The Character of the Black Sorcerer in Nineteenth Century Literature and the Press: a Study of Brazilian Slavery.

Natália Vicente Jaremko. (IC)

Abstract

This research aims to study the depiction of black sorcerers in Brazilian literature and the press to understand its relation with the social and political context of slavery, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Key words: slavery, sorcerers, literature, press.

Introduction

In the first year of research, I read works of literary theory in order to understand better the possible uses of literary materials in historical studies. In addition, I read texts about the relations between literature and the press in the nineteenth century, since most literary works that are relevant for my research were originally published in newspapers and magazines. Furthermore, I have read about magic, African religions and slavery, from both political and social perspectives. Also, I have been exploring novels and periodicals – mainly from 1852 to 1871 – that depict one or more black sorcerers as characters. The aim is to explore the ways in which these black characters are constructed in the context of a slave society.

Results and Discussion

After exploring several peridicals, I have decided to focus my study on a serialized novel published originally in 1852 and 1853[1] in the magazine *Marmota Fluminense*[2], and again, in 1859 and 1860[3], in the same periodical. The novel is called *Maria ou A menina roubada*[4] and tells the story of two black sorcerers, as well as of a lot of other complex characters that are rich for a discussion of Brazilian slavery at the time.

I intend to understand how the main sorcerer – *tia*[5] Laura – is structured. So far, it has become clear that her practices combine elements of European folklore and traditional African religious beliefs.

The author is Antônio Gonçalves Teixeira e Sousa and I have also studied a little about his biography, because it is important to obtain information about his political and social views. Thus, I can assert that he was a man of African descent and approached many issues regarding slavery in his literary works. Nevertheless, he was not an abolitionist –actually, nobody defended the immediate end of slavery in Brazil in the 1850's. He spoke in favor of a better treatment for slaves, although he did not question the property rights of slaveholders and the paternalist ideology that sustained their power.

Conclusions

I will continue to analyze this novel, focusing mainly on characters that are slaves –both African and Brazilian-born – and free or freed people of color. Of course, black sorcerers are the most important characters for my research. I will seek more information about the author, the intellectual context – what kind of literature and scientific texts the intellectuals of that time used to read – and the mentality – to understand how people at the time professed and dealt with magical thinking. I will read texts about witchcraft and folklore, besides continuing to explore the newspaper where *Maria* or *A menina roubada* was published.

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[1] TEIXEIRA E SOUZA, Antônio Gonçalves. *Maria* ou *A Menina Roubada.* In: *A Marmota*, Rio de Janeiro, pp. 1-4, n. 295, Sep. 10th, 1852 – n.341, Fab. 18th, 1860.

[2] *Marmota* means "marmot" and *fluminense* is related to the fact that the periodical was published in Rio de Janeiro.

[3] TEIXEIRA E SOUZA, Antônio Gonçalves. *Maria* ou *A Menina Roubada.* In: *A Marmota*, Rio de Janeiro, pp. 1-4, n. 1096, Oct. 4th, 1859 – n.1129, Jan 27th, 1860.

[4] The translation would be: Maria or the kidnaped girl.

[5] As in "aunt", name used to indicate sponsorship.