

EPIC POETRY IN BRAZIL

Literary Innovation and Debate in the 19th Century

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E-book



São Leopoldo
2023

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- E69 Epic Poetry in Brazil: Literary Innovation and Debate in the 19th Century. [E-book]. / Edited by: Roger Friedlein, Marcos Machado Nunes e Regina Zilberman. – São Leopoldo: Oikos, 2023.
130 p.; 16 x 23 cm.
ISBN 978-65-5974-142-7
1. Brazilian literature. 2. Epic poetry. 3. Epic style. I. Friedlein, Roger. II. Nunes, Marcos Machado. III. Zilberman, Regina.

CDU 869.0(81)

Catálogo na Publicação:
Bibliotecária Eliete Mari Doncato Brasil – CRB 10/1184

Tradition and innovation
in epic practice

A Confederação dos Tamoios, an exemplary epic

Rafael Brunhara

The title of this work might sound naïve or provocative, depending on the understanding of the term *exemplary*. How could *A Confederação dos Tamoios* be exemplary if it became known when the epic was a poetic genre under discussion, perhaps awaiting reformulation? In other words, what *model* could it be linked to at a time when models were already uncertain or called into question? We propose the hypothesis that *A Confederação dos Tamoios* can be considered exemplary precisely because it gives rise to a controversy that brings to focus the central debates on the epic genre in the 19th century. In a way, because it is an epic composed during Romanticism, *A Confederação dos Tamoios* articulates questions about the epic genre in which its present can be seen, its future projected, and its past resumed.

Thus, *A Confederação dos Tamoios*, whether due to the elements it mobilizes internally or to the controversy it gave rise to, demarcates an important place for the epic genre in Brazilian literature from the 19th century onwards.

We will argue that the poem occupies this place due to a conscious oscillation throughout the work of Gonçalves de Magalhães. The official founder of Brazilian Romanticism occupies a transitional intermediary place, which alternates between the neoclassical forms and the new precepts of a romantic aesthetic. For this reason, the assessments of his work are often disparate: Alcântara Machado, for example, calls him a *regretful romantic* (1936), while Antonio Candido, in his *Formação da Literatura Brasileira*, defines him as an *early romantic*, considering him the representative of a “vacilante” generation that placed the aesthetic and common places of classicism in a romantic setting (CANDIDO, 2014, p. 369).

We intend to argue that this oscillation is typical of the poetry of Gonçalves de Magalhães and that it can be revealing, leading to a more proper understanding of his poem *A Confederação dos Tamoios*.

Thus, in this work, we will consider certain aspects of the controversy initiated by José de Alencar surrounding *A Confederação dos Tamoios* following closely the propositions expressed by Saulo Neiva in his article “Reler hoje *A Confederação dos Tamoios*?” (2017). Nevertheless, we will also, in response to his invitation in that work, propose a reading of the poem that “o insira novamente na obra de Magalhães, mais do que na ruidosa polêmica que o envolveu” (NEIVA, 2017, p. 15). In this direction, this work seeks, at first, to explain the poetic course and program of the work of Gonçalves de Magalhães and then to discuss examples from *Confederação* that place the poem in this program and that outline a particular conception of epic poetry, in contrast to those flaunted in the controversy raised by José de Alencar about the poem.

There had already been an attempt at a Brazilian epic during Romanticism, with the poem of Teixeira e Souza, *Independência do Brasil*. The first volume dates to 1847, and the second to 1855, but the work was already in the making at the beginning of the 1940s, as stated by the author in the preface to the first volume (SOUZA, 1847, p. 16).

The leading cause of the misfortune of the work, seldom remembered, was not its poetic merits but rather its inadequacy to a poetic-political program that was spreading rapidly in the early years of Brazilian Romanticism. As for the form, the poem applies the distinctive elements of the epic genre: Pedro is the hero, and the marvelous is present in the representation of angels, demons, and personifications, such as Despotism and Anarchy, who appear in place of pagan deities in a formulation closer to Tasso and his *Gerusalemme Liberata* than to *Os Lusíadas* by Camões. However, it resembles Camões in the sense that it makes use of the decasyllable and the *ottava rima*. Thus, the formal model is Camonian, but the matter is strictly contemporary and offers a distinct representation of the marvelous, not adopting the mythological element, not even as a poetic figure.

When Teixeira e Souza allows himself to explore a topic of the ancient epic, the descent into the hells in Books V and VI, he represents Despotism,

the enemy of Brazil, who raises the infernal powers against the nation. He incorporates the pagan imaginary only in a listing, which is another formal feature of the epic (Book VI, stanzas 26 and 27):

XXVI

Per entre as trevas denegrída assoma
A turba, que surgira desse Abysmo,
A qual á velha Grécia, e antiga Roma
 Já levara o fallaz polyteismo;
Ninguém calcular pôde a vasta somma
Dos deuses, que adorara o gentilismo!...
Creu-se que o num'ro seu o Olympo enchia.
 A cujo peso Atlante succumbia!

XXVII

São esses os que foram n'outra edade
Rhea; Juno (dos numes soberana);
Saturno; Jove (a excelsa divindade);
 Pallas; Astrea; Ceres; e Dianna;
 Thetis; e dos amores a deidade;
Marte (da guerra divindade insana);
Neptuno; Apollo; Baccho; Hermes; Summano;
 Esculapio; Bellona; Hebe; Vulcano:
 (SOUZA, 1847, p. 256-257).

As Paulo Franchetti shows (2007, p. 91-92), the poem is rejected, and its discredit, despite its modest poetic qualities, is due to Pedro II's commitment to favor the intellectuals of Instituto Histórico Geográfico Brasileiro, who exposed the need for studies and literary works dedicated to Brazilian Indigenous peoples. In fact, 1836 was the year of the first edition of the magazine *Nitheroy*, in which Gonçalves de Magalhães published his *Ensaio sobre a História da Literatura Brasileira – Estudo Preliminar*. That served as the first Brazilian romantic manifesto. In a well-known passage, he emphasizes the desire for detachment from Portugal and for poetry founded on mythology in search of a poetic morality “que empluma as asas ao Gênio” (MAGALHÃES, 1836, p. 148):

Com a poesia vieram todos os Deoses do paganismo, espalharam-se pelo Brasil, e dos céos, das florestas e dos rios se apoderaram. A Poesia do Brasil não é uma indígena civilisada, é uma Grega, vestida à Francesa, e à Portuguesa, e climatisada no Brasil (MAGALHÃES, 1836, p. 146).

The poets must now seek inspiration for their imagination in Brazil, in the Indigenous peoples. To this end, Magalhães draws on the idea advocated by Schiller in the principles of German Romanticism: it is the genius of the poet – his original inspiration – that becomes the only thing to rule art, that must break free from predetermined classical models and follow only the inspirations of the soul. The intention to explore themes that characterize Brazil's new status of independence perfectly harmonizes with the idea of genius, proving a certain anti-lusitanian tendency of the Brazilian literature of the period to establish once and for all their nationality.

This premise is innovative in terms of matter, but its form is still classical: although a new formal set of rules is sought, a representative or mimetic regime still prevails, which understands art as the imitation of nature or models. This understanding is, in our view, at the heart of the writing of *A Confederação dos Tamoios*. It manifests in an oscillation between romantic motifs and the classical framework halfway through the imitation of models and romantic inspiration.

This dichotomy between the notion of genius and the exemplary nature of the models appears in another part of the essay, which is cited less often. In it, Magalhães condemns the servile imitation of the ancient, the classical precepts of imitation that paralyze the genius, but at the same time advises the study of these texts, showing the force of these models. His romantic manifesto is mainly conservative:

e si até hoje a nossa poesia não oferece um caracter inteiramente novo e particular, é que os Poetas, dominados pelos preceitos, atados pela imitação dos Antigos, que como diz Pope, é imitar mesmo a Natureza (como si a natureza se ostentasse sempre a mesma nas regioens polares, e nos Trópicos, e diversos sendo os costumes, as leis, e as crenças, só a poesia não partilhasse essa diversidade) não tiveram bastante força para despojarem-se do jugo dessas leis, as mais das vezes arbitrarias, da quelles, que se arrogam o direito de torturar o Gênio, arvorando-se Legisladores do Parnaso. Depois que Homero, inspirado pelo seu Gênio, sem apóio de alheia crítica, elevou-se à grandeza da Epopeia, criação sua, e Píndaro pelo mesmo caminho à sublimidade da Lírica, vieram então, os críticos, e estabeleceram as regras. Convém estudar os Antigos, e os modelos dos que nas diversas composições poéticas se avantajaram, mas não escravizar-se (MAGALHÃES, 1836, p. 158).

At the same time as he theorized about Romanticism, he began to practice it. In this sense, we are particularly interested in the preface of his book of poems *Suspiros Poéticos e Saudades*, entitled “Lede”, which tries to summarize the expedients of romantic art but, in doing so, reveals an oscillation between the classical and the romantic. As noted by Manuel Bandeira (2009, p. 46) in his *Apresentação da Literatura Brasileira*, while Magalhães “despediu-se das ficções de Homero não despediu-se totalmente da velha retórica”

Pede o uso que se dê um prólogo ao Livro, como um pórtico ao edificio, e como este deve indicar per sua construcção a que Divindade se consagra o Templo, assim deve aquelle designar o caracter da obra. Sancto uso, de que nos aproveitamos (...) (MAGALHÃES, 1836, p. 1).

The first paragraph refers to a model to be emulated, the adequacy of a genre, or usage: “Pede o uso que se dê um prólogo ao livro”. Poetry is equated to the building, perennial, recovering the classical topic of *Exegi Monumentum*,¹ on the one hand, the imagery is pagan: as the gate should allude to “a qual divindade o templo se consagra”, on the other, the preface, with the words “ Santo uso “ refers to the Catholic sphere. Magalhães proposes, in this first paragraph of “Lede,” a reform that is prudent and concerns the neoclassical building. He continues:

É um livro de poesias escriptas segundo as impressoens dos logares; ora sentado entre as ruínas da antiga Roma, meditando sobre a sorte dos impérios; ora no cimo dos Alpes, a imaginação vagando no infinito, como um átomo no espaço; ora na gothica catedral, admirando a grandeza de Deos, ora entre os cyprestes, que espalham suas sombras sobre os túmulos; ora enfim reflectindo sobre a sorte da Pátria, sobre as paixoens dos homens, sobre o nada da vida. São Poesias de um peregrino, variadas como as scenas da natureza, diversas como as phases da vida, mas que se harmonisam pela unidade do pensamento, e que se ligam pelos annéis de uma cadeia. Poesias d’alma, e do coração, e que só pela alma, e o coração, devem ser julgadas (MAGALHÃES, 1836, p. 2).

¹ The first traces of this topic, consecrated by Horace in his *Ode* 3.30, are already seen in the *Sixth Olympian Ode* of the late-archaic Greek poet Pindar, in which he compares the opening of his poem to a gate with gold pillars placed as the front of a well-built chamber, forming an extraordinary palace, and in which he states the beginning of the work must be given a likewise glistening front.

His poems will be “escritos segundo a impressão dos lugares”: it is an immersion in a world mediated by the Self, the quintessential territory of romantic subjectivity; the poet meditates on the fleetingness of everything (“nas ruínas da Antiga Roma”) and the sublime (sometimes terrible, “no cimo dos Alpes”, sometimes magnificent, “a gótica catedral”); but at the same time, he expresses concern about the unity of the work (the unity of thought harmonizes everything), a neoclassical relapse that is soon countered with another image: these are “são poemas da alma e do coração, e que só pela alma, e o coração, devem ser julgadas”. Magalhães intends for his poems to be a sigh that harmonizes with the sigh of his reader, recovering the idea of subjective and almost elusive identification.

From then on, the classic becomes romantic: his book ceases to be the building mentioned at the beginning of the preface to become “folhas que lançamos hoje aos pés” (MAGALHÃES, 1836, p. 3) or even a “folha no meio da floresta batida pelos ventos do inverno” (MAGALHÃES, 1836, p. 8-9). The classic idea of the permanence of the work alternates with images of its fleetingness and transience, which are one of the favorite themes of Romanticism. Although the book is a sigh – an echo in the realm of the ineffable that corresponds to the undivided manifestation of the poet’s interiority – Magalhães will rationally state that “para bem se avaliar esta obra, três cousas releva notar-se: o fim, o gênero e a forma” (MAGALHÃES, 1836, p. 3), referring to a classic model of generic production, in which each circumstance possesses its specific poetic genre, formally structured and targeted.

It seemed necessary to indicate the precepts of this aesthetic that landed in Brazil, and that was already being left behind in Europe, but by rapidly listing the romantic topics that were only gradually developed in Europe, Magalhães shows his oscillations between the neoclassical language in force and the recently arrived romantic one.

This uncertainty and this oscillation are acknowledged thirty years later; Magalhães calls romantic lyricism a “desalinho”, stating that its only law is disorder, and places his work between the classical and the romantic. That is what he expresses in 1865, in the publication of his *Tragédias*, only one year after the second edition of *Tamoios*. Perhaps apprehensive because of the previous controversy surrounding his epic, he warns in *Tragédias*:

Frios censores, críticos impassíveis, juizes parciaes e imparciaes, amigos e inimigos, a vós me entrego. Não faltarão accusações em todos os gêneros. Talvez tenham razão, sobre tudo si quizerem medir esta obra com o compasso de Aristóteles e de Horacio, ou vel-a com o prisma dos Românticos. Eu não sigo nem o rigor dos Clássicos, nem o desalinho dos segundos; não vendo verdade absoluta em nenhum dos systemas, faço as devidas concessões a ambos; ou antes, faço o que entendo, e o que posso (MAGALHÃES, 1865, p. 7).

These arguments seem enough to locate *A Confederação dos Tamoios* within the poetic project of Gonçalves de Magalhães and this “Romantismo de primeira hora”. To a great extent, this conception of his work eliminates the criticism the poem received in the controversy initiated by José de Alencar with his *Cartas sobre a Confederação dos Tamoios*. As shown by Neiva (2017, p. 7-8), Alencar focuses his criticism on two aspects: the technical ineptitude of Gonçalves of Magalhães and the inadequacy of the poem as an epic. The scholar observes that this inadequacy is part of a corollary accepted by Alencar that the epic was an outdated genre. Outdated because it is no longer possible to strictly adopt the rules inspired by the models in this new literary moment. It is for not following the models and for using, in the epic, images typical of other genres – there is a twist on the idea of the classic *decorum* – that Magalhães will be criticized. I quote the excerpts mentioned by Neiva (2017, p. 8):

Perguntaria se não é extravagante que um poeta, destinando-se a cantar um assumpto heróico, invoque para este fim o “sol que esmalta as pétalas das flôres”, como faria um autor de bucólicas e de idyllos? [...] [...] A invocação do poema do sr. Magalhães, por qualquer lado que a consideremos, não satisfaz; como arte, como fórmula da epopéa, é contra as regras e exemplos dos mestres (ALENCAR, 1856, p. 65-66).

Neiva (2017, p. 9) shows that the conception of epic by Magalhães dialogues with the conceptions of epic from the past and is more dynamic than the view by Alencar. In a warning to the second edition of his epic, Magalhães conceived the epic as “encerrando todos os gêneros de poesia” (2008, p. 855) – a renaissance point of view – at the same time as he aims at updating the genre: he claims to abandon the Camonian *ottava rima*, a measure consecrated for the genre since it was too conventional and inappropriate to the taste of the time.

We add to Neiva's theses that Magalhães operates this renewal of the epic objectively, proposing an interaction between the matter of his poem and the classical substrate and imagery, never entirely abandoning them, but rather dialoguing with them²: they are still the throes of a poetic representation which sees art as imitation, but this imitation is now completely new, detached from European models and injected with an atmosphere of nationality.

An example of this expedient, in *Confederação*, is in the use of the simile. This rhetorical-poetic resource is determinant in classical epic, which makes it possible for Magalhães to compare figures of the classical framework with the originality of Brazilian scenes, characters, and landscapes. This is the case of the simile that characterizes the poem's hero, Aimbiré, in his first appearance (II, v. 48-53). There, the Indian is compared, respectively, to Hercules, to the god Mars and the Greek statuary of Phidias, in a profusion of Greek-Roman topics:

De vultu hercúleo, soberano o porte,
Olhar dominador, severo o rosto,
Bela estátua de bronze parecia,
Qual a de Marte modelara um Fídias.
(MAGALHÃES, 2008, p. 882).

The Amazon River, in verses 60 to 63 of the first book:

Ressupino gigante se afigura,
Qual outro Briaréu, mas verdadeiro,
Que estende os braços para arcar a terra!
(MAGALHÃES, 2008, p. 861).

The work itself already tells us that it would be programmatic to put side by side such images to highlight their new aesthetic intentions, revealing the game that seems to be predominant in the poems of Magalhães (I, v. 132-138):

Oh vós da Grécia deleitosos campos
Onde o Alfeu e o Eurotas serpenteiam,
E em cujas margens dríades habitam!

² This becomes clear in the figure of other poets that Magalhães considers as mentors. Souza Caldas, called by him as "primeiro dos nossos líricos" (MAGALHÃES, 1836, p. 4), reiterates, in his content, the religious theme by appropriating biblical modes of expression and breaks with the arcadian imagination; however, he transposes the psalms into fixed forms, such as the cantata and the ode.

Montes, que dais abrigo em vossos topos,
De loureiros à sombra, às castas Musas;
Vós não assoberbais a majestade
Destes montes brasílios, destes bosques!
(MAGALHÃES, 2008, p. 863).

Magalhães will find this dialogue between originality and model not only in Arcadian predecessors who portrayed the Indian – such as Santa Rita Durão and, above all, Basílio da Gama, who, however, he does not refer to directly – but also in romantic contemporaries, especially Odorico Mendes, who he directly referred to, as we will see now.

Only one year before the publication of *A Confederação dos Tamoios*, the *Eneida Brasileira* was printed in 1854; the epithet was not fortuitous. With this title, Odorico emphasized not only his act of pouring all Virgil into Portuguese (a project completed in 1858), but also marked a position that distinguished his *Eneida* from that of the Portuguese translators João Franco Barreto (in the 17th century, who adopted the *ottava rima* and Camonian lexicon) and José Victorino Barreto Feio, in the 19th century.

It is possible that the translation of Odorico might have influenced the conceptualization of epic in Magalhães, as can be seen from an essay published by Magalhães in the issue of *Revista do Instituto Histórico Geográfico Brasileiro* published in the first quarter of 1860. In it, Magalhães treats Odorico as an *auctoritas* of the Brazilian epic in a tone that appears to be a covert replica of the controversy of five years earlier:

Os feitos dos indígenas oferecem argumento simpático à nossa poesia nacional. E como bem notou o Sr. Odorico Mendes: os selvagens, rudes e de costumes quase homéricos, podem prestar belos quadros à epopeia. O parecer de tão abalizado crítico, que nos deu Virgílio em português, e luta para interpretar Homero, é de tanto peso, que decide só por si qualquer dúvida (MAGALHÃES, 1860, p. 63).

The Brazilian Latinist Paulo Sérgio de Vasconcelos (2007, p. 39), in an analysis of the translations by José Vitorino Barreto Feio and Odorico Mendes, notes that, although both translators sometimes “filtrem Virgílio pelo viés camoniano”, Odorico “se impregna do estilo virgiliano e escreve à maneira virgiliana, empregando certas características do estilo do poeta latino”, such as archaisms, hyperbatons, and poetic compounds. Professor Brunno Vieira (2010, p. 144) shows how, in parts of the Magalhães’ epic,

there are allusions to the *Eneida* by Odorico in intertextual key. He quotes, as an example, a passage that marks the beginning of the story in *A Confederação dos Tamoios* (I, vv. 46-48): “Baliza natural ao Norte avulta/ O das águas gigante caudaloso, /Que pela terra alarga-se vastíssimo” (MAGALHÃES, 2008, p. 860), which is compared to verses 20-22 of *Eneida Brasileira* by Odorico Mendes: “Colônia Tíria no ultramar, Cartago, / Do Ítalo Tibre contraposta às fozes/Houve, possante empório, vastíssimo” (MENDES, 1854, p. 7).

According to Vieira, both works share poetic and rhetorical resources that refer to a Latinizing inheritance, if not precisely Virgilian:

O início da epopeia e da tradução brasileira são correlatos. Notem-se a digressão geográfica (lá o Amazonas, cá Cartago), o hipérbato latinizante (“o das águas gigante caudaloso” // “do ítalo Tibre contraposta às fozes”), a amplificação na descrição (a concatenação de epítetos e adjetivos e a coincidência dos superlativos finais “vastíssimo” e “aspérrimo”), a economia nos artigos no primeiro verso que deixa lapidar o português (VIEIRA, 2010, p. 145).

A comparison, also quoted by the Brazilian scholar (2010, p. 145), to the Portuguese translation by José Vitorino Barreto Feio, also from the 19th century, can elucidate the proximity between Magalhães and Mendes:

Longe da foz do Tibre, olhando a Itália,
Uma cidade antiga houve, Cartago:
Colônia foi de Tírios; opulenta,
E na escola da guerra endurecida.
(FEIO, 1846, p. 4).

But it is not only by language and form that the relationship with *Aeneid* is observed. It is also seen in the reupdating or emulation of commonplaces of the epic. In Book VI of *Aeneid*, Virgil imitates a scene already seen in Homer’s *Odyssey*: the descent into the hells. In this episode, Aeneas rejoins his father, Anchises, who shows him the souls that will incarnate in the bodies of Roman heroes still to be born. It is the moment when Virgil pays a compliment to Rome, showing how great the future of the Romans will be, heirs of Troy (*Eneida Brasileira*, Book VI, vv. 778-781):

Eia, a glória que os Dárdanos espera,
Do ítalo tronco os descendentes nossos,
Que a fama ilustrarão de seus maiores,

Hei de explicar-te, e aprenderá teus fados.
(MENDES, 1854, p. 207).

At this moment, Aeneas has a vision of his distant descendant, Gaius Octavius, who will restore peace comparable to the Golden Age, the “satúrnios séculos dourados” (*Eneida Brasileira*, Book VI, vv. 816-819):

Eis, eis o promettido, Augusto César,
Diva stirpe, varão que ao Lácio antigo
Há-de os Satúrnios séculos dourados
restituir (...) (MENDES, 1854, p. 208).

There is no “descent into hells” in *A Confederação dos Tamoios*. But just as Aeneas sees the glorious future of his people configured in a Rome of the times of Virgil, in *A Confederação dos Tamoios*, Magalhães also heralds a future of glories to the heroes of his epic.

After a confrontation with cacique Tibiriçá, the Tamoio hero Jagoanharo receives the visit of Saint Sebastian in a dream, who offers him a vision of the future. The saint shows, in this future, among other events, the foundation of Rio de Janeiro (the place of climax for the narrative of *Confederação*), the independence of Brazil, and the end of the conflict narrated in the poem, praising the Brazilian emperors and Christianity. Thus, Magalhães follows the Virgil model in the sense that the future in the context of the narrative is, extradiegetically, a praise of the present through the elaboration of the matter of the past. In this way, Pedro I is portrayed and praised as a peacemaker hero in terms of Caesar Augustus by Virgil. José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva is depicted as the patriarch of independence (Book VI, vv. 224-227):

Ei-lo, egrégio mancebo de alto porte,
A quem glória imortal o céu destina,
Dos filhos do Brasil já ladeado,
E desse sábio Andrada, que se ufana
Co'os ilustres irmãos de ter nas veias
Sangue de Tib'riçá, e dos tamoios.
(MAGALHÃES, 2008, p. 976).

On the one hand, *A Confederação dos Tamoios* ends with the defeat of the Indians by the enemy. On the other hand, in the figure of Andrada, there is a glimpse of a future reconciliation, constituting a national past.

The same happens in Virgil's *Aeneid*, when the Trojan hero, Aeneas, founds a new city that will appease the wrath even of gods that used to be enemies.

In conclusion, two elements make it possible to recover *A Confederação dos Tamoios* and call it “exemplary.” First, as we have already mentioned, there is the complete adequacy of the work for the poetic program of Magalhães, that not only sees the epic as dynamic (NEIVA, 2017, p. 9), but also seeks the synthesis of the formal and classic image frameworks with national themes, in a clear effort for emulation, without entirely abandoning them. This seems to be the answer that Magalhães found to deal with the adequacy of ancient forms in the face of emerging romantic aesthetics.

Second, considering the importance and authority of Odorico Mendes, noted by Magalhães himself, for the conception of epic, we might think of an affiliation of the Brazilian poet to a Virgilian mold or to a certain forgotten “vertente latinizante” of Brazilian poetry, one that, as the scholar Paulo Franchetti (2008, p.1103) defines it, is

Uma vertente que talvez só agora possa ser encarada de modo compreensivo, com a queda da hegemonia do padrão de gosto modernista e com o conseqüente esbatimento do vetor teleológico da descrição histórica elaborada em meados do século XX, que apagou ou como monstrosidade ou apanhado de tolices, tudo aquilo que se afastava da linha ideal de progresso em direção à coloquialidade expressiva posta a serviço da investigação ou do retrato da vida social (FRANCHETTI, 2008, p. 1103).

These elements seem important for *A Confederação dos Tamoios* to be considered and studied more, getting past the controversy that nourished its reception.

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