



## The teacher education novel: contributions from literature to think the History of Education

O romance de formação da professora: contribuições da literatura para pensar a História da Educação

La novela de formación del profesorado: aportes de la literatura para pensar la Historia de la Educación

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### Abstract

This article investigates the teacher training processes described in two novels published in the first half of the twentieth century, namely: “The Calvary of a Teacher”, by Dora Lize, and “Clarissa”, by Érico Veríssimo. We read these books as apprenticeship or education novels that, as they present the character-teachers in different circumstances, school and non-school, allowing us to identify the complex processes that build their professional identities. The themes related to the main character's professional choice, the gender issues present in the novels' plots, as well as the potential uses of literary works to deal with the themes in the history of Brazilian education, including the history of the school, the teaching profession, and the clashes between the traditional method and the renewed teaching ideas constitute articulating axes for the analysis proposed here.

**Keywords:** Formation novels. Literary source. Teacher training.

## Resumo

Este artigo investiga os processos de formação docente descritos em dois livros publicados na primeira metade do século XX, a saber: “O calvário de uma professora”, de Dora Lice, e “Clarissa”, de Érico Veríssimo. Investe-se na leitura desses livros como romances de formação que ao apresentarem as personagens-professoras em diferentes circunstâncias, escolares e não escolares, permitem identificar os complexos processos que constroem suas identidades profissionais. As temáticas relacionadas à escolha profissional das protagonistas, as questões de gênero presentes nos enredos das obras, assim como os usos potenciais das obras literárias para tratar dos temas da história da educação brasileira, incluindo a história da escola, da profissão docente, e os embates entre o método tradicional e as ideias renovadas de ensino constituem eixos articuladores da análise aqui proposta.

**Palavras-chave:** Romances de formação. Fonte literária. Formação docente.

## Resumen

Este artículo investiga los procesos de formación docente descritos en dos libros publicados en la primera mitad del siglo XX: “El calvario de una maestra”, de Dora Lice, y “Clarissa”, de Érico Veríssimo. Tomamos la lectura de estos libros como novelas formativas que, al presentar al personaje-docente en diferentes circunstancias, escolares y extraescolares, nos permiten identificar los complejos procesos que construyen sus identidades profesionales. El análisis propuesto tiene como ejes la elección profesional de los protagonistas y las cuestiones de género presentes en las tramas de las obras. También integran el análisis consideraciones sobre los usos potenciales de las obras literarias para abordar los temas de la historia de la educación brasileña, incluida la historia de la escuela, de la profesión docente y los enfrentamientos entre el método tradicional y las ideas pedagógicas renovadas.

**Palabras clave:** Novelas de formación. Fuente literaria. Formación de profesores.

## Introduction

During the course of the twentieth-century, the rearing of individuals was conceived predominantly as a process of "natural" development ranging from childhood to adulthood, to be monitored and led by the family in the home and the teachers at school. An association between the development of children and social progress was established, which demanded scientific studies and government investments in the issues related to their health and education, a formulation that still persists in discourses around education published in the Press today. The issue of childhood gained political importance and the tasks of caring for and educating children came to be recognised as socially relevant attributions. The hygienist movement of the first half of the twentieth century and the institutionalisation of psychology as a science and as a profession contributed to that process, taking the developing child as the object of studies and interventions. The idea that the future of the fatherland depended on the survival, health and good education of children caused great importance to be placed on the instruction of mothers in terms of puericulture and of the professional training of teachers (FREIRE, 2008; FERREIRA & GONDRA, 2006).

In the period corresponding approximately to Brazil's First Republic, the government's efforts regarding the education of children focussed on the setting up of teaching public systems, which took shape in the serialised primary schools (pupils of different ages no longer lumped together but segregated into "series", according to age), where simultaneous teaching was carried out, and in the Teacher-training Colleges. Such institutions slowly spread throughout the country (SOUZA, 1998; CARVALHO, 1989). From the 1920's onwards, the attention of educators turned to the issues of methods, and a series of reforms in education were carried out in several states, at the same time in which publications specialised in education multiplied (NAGLE, 1976; CARVALHO, 1989). The principles of the New School (*Escola Nova*) movement guided the reformers' initiatives and gained greater visibility with the publication of the *New Education Pioneers Manifesto of 1932*, a document written out by Fernando de Azevedo and signed by several intellectuals of the time. The Manifesto demanded the institution of public schools for all, where boys and girls studied together, a lay, free and compulsory school. Additionally, it supported the renovation of teaching practices, grounded on the new knowledge of children's psychology and development (VIDAL, 2013).

The books *The Calvary of a Teacher (O calvário de uma professora, 1928)* and *Clarissa (1933)* were published during this transition period, and both express the deficiencies perceived in the educational system and in the so-called traditional school practices, considered by *escolanovista* educators as obsolete, and they present a few ideas disseminated in the educational field at the time regarding how the schools should be transformed in order to favour the pupils' development. The fact that the book *The Calvary of a Teacher* is an autobiographical novel and *Clarissa* a fictional novel is relevant, and the difference is clear in the authors' perspectives. Author and teacher Dora Lice suffered on her own skin the difficulties associated with the precarious conditions of teaching during the First Republic, as well as the effects of gender inequality, which was reflected in the hierarchy of positions in the educational system. In the case of Érico Veríssimo, it is relevant to investigate where the writer, who was not himself a teacher, places his perspective regarding educational issues. As observed by Maria Helena Câmara Bastos and Maria Teresa Santos Cunha (2000), the representation of the State of Rio Grande do Sul's society in the author's literary oeuvre includes several aspects of school life and the teaching profession, which are widely explored in the composition of the contexts lived by his characters.

Despite their differences, both can be approximated within the genre of education novel or apprenticeship novel, the *Bildungsroman*<sup>1</sup>, as they follow the building process of the main characters' personality, who, grounded on the experiences lived and the relationships they establish with other people, discover themselves and grow up to occupy a place in the world. What is foregrounded, therefore, is the literary study regarding how human potentialities are elaborated, the development of their possibilities, which has generated rich diversity of interpretations for the concept from the eighteenth century onwards. One could mention Georg Lukács' interpretation, understanding the education novel as "...the formal need that the reconciliation of inner life and the world is the most problematic possible" (p.138x); or the definition that Mikhail Bakhtin, for whom this literary genre features "... the problems of reality and the possibilities of Man and the issue of creative initiative"<sup>2</sup> (p.223). If the diverse interpretations of the kind prolonged its relevance as a form of investigation into how one is brought up, they also were commonly related to the male and Eurocentric formative process. However, wider understandings of the genre have associated the education novel to other spaces and subjects. Studies have shown its potential to speak of the feminine condition in Mozambique, as is the case of Cíntia Acosta Kutter (2018), or, in Brazil, Cristina Ferreira Pinto (1990). This article, in this sense, seeks approximations with such initiatives, mobilising the education novel fertility in order to understand the feminine and educational teaching processes. Thus one can comprehend certain singularities of women's experiences in the world. As Cristina Ferreira Pinto observes, because they are female main characters, it should be taken into account that the social restrictions imposed on women reflected in the characterisation of feminine roles, whose development was portrayed only up to the point where they reached the age to marry and have children. In the case of the books analysed in this text, the fate of being a teacher is presented as a "natural" professional choice for women and not the result of a personal decision, which is more clearly seen in the case of main character Hermengarda, from *The Calvary of a Teacher*, who wanted to be a doctor but, because of the economic setbacks experienced by her father, had to resign herself to teaching.

As they portray the teacher's training process, i.e., the training of those who take up the training of future generations, the novels under scrutiny constitute a special case of education novels, as they emphasise the conflictual conciliation processes between women and the world around them, finally coming to understand themselves as teachers. We consider that the reading of these two books side by side offers valuable elements for the understanding of the history of Brazilian education in the initial period of the dissemination of public schools and of the diffusion of the New School ideals in Brazil, as will become evident below.

### **A writer thinks about training: an incursion into *Clarissa*, by Érico Veríssimo**

In Érico Veríssimo's (1905-1975) prolific production one can find his commitment to the representation of different characters within the privileged urban environments of his literary project. Among them, find teacher characters, as is the case of Clarimundo, in *Caminhos*

<sup>1</sup> According to Cristina Ferreira Pinto, "The 'Bildungsroman' tradition begins with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, published in Germany between 1794 and 1796, and translated into English in 1824 under the title *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (Buckley, 9-10). The German term "Bildung" means education, education, formation, culture or civilising processes, and, in Portuguese, "Bildungsroman" may be translated as 'romance de aprendizagem', 'de formação', or 'de desenvolvimento'" (1990, p. 9). Since its creation in the eighteenth century, the genre was described and analysed by several authors, so various names were established. Mikhail Bakhtin (2011), for instance, uses the term "Education novel", underlining the effects and appropriations of historical time in human development.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from the quote in the Portuguese language edition.

*Cruzados*, a book of 1935, and *Clarissa*, originally published in 1933, whose main character is a recurring trope in Veríssimo's oeuvre, making an appearance in other titles written in the 1930's: *Música ao Longe*, of 1935, *Um lugar ao Sol*, of 1936, and *Saga*, in 1940. This character recurrence, especially of Clarissa as she features in the books mentioned above at several stages of her professional training and teaching, indicates the author's interest in the educational issues and, at the same time, his appropriation of several discourses regarding the school and teacher training in circulation in the first half of the twentieth-century. Such interest also is manifested in the author's incursions into children's literature, especially in books such as *Meu ABC* (*My ABC*) and *Aventuras no mundo da higiene* (*Adventures in the World of Hygiene*), written to be used in schools. The second title clearly shows the harmony between literature and the hygienist discourse that was being disseminated at the time, with significant effects in the educational field, an approximation that has been well examined in the text *Infância, Higiene & Educação*, by Maria Helena Câmara Bastos and Maria Stephanou (2005).

In this text, by means of the analysis of *Clarissa* and of other passages from the other titles where the same character appears, we intend to identify the way in which the author represents teacher training as he appropriates the educational concerns of the time. The books in which the teacher character makes an appearance were published predominately in the 1930's, a decade of intense discussions and educational propositions intent on renovating school and teaching practices. (VIDAL, 2010). One must take into consideration that the *Manifesto of the New Education Pioneers* (*Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova*) had been published in 1932, therefore one year before *Clarissa* was made public, generating heated debates after its widespread dissemination by the Press, as informed by Diana Vidal (2013). Vidal further adds the education pioneers' interest in a structuring discourse regarding the educational arguments triggered by the *Manifesto*. One cannot ignore, therefore, that Erico Veríssimo was influenced by this context as he wrote a book whose leading character is a young girl in the process of becoming a teacher. The literary options and travails with which Clarissa finds herself embroiled in indicate, however, an appropriation by the author, in which Veríssimo not only establishes a dialogue with the themes predominant at the time, but also includes his own points of view, rendering relevant the investigation, inside the author's oeuvre, of one of the ways of thinking and projecting Brazilian education in the first half of the twentieth century.

If Erico Veríssimo offers an original point of view regarding the educational issue by means of a literary text, this is so because, according to historian Nicolau Sevcenko (1983), literature offers a language organised in the form of a discourse marked by the rules of its place of production and, thus, causes the emergence of the *social structures from which they emanate*. In this sense, as stated by Pierre Bourdieu (1998) when he writes on Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, an analysis of the book's structure allows us to see the structure of the social space in which the author himself was situated. Thus, we should mention that Erico Veríssimo was born in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, from a rich and traditional but decadent family, leading him to work as a bank clerk and a pharmacy clerk. So the writer's production seems to have been built from this perspective, because his books will always feature urban themes by means of the observation of the middle classes, as noted by Alfredo Bosi (1997). The books published in the 1930's, especially, attest this literary interest as they follow the development of Clarissa and Vasco (a recurrent male character in this cycle of the author's production). As we start from the hypothesis that literature can be a source for the history of education, because it records a literary universe that represents the historical-social milieu inhabited by its writer, we must take into account, therefore, that the representations of Clarissa's social and circulation spaces by Veríssimo reveal his point of view regarding a crucial moment in the history of Brazilian education.

## The teacher situated in her time

As he creates the character Clarissa, born in Jacarecanga, a fictitious city in the state of Rio Grande do Sul's countryside and whose family is undergoing economic decadence, Erico Veríssimo pays close attention to the year in which the young girl of 13 moves to the state capital in order to study and in which she is transformed by the contact with this new world. As the author chooses this literary construction, one may identify that the book is grounded on a few elements that approximate it to the *Bildungsroman*, i.e., the apprenticeship or education novel (PINTO 1990). Despite the fact that the book does not fit in perfectly into analysis as an apprenticeship novel, it does feature a few elements of this literary genre, since Erico Verissimo seeks to record this special moment, perhaps magic, of transformation, as stated in his preface to the 1973 edition:

I wished I knew how to compose music in order to translate into melody such a poetic moment; or else how to paint, in order to fasten onto a canvas the images of that miraculous minute. [...] This was when it dawned on me the suggestion of writing the story of a girl who awakens to life, for perhaps in that way I could prolong that moment's sortilege (VERÍSSIMO apud MORAIS, 2010, p. 43).

The point is to render evident the situations and circumstances of a girl who is becoming a teacher. But the book places the main character in several situations, often not school-related, where she increasingly finds maturity, especially those situations where she comes into contact with human types and circumstances that characterised society in the 1930's. One thus observes that the formative process described by the author is in dialogue with his literary project, marked by a sociological approach in the elaboration of literary language. Donizeth Santos states that Veríssimo sought "...to elaborate a literature that revealed the social mechanism and its gears, so as to show Man in his social dynamics and the individual in its humanity, i.e., that human beings were caught in the full act of living (SANTOS, 2014, p. 331).

As part of literary modernism, the writer found tools for the construction of a critical perspective of society as he weaved his characters' actions (BOSI, 1997). This way, Clarissa is described by means of a set of circumstances that allow her to get acquainted with different types that compose society. Consequently, the character keeps a circular relationship with reality, which spurs her reflections and, then, composes her subjectivity, helping her to see the world. Thus Veríssimo defines the formative moment. The student is constituted amongst a diversity of people and situations, despite these affecting her on different levels according to the proximity or distance from her preoccupations. It is understood that by means of this trope the author imposes his literary project on educational reflections. Regarding this, the author offers a certain counterpoint to the discourse predominant in the 1930's, which understood teacher training efforts as a concern with students' learning, placing psychology as a fundamental reference to carry out this process. In the writer's formulations, the teacher in training should instead hold society as a reference, therefore, the knowledges around concrete reality, constituted in experience.

This is the way in which the young woman observes the variety of personalities in her aunt's pension, where she lives and shares space with other characters. In the pension live Major Pombo, Amaro, a sad musician who enviously observes Clarissa's happy flourishing, D. Eufrásia, the pension's proprietor, besides Belmira, described as the mulatto. In this environment, Clarissa listens to conversations around aspects of politics, history and social tensions: "News? Nothing. Life rolls on... War threats in Europe. A

speech by Mussolini. Floods in China. Crimes. Electoral campaigns in the United States. In Brazil - 'this which is before sir's eyes'". (VERÍSSIMO, 1976, p.7).

However, Clarissa's vital temporality is something else. She listens to the issues like someone who listens to background music. The aspects of reality that interest her are those that affect her daily routine or that are linked to her concerns as a young girl. Thus, in the path from home to school, the girl sees the world and is charmed by some of its aspects:

The street is alive. On the doors of the farm shops the loose ends of silk pieces fly like coruscating flags. Men and women and children and dogs pass by. On the door of a wholesale store a young boy bites a sweet from Santo Antônio da Patrulha with small and sharp teeth: his chin smeared, the eyes sticky with pleasure. (VERÍSSIMO, 1976, p.11).

In such circumstances, Clarissa looks out through the window, but she also sees herself:

Now she realises that the window glass mirrors her dark-skinned face, on whose red and moist lips little sun stars glisten. She steps back and looks at herself with more attention. A charm! She has the impression that her image has penetrated the window frame, vague and indistinct like a ghost, and as the fish bowl stands as high as her chest, it seems that the fish swims around her breasts: - everything is funny and impossible like in certain confused dreams we have... (VERÍSSIMO, 1976, p.12).

By means of her own image reflected onto the external space, the young woman can observe herself, somehow, recognise her own image mixed with the reflected figures of objects, animals, people. Her own reflection allows, in fact, for a return to herself:

She goes to the mirror. She comes very close to the glass, She studies herself with tenderness. She looks hard into her own eyes, fondling herself in a fit of tenderness and starts to kiss her own arms, almost avidly, with a strange desire to bite them (VERÍSSIMO, 1976, p.61).

By means of the descriptions of the future teacher in front of the mirror, Veríssimo indicates the interpretative key for the young teacher's dawning. It is a path built between reality and its individual interpretation. In this path, big events or great characters are of no interest, but instead, the aspects of exterior life that are close to our experience in a specific moment are. Time is the matter of formation, thus Clarissa builds her history as she takes the present into her own hands. She does not care about the great events in History. Life is created in daily life with artisanal work and this production is enacted everyday, allowing the collection of constitutive elements and experiences. As Walter Benjamin stated "History is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time" (BENJAMIN, 1968, 262-263). Clarissa's present times, as she faces the others, the shops, the school, her own desires, constitute formative matter. This seems to be, in Clarissa's formative process described by Veríssimo, the limit of the possibilities for integration into the more critical elements of historical developments or of the permitted social tensions. In some moments of the plot, she is, additionally, described by her aunt as innocent, having her observations about reality restricted to her own thoughts (MORAIS, 2010). This character building process differs markedly from Vasco's attitude, whom the young woman will marry and who took sides in social conflicts, having participated in a war.

## The teacher was once a student

The way the young student approaches society so as to build her personal dawning also corresponds to the angle of vision through which she observes the school. If in other books where she features we witness Clarissa working as a teacher, the novel that bears her name shows her trajectory as a student, and, thus, we identify correspondences between life dawning in her and the consolidation of a relationship with the school institution. As a pupil, the young woman did not like going to school, which generated intense complaints as she was forced to attend school. It is as if the institution hindered the girl's apprenticeship, which required the possibility of direct contact with the internally re-elaborated constitutive elements of her surroundings, as observed by Roselusia Teresa Pereira de Moraes (2010). In this sense, not even a description of the classes is given, and the teaching institution is represented in the following manner:

How good is life! And how it would be a thousand times better if there wasn't the need (not the need: the obligation) of going to college, of spending hours and hours leaning over the desk, scribbling numbers, writing phrases and sentences, and learning where the Cape of Good Hope is, who is Tomé de Souza, in how many parts the human body is divided, how the area of a triangle is found... (VERÍSSIMO, 1976, p.10).

The school is the space separating pupils from life, so the novel, in some way, questions the contents of pedagogic action. As he builds such perspective of a school, Veríssimo converges with the New School critique of teaching practices, deemed as repetitive and distant from the students. Thus, the discourse of teaching renovation defended teaching practices that the children and youngsters could observe and experiment in order to build their knowledge (VIDAL, 2010). Clarissa recovers this discussion, questioning the meaning of Tomé de Souza or the siting of the Cape of Good Hope for the girl. Thus, this era of great characters and events often repeated by the school curriculum is tensed by daily life:

The first governor-general of Brazil was Tomé de Souza. But if it had been Major Nico Pombo, would the sun cease to shine as it does today? There is a cape called Finisterra. But if it did not exist, wouldn't the *jacaranda* flower the same? (VERÍSSIMO, 1976, p.12)

In Veríssimo's literary proposal, the constitution of subjects takes place by means of small events that allow for the personal elaboration of time and of the past. Thus, such knowledge taught in a moment of greater formalisation of the school institution tenses up the freedom of living and learning in favour of the schooling proposal of living at school in order to learn what it has to teach. From the author's point of view, the link between school and learning must be social life itself and a reflection about it - and not necessarily psychological knowledge, which gained centrality at the time. For the author, facing all this, there is a certain artificiality in school instruction that becomes evident when Clarissa has to study at home:

Geography. Boring subject. Memorise, memorise, memorise... And such a beautiful night out there!  
*The Eastern mountain range is formed by ancient lands that the natural agents have levelled to the state of a plateau.*  
 Clarissa reads and rereads the passage. She closes the book and her eyes



and seeks to repeat by heart the excerpt read. Her lips slightly quiver, the words leave her mouth in a whisper:

*The Eastern mountain range...*

She stops. Then what? She opens the book:

*The Eastern mountain range is formed by ancient lands... Ah! Got it now. The Eastern mountain range is formed by ancient lands... But why ancient and not very old? - that the natural agents... - But what natural agents are those? I know the Mail agent in Jacarecanga, who is Mr. Moreira. Natural agents... What is that! We don't understand a thing, how can we learn? - ... and the reduced to the state of plateaus... - state of plateaus? State... state of Rio Grande do Sul... state of Sergipe... a deplorable state, as uncle Couto used to say...*

The clock strikes half past nine, Clarissa lifts her head. Why do the arms not run faster? (VERÍSSIMO, 1976, p.41)

The class is distant from the references that the student carries along, which were built by means of her experiences and the possibilities of her apprehension of the contents taught. It is as if they cannot be part of the awakening for life that people, lived situations, animals and plants, when known directly, could evoke. It is as if the schooling institution, in Veríssimo's production, was an agent of separation between the dense time of existence and the one built by formal knowledge, seen as artificial when life is taken as a reference. Later, when she becomes a teacher, we see that such disquiet resulted in teaching attitudes described by her in her diary:

“D. Ermelinda, the Elementary's director, carries on being fastidious. Today she told me drily: ‘Clarissa, you need to do a few civic prelections to your pupils’. Now, civic prelections! The poor little souls understand nothing of matters of fatherland, of flag, of civism. What they want is to play”. (VERÍSSIMO, 2005, p.97)

As Érico Veríssimo wrote *Clarissa*, he indicated that school education helps the dawning process, in the sense proposed by the author, as it allows for the approximation of personal references and the situations in which the teaching of content are lived. This perspective seems to converge with the way in which Anísio Teixeira, as he remarked on John Dewey's oeuvre, describes education, understood as: “(...) a process of reconstruction and reorganisation of experience, through which we more acutely perceive meaning, and so we are able to better direct the course of our future experiences” (TEIXEIRA, 1965, p.17)

Education should, therefore, minimise the opposition between the “self” and the “object”, for the integration of both yields the individual's development. For Dewey, it is precisely the identification between both that allows for interest in education. Veríssimo, in his turn, when he brings in the dimensions of the appropriation of time in individual experience, brings attention to the fact that such identification, in some way, allows for the elaboration of a relationship with the also constitutive time of personal dawning that should articulate a critical reflection about society. It is not without a motive that the author stresses the importance of recording a specific moment of personal elaboration, which allows the reader who is also a teacher to elaborate about such issues from the point of view of the educational effort.

As he organises a hypothesis about education, Érico Veríssimo offers a possibility for thinking the issues linked to the theme. As he produced one such reflection in literary terms, the author invented a particular point of view regarding education, generally, and of teacher training, in particular. As he referenced the discourses around renovation of education in the first half of the twentieth-century, the writer created a point of view about the theme according to his literary projects and his social stances where the enunciations on the modernisation of teaching practices and of the school format were yoked to the idea of the traversing of the present's history and social issues. In this sense, the teacher dawns to life and goes through formative processes as she associates her pedagogic stance to a critical perception of the social and political tensions of her surroundings. Additionally, the choice for the representation of the teacher's dawning by means of elements from the education novel allow the articulation and, in some way, the defence, of the idea that teacher training takes place in different instances and leads the professional in various dimensions, such as the social, the political and of gender.

### ***Calvary of a Teacher and the "noblest career of teaching": a few elements for the analysis of the teaching profession and work***

To this class from whom everything is expected, of whom everything is asked and to whom nothing is given, please give your support, your just protection. Because the most important element in children's education is the teacher's personality, she is the one who most cooperates to the great work of national character building. (LICE, 1928, p.04).

Dora Lice's text is pertinent as it deals not only with the issues of the educational field from the historical point of view, but it also renders evident, by means of the use of literary works, the formative potential of the experiences of oneself and of the other. The book is well-known in the academic world, object of theses and dissertations, used as a source and as an object of study<sup>3</sup>, being recommended reading, almost compulsory, to researchers of the history of education area, who seek to better know the organisation of the public teaching systems and teachers' careers in the first republican period. In this context, the use of life histories appears as a resource to think about the schooling institution, its practices and culture, grounded both on oral and written reports: "to reflect about the institution of the school as a place of homogenisation of behaviours and about the space open for the differences in relationships between individuals" (CATANI, 1997, p. 16).

Reading the text triggers feelings of enchantment and sadness. Enchantment is given by the opportunity to know the backstage of a public teaching system's organisation, unveiling what the official texts, laws and decrees do not spell out, to understand how a teacher was forged in the Teacher-training Colleges during first years of the Brazilian Republic, at a moment when the school was celebrated as the cornerstone of the republican project for the Brazilian nation. Sadness is given by the perception of the difficulties experienced by the main character, by the social injustices she denounces and by the terrible life conditions she faces as a professional, wife and mother. In this sense, the issues that are initially configured and that seek

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<sup>3</sup> The Masters dissertation by Dislane Zerbinatti Moraes (1996), titled *Literatura, memória e ação política: uma análise de romances escritos por professores paulistas*, analyses the novel *O calvário de uma professora* and three other novels written by teachers in the period between the years of 1920 and 1935, aiming at investigating the forms in which these professionals conceived their profession, teaching career and school reality, its practices and representations, in the period selected for study.

to guide the revisiting of this novel relate to the way in which Hermengarda's life story allows us to think about issues not only of an individual's formation, but also of those who participated in the schooling process of other individuals. In this sense, the choice of the novel was made not only because it is an important reference for the educational field, but also because of the changes it can promote regarding the view of what the school is, the teaching system, the teaching profession and career.

Before advancing with comments on the novel, a brief parenthesis is in order. It is known that, as stated by Bourdieu in his text "The Autobiographical Illusion" (1998), a life narrative subjected to a selection of events may not constitute a document corresponding to what, in fact, took place in reality. It is a fictional text, a literary reconstruction about a set of facts that may or may not come close to lived reality, which may reproduce real or imagined episodes, an idealised or concrete history, but one that anyway does not invalidate its use as a source and object of study. In view of the complex process of elaboration of individual and collective memories, it is worth stating that the highlights in the book are conditioned only by the subjective relationships that we establish with the text and very little with the search for a claimed truth of the work.

### **The author, the main character and the teacher**

The edition of the novel used for this article is organised in 240 mimeographed pages, featuring more or less readable type and written in the spelling of the time, as penned by Violeta Leme under the pseudonym of Dora Lice. The text was published in 1928 by *Estabelecimento Gráfico Irmãos Ferraz*, who also published teaching magazines. Right at the beginning of the text, Dora Lice is careful in warning the reader that "The facts narrated here are authentic, but, for the good flow of narrative, do not keep chronological order". (p.03). But, it is possible to identify the reconstruction of the first steps taken by the teacher in her career and the feeling that autobiographical facts fuse with fictional ones is permanent in the course of the plot. The author worked as a primary teacher in several schools both in São Paulo state's countryside and the capital city between the years of 1905 and 1935. She had seven sisters, four of them teachers, was Vice-President of the Itatiba Red Cross, and in 1918 actively participated in the caring for the victims of the Spanish Flu. Her book, initially published under a pseudonym was reissued in 1952, a moment in which the true authorship of the text was revealed (MORAES, 2019).

The choice of a profession stands out in the main character's initial career steps. Dora Lice did not want to be a teacher, and, growing up "among child's play and her parents' tender caring love, the infant flowered as a child full of freshness and grew in grace and vigour" (LICE, 1928, p. 14), she soon had to deal with fate's hindrances: "With a face full of angst, her father entered the home one day. He was ruined! The abolition of slavery had disorganised the plantations. The slump in coffee prices, coupled with a pair of unlucky transactions, had erased his hope of saving his beautiful and rich property" (idem, p. 18). And, in this context, Hermengarda, "Seeking to soften the violence of the blow that had bruised her father, took up the education of her little brothers, exchanging, in resignation, the difficult task she had imposed on herself, the dream she had been about to fulfil" (LICE, 1928, p. 18). As her brothers' preceptor, "Directing everything with method, she disciplined her brothers like in school. The times for meals, for study, for recreation, everything was regulated. When they wanted to revolt against her authority, she knew that the science of educating is the 'science of reason and of the heart' and resorted to sisterly affection and the little rebels became submissive" (idem, p. 19-20). To reproduce what was known to her of the schools she had attended became, thus, the safe way to lead the instruction of her younger brothers.

However, despite her success in the pedagogic tasks carried out with her brothers, she wanted to be a doctor (her father had decided to support her, before fate's hard knock), but she accepts the idea, not before vehemently protesting to the suggestion made by a relative: "- Never! I will never be a teacher in a public school! A poor creature, always so humiliated, by so many hierarchical superiors - directors, inspectors, secretary. I want to work, but not as a slave! I want to work as a thinking being, and not like these unlucky creatures, transformed into veritable machines, moved only by very heavy and complicated machinery, denominated - Public Instruction General Directory". But, soon, the young girl is made to change her mind. The death of the brother who had helped with the family's expenses after the parents' bankruptcy and their consequent great consternation, made Hertmengarda rethink the Teacher-training College. "It was, to her regret, an obsession. It repelled her strongly, it was repugnant. She returned, persistent, insistent. It was the only saving floating plank, in her difficult situation" (LICE, 1928, p. 23).

The establishment of schools for the specific training of teachers for their jobs is linked to the institutionalisation of public instruction in the modern world, i.e., to the implementation of liberal ideas of secularisation and extension of primary education to all echelons of the population (TANURI, 2000, p. 62)

Resigned to her fate, the young woman signs up for the admission examination to the Teacher-training College and is fully admitted. But she was different from her other colleagues, who were admitted with distinction, not by the knowledge shown, but by the privileged social positions they enjoyed. The difference in treatment given to candidates of distinct social classes deeply marked the writing of the novel not only in young Hermengarda's initial training process, who, despite being an excellent student and of getting the answers right, does not get an honourable mention in her initial exams, nor is she favoured in the pick of professional posts (or schools). In the main character's words: "We only achieve something with the intermediation of politicians" (p. 41). It is worth noting that public examinations and tests were one of the first legitimate forms of teacher selection for work in public schools in the Province of São Paulo.

Teacher-training colleges are at the origin of a deep change regarding primary teachers, a veritable sociological mutation. Within their scope, the miserable and little-instructed teachers of the beginning of the nineteenth century would make room, in a few decades, for trained professionals, prepared for the exercise of the teaching activity. (NÓVOA, 1991, p. 125).

Hermengarda regards teaching work as a socially relevant function<sup>4</sup>, but one where, at the same time, everything is demanded from those who teach, but little is offered in return. In several passages of her account, the author records the injustices imposed on her class, as illustrated in a conversation she has with a young inspector, a classroom mate and her secret admirer since school days. The colleague, once graduated, got a post at the Public Instruction Directory. According to this admirer, Mr. Aluisio. "Teaching is a most noble career, but the least independent of them all. It forces us to always bow". The young

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<sup>4</sup> The debate around the teaching profession and the ideological mechanisms that fit teaching into a certain social place and the exercise of a practice can be taken up in Regina Zilberman's text, "Literatura e história da educação: representações do professor na ficção brasileira" published in 2004. In this text, the author revisits several works of Brazilian literature in order to analyse the representations of the teachers' role in different moments in Brazilian history.

professional promptly replied "But I will always keep my head high!" (LICE, 1928, p. 33), an attitude she keeps during the whole of the plot despite adverse and terrible life and professional conditions. The first denunciations were thus voiced and were related to the social injustices seen in the school rankings and in the allocations of best work positions, given to the young women and men from richer families.

In the classes' organisation or management, the teacher kept her proud position, not being discouraged by the hardships of far away schools, by the ignorance of teaching inspectors, or still by the difficulties that the students faced to attend school at all and to learn the contents taught. And the parents, "very satisfied with their daughters' progress, personally came round to bring her their applause and most sincere gratitude" (idem, p. 52). And the teacher, "concentrated on the greatness of her mission, helped the child, a budding flower, to fully bloom" (LICE, 1928, p.47).

Having a teaching system all of her own, Hermengarda organised class plans that gave excellent results. She read foreign authors (there was nothing in our vernacular about pedagogy and psychology) and she learned from them what her leaders ignored. Diligent as she was, she knew how to put into practice, to the pupils' great benefit, what theory had taught her (LICE, 1928, p. 46-47).

Metaphors and comparisons are present in several passages of the text, representative of discourses of the time and that may give us important indications of how the representations of the teaching profession and career were elaborated at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Israel Scheffler in his book "The Language of Education" (1974), the study of educational discourses, understood in their definitions, metaphors and slogans, may reveal of the absolute and relative premises that compose the educational ideology in different social and historic contexts, meriting attention regarding their uses and diffusion. In the author's words:

the educational discourse encompasses countless different contexts, crossing the scientific sphere, ethics and practice, which impress a variety of tones and emphases to notions that are ostensibly common. (SCHEFFLER, 1974, p. 17)<sup>5</sup>

The main character's dedication to teaching is evident in several of the novel's pages, as well as the little or inefficient training of those who were in positions of management in the social and historical period portrayed. They sometimes hindered, instead of helping, the classes' good progress and the children's learning. There are many references to the clashes between the young teacher and both teaching inspectors and school headmasters. Among those, we can highlight the narrator's much expected promotion to work with a primary schools. It is important to clarify that the "usual" progression in the teaching career of that period, for teachers without a patron, was to work for a few years in isolated schools, and later apply for a position in assembled schools (*escolas reunidas*) and/or primary schools, considered the embodiment of a more modern and organised form of teaching<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Translated from the quote in the Portuguese language edition.

<sup>6</sup> São Paulo State's primary schools (*grupos escolares*), characterised by graduated schools where the teaching method was simultaneous, were created in 1893 and have heralded the organisation of public and state teaching systems, especially as they established relevant changes for the administrative and pedagogic organisation of primary schools. Notwithstanding the groups having taken up model-like features, there is a variety in types of primary education schools until 1930: model-schools (created by the 1890 reform for the training of teachers), *escolas reunidas* (where the number of pupils was not enough to constitute a primary school) and isolated schools (with a single teacher and pupils of different ages and levels of

In that institution, the main character found the man who had been once her uncle's servant, now a teaching director. Used to the freedom in the organisation of the schedules and teaching contents she enjoyed in the isolated school and with the recognition from pupils and parents, she found herself under the responsibility of the former acquaintance, adverse conditions for professional work. To teach with freedom in a faraway school or in a recognised primary school and under the strict control of directors and teaching inspectors? Such dilemma followed the main character, who in the course of the plot oscillates between the two proposed models of school organisation.

### **Conflictual relationships and the balsam of professional solidarity: relationships and the constitution of teachers' knowledges.**

The abuses by teaching directors gives us strong indications that the shaping of teaching as a recognised profession in the legal and social scopes was the object of struggles, resistance and harsh accommodations. According to António Nóvoa (1991), the first education professionals faced difficulties in finding a social place. "Superior" knowledge was expected from them, not always matched by corresponding pay. "[...] Not bourgeois, not notable, not a peasant, not an intellectual, not an artisan, the primary teacher has enormous difficulties in finding a place in society" (NÓVOA, 1991, p. 124).

Besides the conflicting and arid relationships with institutional superiors, there are other, lighter and more productive relationships from the point of view of the establishment of sociability networks and cultural exchanges, put into motion by the arrival of a new director. "With the kindness of the new director, even the teachers became more sociable. The married ones received the block in weekly meetings" (LICE, 1928, p. 65). In such meetings, they sang and played the piano, read poetry, read chapters of books related to teaching or not, debated educational issues and about women's life in society (they discussed at one point feminism and the differences in the social roles of men and women), made clothes for the poor children relying on the school's charitable fund, uniting the useful to the pleasant.

The social and professional universes presented by the plot are fundamentally feminine. The main character always references her students in the classroom, refers to her teacher friends, highlighting feminine solidarity in social relations and presents the masculine figure as related to power (positions of management and supervision) and oppression. This sociability network established between the teachers and accounted for in the novel give us important indications of elements to think the knowledges associated to work and to the ways in which the professionals unite and organise in order to elaborate the hardships of everyday school life.

The fertile research by Maurice Tardif (2002) points out that experiential knowledge is as important as the academic or disciplinarian knowledge, the knowledge of initial training, the curricular knowledge related to contents to be taught at school. Experiential knowledges are forged in the teachers' everyday life, shared and reflected upon individually and by the group who works in a given school context. The knowledges of life and the professional knowledges that women exchange in the meetings are those that allow for the establishment of friendship and solidarity bonds crucial to the overcoming of adverse conditions of life and profession. "When two teachers meets, especially if they are devoted to teaching, their conversation soon veers towards pedagogic methods. Hermengarda had forged devotion out of teaching. She didn't let an occasion go amiss without expanding her ideas about literacy processes" (LICE, 1928, p. 147). Or further, according to Tardif (2002):

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schooling sharing the same space). Besides such distinctions, there are those perceived among the schools sited in urban and rural areas (SOUZA, 1998; GALLEG0, 2003).

It is through the relationships with peers and, therefore, by means of the conflict between the knowledges produced by the teachers' collective experience, that experiential knowledges acquire certain objectivity: the subjective certainties must be, then, systematised in order to become a discourse of experience capable of informing or of educating other teachers and of providing an answer to their problems. (TARDIF, 2002, p. 52).<sup>7</sup>

The social and historic context described and lived by Hermengarda and her friends is characterised by the wide and systematic debate around the issues related to the renovation of teaching. Topics such as the New School, active teaching, analytical method, tests and metrics constitute recurring themes in the debates and in the professional practices of the time. Pedagogic literature, composed by specialised periodicals and pedagogic manuals, evolves to treat educational problems from a technical, "scientific" point of view, and to encompass theoretical and practical issues within the school. The main concern regarding teacher training and primary schools' curricula moved away from the "contents" to be taught - which characterised the beginnings of the institution - towards teaching methods and processes. Fresh knowledges related to better forms of "managing the class" was added to the knowledge about professional identity (TANURI, 2000).

The incursion into Violeta Leme's novel, initially produced as a denunciation text against teachers' ghastly conditions of life and work, today becomes a source and object of study for a variety of themes in the educational historiographic field. The approach proposed here intends to bring out elements for the comprehension of teaching work, of the teaching career and of the contradictions present in one and the other, but does not in anyway exhausts the analysis of such issues or the text's formative potential. By means of its reading, one can understand the life of a teacher, her relationships with other hierarchically superior professionals, with her colleagues and the students under her responsibility, as well as the practical knowledges of her profession.

### Final considerations

When I wrote the book *O Quinze*, between 1929 and 1930, I was already a professional journalist. This was the occasion when I had the only public employment of my life: I was nominated full-time teacher at the Teacher-Training College - a history professor - earning four hundred thousand réis a month, which was a reasonable wage at the time (QUEIROZ & QUEIROZ, 2004, p. 31).

Returning in time a little: I graduated as a teacher in 1925, at the age of fifteen (QUEIROZ & QUEIROZ, 2004, p. 41).

The joint analysis of *Calvary of a Teacher* and *Clarissa* highlighted other nuances in the history of teacher training, at a time when the issue of education for the development of individuals and the progress of the nation reached great visibility in Brazilian educational discourse. In their approximations as *Bildungsroman*, the two novels invite us to imagine

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<sup>7</sup> Translated from the quote in the Portuguese language edition.

what it meant for a young woman to become a teacher at the age of around fifteen - as was the case of Brazilian writer Rachel de Queiroz and so many women of her generation - and take up the task of leading the development of children at a time when public school was undergoing a consolidation and expansion process throughout the Brazilian territory, and the professional placing of women was still incipient and, for the great majority, restricted to a few alternatives, among which primary teaching.

*Calvary of a Teacher* provides a living account of the adversities faced by young women who had just left the teacher-training college during the first republican period: the distances to be covered in order to reach work, the precariousness of the schools' facilities, the lack of didactic material and of publications on education in Portuguese, the arbitrariness of those who had positions of authority etc. The main character, further, denounced corruption in the practices of patronage by politicians in the distribution of placements, among other difficulties, perceived as even more bitter because she did not wish to take up the teaching career in the first place, but was forced into it. Despite everything, she appreciated the charms of the profession in the "blossoming" of her students and played her role with intelligence and responsibility.

*Clarissa*, in its turn, can be read as the literary expression of the hopes placed in the future of the school from the 1930's onwards, threatened only by the persistence of traditional teaching attitudes that cast a shadow on the young teacher from the moment she crossed the school's gates. In opposition to the teaching that was uninteresting because far from her daily life and inclinations, stood the experiences lived outside the school, like the observations and reflections that she made grounded on her surroundings, which provided her with more relevant learning experiences about the world and about herself.

We think that the approximations of such narratives in the analysis carried out here allowed us to glimpse at the fertility of literary works as sources for the history of education, when examined in articulation with academic production.

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