmente por eles, e o público francês passou também a procurar com avidez aquelas obras. Todavia, os editores logo se depararam com um sério problema. Poderia o grande público, tão interessado, na época, pelos "mistérios da alma eslava", receber de chofre romances quilométricos, como al-

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mais de trezentas páginas, em lugar das mil e tantas do original. E foi sobre esta edição que se basearam alguns editores portugueses, espanhóis, brasileiros e outros, para apresentar aos respectivos públicos aquele romance de Dostoiévski, mas geralmente sem a honesta advertência do editor francês, no sentido de que se tratava de uma adaptação. Traduções desta continuaram a sair em diversos países, até há poucos anos, mesmo depois de aparecerem outras baseadas no texto integral, como a incluída na edição espanhola das obras completas de Dostoiévski (Editora Aguilar, 1935), em tradução de R. Cansino Assens, que realizou trabalho de alto nível, apesar de algumas liberdades ligeiras em relação ao original.

Para se perceber a que ponto os editores de alguns países ocidentais temiam a tradução fiel de muitos textos russos, basta lembrar que, passados quarenta anos da morte de Dostoiévski, Gide apresentava como um fato extremamente auspicioso o então próximo lançamento de *Oss Irmãos Karamazov*, em tradução francesa integral.

Outras obras fundamentais da literatura russa foram igualmente prejudicadas em sua divulgação no Ocidente, devido à ação criminosa de alguns editores franceses. Serge Persky exerceu, por exemplo, uma intensa atividade como tradutor de obras russas, além de publicar diversos estudos. Suas traduções de Gorki são frequentemente acompanhadas da observação "traduit d'après le manuscrit", mas, na tradução da famosa trilogia autobiográfica, não vacilou em eliminar alguns dos trechos mais importantes e substanciais de

de ficção de Dostoiévski para o inglês, por Constance Garnett, e que se tornaram clássicas. A atividade do tradutor inglês Aylmer Maude, em colaboração com Louise Maude, está intimamente relacionada com a difusão da obra de Tolstói no Ocidente. O tradutor mantinha correspondência com o escritor, e este lhe manifestou, em mais de uma oportunidade, sua aprovação pelo trabalho realizado. A honestidade profissional de Maude permitiu até reconstituir aproximadamente o texto original de algumas passagens da obra de Tolstói. Assim, comparando o texto russo impresso em Sebastopol com a sua própria tradução, Maude estranhou, em carta ao escritor, o aparecimento de frases, que foram acrescentadas por um redator da censura. Este sacrificara implacavelmente a obra e, visto que Tolstói não conservara o manuscrito, o melhor meio para uma reconstituição do texto russo, anos mais tarde, foi utilizar a tradução de Maude.

Houve também edições alemãs tão superiores, geralmente, às francesas da época, que Gide serviu-se delas para conhecer melhor Dostoiévski.

Atualmente, a situação mudou bastante. Além de serem acessíveis ótimas traduções do russo em alemão, italiano, espanhol, inglês etc., os próprios editores franceses não se arriscam mais a deturpações como as de Persky e há textos excelentes em francês. Mesmo assim, porém, continua grande a tentação de adaptar um pouco o original e torná-lo mais fácil ao leitor, não por meio de notas explicativas, mas pela alteração e pela tradução muito livre. Dostoiévski continua sendo uma grande vítima dos tradutores. Seu estilo não apresenta o mais das vezes dificuldades consideráveis de tradução, mas justamente a esse

de *Niétotchka Nierxávova*, por Henri de Mongault e Lucie Désormonts (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1952). Assim, no trecho em que *Niétotchka* acompanha o padrasto pelas ruas de Petersburgo, após a morte da mãe, e em que ele desce para junto de um canal, sentando-se sobre a última baliza, o texto original diz: "A dois passos de nós, havia um vão". Mas, na tradução (pag. 1.116), ficou: "A deux pas de nous, l'eau tourbillonnait". No trecho em que se transmite a impressão de *Niétotchka* sobre a morte do padrasto, está: "Ele morreu, porque semelhante morte era algo indispensável, uma consequência de toda a sua vida". E na tradução francesa (pag. 1.118): "Mort! Pareille fin éait la conséquence naturelle, obligatoire de la vie qu'il avait menée". Ora, o ponto de exclamação acrescenta à frase um patético incompatível com a intenção do autor, naquele trecho.

É preciso insistir, no entanto: no presente, há condições, no Brasil, para a apresentação de boas traduções de autores russos. Além da maior facilidade em se obterem ótimas edições em diferentes línguas, têm aparecido algumas traduções diretas, que parecem realmente auspiciosas. Tivemos oportunidade de comparar com o original a tradução do conto "Angustia" de Tchekhov (*Mar de Histórias*, 3.º vol., Editora José Olimpio, 1958), feita diretamente do original, por Paulo Rónai e Aurélio Buarque de Holanda, e ficamos agradavelmente surpreendidos com a capacidade dos tradutores em transmitir o espírito da obra, a atmosfera tipicamente *tchekhoviana* do conto. Pareceu-nos igualmente muito boa e fiel a tradução de Tatiana Belinky de outro conto de Tchekhov ("A Mulher do Farmaceutico"), incluído em *Maravilhas de Conto Universal*, da Editora Cultivix, 1958.

Em suma, se há condições para a apresentação de boas tradu-

Facsimile of "Translations from Russian" by Boris Schnaiderman (O Estado de S. Paulo, 2.7.1959).

Much of the local flavor would be lost in any translation. And a true poetic transposition would require a Manuel Bandeira, for example, to know Russian well and devote himself to the task. (*Para todos*, 1st half of November 1957)

It can be seen that Boris Schnaiderman is already pointing to the partnership process that at the beginning of the following decade would be established between him and the brothers Haroldo and Augusto de Campos. The news-

paper articles bring various fruits of this association, such as in “*Maiakóvski reeditado na Rússia*” (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 04/08/1961), “*Um paradoxo de Maiakóvski*” (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 05/06/1961) “*Carta a Tatiana Iacovleva*” (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 9/29/1962) and “*Dois temas russos*” (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 11/16/1963), texts that contain not only theoretical problems relating to translation, but also verses by the Russian poet finally available in Portuguese out of the verbose condition in which they were usually allocated. The topic of the specifics of poetic translation is also addressed in one of his most fascinating comparative studies, “*Púchkin, tradutor de Gonzaga*” (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 06/16/1962).

In some articles the voice of other authors is used to communicate Boris Schnaiderman’s own ideas. The translation of the article “*Arte moderna na União Soviética*” (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 09/03/1961), a fragment of the autobiography *People, Years, Life* by the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg (that Boris Schnaiderman would translate in part), speaks of the incredible performance of the vanguard in the first Soviet context and its dispersion in subsequent times. In the same vein, “*Tradução e estilo*” (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 3/21/1964) is a note on the book *Teoria e crítica da tradução* published by the University of Leningrad, in which the great critic and translator Efim Etkind

attacks the translations that seek to achieve a medium style, i.e. lean, correct, neat, but without further boldness, in transposing the stylistic peculiarities of an author [...] Etkind states that overcoming these deficiencies requires better disseminating modern theoretical conceptions on literary translation, based on compared stylistics.

“Boldness” is the word most frequently used in Boris Schnaiderman’s essays on translation from the late 1950s to his recent book *Tradução: ato desmedido*, and reverberated in the meantime in numerous interviews. The items from those early years enable mapping a general movement towards audacity, escape from literalness, requirement for the inclusion of modern and avant-garde principles. These principles are the leitmotifs that connect the various spheres of the author’s activity: the orientation present in the articles ran in parallel to the drafting of Boris Schnaiderman’s first and only fictional experience, the novel *Guerra em surdina* released in 1964, but whose project dated back to wartime. One way to interpret this novel is to see it as an attempt to reintroduce modern experimentalism, through a complex mix of genres, into a topic as squandered as Second World War literature, addressed in both the Russian-Soviet and Brazilian cases, through proposals inherited from nineteenth century stale realistic-naturalistic schemes.

In this regard, the contact with Haroldo and Augusto de Campos is more appropriately construed as an elective affinity. It certainly helped to radicalize the way Boris Schnaiderman saw the methods of the translator. But the acco-

lades to the dynamic and radical aspect of the literary text are already embedded in his comments on the brief fiction of Oliécha, Katáiev, Bábel and so many others, from the first lines of the first articles published in a newspaper, in which Schnaiderman regrets the replacement of boldness with more traditional procedures derived some times from changes inherent in the lives and work of those authors, and others from external pressures. The hundred early texts written by Boris Schnaiderman in the turn of the two decades, by equating the modern element in literature with the modern element in the translation process would by themselves suffice to place their author in the list of great Brazilian critics, of renewers of thought about translation and of great Slavists of the twentieth century.

ABSTRACT – In this paper I propose to point out the importance of newspaper articles published by Boris Schnaiderman from 1956 to 1964, comprising approximately one hundred texts in which literary translation issues are pivotal.

KEYWORDS: Translator, Translation from Russian, *O Estado de S. Paulo* newspaper, Boris Schnaiderman.

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