



## A literature for children: Countess of Ségur

Priscila Kaufmann Corrêa – Doctoral student in Education – FE – UNICAMP

In Brazilian schools of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, French was taught as the foreign language of the educated elite. In many schools, boys and girls were encouraged to speak only French, having also access to French publications. Among such works were included the books of the *Bibliothèque Rose* (Pink Library), a collection that was consolidated by the stories of the Countess of Ségur from 1856 on.

At Colégio Progresso, a female boarding school located in the city of Campinas (SP), students learned French and had a collection of 528 French books at their disposal, which included the *Bibliothèque Rose* collection. At Notre Dame de Sion, a high school in Rio de Janeiro (RJ), maintained by the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion Priests, these books were also considered appropriate for female reading (SILVA, 2002, p. 171). Even at private libraries, such as the one owned by the Count of Pinhal, in São Carlos (SP), there were books by the Countess of Ségur.

Sophie Rostopchine (1799 - 1874) was born in Russia and married the Comte Eugène de Ségur at the age of 18, in France, where his family had gone into exile. Her writing career began at the age of 58, when she already had 19 grandchildren, to whom she dedicated her work. Her first book, entitled [\*Les nouveaux contes de fées\*](#) (*The new fairy tales*), was released by Hachette as part of the *Bibliothèque Rose* collection, sold at train stations kiosks – which were designed by the publisher Louis Hachette (1800 - 1864) in 1852.

The most prominent work by the Countess of Ségur was the "Trilogy of Fleurville", comprising the titles [\*Les Malheurs de Sophie\*](#), [\*Les Petites Filles Modeles\*](#) and [\*Les Vacances\*](#). The main characters of the three stories are the sisters Camille and Madeleine and their friends Margaret and Sophie. The familial atmosphere and the universe of the children presented through moments of mischief and pranks, permeated by a strong moralization of the children's behavior, are ingredients that have ensured the permanence of these books in the publishing market for over a century.

Despite the great success, the writer's novels were accused of perversion and sadism during the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to passages filled with verbal and physical violence.



[Children and animals being spanked](#) are strong scenes that had been presented both in text and illustration in the books. In later editions, however, [these images were suppressed](#) and the books have since then been published with editor's warnings about the content of the novels and the context surrounding their first printing.

In addition to the French editions circulating in Brazil, distributed mainly through Editora Garnier, the books by the Countess of Ségur also had editions in Portuguese published by Editora Aillaud, both in [Paris](#), and in its subsidiary in Lisbon. These Portuguese editions were sent from Aillaud to Lallemand Frères, located in Lisbon, from where they were then sent to Sao Paulo during the decade of 1870. (LEÃO, 2007, p. 7) The first Brazilian translations were published by Editora Francisco Alves, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Brazilian versions were later published by Editora Melhoramentos, Editora do Brasil, and, in the 1970's, by Edições de Ouro, [adapted by Herberto Salles](#). The writer from Bahia included [Brazilian elements](#) in the works of the Countess, such as ways of speaking, names and skin color of the characters. These adapted versions still feature in the catalog of the Editora Ediouro, which attests the longevity of the Countess's work.

Her books have also inspired other writers in Brazil, such as Maria Clarice Marinho Villac, who studied at Colégio Progresso and, thus, read many French books in the course of her childhood, developing an affinity with the leading character of *Les Malheurs de Sophie*. Between 1937 and 1945, her published works were aimed at a young audience and included titles such as [Clarita da pá virada](#) (Mischievous Clarita) and *Clarita no Colégio* (Clarita at school), in which we may notice the relation with the books by the Countess of Ségur that enchanted the little girl and led the writer Maria Clarice to recount her childhood memories, in a fluid and engaging language with a moralizing undertone.

The permanence of Sophie de Ségur's books, their national versions and narrative spin-offs throughout the works of other Brazilian authors lead us to ponder that many of the expectations regarding childhood approximate others in different contexts and spaces, such as those of France and the ones in Brazil.



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