

## Mário de Andrade's 'Formation Letters' (1924-1945) and its Educational Strenght

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**Abstract:** This paper concerns the *formation letters* exchanged between Mário de Andrade and a group of young writers during more than two decades, in which he was recognized as a master for the younger ones. Inspired by Michel Foucault's analysis about Greco-roman's care of the self and its extension in the educational field – *psicagogy* –, we support the hypothesis that claims that, through the mentioned correspondence, some practices of formation were established away from the pedagogical dealing *strictosensu*. That redirects education towards a new arrangement, marked by an ethical addressing to writing practices, which would lead them to undertake the role of a permanent ethical link between the subject who writes and his own truth, both in permanent elaboration.

**Keywords:** letter, writing, brazilian literature, Mário de Andrade, Michel Foucault.

# As 'Cartas de Formação' de Mário de Andrade (1924-1945) e sua Potência Educativa

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**Resumo:** No presente artigo, analisam-se as 'cartas de formação' trocadas entre Mário de Andrade e um conjunto de jovens escritores ao longo de mais de duas décadas, nas quais ele ocupou o lugar de mestre para os mais novos. Inspirados pela análise de Michel Foucault sobre o cuidado de si greco-romano e sobre sua extensão para o âmbito educacional – a 'psicagogia' –, sustentamos a hipótese de que, por meio das correspondências em tela, instauraram-se práticas formativas em nada tributárias do trato pedagógico *stricto sensu*. Apontamos para um arranjo educativo marcado por um endereçamento ético à prática escritural, de sorte que esta assumisse o papel de elo permanente entre o sujeito escrevente e sua verdade, ambos em permanente construção.

**Palavras-chave:** carta, escrita, literatura brasileira, Mário de Andrade, Michel Foucault.

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**Resumen:** El presente artículo trata de las *cartas de formación* intercambiadas entre Mario de Andrade y un conjunto de jóvenes escritores, a lo largo de más de dos décadas, en las cuales él ocupó el lugar de maestro para los más nuevos. Inspirados por el análisis de Michael Foucault sobre el cuidado de sí greco-romano y su extensión en el ámbito educacional – la *psicagogía* –, sostenemos la hipótesis de que, por medio de las correspondencias en cuestión, se establecieron prácticas formativas lejanas del trato pedagógico *stricto sensu*, apuntando para un diseño educativo marcado por un direccionamiento ético a la práctica escritural, a fin de que esa asumiera el papel de eslabón ético permanente entre el sujeto que escribe y su verdad, ambos en permanente construcción.

**Palabras Clave:** carta; escrita; literatura brasileña; Mário de Andrade; Michel Foucault.

## Introduction

This article focuses on the relationship between education and writing embodied by a type of formation that, far from being restricted to the school media, involved a group of recognized Brazilian writers. More specifically, we analyze the 'formation letters' exchanged between young writers and Mário de Andrade, to whom time has put the *master* epithet, almost as a first name, because of his formative activity among the younger writers.

Maintained for more than two decades - at least since 1924, when he began his epistolary communication with Carlos Drummond de Andrade -, these correspondences became famous among the beginning writers of the time, thanks to the solicitude and the frankness with which the author of *Macunaíma* welcomed them. Afflicted by advices about the writing profession, these young men nourished themselves intensely with the assumed Mário's writing mania, reinforced by the self-imposed obligation of not leaving unanswered the letters of the youngest: "[...] an unanswered letter burns me, makes me impossible to live, persecutes" (Andrade apud Moraes, 2007a, p. 48). On such bases, the writer from São Paulo would have established an epistolary project, whose orientations to the interlocutors were based on harshness and criticism, as Marcos Antonio de Moraes states in his famous study titled *Orgulho de jamais aconselhar: a epistolografia de Mário de Andrade* (2007a).

This project led him to gather, among his pupils, names such as Otto Lara Rezende, Fernando Sabino, Otávio Dias Leite, Paulo Mendes Campos, Hélio Pellegrino, Murilo Rubião and Moacir Werneck de Castro, from which arrived in the decades following the death of Mário in February 1945, news of a literary education in no way similar to what was broadcast in schools and universities. According to Guilherme de Figueiredo (apud Andrade, 1989), it was a formation in which 'literary aesthetics and political ethics' converged in a social justice capable of guiding the writer. Drummond made a chorus with Figueiredo in defending the ethical-formative character of his interlocution with the master, describing it as "[...] the most constant, generous and fruitful stimulus to literary activity, received by me in all of existence [accompanied by...] lessons from human behavior, care for a shy and disoriented man" (Andrade & Andrade, 2002, p. 34).

Reports such as those of Drummond and Figueiredo were not the first to make public the Mario's concern with the educational issue. Prior

to this, during the period when he was director of the São Paulo Department of Culture, the writer had already committed himself to offering children of pre-school age a public education through playgrounds, understood by many as precursors of early childhood education in its present form (Arantes, 2008; Faria, 1999). It was only posthumously, however, that his formative action on the writers themselves achieved notoriety beyond literary circles. As his letters were being published by his interlocutors, the image of Mário de Andrade was designed for the general public as a guide and, to some extent, an example for a whole generation of literati. One of these pupils, João Etienne Filho (1994, p. 22), stated that, although Mário may not have been “[...] the greatest in any of the genres that he has dealt with, [...] he is undoubtedly the greatest human figure in the whole history of thought in Brazil [...]”, since what he offered to the interlocutors “[...] were not only the advices and reprimands, [but] it was the tone, it was the heart, it was the giving of oneself, with the best of himself even, flooding us with care, affection, trust” (Etienne Filho, 1994, p. 22).

In addition to the letters and articles lamenting his death, the obituaries written by the young people with whom he had made contact also contributed definitively to associate the name of the modernist poet with the epithet of master. Some of these writings, gathered by Marcos Antonio de Moraes (2007a) in *Um mestre que perdemos* - section of the book, already mentioned, on Mário de Andrade's epistolography - reinforce the singularity that guaranteed Mário the praise received: a corresponding “[...] intuitive miraculous, capable of knowing the psychological minutiae of each young man who would benefit from his experience” (Guimaraens Filho apud Moraes, 2007a, p. 32). According to Lygia Fagundes Telles (apud Moraes, 2007a, p. 33), his work was based on mutual zeal among the letter-writers, “[...] because with him the most distrustful were immediately at ease, the most arrogant were soon opening their soul”. Mário da Silva Brito (apud Moraes, 2007a, p. 35) reveals that to the vote of confidence of the young people that Mário de Andrade gave back offering them “[...] generously and fraternally his intelligence [...], making them aware of multiple and intricate mysteries and secrets of artistic creation and yet making them place art in direct conjunction with life”. These and other reports, Moraes concludes (2007a, p. 36, author's emphasis), construct “[...] the figure of the ‘master’ who incorporates the values of the ‘friend’ and the ‘confidant’, engendering the ‘teacher’, capable of teaching without the distant bulkhead of the title”.

The epistolary encounter between Mário and the young writers would therefore have consisted in an education based on literary knowledge, but its accomplishment depended greatly on the network of affections between educator and student.

### **Letters as an exercise in care of the self: a working hypothesis**

Rather than aiming to establish parallels between Mário de Andrade's conduct and possible pedagogical approaches inspired by affective relationships, we defend here the general hypothesis that, through such correspondences, practices of formation were established away from the pedagogical dealing *stricto sensu*. In a different direction, such an experience, attributing centrality to the ethical moderation of beginners by a master, would seem to be an important turning point in the recent history of educational practices, since it breaks with the preponderance of the canonical type of transmission of knowledge made possible by the *modus operandi* at school.

In order to support this hypothesis, we are guided by Michel Foucault's discussion in his course at the Collège de France in the first months of 1982 and entitled *The Hermeneutics of the subject* (2010a). In this discussion, the French thinker alludes to the Greco-Roman philosophical notion of care of the self, which would have constituted, for a long time, an ethical-political nucleus around which a series of practices and precepts would have been organized to the constitution of modes of life proposed by some philosophical currents, especially of the Stoics. Included among these practices, the exchange of letters is evoked in Foucault's research because of their importance in the attainment of such lifestyles, by operating not only as a means of diffusion of ideas, but also as a practice of stylistic-existential transformation of correspondents. A great example of this are the *Letters to Lucilius*, of Sêneca (2009).

In addition to the epistolary communication, the spiritual and physical exercises, through which the involved subjects would accede to the 'philosophical truth', competed for the constitution of this ethic of existence. For this, it was necessary, first of all, to raise for himself a director of conscience who could guide them in the path of truth; someone who might have been a fool before, had surpassed this condition, getting to know how to take care of himself.

This correspondence, in the Stoic tradition, brought together the vigil function of the pupil's habits and thoughts. The moderation imposed by the master was directly linked to the conversion of the disciple to 'other

life', based, according to Foucault (2011), on a distinctive ethics of existence. Hence, the master-sender's speech was given great value and responsibility, which should therefore be frank, based on *parrhesia* (*libertas*, for Latinos). This form of enunciation of the truth, for Foucault, engaged the master with a 'truth-telling' combined with the need to say everything.

If, on the one hand, epistolary writing entailed a form of governing the life of the disciple, on the other, it facilitated the constant reactivation of existential maxims, which should be incorporated by the learner, so as to constitute an ethical 'armor' that would prevent him from getting lost in the face of difficult situations. In this sense, the letters assumed a concomitant and conjugal function to that of the *hupomnemata*, a kind of notebooks that "[...] constituted a material memory of things read, heard or thought; thus, they were offered as an accumulated treasure for later re-reading and meditation" (Foucault, 2004, p. 147).

From this perspective, writing would assume a double meaning: ascetic and etopoietic.

Whatever the cycle of exercise in which it occurs, writing is an essential step in the process toward which all *askésis* tends to: that is, the elaboration of the discourses received and recognized as true in rational principles of action. As an element of self-training, writing has, to use an expression found in Plutarch, an 'etopoietic' function: it is the operator of the transformation of truth into *éthos* (Foucault, 2004, p. 147, author's emphasis).

The *hupomnemata* have already been the target of many comparisons with modern practices, such as writing journals or letters. They were also interpreted as drafts subsequently used for the construction of philosophical treatises. Such an approximation, however, is not sufficient, in our view, to situate their complexity in the old thought implied there, since it did not matter, in that context, to make the annotations complete records of some theme - in this differs from the grammar that "[...] seeks to know a work in its entirety or all the works of an author" (Foucault, 2004, p. 150). The truth, for the Stoics, gathered a 'local' value, being knowledge something that only mattered when converted into *leitmotiv* of the performance by its bearer. Nor would a narrative of itself, such as that constitutive of Christian identity and nowadays associated with autobiographical culture (Gomes, 2004;

Malatian, 2009), be at stake. In the opposite direction, "[...] it is a question of not seeking the unspeakable, not of revealing the hidden, not of saying the unspoken, but of grasping, on the contrary, what has already been said; to gather what could be heard or read, and this for a purpose which is nothing more than the constitution of itself" (Foucault, 2004, p. 149).

All these attributes of the *hupomnemata*, which, in general, also applied to the letters, point to two quite different models of education, which, according to Foucault (2010a), have taken place among classical thinkers: the 'pedagogy' and the 'psycagogy'.

Let us call it 'pedagogical' the transmission of a truth that has the function of endowing a subject with any aptitudes, capacities, knowledge, etc., which he did not previously possess and which he should possess at the end of this pedagogical relation. If we call 'pedagogical', therefore, this relation that consists in endowing a subject with previously defined aptitudes, we may, I believe, call 'psycagogic' the transmission of a truth that is not intended to endow any subject with aptitudes, etc., but to change the mode of being of the subject to whom we address (Foucault, 2010a, p. 366, author's emphasis).

In practice, both modalities converged in the performance of a master, which does not mean that one of them was not preponderant in the relationship established with the disciples, as was the 'psycagogy' for the Stoics or the pedagogy for the Platonists.

If we now allude to the Greco-Roman educational-philosophical experience, our intention is not to raise similarities with that experienced by the literati in contact with Mário de Andrade - an argument, moreover, largely explored by studies aimed at updating the notion of self-writing in order to describe an alleged autobiographical *éthos* proper to writing in Modernity (Gomes, 2004; Klinger, 2007; Malatian, 2009). Instead, we intend in this article to record the experience lived by Mário de Andrade and his pupils in a horizon of formative practices that, before joining a pedagogical aspect, operated to the detriment of a formation centered on the transmission of knowledge; practices, therefore, attentive to the subjective transformation of the individual.

Clinging to such a hypothesis, we proposed to compile and analyze the communication of Mário de Andrade with 24 young writers, who exchanged letters of formative content in the period between 1924 and



1945, namely Alphonsus de Guimaraens Filho, Araldo Alexandre, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Cristiano Martins, Fernando Mendes de Almeida, Fernando Sabino, Guilherme Figueiredo, Helio Pellegrino, Henriqueta Lisboa, João Etienne Filho, José Antonio Ferreira Prestes, José Dantas Mota, Ledo Ivo, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Moacir Werneck de Castro, Murilo Miranda, Murilo Rubião, Oneyda Alvarenga, Oswaldo Alves, Otávio de Freitas Júnior, Otavio Dias Leite, Otto Lara Rezende, Paulo Mendes Campos and Pedro Nava.

The search for the listed letters (1146 letters in all) directed us to the archives, especially to the Institute of Brazilian Studies (IEB - USP), where the author's personal collection is complete, including letters received by him and copies of some of his answers. On the occasion of the acquisition of the collection by the São Paulo institution in the 1970s, the massive amount of letters - 6992 passive and 588 active - was delivered by his heirs with a testamentary condition imposed by Mário de Andrade: passed 50 years after his death prior to the opening of the estate to the public. From the year that this period expired (1995), many editions of the master's letters came to join those that had already been printed in previous decades, some of which bring together both the venerable writer's letters and the responses to them. This greatly contributed to our research, since we had additional material for consultation when, for example, we were in doubt about certain passages handwritten in the originals.

With regard to the *corpus* of the investigation, it is worth recalling the existence of gaps in the communications, a fact explained by the loss of some parts of the original correspondence. This condition, however, did not constitute an impediment to our objectives, since we did not focus on the particular way of addressing one individual or another, but rather an experience shared by many. In this sense, we also methodologically approach Foucault (2010b), borrowing his conceptualization of 'focus of experience' to orient our dealings with the sources and with the history of educational practices reflected in them.

In contrast to the definition of experience derived from phenomenology, in Foucault such a notion is seen as unrelated to a subjectivist plot that could condition it to the interiority of an individual. Instead, we have experiences modulated by specific focuses, such as eighteenth-century madness or sexual immorality in the nineteenth century, which were constituted by the articulation between "[...] forms of

a possible knowledge, normative matrices of behavior, modes of virtual existence for possible subjects" (Foucault, 2010b, p. 5). Moved by this perspective, Foucault was forced to operate a revision of his methodological framework, which interests us here. Again:

It was a question of moving the axis of the history of knowledge to the analysis of the knowledge, of the discursive practices that organize and constitute the matrix element of these knowledge, and to study these discursive practices as regulated forms of veridiction. [...] It was to analyze, then, let us say, normative matrices of behavior. And then the displacement consisted not of analyzing Power with a capital 'P', nor of institutions of power or of general or institutional forms of domination, but of studying the techniques and procedures by which one conducts the conduct of others. [...] Thirdly, it was a question of analyzing the axis of constitution of the subject's mode of being. And then the shift was that, instead of referring to a theory of the subject, it seemed to me that it would be necessary to try to analyze the different ways by which the individual is led to constitute himself as a subject (Foucault, 2010b, p. 6, author's emphasis).

In accordance with these assumptions, the approach of the letters was focused on the circulation of discourses and practices promoted by them. We have been able to describe and analyze certain contours of this literary-formative experience, as well as some of its displacements along the 22-year time-span considered. It was important for us to relate the discourses to one or other of the correspondents, since we did not focus on the constitution of certain literary works, nor the relation between them and their respective authors - as they do, in fact, studies that attribute to letters the character of literary 'paratext', allegedly facilitating the critical reading of a work (Willemart, 2005; Moraes, 2007b; Pino & Zular, 2007). In our case, the explicative pair work/author has also shown to be ineffective because it is centered in the scriptural work per se, while we aim at a more diffuse experience, capable of producing gestures not immediately linked to textual practice. In sum, by positioning ourselves in favor of the apprehension of the ever-undetermined experience between writing and existence, we did not set out to examine the encounter between the author and the work, but rather the scope between writer and literary writing when in correspondence with a master.

## The new sparrows

Not directed only to Mário de Andrade, the demand of young literati for advice of authors already established was relatively usual throughout the twentieth century. Not all contemporary writers of Mário, however, demonstrated the same willingness to engage in epistolary dialogues, as Manuel Bandeira's account shows in an interview in 1968.

Woe is me! I live receiving manuscripts. Consultation about poetry, still ok! But about novels and short stories?[...] To the bearers of these genres I will soon say: why do not you look for Graciliano, Zé Lins, Otávio de Faria? Imagine that one morning I was awakened at seven o'clock by the clink of the telephone. It was an incipient unknown poet who, without further ado, gave me this one: 'Can you hear a new sparrow?' I replied that it was too early to hear 'young sparrows'. I have since called these little poets 'new sparrows'. Sometimes not even new. I do not know what to answer but say: read the *Letters to a young poet*, by Rilke (Senna, 1968, p. 65, author's emphasis).

The phenomenon of formation letters, rather than consisting of the only way of contact between inexperienced writers and others already established, was included in a list of specific practices based on the experience of the literati, which were not new when Mário began to receive and were not restricted to epistolary exchanges. The report by letter of the young writer Hugo de Carvalho Ramos to his brother, in 1912, shows us this. In it, Ramos tells of being seduced by the prospect of moving to the then capital of the Republic, not because of the landscapes, but for "[...] being able to know and admire closely the great stylist of *Inverno em Flor*, of *Jardim das Oliveiras*, Coelho Neto" (Ramos apud Broca, 1960, p. 51). Their longing was appropriate, as Brito Broca relates in *A vida literária do Brasil: 1900*, since there were many examples of great writers who, at the beginning of the century, had received in their groups young people from different places. Such were the cases of Coelho Neto and Inglês de Souza in Rio de Janeiro and José de Freitas Vale in São Paulo who in the first two decades of the twentieth century made their homes spaces for meetings of artists and writers, often admitting the entry of beginners. The same occurred with some literary people who frequented the cafes of Rio, whose groups were also composed of boys from other places, in order to live with those writers they esteemed. Lima Barreto's

group, for example, was sympathetic to the presence of 'freshmen' (Broca, 1960).

The search of the young people for the approval of the incensed literati had manifested, before that, in the letters to Machado de Assis (2008, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015), which was taken by a teacher even earlier than Mário de Andrade, with some young people 'sponsored' by him. One of the most remembered cases is that of Carlos Magalhães de Azeredo, for whom the noted writer had great admiration and affection, as was the case with Joaquim Nabuco, whose correspondence had begun when he was in school (1866), and with Mário de Alencar, 33 years younger than Machado de Assis. The same Machado, in even more remote times, would have been the young man for the illustrious men of letters of his youth, like Quintino Bocaiúva and Caetano Filgueiras, as evidenced by the letters exchanged between them in the early 1860s (Assis, 2008).

If, on the one hand, the formative demand of the aspiring literati by recognized peers contributed to the emergence of the epistolary practice for formative purposes, on the other hand, we cannot disregard the willingness of older writers to assume the post of master to disseminate literary knowledge. Such a task, far from having been uniformly carried out by those called upon by the younger ones, aroused not one but many ways of proceeding to the demand of the senders. In this area, the supposed responsibility of forming older writers seems to have long been confronted by interpellations of various kinds, covering, among other things, the profile of the writer-trainer and the fragile frontier between learning to write and mimicking the writing style of the one who teaches it.

From the writers of the early twentieth century to Fernando Sabino (personal communication, December 25, 1989) - who, in an interview, claimed to have refused to correspond with younger colleagues for not being able to do so - a long line of writers who reflected on the limits and problems arising from the formative gesture towards the beginners shows how much the educational question was present in the literary circles. This is what presides, it seems to us, Lima Barreto's concern with the youth under the influence of other bohemian circles than his own. Seeing that these groups had an 'artificially literary' link with writing, stipulated as a rule, among his writers, that one did not speak of literature, aiming to protect its new members from a 'literatizing' sphere (Broca, 1960).

Even Mário de Andrade, whose work with young people may have been the most celebrated in the literary circles, would not have been exempt from criticism of his relationship with his ‘young men’. It was at least what he himself seems to have pondered when reading a critique published in 1944 in a newspaper. The text made reference to the “[...] writers of fifty years always projected on the literary vein of the new, and that they end up denominated of ‘masters’” (Borba apud Moraes, 2007a, p. 162, author’s emphasis). They would be ‘Dracula masters’, given the ‘thirst’ with which they went to the pupils.

It is a vital necessity for them to accompany the boys, never to tear themselves apart from the disciples, to keep them always up to their presence and their contact, not in an enlightening and loyal way, but as a means of supporting their own decadence [...] is so subtle the caress of these ‘masters’, so refreshing their proximity, so soft the whisper of their conversation! (Borba apud Moraes, 2007a, p. 162, author’s emphasis).

The São Paulo writer, feeling censored, even without his name mentioned, began to reflect on his place before the younger ones and admitted that he could not at all justify an “[...] exclusive interest [...] disinterested” (Borba apud Moraes, 2007a, p. 163) by them, so that nothing would prove that he was not a ‘Dracula’. The question, often repeated when a friendship began with someone less experienced in the occupation, reflected the difficult task of measuring the limits of what he offered to the young men who came to him. At such times, his reflections were constantly on the difference between what he did and a pedagogy based on advice. In the same way, many times he refuted the epithet of a master with whom he had lived for many years. For Moacir Werneck de Castro (apud Moraes, 2007a), this attitude stems from the annoyance with the ‘hagiographic’ character attached to the title considered.

If, on the one hand, Mário avoided being surnamed in this way, on the other hand, he also refused to grant the title to Machado de Assis, a long-time writer known as such, whom he had never wished to be called a master, and that, unlike, had grown accustomed to find, as his age approached, such a form of treatment in the letters he received. After a few decades of Machado’s death, the elements that would have qualified him for mastery were challenged by Mário in a series of articles published in the *Diário de Notícias* (Andrade, 1993), beginning with his influence on

young people who, according to he said, was little, as he testified to the fact that those who worshiped him only did so after the age of 30. Moreover, lacking “[...] gifts of generosity, trust in life and in man, hope” (Andrade, 1993, p. 53) and for having done everything possible to “[...] hide their possible defects, their origins, their elements of his intellectual formation and his illness” (Andrade, 1993, p. 65), Machado could only, Mário sustains, raise in the readers of the postmodernist generation the admiration for his work, without being interested in the paths and detours that connected him with it. Finally, he points out the kind of influence he could have.

Machado de Assis is an end, not a beginning and not even a new breath gathered on the way. He crowns a complete time, but his influence has always been negative. Those who imitate it, surrender to a dangerous insulation and exhaust themselves in the disaffection of immobility (Andrade, 1993, p. 68).

It is clear from the arguments presented that when the writer from São Paulo referred to Machado de Assis as a master, he wanted to create a pejorative effect. From his point of view, what could be praised was restricted to his writing, and there is no reason to take it as an ideal of existence. Regarding this, he warned some of his correspondents, as is the case of Fernando Sabino.

You need to read Machado de Assis a lot, but read with reread, robbing him, plagiarizing him, not in style or in spirit but in the delicacy of feeling. Machado de Assis should not be for you a life companion, but only a treasure from where you will steal. Steal everything that might be useful to you, throwing the rest away (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 52).

Such considerations of Mário de Andrade about himself and about Machado de Assis outline a framework for the understanding of the literary profession, in which the roles of writer and trainer intersect, without necessarily coinciding. And although the solicitude before the young has generated dissension among the literati, the recurrence of the theme of a literary mastery demonstrates the weight assumed by the figure of the master-literate and, in complementary opposition, that of the literate-disciple, in the writing experience lived in the literary circles of the mid-twentieth century. This makes the letters exchanged with Mário

guarantee a significant interest and value for the educational investigations focused on the intricacies of formation.

## **Life and literary writing: an immersion in the formation letters**

The friendly and encouraging face of Mário, mentioned in the accounts of some of his disciples, often gave rise to a more austere one, especially when the writer was faced with the need to evaluate negatively the texts of his recipients. The roughness, in these cases, was reflected in its critics that circulated in newspapers and magazines of the time. In the letters, the critical task, far from demonstrating disaffection, emerged as the duty of the older friend who said he preferred to be patronizing with others who did not care. This is not to say that Mário's self-attributed role was fulfilled unequivocally, because even though he believed that "[...] the good survive the struggle" (Andrade & Sabino, 2003 p. 26), he feared that the youth's vanity might lead to a misunderstanding, as he confesses in a letter to Otávio Dias Leite (Moraes, 2006).

Nevertheless, the surrender of the young people to this critical arrangement was presented as a condition for Mario to correspond with them. That is, he established a kind of ethic of exposition on the part of the younger ones, which would face the irredeemable willingness of the writer of São Paulo to say frankly what derived from his reading of the originals.

As for the losses of those who would act otherwise, we have in a letter of July 1940 to Alphonsus de Guimaraens Filho a detailed clarification.

Individuals of my kind, combative and combated, but chiefly confident in progress, in improvement, not properly human, but of men in particular, when they reach a certain age they begin to fear the empty cold around when the old age arrives. This is terrible, Alphonsus, because it is a pressing, constant invitation to condescension. When we meet a man, a 'right' artist, we have a fear of losing this possible company, this possible heat for the age that will arrive. Believe me, Alphonsus, it's a lot harder to be honest, be honest with a young man like yourself than with an already-done man that experience of years already guarantees that we will not lose any more. But your letter has come to calm me down, proving once again what I had already sensed in our

quick meetings in Belo Horizonte: that you are a 'right' subject more intelligent than vanity (Andrade & Bandeira, 1974, p. 15, author's emphasis).

Mário goes beyond the confessional tone with which the narrative begins, presenting the relationship between masters and disciples in very conflictive ways. It is a kind of small treatise on such relations, in which it discusses both the obligations of each of those involved in the communication and the dubious place occupied by friendship in this type of practice, since it could result in both what would create the conditions for a more direct criticism, and what would prevent the master from telling the truth, in favor of maintaining the affective relationship.

This notion of criticism, directed to the writer and not to the written text, seems to have been one of the bases for the appearance of an ethical education and of the figure of the literary-master, which, in turn, circumscribes the formative experience referred to the twentieth century, when the public debate about the importance of literature had already cooled and the man of letters had given way to the writer. Until then, it could be said, the type of master mentioned was only in latency, and the existing mastery was about converting the 'monks' - according to the analogy of one of the correspondents of Machado de Assis, referring to those who practiced isolated writings - into 'soldiers' who, by different means - newspapers and academies of letters, for example - fought for the salvation of the literary institution (Assis, 2008).

It is possible that other writers of that time constituted formative relations in other ways, more similar to the one that made Mário's letters to be object of interest in more recent days. Nevertheless, it took a few more decades for the formative demand of young people to deflagrate, focusing more on the writer himself and less on the defense of literature.

In order for the formation of the beginning writer to be accomplished, it did not only matter the dialogue between the master and the disciple, but also the insertion of the young man into groups of literati, in which common links were built between the peers, and the distance from the readers was carved day and night. Contact with the master was often a determining factor for the welcome or not of the young admirer, either through his insertion into previously formed groups of which Mário was a part, or through the sponsorship of entire groups of young people, as occurred with some writers from Minas Gerais of the circle of Fernando Sabino and Otto Lara Resende.



The fragile situation of the newcomers to the literary environments encouraged them to contact the masters not only for admiration but also because of the very mechanism by which those with more time of profession assisted the younger ones. And Mario did not run away from this, because he understood that writers' lives depended not only on writing, but also on the interpersonal relations established between them, especially those fostered within a group. There were, for example, some pupils of his who could witness a greater surrender of the poet to gregarious manifestations. Among them, it stands out the group of writers from Rio de Janeiro that Murilo Miranda, Carlos Lacerda and Moacir Werneck de Castro took part. It is Mário himself who tells:

Do you really want to know what Rio gave me? - it was the fellowships, the bar conversations, our conversations, the strangest human spectacle of your lives. [...] for me that came from an order of well-defined, no casual existences, where the complete abstraction of the unforeseen was done, you all made me a huge shock, gave me a vital glamor, made of everything, of the worst and of the best (Andrade, 1981, p. 67).

The three-year period separating the letters sent to Miranda and Resende seems to clearly delineate the change of tone from one era to another, since it is in the meantime that the modernist is criticized by writers of the new generation - whether by his political stance, or because of his supposedly vampire motivation to maintain friendship with the young - remaining in any case the support to the youth groups he sponsored.

Not all groups, however, would be worthy of such praise, according to the São Paulo author, as it shows the criticism he makes of Sabino's choices after leaving Belo Horizonte.

You're living too artistically. You are gaining condescending sympathies even in groups that should hate you. That they must hate you. You are choosing friends who are bad company for artist Fernando Sabino. You are abandoning your friends from Minas [...]. This is to betray, to betray yourself, to betray the friendship, to betray the group, to betray its Minas Gerais origin (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 199).

Fernando Sabino, in the letter in response, accepted the reprimand of his friend, agreeing with the argument that he was surrounded by "[...] friends of the occasion [...]" (Andrade & Sabino 2003, p. 207). He then said to want to "[...]correct himself, be less free, less available and less silly" (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 206), as well as "[...] kicking the ass of condescending considerations" (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 207). Whether or not he had done so, years later he would confess, in an interview with Clarice Lispector, he that the same sentiment of Mário as for his youth: a generation in his surroundings had been lacking that could abstract him from loneliness (Sabino, 2007).

As a result of this double interaction promoted by Mário – with himself and his interlocutors - the letters give an educational arrangement marked by an ethical address to writing practice. Such an arrangement would be founded not only on the criticism presented by the master, but on a continuous self-reflexive task, confused in many cases with the writing itself. Such a configuration seems to have given rise to a writing capable of bending over the very life of the writers who, in this context, would be governed by it in other aspects besides the literary making.

This is the case of love relations treated as material to be submitted to formation and artistic creation, and the theme of the 'cost' of happiness is a recurring topic in the communications of different interlocutors with Mário. Starting from the suspicion of a prejudice brought to the writing when one leaves the loves to assume too much importance in his life, such communications were field for the moderation of the idealisms and presumed exaggerations of the inexperienced letter writers, as it happened with Carlos Drummond de Andrade, that did not see how to conciliate prosaic experiences, such as marriage, with the sublime task of creation that supposedly defined the lettered (Andrade & Andrade, 2002).

In the face of this specific case, Mário pondered on what might satisfy the wishes of Itabira's friend: "It is true that a person of such sensitivity and lust for conscience cannot have the common happiness which is made of insensitivity and unconsciousness. The happiness of you has to be spiritual and the best way to achieve this is to have not vanity but the courage of oneself" (Andrade & Andrade, 2002, p. 128). The courage spoken by the eldest would not be the one usually associated with a certain 'aesthetic life'; on the contrary, it was to the detriment of this that Mário organized his argument by treating literature as a 'plague', capable of poisoning feelings and hindering the accomplishment of a life beyond his

ideal. “Do not put anything of aesthetics in your life, put life that has nothing to do with the artistic and therefore disinterested attitudes of the spirit” (Andrade & Andrade, 2002, p. 125).

Also in the communication with Fernando Sabino, the alleged difficulty of conciliating writing activity and love relationships was brought up. The young sender expressed his difficulty in adapting to the assumption that “[...] the work of art demands of the artist everything that he has of life, of human force that only suffering is capable of providing” (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 27), without revealing clearly what kind of situation he was experiencing.

In two words: in view of a long-awaited happiness, a possibility of achieving this happiness, which will not erase me, I am certain, this suffering, this lack to which I have referred: do you think that this will prevent me from becoming a writer? Is it imperative that I give up this opportunity to be happy, that I suffer seeing my dreams fall apart, my hopes frustrated, everything failed in life, to create something? (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 28).

Only in the following letter, one knows that the happiness of which he spoke was, as Mário had supposed, a “[...] sincere love that happens to be rich, engaged, legal marriage and arranged life, without any financial worries” (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 30). Between the two letters, however, that of the master had already dealt with him in his heart, by the simple defense that what he should oppose was accommodation, not happiness. Such an argument begins by recognizing the value of suffering for the artist.

There is no doubt that art has among its constituting elements the dissatisfaction. Art is the daughter of pain, they say and you repeat in your letter. I prefer to say dissatisfaction that is more dynamic [...]. There are momentary satisfactions, of course. And there it is, my God! The satisfied [...] But you will observe throughout your life that the ‘satisfied’ with their mission and with the works they perform, will never be ‘true’ artists (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 31, author’s emphasis).

It would not so, however, that the writer’s happiness could not be attained, and that it was only conditioned to a resignification in order to

observe an artistic life, which could not be sustained amidst attitudes of comfort.

It's simple, my little brother, although it's difficult. It's never you lose consciousness that your experience of happiness should also be an object of personal improvement. It is not fair to refuse a facility that life offers us, as long as that this facility is fair. (Andrade & Sabino 2003, p. 34).

For Mario and his correspondents, therefore, it seems to have taken a look at the experience of love, according to which, before offering itself as content for literary creation, it would interpose itself between the literary and the writing, obliging lovers to modulate it through their literary experience.

The idea of moderation of the writer's subjective traits in favor of actions and feelings more conducive to literary creation extends, in the letters, also to other themes. The topic of creation is problematic, especially when the quarrel between the conceptions of spontaneous literary writing and the one that is acquired by effort and study is brought to light.

In the midst of such a dispute, Mário chooses to criticize the exacerbated belief in the idea of spontaneity. At this point, nothing seems to be original in the mastery of the São Paulo writer, since it was common in the discussions of the nineteenth century to ponder the work necessary for the inspiration - of a sense close to the spontaneity of the eighteenth-century letters - to manifest itself (Assis, 2008). Creation would be, for many authors of the imperial period, something to be not only moderated by formal rigor, but also encouraged, residing its problem not in inspiration itself, but in the presumption that it would come without effort. In this way, it would be for the writer to work on his writing that would direct him to an inspiration capable of producing a bigger work. The writer's work and studies, therefore, would have to open the way for the creative force of the writer to flow. And this would happen in such a way that the more successful his work was, the more the work would bring what was in his soul.

Nevertheless, even if it is based on the common idea that effort is a primordial condition for literary production, Mario's critique of the notion of spontaneity arises under another bias, which necessarily compels it to literary writing. As such, he took spontaneity not as that which must be

marked to achieve a good work, but as an obstacle and as it does not work, that is, as that which, being innate, cannot coexist with the conscious operation of writing, so that it could only come from the imposture of the writer.

According to this point of view, we see a different conception of artist/writer emerge in contrast to that of the previous century, coupled with the inspiration/effort pair, since the writer would lose his spontaneity in favor of an artificial writing. Thinking about this, Mário de Andrade instructs Fernando Sabino to doubt the idea that the artist should only create when in a 'state of poetry'.

[...] that of the guy who only puts in writing when he 'feels disposed' is stupidity. Especially for the prose writer. [...] It's not about having a disposition: you are a worker like any other: it is about having hours of work. So, go writing, go working even unwilling (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 25, author's emphasis).

Sabino, despite identifying himself with the figure of the worker alluded to by Mário, is reticent about the way the friend conducts the argument, considering that he "[...] exaggerates when he says that the spontaneity and sincerity of the artist do not matter at all for the work of art. I think something should matter. At least they influence" (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 43). Faced with the hesitancy of the young man, then 19 years old, Mário returned to the subject in the following letter. As a counterexample, he evoked the writer "Olegário Mariano who never reads a book 'not to be influenced'" (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 50, author's emphasis), explaining in the sequence where his nuisance came from.

All is because they do not conceptualize sincerity and spontaneity. Sincerity with what? Immediate spontaneity or later? [...] Sincerity with what we are or with what we have the conviction that should be? [...] Sincerity and spontaneity are things that change constantly, day by day. They have to be repudiated as conscious elements of the work of art which is artificial, art-making. Sincerity, spontaneity cannot be an aesthetic element, much less technical! Sincerity is, without us wanting. As conscientious elements of art, sincerity and spontaneity can only be academicism, nostalgia, laziness and ignorance (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 50).

At the end, based on the point defended by Mário, Sabino willingly accepted the need to follow the plan established by the tutor to moderate himself in writing. Such a plan included some rituals that would hinder the 'lazy' use of spontaneous creation.

There is a human way for us to fix this sneaky trend [the easiness]: the setting of a commemorative date for its greatness as a man and an artist. Set an annual date for your spiritual retreat [...] What have I done this past year? In what does this add to my work or harm it? What do I need to do next year? What should I complement? After all, I'm telling you banal things, which, to the banal, seems to be smelling a confessionary (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p.35).

Years later, in one of the last letters of the correspondence between the two writers, Sabino demonstrated that the practice described by Mário, whether or not it was by the advice of the eldest, participated in his life as a writer.

Look, Mário, I was twenty-one the other day, with a vast examination of conscience, I put things in places. [...] I did something like fixing a broken-down bookcase, taking out all the books, and then putting it one by one in its place. Locked alone in a room, I sought for hours of silence and solitude to achieve detachment and absolute humility (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 188).

In addition to the rituals against the lack of reflexivity proper to spontaneous writing, the plan suggested by Mario to Sabino also included an indefinite set of readings, for which the teacher suggested some selection criteria.

What I think, in the main, is that you set a reading plan and follow it, against everything and against everyone. The two main criteria, I believe (never thought much in the case), should be these:

1<sup>st</sup> Essential readings for the dignity of the intellectual.

2<sup>nd</sup> The criterion of proximity:

Proximity of social being (political, religious and other tendencies)

Proximity of individual being (tendencies and gestures and ideas of artist)

Proximity of vital being (in principle the current art should interest more than the one of the past)

Proximity of ethnic being (in principle the Brazilian literature should be more interesting than the Portuguese, this more than the Spanish, Latin more than German, European more than Chinese) (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 53).

The same argument against spontaneity reappeared two years later in Mário's communication with two pupils of generations before that of Sabino - Guilherme de Figueiredo and Carlos Drummond de Andrade -, demonstrating that it was not a subject limited to dialogue with the writer of Minas Gerais.

If you have technique, and I have, I did everything to have, and I do, and I have contempt and almost disgust of those who do not have technique and curse of dishonest: who has true technique knows how it incorporates itself to the artist in such a way that it becomes both the idea and the finger of the hand. The technique is an acquired spontaneity (Andrade, 1989, p. 106).

Is there anything more sincerely spontaneous than correction when it comes? It is known Musset's case correcting the rhyme [which was right ...] only to irritate Master Victor Hugo who detested the poor rhymes. There will be something more lyrical, more spontaneous than that! (Andrade & Andrade, 2002, p. 527).

As a consequence, we have that writing, for Mário and his guests, no longer sought the maximum expression of the subject, making the work a representation of the interiority of the writer. For them, writing could only come to exist by the criticism or withdrawal of the writer from what was most intimate and immediate. In other words, the work would not be successful if closer to what the writer supposedly felt, but the one that most modified what constituted him as subject.

## **Final considerations**

Centered on the figure of Mário de Andrade, the formative experience of young people, whose letters have been analyzed here, denotes the common effort towards a departure from what had been experienced by the literate of the nineteenth century in their encounter with the profession of writing. Taken as a negative reference by Mário, Machado de Assis played a counterexample in establishing a relationship with writing doing, in order to divert the beginners from the technical coldness that would only result in "[...] masterpieces of academic character

[...]”, in which, however, “[...] perfection is isolated in the infertile sadness of immobility” (Andrade, 1993, p. 68). Instead of a writing gesture governed by literary productivity, the São Paulo poet sustained another *savoir faire*, moderated by the functionality that this would assume in the life of the literati in formation, calling for a writing, somewhat detached from the work: to write without object or start, but with the intention of transforming the one who writes.

This displacement, in turn, came to break with the canonical literary logic - founded on the assertion of the transience of the author in the face of the work -, since it establishes a subjective sphere of writing, in which it would not be the writer, but the writing that would perish. Thus, something like an ‘intransitive writing’ emerges, not conditioned to the conclusion of a literary text. Conversely, if there were work that mattered to such interlocutors, it would be based on the ethical transformation of the writer himself, and not on the verification of his writings.

To that end, it seems to us, the writers in formation were delegated the task of giving up literary ideals and an alleged spontaneous ‘truth’ that would define them, in favor of an intense work on themselves, henceforth around another modality of veridiction, this an artifice and founded on continuous writing, as advocated by Mário (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 213, author’s emphasis): “Take three years to write your new novel. Or five. It does not matter. But acquire by the perfect suffering of the analysis of life and of ‘its’ authors a thing far more noble than spontaneity and much more spiritual than sincerity: conviction”.

It was therefore a question of reorienting the link between modes of subjectivation and the very nature of the writing occupation, pointing to a non-appeasement in the relation of the individual to himself. Rather, it would involve a confrontation with himself that would force him away from the point where writing began, becoming intrinsically transformed at the end of the course.

In this clash, remained to the master the responsibility of vetoing the youngsters the patronizing attachment to an ideal of success, as well as to the fixity arising from it. Thus, it was maintained open the way to a continuous experimentation of oneself. In other words, writing would be the primary function of the epistolary preceptor in the experience in focus, so that writing would assume the role of permanent bond between the writing subject and his truth, both in permanent construction. It was this imperative that linked the formation of the beginners to an ethics of



dissatisfaction with what they had already consolidated, imposing upon them the task of perennial writing, summarized in the complement of the advice sent to Sabino in the letter of January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the last exchanged between the two: “Always seriously, get tired, do not save anything, spend everything, throw all your cards on the table and do not bluff. And if the book does not go well, say: I lost. And start another game. But in the defective or failed book you will have a way” (Andrade & Sabino, 2003, p. 212).

As a consequence of this type of arrangement between master and disciple, the writing work was dragged into the condition of formative operator no longer in favor of a game of apprehension-expression of the feelings, ideas and perceptions of the individual who writes. On the other hand, the intended effect of writing is that of a questioning experience of the truths that had constituted the subject, in a specular game in which he himself should enunciate a frank and fearless discourse, aiming at the transformation of the interlocutor.

Such a formative, ‘psycagogic’ way par excellence, sought to separate the writer from the immediate plan of pedagogy and self-knowledge. Beginning with Mário de Andrade and his ‘etters of formation’, the two ideas - writing as an expression of himself and as a distance from himself - begin to coexist, certainly, both in the discussions between the writers and, to some extent, in those headed by scholars of the literary field. There remains, however, the task of deepening such discussion in the field of education, by investigating more fully the potential impact of such coexistence, beyond the literary perimeter, in current formative experiences.

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## Note

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