



The letters and the nation: Olavo Bilac and his chronicles about education (1900-1906)¹

As letras e a nação: Olavo Bilac e suas crônicas sobre educação (1900-1906)

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Abstract

The chronicles of Olavo Bilac, although clouded by his poetry, are important documents for the analysis of political, social, and educational debates in the First Brazilian Republic. Bilac seized a prestigious spot in the Brazilian newspapers of the *Belle Époque*, and while playing this role, he promoted a modernizing agenda in which the massive literacy of the population was a primordial task. Literacy was what could lead Brazil to modern civilization.

Keywords: Olavo Bilac. Education. Illiteracy. Chronicles.

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Resumo

Ofuscadas por sua poesia, as crônicas de Olavo Bilac são importantes documentos para análise dos debates políticos, sociais e educacionais na Primeira República. Ocupando espaço de prestígio nos jornais brasileiros da *Belle Époque* Bilac engajou-se em prol de uma agenda modernizante na qual a alfabetização massiva da população desempenhava tarefa primordial. O letramento era visto como a pedra de toque capaz de conduzir o Brasil à moderna civilização.

Palavras-chave: Olavo Bilac. Educação. Analfabetismo. Crônicas.

Resúmem

Ofuscadas por su poesía, las crónicas de Olavo Bilac son importantes documentos para el análisis de los debates políticos, sociales y educativos en la Primera República. Ocupando espacio de prestigio en los periódicos brasileños de la Belle Époque Bilac se comprometió en pro de una agenda modernizante en la que la alfabetización masiva de la población desempeñaba una tarea primordial. El letramento era visto como la piedra de toque capaz de conducir a Brasil a la moderna civilización.

Palabras-clave: Olavo Bilac. Educación. Analfabetismo. Crônicas.

Introduction

As a poet, Olavo Bilac (1865-1918) stood out in the eyes of the general public with the launch of his work *Via Lactea*, in 1887. However, his performance in the world of languages and literature was broad and versatile. Besides a poet, he was a ghost-writer and publicist. Bilac also wrote children's books, school manuals, and chronicles. He even succeeded the great Machado de Assis (1839-1908) as a chronicler for *Gazeta de Notícias* — one of the most important newspapers in Brazil at that time. Bilac's chronicles are rich documents if you want to analyze the political, social, and educational debates during the First Republic (1889-1930). His most fertile time as a chronicler was between the years of 1897 and 1908: the first period refers to when he assumed the function in *Gazeta*; the second marks a final break with the press — although its public engagement only increased after that².

Bilac was an *epigone* of pedagogical ideas that set up a far-reaching educational ideal in the history of Brazilian education. The poet left the altar of the muses to use his pen for the benefit of a project that wanted to modernize the country: Brazil had finally identified that massive literacy would be an essential aspect for its progress. The process that Nicolau Sevcenko named “the compulsory insertion of Brazil in the *Belle Époque*” (SEVCENKO, 2003, p. 35) was vehemently defended by Bilac in its multiple facets: sanitation, beautification of the capital, mandatory vaccination, and education. The side effects — vaccine revolt, demolition of colonial houses, and gentrification — that were the core consequences of these “modern benefits” were minimized or justified by Bilac. As an inspector of public education in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and a *gens de lettre*, it is no wonder that Bilac had privileged literacy as the main topic of this modernizing agenda.

Illiteracy: an enemy

For Bilac, literacy was the most urgent issue in Brazil. Unlike other intellectuals at the time, who considered the racial controversy as the country's fundamental dilemma³, the poet and chronicler established the nation's number one enemy very boldly: illiteracy, the “main cause, and perhaps unique, of all our backwardness” (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 12/04/1903 in BILAC, 2011, p. 202). Despite concentrating the great names of the national *intelligentsia*, as well as the mass of the common literate people, Rio de Janeiro was still a city of illiterates and, if that was the reality of the national capital, “imagine what will happen in the other states!” (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 02/02/1902 in BILAC, 2011, p.135) — inquired the chronicler. In the same chronicle of 1902, in which he stated the aforementioned manifesto, he continued to protest against the closure of schools:

Apart from Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo, where public education has received special care, illiteracy rules the vastness of Brazil. Schools are closed “for lack of attendance,” and nobody remembers that the duty of the government is compelling people to attend the academy, not closing it (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 03/02/1902 in BILAC, 2011, p. 135).

² After a controversy involving government communication published in *Agência de Notícias América* (Owned by Bilac and Martins Fontes), the poet and chronicler interrupted his collaboration for the newspapers he worked and promised to never write again for the press (BILAC, 2011, p. 41). He kept his promise and, after that episode, Bilac would focus on writing children's and school books (*Através do Brasil* and *A Pátria Brasileira* are from that time). He also aimed his attention at public campaigns, such as the one for mandatory military service (1915) and for mandatory massive literacy.

³ Silvio Romero (1851-1914), João Ribeiro (1860-1934) and Nina Rodrigues (1862-1906), for example.

Moving between the national capital and the capitals of the world, especially Paris⁴, Bilac deemed the European system and culture, as he saw the literacy of the population like a *sine qua non* condition for a country to enter modernity. In his perspective, primary education should be mandatory in Brazil as it already was in “civilized countries.” According to Bilac, Brazil had the largest number of illiterates among the countries of America. He affirmed that closing schools due to the lack of attendance was absurd since it happened “because the people are lazy, because the big guys get along with ignorance, because nobody forces the children to go to school” (idem, *ibidem*), while it should occur only as a result of a satisfactory percentage of literate people. In his agenda, the writer submitted mandatory primary education as a categorical Kantian imperative:

“Mandatory”... this word is strong, and many people defy what it means. But sometimes respect for individual freedom is absurd. Does anyone have the right to walk naked in the streets? Or to perform indecent acts in public? [...] illiteracy is also indecency, immorality, and a public danger. Because of it, there are no statistics in Brazil, no elections, no civic dignity, and no nationalism (Gazeta de Notícias, 02/03/1902 in BILAC, 2011, p. 135).

Afterward, when a federal law obliging states to provide mandatory primary education was a “dream coming true,” Bilac ironized the “freedom fighters” who advocated for the right to not take vaccines and to not provide education for the children by invoking “liberal ideals.” The chronicler wrote with humor:

We live to glorify the Swiss Constitution, the customs of Switzerland, the morality of Switzerland, the electoral system of Switzerland, the civic virtues of Switzerland, the freedom of Switzerland, and whenever we want to refer to a perfect republic, we refer to Switzerland. Well, then: this law, as noted by Mr. Leôncio de Carvalho, is copied from an article in the Constitution of this very liberal Switzerland. The Swiss people, who praise freedom above all things, do not recognize the “freedom of illiteracy”... there it is: what will perhaps cool the enthusiasm of our liberals for the glorious Helvetia! (Gazeta de Notícias, 19/12/1903 in BILAC, 2011, p. 207.)

Eradicating illiteracy meant following-up what had started with abolitionism and the proclamation of the Republic: “how can one be free and know what freedom is if they do not know how to read? If they have a spirit opposed to all modern conquests if they allow their intelligence to fade, and let inaction reduce them to their simple instincts?” (idem, *ibidem*). In Bilac’s view, illiteracy was a socially mainstream aphorism that deprived Brazil in several areas and made the country and its literature obscure both here and abroad.

This is a sad, sad country, where there is not a single newspaper publisher that sells forty-thousand copies a day, where there is no book that runs out of edition per year, where there is no writer who can live solely on the product of his intellectual work! And yet we complain

⁴ Bilac traveled to Europe several times and Paris was his favorite stop. He was there for the first time between 1890 and 1891, in 1904, and from 1906 onwards almost annually (JORGE, 1992).

about the obscurity in which we live! And we're still sorry that no one knows us! (Gazeta de Notícias, 02/11/1903 in BILAC, 2011, p. 170.)

The bitter scenario of literacy in the country was not just a question of cultural or educational policies, it was also a matter of national security. Sensational news was popping up, such as "The German Danger," "The American Danger," "The Japanese Danger" and similars. The "dangers" meant the multiplication of foreign schools in Brazil and the "foreignization" of some regions in the country. For Bilac, there was indeed a risk, since "a people of a hundred million illiterates would be easily conquered by a people with a million educated men" (Gazeta de Notícias, 26/02/1904 in BILAC, 2011, p. 230) — and the neocolonial experience demonstrated the truth of that narrative. Frédéric Masson's allegation "what makes a nationality immortal is not its spoken language: it is its written language" (idem, p. 230-231) reinforces Bilac's statement: "Languages that are only spoken are always defeated by the ones that are simultaneously spoken, read and written" (idem, ibidem).

The "German danger" was the most feared. To contain it, "a good army, a good squad, and good schools," as Alcindo Guanabara said (Gazeta de Notícias, 10/01/1905 in BILAC, 2011, p. 317). Bilac believed that these dangers were not a consequence of foreign influence, but a result of Brazil's own fiasco:

armies will be worthless if there is no awareness of nationality, which is more powerful than any weapon. Have no fear of an armed invasion: it can be repelled in pitched or naval battles. Do not be scared of what is called the 'German danger' [...] The conquest. If one day our country is indeed conquered, it will be through the peaceful and slow dimming of the Brazilian nationality. Would the people rise up to repel it? But how, if there were no Brazilian people? — what happens if the majority of the population in the South starts to speak and write in German? If they do not speak, write, or understand Portuguese? The core of nationality is, first of all, the language. And our language is being lost (Gazeta de Notícias, 10/01/1905 in BILAC, 2011, p. 317).

Today, we can clearly see that the national language is not the heart of nationalism, although at that time, Ernest Renan — whom Bilac read vigorously — had already written about this⁵. Renan lectured on how Brazil's Latino neighbors had to build their nationalism without relying on Castellan — a language that almost all of them countries spoke (RAMA, 1985).

Brazil cannot read

The year was 1903. Brazil's President Campos Sales (1841-1913) had "cleared up" the country's finances through the *funding loan*⁶ policy and was succeeded by Rodrigues Alves (1848-1919), who continued with his work. Mayor Pereira Passos (1836-1913) proceeded with a full reform, which tore down the old and unsanitary city and brought up a brand new capital with a future full of hope. João do Rio (1881-1921), the journalist, was writing about the bookstores getting busy in Rio. His article "Brazil reads," published in

⁵ The text *What is a nation?* is from the *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Conference, lectured by Renan at the Sorbonne, in 1882. It was later published as a part of the volume *Discours et conférences* (1887).

⁶ Campos Sales assumed the office in 1898, when there was high inflation rates and low coffee prices due to overproduction. In light of this, he negotiates with the British bankers: Sales asked for loans of around GBP 10 million and a provisional suspension of interest payments on the foreign debt.

Gazeta de Notícias, was regarded with skepticism by Bilac: “No, my dear João do Rio! Brazil does not read because it simply does not know how” (Gazeta de Notícias, 12/04/1903 in BILAC, 2012, p. 202). The poet appeals to numbers: only two book editions were sold out — and they were published by the most famous Brazilian publishing company, *Garnier*, which usually printed just around two thousand copies. Comparatively, France was going through a “book crisis” during that same time. Book publishers did not sell and profit that much anymore, but that was a consequence of the rising popularity of the newspapers, as Bilac used to say. Although in Brazil, neither books nor newspapers could sell fifty-thousand copies per day — even the national ones. Bilac was very disturbed by the retrogress in literacy:

Ancient magazine *Revue des Revues* monthly displays pieces of the world’s literature. You can find samples of articles originally published in local European journals, or North-American, Chilean, Montevidean, Peruvian, but no sign of Brazilian ones. And that’s simply because we do not have any journals at all. *Revue*’s last edition pitches about an article published in *Estudios* journal, from Montevideo. The piece addressed the “literature of Maranhão between 1830 and 1902”. Then we learn that in Maranhão there was this man Antônio Henrique Real, a poet named Otero Mendes, the novelist Sabas da Costas, and yet another poet, Franco de Sá. We also get to know that Aluísio Azevedo had translated Molière’s work and is a theater critic, besides much other news — all of them in a fuss of names, dates, schools, people. Thus, we are doomed to be known by the ones that write about us. We should pray for the skies that no one actually wants to know us, that we remain anonymous, for it is better being unknown than being defamed... (Gazeta de News, 02/11/1903 in BILAC, 2011, p. 170-171).

Brazil was like an ocean of illiterates. Hence, he states:

Here, the poets, the novelists, the critics, and the controversial writers write for themselves, that is, for the people that work in the same fields. We lie to ourselves and make literature for a selfish and lonely kind of pleasure (Gazeta de Notícias, 11/02/1903 in BILAC, 2011, p. 170-171).

João Ribeiro (1865-1934), a grammarian, literary critic, and historian, held the same opinion. For him, finding fine men to join the Academia Brasileira de Letras (Brazilian literary society) was an extremely hard quest: “strictly speaking, if there are forty academic men in France, we could only long for four” (RIBEIRO in LEÃO, 1962, p. 67). Bilac believed that the country was going through a special moment: an “undeniable intellectual and moral development” was happening (Gazeta de Notícias, 03/09/1900 in BILAC, 2011, p. 51). However, if a nation wants to be noteworthy, it should make sure that the progress hits all the social sectors — there is no use in limited knowledge.

Secondary Schools and Universities

Bilac’s chronicles focused on literacy and compulsory primary education, so there was not much space left for talking about secondary schools and universities. For him, these educational stages were less important since they depended on primary education. Even so, the

poet would still lecture on this matter, in a way one could easily identify that he strongly believed in the Law as a remedy to the Brazilian educational system:

Writing correctly is useless in Brazil today. That is unless you want to be a journalist or pursue a career in literature. Doctors, lawyers, and engineers write carelessly. They think writing perfect Portuguese and praising it is restricted to the ones that directly work with the language. If you read a thesis of a Brazilian soon-to-be Physician you would be horrified: idiocy and obscurity are all around. In France, England or Italy there are no doctors, lawyers, or engineers that write poorly in their own native language. Why? Because primary education is mandatory in Europe. You would not join any university if you had not completed secondary school. What we see here is absurd... (Gazeta de Notícias, 06/02/1902 in BILAC, 2011, p. 138).

This statement sounds like a *mea culpa*. After all, Bilac had joined medical school at only fifteen, under a special authorization from Emperor Pedro II. Being versed in your native language was essential for Bilac:

We think through words, and those who do not know how to use words cannot take advantage of their own ideas. You do not need to perfectly master the language in order to be a good doctor, engineer, or lawyer, but you do have to speak and write it appropriately (idem, ibidem).

In that same chronicle, Bilac advocated for a Bachelor of Arts degree that was offered by Colégio Pedro II. The program was ridiculed and mocked by society. Faculties did not require this degree for admission, so the students did not mind about getting it. But the ones who did get it were “Bachelors of Arts in Sciences and Languages.” This degree had no specific use, but it was a symbol of esteem.

Universities represented novelty, science, and progress, but Bilac had a critical perspective on them. A dozen of experts was not enough, the country needed more: “All the universities and all educational reforms will be useless until primary education is mandatory by law. That is what will save us” (Gazeta de Notícias, 19/12/1903 in BILAC, 2011, p. 207). As a poet, Bilac was a friend of the muses and the great symbol of Parnassianism in Brazil. In contrast, he was also a pragmatical chronicler who had strong opinions on how to solve the country’s dilemmas:

education does not mean creating cold scholars, rude sophist men, or intransigent ideologists that do not care about social issues. It means building brave and wise men who are able to think, act, and use all their soul and knowledge for great purposes. In a new country like this, where almost everything is undone, it would be absurd to have cenobites, anchorites of science, poets or philosophers, mathematicians or artists, isolated in their selfish studies, blind to what the common people are experiencing, insensitive to the suggestions of the environment in which they live. [...] If you study the political and economic conditions of our homeland, you will see, my young friends, that the men of your generation will receive an honorable, but very expensive legacy (BILAC, in HANSEN, 2011, p. 26).

In this young country, where there was so much left to do, Bilac's modernizing agenda and ideas for the national education system stood out for their workability. He was able to balance both his career as a chronicler and his fight for all the points at issue in Brazil, especially literacy, which he considered a core element for citizenship. Patrícia Hansen (2007, p. 63) affirms that seeing Brazil as a child and European countries as seniors was a prevalent perspective in all the civic-patriotic literature during the First Republic. That would only change with Monteiro Lobato during the twenties (1920s). Ultimately, Bilac acknowledges that building a strong country and promoting a tight union between Brazilians were the most important resolutions. They could not be achieved without massive schooling since schools would teach the people all the necessary knowledge for modern life and lecture on loving the nation — something indispensable for science and progress.

Slow-paced progress

Bilac displays his optimism in a chronicle he wrote for *Gazeta de Notícias* in 1904 (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 05/04/1904 in BILAC, 2011, p. 237-238): the number of enrolled students in Rio de Janeiro's schools had risen from 11099 to 26707 during 1893 and 1903. The poet was not totally fulfilled, but that was a relevant expansion. As an educational inspector, he knew "how hard it was to convince an illiterate father that education is important for his children." The teachers would even try to "preach" for the general public about education in their non-working hours, and Bilac admired that. He stated that it would be way lighter for teachers if primary education was mandatory as it was in "civilized countries." "If on November 15, 1899, the Provisional Government had imposed mandatory primary education, we would already have a huge press and rich book trade today. An entire generation of literate people would have sprung from the bosom of this glorious law..." (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 08/03/1904 in BILAC, 2011, p. 231).

Jules Ferry had established laicism in all French schools during 1880, free primary education in 1881, and mandatory education in 1882. That was the tripod of principles for all schools in France: they should be free, secular, and mandatory. Years later, while in Paris, Bilac could see the consequences of these policies. He says: "For those who live life using their intellect and not only their instincts, it is quite amazing to perceive that in the great Paris there are no humans who cannot read" (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 15/06/1904 in BILAC, 2011, p. 257), and then he begins a narrative about a common day in the bright and literate city:

In the morning, all the poor seamstresses, who are in a hurry to the studio, are eating a croissant, which is usually all they have for lunch; all porters, servants, coachmen, truck drivers; all the workers, in their blouses and hats, who marched into the suffocating air of the workshops; all the cooks and all the servants; all the bourgeois, who fill the buses, the tramways, the cars of the *chemin de fer de ceinture*; all these people are walking around with a newspaper in their hands, taking their portion of intellectual food. The newspaper is inside the poorest attic, in the most humble hovel. Everyone here feels the need to nourish the brain (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 15/06/1904 in BILAC, 2011, p. 257-258).

Mass schooling, strong press industry, and high-end literature in France — besides all the luxury in Paris — had assembled a model civilization that people should follow, not only in Brazil, but also in South America in general, Mexico, Spain, and Portugal, as stated by Jean-François Botrel (2012, p. 62-67).

For Bilac, Brazil was like a baby crawling towards literacy for all. There was a lot of effort but not that much of a progress. Although the aforementioned Paris scenario was romanticized, it is quite clear that Bilac was truly worried about national education for everyone. Literacy was a core element for modern nations, universities, nationalism, the industry, science, and writers:

Yes, we do have a Brazilian literary society (*Academia Brasileira de Letras*), with forty (?) honored and immortal writers (!); but none of those writers can live on their artistic work in this country where there are twenty-million inhabitants. Their books had never been printed in more than ten thousand copies. Understandably, the enemies of this society question its relevance (Gazeta de Notícias, 11/13/1905 in BILAC, 2011, p. 366).

Bilac's criticism of the literate citadel is striking. Brazil did not need a few sages isolated in ivory towers, for it was not a fight for getting more readers to consume books, but for social development. If the universities went along with the Academy's idealism they would also be pointless:

Writers would have a wide public if at least a fifth of our population knew the secrets of reading. But writers do not have a large nor a small audience — Brazil has universities instead of primary schools. An Academy in a country of illiterates represents a cinematographer for the blind or a phonograph for the deaf. It is a useless and ridiculous luxury. Recently, an ironist said: 'The Academy has a *raison d'être*: since there is no public that reads the work of the academics, the academics read each other's work' (Gazeta de Notícias, 11/13/1905 in BILAC, 2011, p. 367).

Within a few years, Bilac's struggle had finally paid off - although modestly. General indexes for education in Brazil were still pitiful, but public education was certainly expanding:

The progress in these past ten years is indeed admirable. Public schools have risen and regenerated. They have become so noble in Rio de Janeiro that the best and the richest families in the city are willing to abandon their ridiculous prejudice about “everything that is free is bad.” They started considering public schools for the first education of their children instead of the private schools that had the merit of being private and... expensive. This new power of public school is due to the development of normal study schools. Even Calino can affirm that there are no good schools if there are no good teachers (Gazeta de Notícias, 27/09/1906 in BILAC, 2011, p. 407).

Bilac was referring to the newly trained teachers that had graduated from Rio de Janeiro Normal School in 1906. Besides developing teacher training, the country was improving its indexes since the end of the nineteenth century. No, the “massification” of school and literacy could not be celebrated yet, but there was growth in the number of students, both in absolute

numbers and in percentages. Also, at the same time, the pedagogical literature for children was flowering, as a consequence of the growth of the reading public⁷. Bilac was one of its most famous authors. Marisa Lajolo pitches about these modest instances of progress:

In the early years of the twentieth century, the country believed in itself: it trusted that it had overcome economic and social impasses with the abolitionism in 1888. It relied on its institutions since the Republic seemed to have fulfilled the promises of modernity and a bright future (LAJOLO in BILAC & BOMFIM, 1996, p. 15).

In 1902 Bilac published his book *Poesias* (Poetry). From then on, the poems he wrote were slowly fading away as his chronicles rose. Bilac was also focused on public campaigns and literature for children. Equally important, while he was still a chronicler for *Gazeta de Notícias*, he began his own column, *Registro*, in the *A Notícia* newspaper. Later, in 1904, he also joined the new and modern *Revista Kosmos*. His work in Public Instruction for the federal government began in 1899 and it went on until the end of his life.

He started his journey as a children's literature author in 1894, with *Contos Pátrios*. This book comes from Bilac's own financial struggle: he asked his friend Coelho Neto for help because he did not want to sell his mother's jewelry. Then they offered to write a book for publisher Francisco Alves. They raised four *contos de réis*⁸ (4:000\$000) with it, which was written in less than a week. The book sold more than one hundred thousand copies until the twenties (1920s). Partnerships and endorsements eventually became common for Bilac. In 1905 there was *Tratado de Versificação* (written with the help of Guimarães Passos) and many more. Later, in 1910, when he was not in the press anymore, Bilac published *Através do Brasil*, his most prestigious work for this time: Manoel Bonfim was a co-author. *A Pátria Brasileira*, another book by him and Coelho Neto, came right after in 1911.

His work as a poet had highlighted him among the general public and the fine scholars, but as the twentieth century began, he started to be famous besides the writing world. In 1900, he went to Buenos Aires as an official journalist for the presidential committee and was the center of attention at a formal dinner, as he would be many other times in the future "*que hable Bilac, que hable!*" (JORGE, 1992, p. 214). Shortly, in 1906, he was appointed as general secretary for the III Pan-American Conference. He dazzled Joaquim Nabuco with his perfect oratory skills. Still, in 1906, he published *Conferências Literárias*, a book that assembled all the lectures he had given throughout the years, in which there was always a great audience. In 1908 he was the official journalist for the National Exhibition — an event designed to present the metamorphosis of Rio de Janeiro — further, in the following year, he was invited to speak at the grand-opening of Rio de Janeiro's Theater.

Bilac was an illustrious participant in modernizing Brazil. His engagement can be summed up in *Pátria, Civilização e Trabalho* (Patriotism, Civilization, and Work). This formula had built a strong ground for education in Brazil, as demonstrated by Circe Bittencourt⁹. It also inspired the *Através do Brasil* narrative.

⁷ It was a typical growth phenomena in early stages — something like a 1-2-4-8 progression — that doubles in a relatively short time, but is not a relevant percentage when considering the total population.

⁸ The Brazilian currency at the time called Mil-réis, a thousand Mil-réis our a million was called by common people like "conto de réis".

⁹ BITTENCOURT, Circe. *Pátria, Civilização e Trabalho – O Ensino de História nas Escolas Paulistas (1917-1939)*. Edições Loyola: São Paulo, 1990.

Final considerations

By exploring Olavo Bilac's chronicles in this paper, we can recognize his main facets as a publicist. Equally important, his work on Patriotism in Literature aimed at the ones who were taking their first steps into literacy. This scenario reveals how poor was the realm of languages and literature in Brazil at that time: a poet had to be a chronicler and a warrior for literacy simultaneously.

This "multitasking" was not performed exclusively by Bilac, though. In fact, it was utterly normal at the time (MACHADO NETO, 1973; MICELI, 1977). The segmentation in science fields and the subdivision in book genres were coming out strong in Europe, but this process would take longer to establish itself in Brazil and other southern countries. Altogether, we can clearly see how different the book industry was in Europe in comparison to here.

The development of the field of languages and literature in Brazil was lethargic and hazy. It was part of a wider project that longed for "modernization," lead by the elite. It is clear that installing Brazil in *Belle Époque* was grueling. There were lots of obscure setups that used the key-words of the time, such as Republic, Modernity, and Instruction.

Bilac was a member of a group of cosmopolitan experts. He fought for the ideals that were taking the globe, which were unfortunately misused by the elites, like the Republic.

All in all, we should understand that Bilac, while as a chronicler, was not a blind advocate for the elites. Yes, he did have his idiosyncrasies, preferences, and oscillations, but he actually believed and fought for literacy for all, which was, in his perspective, a passport for modern civilization.

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