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RESPONSE PAPER 1

The Elitist Imposture

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Unlike many of my colleagues, I do not intend to become a teacher after graduating in Letras. Thus, thinking about aspects of language and culture invariably brings me back to the universe in which I belong and which has finally brought me to this course: the reading and booktube universe.

In order to get to the point where I intend, it is necessary briefly to trace my trajectory, in which personal and professional aspects are so merge that is difficult to speak of both separately. I have been an avid reader since I was a child, and for this reason, I created in mid-2011 Minha Vida Literária (MVL), a blog and a channel on YouTube to share my impressions about books I read. At that time, I was finishing my first degree, unmotivated for not feeling that the career of nutritionist was what I really wanted. When I created MVL, I encountered the publishing area and, for the first time, I saw in Literature a possibility of a profession. In this way, after graduating, I chose to return to study, this time to Letras course.

It has been seven years since the establishment of MVL. What started as a hobby today is my profession, as this is my only paid activity and my source of subsistence, as well as it has been for many of my colleagues who operate in the same area.

The booktube is the area of YouTube focused on the channels that talk about books and literature. Because of its growth, a recent controversy involving the role of booktubers came after a Brazilian author asked if we should charge for reviews and disclosures made in our

channels. The debate was intensified after the publication of a critique about it in *Época*¹, and this is where I begin my reflections on the proposed themes.

The text written by Paulo Roberto Pires carries with itself clear positions about who has the property to talk about literature. Moreover, starting from a remarkably elitist point of view, the journalist ends up questioning, also, what is Literature.

Democratizar leitura é vender muito — não importando a qualidade do que se vende. Mistura de populismo de mercado com anti-intelectualismo, a filosofia booktuber atualiza o princípio de Monteiro Lobato de que “um país se faz com homens e livros”. É só olhar em volta e ver em que Brasil vivemos hoje.

The idea behind his arguments is that there is a "good literature", which is not recommended by booktubers— and when it does, it is done with unpreparedness, because they are not an intellectual subject, capable of talking about the matter with property for such. Still, the interest behind the booktube would be purely marketing: objectifying sales of the book, a product, the main commitment in this scenario would not be with art. Therefore, booktubers, by substituting the role of literary criticism, would thus lead to a decline of literature itself.

Just for clarify: Pires was wrong in many of his notes, starting from the fact that most of the content produced by booktubers is unpaid. Although, yes, this group has affected — and a lot — the sale of books, the primary goal is to simply share experiences of reading, as friends who talk about a book they read or a movie they watched. Anyway, the point to be expanded is not this but Pires arguments involving the quality of the literature consumed and indicated by the booktubers.

A notion that divides literature in "good" and "bad" is the same one that understands culture as "high" and "low", which values one at the expense of the other and, in consequence, segregates who has such a valued culture of those who does not have it. Thus, this belief not only impact the object to be studied and treated as such (eg, classical music is seen positively in Brazil, to the detriment of funk, commonly criticized), but also affect the perceptions about each individual and its relation to the world, whether by the way the subject will interpret it, or how the subject will be interpreted. Thinking about someone "without culture" brings with it a series of preconceptions that contribute to the constitution of that person's image.

And so does language, which is commonly understood from the point of view of grammatical rules and is commonly divided between "right" and "wrong". Those who do not

¹ <https://epoca.globo.com/paulo-roberto-pires/a-impostura-booktuber-23004427>

use it adequately, according to these rules, are seen in a depreciative way. To commit a grammatical error does not mean only to err in this sphere, but, mainly, it means to belong to a stigmatized group, "acculturated". The opposite, in turn, brings another interpretation: using the language well in its standard norm causes an appreciation of the individual.

This is so true that it is precisely what happens in the text of Pires. The author uses refined (and often obsolete) terms not only for the sake of style: he does this to reinforce his point of view and to distance himself from the attacking group. In applying a far-fetched language, Pires intends to demonstrate the appropriation of the culture he defends, in addition to asserting his property to discuss the issue. At the same time, it distances itself from the booktubers, also known by the colloquial language that they use in the videos, in the majority of the cases.

The danger of such a position is to reinforce the idea of "culture" and "language" as something distant when both are inseparable from us. We are responsible for the existence of a given culture and a given language, since they exist because we use them. At the same time, both enter into our constitutions, so that it is impossible to exist apart from a certain culture and language.

Pires himself points out that most of the problems exist in Brazil come from the inexistence of readers and a decadent intellectualism. However, the critic ends up being incoherent in his arguments by expecting Brazil to be a reading country by making reading the property of a select — and refined — group. Even within the position, he defends his argument is flawed: if, in fact, there are readings superior to others, how is it possible to reach those at the top without first climbing the first and lower steps?

The existence of the booktube does not exclude that of literary criticism, especially since the functions of each of these spheres is not the same. Literary criticism must exist and must fulfill its function; going against such an assertion would be a mistake. However, it is also wrong to ignore the role that booktubers have been playing in creating new readers. The close language to those who watch them allied with books with which their audience can identify has been instrumental in breaking the barriers between readers and literature, deconstructing the idealized vision around them that pushes it away and places it on a pedestal. Literature must be within the reach of all because it is part of who we are.

My intention with this paper was to bring the reflection on the aspects proposed in the text of Paulo Roberto Pires. Rather than defending the activity I pursue, I sought to see the

ideas behind the critic's words to comprehend how different understandings of what language and culture are — from the specific context of literature — result in different implications. My proposal is that we look at them from the perspective that they are part of us. In this way, we avoid distancing ourselves from both and, therefore, distance from ourselves.