

IN THE PATHS OF COMPARATIVISM: A BRIEF
INTELLECTUAL PROFILE OF TANIA FRANCO CARVALHAL

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Professor Tania Franco Carvalhal's death on September 10, 2006 was an irretrievable loss to Comparative Literature Studies and to all those who knew her well, who were graced with her friendship and generosity, and accompanied her indefatigable activity and intellectual brilliance. Tania Carvalhal was a distinguished scholar, an eminent Professor (Professor Emeritus at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul), a sensible critic of the literary phenomenon, and a dynamic organizer of discussion forums in the area of Comparative Literature. She was one of the visionary founders of the Brazilian Comparative Literature Association (ABRALIC), of which she was also the first President, and the President of the International Comparative Literature Association (AILC/ICLA), from August 2004 till shortly before her death.

Tania Carvalhal began her career very early as a Professor of French Literature at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. She had graduated in Literature (with a major in Portuguese and French), received an MA in Brazilian Literature, with a thesis on Augusto Meyer, and a Doctorate in Theory and Comparative Literature from the University of São Paulo. In 1971-72, she spent a year in Paris, where she studied with Roland Barthes, Jean-Claude Chevalier and George Raillard, among others. Upon her return to Porto Alegre, she began teaching Literary Theory and later Comparative Literature, but never abandoned her interest in French and Brazilian Literatures. On the contrary, her first publications were on authors such as Molière, Claudel, Mauriac, Ionesco, Beckett, Adamov, and the Brazilians Augusto Meyer and Mário Quintana. And her first Comparative Literature courses dealt with the relations between French and Brazilian literatures.

Professor Carvalhal's writings clearly reveal her profile as a true comparatist. They are generally speaking of two sorts: studies on the history and the nature of Comparative Literature and its relations to the discursive practices of Literary Theory, on the one hand, and comparative studies of authors, trends and movements, as well as of literary works and other products of artistic or cultural expression, on the other. With regard to the first, she published a book (*Literatura Comparada*, 1986) that has been adopted by every Brazilian university where the discipline is taught and that has also been also translated into Spanish, and with regard to the second, we cannot fail to mention her *A evidência mascarada* (1984) – a sensible and fairly complete study of Augusto Meyer's works – and her *O próprio e o alheio* (2003), a collection of essays of the finest sort, all addressing significant contemporary questions frequently raised by Comparative Literature.

Tania Carvalhal's essays deal with a wide variety of subjects—they are evidence of her great erudition and special talent—and are written with great care in a clear, precise style. Tania is one of those writers for whom her means

of expression were as important as that which she wanted to transmit, and she rewrote her texts several times until they achieved a satisfactory form. The result is a poetic, well-elaborated piece, which makes the reader's activity a pleasant task. Imagination and creativity are often present in her works, even in her more theoretical texts, and her reflection is developed in a way that fascinates her readers.

Within the field of Comparative Literature, Tania has always embodied a strong preoccupation with the dialectical relationship between the local and the universal and has devoted considerable attention to the study of Brazilian traditions, and even more specifically to the regional traditions of the South of Brazil. She was, for a long time, the Director of the Instituto Estadual do Livro in Porto Alegre, whose main function was to make the works of local authors known, and she published numerous critical editions of these authors' texts, with informative introductory notes and critical studies, which today have become indispensable references on these authors. Writers that were little known outside of their own region of origin thus came to be appreciated in the Brazilian academic milieu and entered the canonic realm of Brazilian literature. Their works, which up to that point had been restricted to a few local readers, came to be known and studied in university Literature courses.

This preoccupation Tania demonstrated with the constitution of a tradition turned her interests to another sphere, fundamental also for her studies of Comparative Literature—that of the relations between Brazil and the other Latin American countries. Although Brazilian literature had already been widely studied in relation to different European literatures and, more recently also, to North American literature, comparative studies of Brazilian and the other Latin American literatures were not widely pursued yet. Moved by the growing interest that Latin American Studies were nurturing in Brazil and by the strong similarities between Brazilian and Spanish-American literary and cultural production, Tania joined the scholars who were working on the subject in Brazil and played an important role in the development of the area by bringing them closer to Spanish-American colleagues, particularly from the South Cone, and by producing a number of relevant essays on the field.

As a Literature Professor Tania Carvalhal has played an important role not only in her university, but also in other institutions, both in Brazil and abroad, where she taught as a Visiting Professor: University of São Paulo, University of Victoria (Canada), Indiana University, University of Paris IV — Sorbonne, Universities of Córdoba and Salta (Argentina), and University of Barcelona. At the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, in addition to her teaching activity, which included a wide range of subjects—from French

and Brazilian literature to Theory and Comparative Literature—she directed several theses and dissertations and held important positions as the Dean of Graduate Studies in Literature. The numerous events she organized, moreover, particularly in the area of Comparative Literature, undoubtedly constitute a landmark in the development of the area in Brazil. These events were usually followed by the publication of their proceedings, which were carefully edited by Tania herself, with the help of her colleagues.

It was with her pioneering spirit and firm determination that Tania took on, together with myself and a few other Brazilian comparatists, the charge of founding the Brazilian Comparative Literature Association (ABRALIC). The idea arose in 1985 in Paris during the XIth Congress of ICLA, held at the Sorbonne Nouvelle. There, amid intense debates about a broad spectrum of themes related to the discipline, ranging from questions on Narratology, Semiology and Reader Response Theory – all at that time in vogue – to discussions on Translation, the opposition between oral and written texts, and cultural dialogues, Tania turned to me and asked: why don't we found a national Comparative Literature association like the ones we have seen here represented and affiliate it to the ICLA? After the initial shock, I came to enjoy the idea and we celebrated our future undertaking, together with other Brazilians at the Congress' closing reception on the waters of the Seine.

Fortunately, the idea did not remain just a dream. Upon our return to Brazil, we kept in touch, and, after enlarging the founding group by the inclusion of other scholars from different parts of the country, we founded, on September 9, 1986, at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, in Porto Alegre, the Brazilian Comparative Literature Association. And Tania, its first President, organized two years later the First Congress of the Association, which engaged the participation of a significant number of Brazilian intellectuals along with the great majority of members of the ICLA Executive Council.

Our difficulties during the phase of consolidation of ABRALIC were numerous and hard to overcome, but our efforts were not in vain. The Association, which counts nowadays more than two thousand members who are professors and researchers in literature, is the main institution of comparative literary studies in Brazil, and its radius has extended to such an extent that it has even encouraged the creation of new graduate courses in the area. Its activities during these two decades of existence have been significant: the organization of ten International Congresses of great import, followed by the publication of their respective *Proceedings*, which constitute indispensable items for the bibliography of Literary Studies in the country, the organization of several colloquia and seminars, and the publication of

the *Contraponto* bulletin and of the *Brazilian Review of Comparative Literature*, today recognized as the main vehicle of Comparative Studies in Brazil.

But Tania's dynamic character and enthusiasm were not restricted to the creation of ABRALIC. From that time on, she engaged in intense activity with the ICLA, first as a member of its Executive Council for two terms, then its Vice-President, and finally its President. She also founded within the ICLA the Committee for Latin American Studies, which she coordinated for some time, and had a major role in the creation of the Argentinean, the Uruguayan and more recently the Peruvian Comparative Literature Associations. In addition to all this, she was always present at the events held by these associations and undertook an active collaboration with their publications.

It is as an eminent Professor, devoted to the education of her students, as a careful and delicate writer, conscious of the importance of her task, as a scholar who knew well how to pursue her academic career and direct her experience in the intellectual milieu, both in her own country and abroad, and as an entrepreneur who never failed to bring her projects to concrete fruition that we pay homage to her in this text. But it is above all as a respectful, friendly and generous colleague, acutely sensible and enthusiastic about her work and always one ready to join in dialogue that we pay our tribute at this moment with the awareness that she has left us, but has indelibly left her mark on the paths of Comparative Literature.