

Education and Reading for Children in Brazil at the time of the Nation's Founding

Escolarização e leitura para crianças no Brasil no início da República

La scolarisation et la lecture pour les enfants au Brésil au début de la République

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents some reflections on the development of the Federative Republic of Brazil's school system, at the time of the country's founding, through the expansion of primary education. The purpose of the paper is to establish relationships between questions related to the expansion of both books and the publication of children's literature in the country.

Index terms: education, primary school, reading, children's books.

RESUMO

No artigo em questão, faremos algumas reflexões sobre o processo de escolarização no Brasil do início da República, através da expansão da escola primária. Buscamos estabelecer relações entre as questões relativas à expansão dos livros e a ampliação da publicação da literatura infantil no país.

Palavras-chave: escolarização, escola primária, leitura, livros para crianças.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article a pour but de présenter les résultats d'une recherche, dans laquelle nous avons vérifié la formation de la conscience discursive des élèves de la deuxième année de l'enseignement primaire. Cette recherche vise à contribuer méthodologiquement dans l'espace enseignant-

apprentissage de la langue maternelle, mettant en évidence la médiation intentionnelle, propice aux conditions de production, à contribuer dans la formation de la conscience discursive des producteurs de textes par le moyen d'une parité entre le lecteur et l'auteur.

Mots- clés: production de texte, lecteur et auteur, médiation, parité.

1. Introduction

In the article in question, we intend to hold a discussion on the instruction of basic skills beginning with Hébrard (1990) on education in Brazil in the early years of the Republic and then moving on to Souza's (2004) and Nagle's (2001) works, noting the existing relationship between the increased need for educating the Brazilian population, the expansion of primary school and the expansion of the children's books industry, using the work of Lajolo and Zilberman (1985, 1996, 2002); Lajolo (2006) and Feijó (2005).

To address the points above, over the course of our research we have attempted to find answers to questions concerning the emergence of "education" as a necessity: Would it be possible to rescue a moment in history in which the skills of reading, writing and counting became indispensable to humans and were tied to an institution capable of transmitting those skills to the public?

2. Education of Elementary Knowledge

With these questions, we refer to Hébrard's (1990) studies on the instruction of basic skills in the modern era, in which he also investigates the construction of the instruction of this knowledge, beginning with France and by providing elements for discussion. It is interesting to consider from the beginning that basic academic skills (reading, writing and counting) were not always linked to schooling. Thus Hébrard (1999, p. 37) warns that:

Historically, the school cannot be considered the only place, nor the dominant place – where the intellectual equipment of a society is constructed and transmitted. It plays an important role (less or more) in defining that equipment, in particular when it enunciates the norms surrounding the equipment's legitimate use.

For the author (1999, p 37), the "universal literacy of Christians was considered necessary after the Council of Trent to convey the science of salvation." Until the French Revolution, Hébrard reminds us (1990, p.40), "people learned to read before they learned to write, [and] afterwards, to draw numbers." Therefore the importance of the trilogy in question was being historically constructed within the conflicts of classes that had different interests, in which we observe divergent groups in regards to the question of the "socialization of certain knowledge." It is from this context that the need for the education of Christians grew (1990, p 37):

The Catholic Church then gave parochial schools and educational institutions, founded by the new educational congregations, an impulse such that it is impossible to reconstruct a history of written culture without considering the modalities of its education.

The social movement of various groups imposed "needs" in relation to reading, writing and calculation at different times throughout history. Hébrard (1990) reminds us that before becoming school subjects, reading, writing and counting were activities conducted exclusively by professionals, who worked with Latin, a language that required an extensive familiarity for proficiency. In the sixteenth century, with the creation of schools for the intellectual formation of the elite, teaching of Latin was incorporated into the curriculum.

The responsibility of teaching basic skills belonged to the family, once "students who reached the sixth grade knew generally how to read and use a pen" (HÉBRARD, 1990, p. 42). Over time, the models for teaching these basic skills were modified: in the seventeenth century, reading was

necessary to instruct Christians, as the catechism (a religious book) was used during masses; in the eighteenth century, Jean-Baptist de La Salle proposed a school that would integrate reading (which had previously been taught through Latin but would now include French), writing and counting. Along with these changes, the expansion of education, “grade levels,” and classrooms transformed the instruction of elementary knowledge (HÉBRARD, 1990, p.46).

According to Hébrard (1990, p. 66), one aspect that we should consider when thinking about basic skills is that these same skills became to be considered as prerequisites for further learning, and furthermore, schools alone were not responsible for the transmission of these skills at certain moments in history, for

(...) the places of early learning were as much school-based as they were non-school-based and they are treated very differently according to the future trajectories of the children. Thus, a point to be considered is “how this trilogy [reading, writing and counting], from our point of view, so natural, is produced in and by schooling. (HÉBRARD, 1990, p.67)

In the eighteenth century, the school becomes the place of learning of basic skills, not without the contradictions, however, which surround the diffusion of basic skills. To Hébrard (1990, p. 69), multiple segments of society were interested in the dissemination of such knowledge, given that:

We therefore also need to examine carefully this time when Catholic churches considered it necessary to connect the religious education of “children and the un-educated” no longer with the sermons and the rituals of the liturgical calendar, but rather with more or less widespread literacy.

These contradictions are evidenced by the historian, who shows us the relationship established between a “breaking” (that is viewed as a necessary adjustment) of the oral and gestural Christian tradition, moving on to what was called the science of “salvation,” in which “the book is the most concrete manifestation [of God’s will] and reading is the privileged form of

appropriation [of this manifestation]" (HÉBRARD, 1990 p. 69). It was not by chance that the book, an object of reading materialization, was distributed or hidden, depending on the interests of the social class in question.

It is thus evident that the "necessary" instruction of basic academic skills was constructed from distinct and conflicting interests between segments of the Catholic Church and other social groups. What were these groups' intentions in expanding schooling and consequently in the dissemination of these basic skills?

Many interests are hidden in the schooling process. Already in the nineteenth century, in studies covering one hundred years of French history (1880 to 1980), Chartier & Hébrard (1995) identify lectures that apparently defended positions contrary to the literature being studied, but that over time, a unified discourse formed, in which what was read was recognized as having universal value.

The student, the individual, must become a reader and where he will learn will be at school. From then on, in the process of societal change, two fundamental categories were constructed and expanded: time and educational space (i.e. school). Tasks that were previously assigned to other sectors of society, such as the family and the Church, were transferred to the school; it was now at the school where the diffusion and transmission of basic skills and knowledge – now considered “indispensable” to the “new man” – would occur.

3. Brazil and the Education Process in the Early Twentieth Century: Some Considerations

We conducted this brief retake of questions worked on by the studious French to consider our point of departure in relation to the valorization of basic academic skills, among them reading. Education and

the expansion of reading in Brazil appear to have a highly favorable connection that we can observe throughout this text through its different personalities, which are: authors, editors, publishers, readers and schools.

One has to consider that until the 1920's, only a very small portion of the population attended school and it was widely believed that schooling was the "savior of the motherland," as it served to drive great jumps in the economic and social development of the country, generating what Nagle (2001, p. 134) showed:

Faced with the phenomenon of institutional liberation, which triggers the opening of new paths on the plane of thought and action, it is crucial to understand the meaning of the contribution of this civilizing process, as much in regards to the forms of patterns of thought as to the forms of the patterns of academic achievement.

What seems to be highlighted here is the search for instruction that must be growing, making clear what the author (NAGLE, 2001, p. 134) characterized as a feeling of enthusiasm and pedagogical optimism, regarded as being:

On the one hand, there is the belief that by the multiplication of educational institutions, the dissemination of school-based education, it is possible to incorporate large sections of the population on the route of national progress and put Brazil on the path of the great nations of the world; on the other hand, there exists the belief that certain doctrinal formulations about education demonstrate the path to the true formation of the new Brazilian man (progressive education).

Thus enormous potential is attributed to school-based education; it is seen to hold the power of transforming the country and the people of Brazil. Viewed as the "motor of the history" (NAGLE, 2001, p. 134), school-based education will evidence the appearance of constant discussions and reforms in the early twentieth century, especially in regards to elementary education.

We asked ourselves: How do we talk about reading during a time when the majority of the Brazilian population was illiterate?

Even though only a small portion of the population had access to formal education and that the end of the nineteenth century was marked by a shortage of national works of literature for children and youth (although the application of the adjective “national” to literature is questioned by several authors, among them Lajolo and Zilberman; 1985), this situation would change substantially in the beginning of the twentieth century. The expansion of school as a “necessity” for the public also contributed to a growing interest in publishing books to reach this expanding school audience, marking an increase in interest in publishing books for children (particularly didactic books in the case of schools).

According to Nagle (2001, p. 149):

Data from the 1920 Census, the discussions and the studies resulting from the conference on elementary instruction in 1921 and the constraint that dominated the spiritual environment in 1922 when, at the same time that the country sought to celebrate the centennial of [Brazilian] independence [from Portugal], an almost 80% illiteracy rate weighed on the nation – according to the calculations of the time – transformed illiteracy into the great shame of the century, as the ultimate insult to a people that wish to join the path of “modern civilization”.

The path initially found to achieve national progress through education, says NAGLE (2001, p. 150), “is literacy, viewed as the necessary ‘first step’ in primary education, and the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic to the majority of children was considered more democratic than providing a broader education, but only to a minority [of students].” Here, we refer again to the beginning of this work, when we put faith in the value that over time school and basic academic skills would achieve throughout history, in Europe in the eighteenth-century and in the twentieth century in Brazil, which in Brazil is characterized by the “urgency of public education.”

Gradually, the need for a school that taught literacy (NAGLE, 2001, p. 151), “evolves into the demand for an integral primary school, considered

the main institution for building national character and for this very reason, should reflect governmental preferences." Furthermore, the need for technical and vocational education for the development of the workforce is reconsidered, aiming for what the author called the attempt to make Brazilian civilization "eminently practical, as were the most modern and advanced civilizations of the contemporary world" (NAGLE, 2001, p. 153).

Thus many efforts are set into motion to expand education, especially primary education, in order to reduce Brazil's [economic] delay [in comparison with the most advanced nations of the time]. Researcher Fatima Rosa de Souza's studies (2004) show the establishment and modernization of elementary education in the State of São Paulo [and then] expanding to other Brazilian states, in which various adjustments in methodology were observed, precisely for (2004, p. 116) "the establishment of a uniform program and standardized tests converted the first lessons and others into a formal curriculum with accompanying teaching materials and the logic of their contents began to determine the organization of the school."

From the influence of positivist thought, the Brazil of enthusiasm and pedagogical optimism, defending mass literacy, "means that the Brazilian school was radically transformed in the 1920s: in its objectives, content and social function"(NAGLE, 2001, p. 152). Furthermore,

The movement that sought to transform standard education in Brazil, in this decade, went so far as to produce the overestimation of elementary school, as the discussions, plans and reforms in this type of education were frequent, but they carried the objective of adjusting to the new functions of elementary school. (NAGLE, 2001, p.152)

Souza (2004, p.117) explains that time evolves to have a meticulous ordering, apart from the strict discipline and good behavior required by the students, "verified by the diligence, frequency, punctuality, cleanliness,

order, obedience, [and] fulfillment of duties.” Elementary school programs undergo several reforms.

In all these reformulations, the alterations said more about the configuration of materials (agglutination of content and its distribution among various grade levels) and the expansion of methodological reference points than about cultural selection. This means that the set of subjects established in the late nineteenth century were maintained and used until 1968. (SOUZA, 2004, p. 128)

Despite the ideals of valuing primary school as a way of ensuring the education of a large segment of the population that was illiterate, Brazil faced many structural challenges, such as securing regular school spaces and class periods/schedules, aside from other issues. Souza (2004, p. 124) emphasizes that:

The lack of jobs and the state's inability to meet the demand for schools, are part of a much greater web of problems: the precariousness of school buildings, the high selectivity of primary education, the lack of classroom furniture and teaching materials, the lack of uniformity and standardization in teaching, the difficulty of using modern teaching methods and full compliance with school programs, the difficulty in the provision of teachers to isolated schools, low salaries for teachers and poor working conditions.

The contradictions those arose from the attempt to implement primary education throughout the country also reveal themselves in the curriculum. Difficulties related to complete implementation of the curriculum are analyzed in Souza's studies (2004, p. 132), which include accounts by inspectors and directors of school groups in Brazil. The author affirms that subjects such as "reading, writing, calligraphy and arithmetic were regarded as fundamental" (SOUZA, 2004, p. 132) while others subjects were given secondary importance and finally there were those subjects to which were devoted very little time, such as drawing, music, physical education and crafts.

In regards to reading, until the mid-twentieth century there was an integration of the texts selected for student reading with moral and civic instruction, aside from the prescriptions of norms regarding behavior, citizenship and conduct in relation to school, family and society (cf. SOUZA, 2004). Poetry has an important role in children's literature notwithstanding the fact that the content also had some moralizing aspect.

The poems of Gonçalves Dias, Castro Alves, Casimiro de Abreu, Camões, Fagundes Varella, among others, put children in contact with intellectual culture, but these poems were often selected for a formative goal often moral and civic in nature. (SOUZA, 2004, p. 133)

It is thanks to the paucity of teaching materials that Brazilian publishers were able to expand their business through schools. If in the nineteenth century, as highlighted by Lajolo & Zilberman (2002, p. 124), writing in Brazil was "bad business" (the product of poor infrastructure), in the twentieth century, the need for the production of children's literature and the nationalization of the production of works aimed at the adult public became clear and possible through the investment of national and international publishers.

4. Education, Reading and Books for Children in Brazil

The 1920's and 1930's in Brazil are marked by demands for change in education, and political parties, civil society organizations and intellectuals refocused their attention on the question of educating the public. Nagle (2001, p.137) makes note of the implications of these educational movements:

The importance attributed to primary education and the meaning of this continued to guide the activities of the Nationalist League of São Paulo during the 1920s. The connection between the leaders of this organization and the revolutionaries of 1924 shows the extent to which that importance fostered enthusiasm around education and how that

enthusiasm transformed into the main instrument for accelerating the country's history.

It was in this scenario of urgency to educate the country that the first works of children's literature were produced, as there seems to be a relationship between the necessity for mass education and the expansion of the production of written works for a young audience. Lajolo & Zilberman (1985, p. 26) highlight that:

Until the arrival of King John VI in 1808, the editorial (and even typographic) support required for building a literary system was worse than inadequate; it was non-existent. A long period of inactivity went by until typographers, publishers, libraries and bookshores made the book a not-so-rare object, at least in the most important urban centers.

However, until the late nineteenth century, the literary works that circulated for young audiences were composed of translations and adaptations of foreign works (cf. ZILBERMAN and LAJOLO, 1985), which would awaken a desire in search of a national (Brazilian) body of children's literature. We have, therefore: "In this climate in which education and school are highly valued and varied literature is being produced simultaneously, the widely-held concern about a lack of appropriate reading material for Brazilian children is blunted" (ZILBERMAN and LAJOLO, 1985, p. 28).

In fulfillment of certain purposes, national works of children's literature gradually occupied more and more space in the Brazilian press of the early twentieth century:

Intellectuals, journalists and teachers rolled up their sleeves and went to work; they started producing children's books that were written for the right audience: students reclaimed their role as a necessary component...of a modern Brazil. (ZILBERMAN and LAJOLO, 1985, p. 28)

The expansion of the school system also made possible the expansion of the book industry. One example of this relationship may be

observed with the implementation of School Groups¹(Grupos Escolares) in Sao Paulo and later in other Brazilian states, which consisted of an urban model structured to serve groups of students that was “subject to an administrative hierarchy and centralized state control” (RAZZINI, 2004, p.2). The expansion of schools and students participating in School Groups contributed to the growth in demand for books.

This market expansion happened in the field of teaching, although we can observe in Lajolo & Zilberman (1985) that since the nineteenth century, works for children had been adapted and translated in Brazil, but the need for national production only became profitable with the expansion of the school system. An example of this effort was the publication of Monteiro Lobato’s first book in 1921, titled *Narizinho arrebitado*² (*second reading book for use in primary schools*), which demonstrates the link between the production of children’s books and the project to modernize the country through formal schooling.

Lajolo and Zilberman (1985, p. 46) explain that "in the beginning, *Narizinho* repeated the sales success of *Saudade*,³ written by Tales de Andrade, and was also adopted into the curriculum of all public schools of the State of Sao Paulo." Even so, national children’s books did not immediately proliferate. It must be kept in mind that (LAJOLO and ZILBERMAN, 1985, p.46):

In the 1920s, the works of Lobato were almost the only ones of note. His limited company included: Tales de Andrade’s stories, published in the *Charm and Truth Collection* of publisher Melhoramentos, and Gondim da Fonseca’s book, *The Kingdom of Wonderland* (1926), which, being edited by *Biblioteca Quaresma*, prolonged at the time the use of adaptations of traditional tales.

¹ public elementary school

² Little Miss Stuck-Up

³ “Saudade” is very difficult to translate, but is comparable to a mixture of longing and nostalgia.

As can be seen in the case of Lobato's first work, children's books seem to have a predetermined destination: schools. Not without reason, Razzini (2004) presents studies on the relationship between the expansion of public school in Sao Paulo and the expansion of the bookstore *Francisco Alves*:

The expansion of the public elementary school in Sao Paulo, initiated soon after the Proclamation of the Republic, would accelerate the development of the publishing market and expand the labor market, involving teachers, artists, editors and writing experts, illustration and production of textbooks. (RAZZINI, 2004, p. 1)

Breaking with the tradition of foreign adaptations, the call for nationalism of literature came from various segments of Brazilian society. Pedagogical changes came one after the other, among them the spread of the *intuitive method*:

This method (...) in vogue in Brazil since the last decade of the Empire, was supported, for example, by Rui Barbosa, as much in his opinions on *Reform of Primary Education* (1883) as in the translation and adaptation of Norman Alison Calkins' manual *First Lessons on Things* (1886). (RAZZINI, 2004, p. 3)

The adaptations of manuals and other materials for use in primary schools also portray this moment in the country's history that centered on the need for modernization, for "progress." *First Lessons on Things* analyzes the intuitive method, among other concepts of progress related to the effort to modernize Brazilian society.

Furthermore, Valdemarin (2000) believes that:

The content taught by the name *First Lessons on Things* conveys an appreciation of scientific progress and its applications. Subjects related to hands-on activities were added to school curriculum, such as the physical sciences and geometry and their applications in building machines and products. (VALDEMARIM, 2000, p. 84)

The idea that the country was lagging behind the rest of the world and that there was a need to join the path of progress ensured the need to import (education) models. Positivist ideas are incorporated into the field of Brazilian education through the ideas of some intellectuals who were obsessed with a need for order that "promised" to achieve "progress without fail." Valdemarim (2000) reflected, however, that different concepts of progress were present at the time, which this paper will not address.

This highly-sought-after progress could only be achieved through education and specifically schools, which had the capacity to implement progress on a national level. There is a search or even a reaction against confessional religious doctrine and the need for positive, practical and objective scientific knowledge. Furthermore, as order was a central principle of Brazilian Positivism, actions were to be regulated and moral freedom suppressed, revealing a highly disciplinary education.

On these aspects, one of the important issues surrounding the spread of the intuitive method is that "in conjunction with observation and experimentation, the intuitive method favored learning through illustration and design" (RAZZINI, 2004, p. 4). That question brings us to the importance that illustrations have in books from this moment forward, considering that "the adoption of the intuitive method and the use of the image were only possible thanks to advances in printing and paper manufacturing techniques, ongoing since the mid-nineteenth century, which lowered the costs of textbooks" (RAZZINI, 2004, p. 4), we can observe the correlation between schooling, the book market, reading, and literature, among other aspects.

Thus it is in this context of "expansion" that the country builds the necessary conditions for the expansion of the domestic book market. In the case of the public primary school, Razzini (2004, p. 5) demonstrates the impact of this expansion through the reorganization of school space and schedules:

This inflection point of the primary school demanded not only specific buildings and furniture, but also the use of new didactic and pedagogical materials such as books, workbooks and illustrated works (such as maps and posters). Furthermore, the new organization of space and time imposed by the model of School Groups contributed to the affirmation of simultaneous instruction and for the standardization and ordering of content, which required a greater variety of books and other materials adapted for grade-level-specific instruction in all subjects.

Thus the market for didactic books expands, fueled largely by the expansion of public education. Among publishers, worth noting is *Francisco Alves, Laemmert and Garnier*. The first expanded considerably from the moment that public education began to spread.

At the time of the republic's founding...the prosperity of the Francisco Alves Bookstore (F. A.) accompanied the expansion of public elementary schools since from 1854 to 1889, F. A. had published only 75 titles (62 of which were made for school instruction) and, from 1890 to 1919, F. A. released 550 titles, of which 307 were educational. (RAZZINI, 2004, p. 9)

Other works by Brazilian researchers will highlight the relationship between literature for children, youth and school and their connection to education in Brazil. Lajolo (2006, p. 66) reminds us that "in Brazilian tradition, children and school literature and schools have always maintained a relationship of mutual dependency."

This age-old partnership helps expand not only the market but also the possibility for more Brazilians to publish their books targeted to a school-based audience. On this topic, we will conclude with Monteiro Lobato.

5. Final Thoughts: Children's Books, Authors and Editors – Monteiro Lobato

The first works of literature aimed at children were translations and adaptations of foreign materials, among them, texts by French authors and

others. As already made evident above, with the republican ideals of progress and nationalism came a need for nationalizing children's literature, what Lajolo and Zilberman (1985, p 23) refer to as the "formation of a new genre".

If European children's literature began on the eve of the eighteenth century, when in 1697 Charles Perrault published the famous *Tales of Mother Goose*, Brazilian children's literature only came to light much later on, almost in the twentieth century, although throughout the nineteenth century news of the appearance of a children's book would happen from time to time. (LAJOLO and ZILBERMAN, 1985, p. 23)

As an author and editor, Monteiro Lobato was interested in distributing his works through this promising market. However, it is important to consider that before Lobato ventured into the world of children's literature production, Brazilian literature's adaptations for children were strongly influenced by foreign cultures:

Around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, Brazilian society – overall but particularly in the capital – was very attached to French culture in all aspects of social life and lived in a state of idolatry towards the city of Paris, which was considered the capital of modernity and Western civilization, as some Brazilian authors' books were printed in Paris. (FEIJÓ, 2005, p. 454)

The publishers that gained prominence during this time were concentrated in Rio de Janeiro, the most important among them being Garnier and the Laemmert brothers:

There were, in fact, two publishing houses (publishers) that, having opened in the mid-nineteenth century, represented all that was noblest in the Brazilian publishing sector. It was through these publishing houses that the publication of books was separated from the publication of newspapers. Foreign publishers and booksellers, such as the brothers Garnier and Laemmert, were the dominant figures of our humble publishing market until the beginning of the Monteiro Lobato era. (FEIJÓ, 2005, p. 454)

The Brazilian publishing market suffered many challenges for "the manufacturing of paper was in its nascent state, proper graphic equipment was practically nonexistent and distribution depended on a very small number of bookstores. We had booksellers/publishers, but not a publishing industry" (FEIJÓ, 2005, p.455).

At the end of the nineteenth century, it is important to highlight the role of the immigrant Francisco Alves, who was the first to invest in books for primary school through the Francisco Alves Bookstore, of which certain aspects were addressed earlier in this paper through Marcia Razzini's research (2004).

In 1910, the book *Through Brazil* by Manoel Bonfim and Olavo Bilac's was published by the Francisco Alves Bookstore, which for Feijó (2005, p. 457): "...was a cheap and simple book...[that was]...above all, easy to read and engaging. Its circulation had a specific target: schools. It was simultaneously a sincere education project by its authors and a commercial enterprise with great potential".

Despite the attempt at nationalizing books, publishers still did not have the necessary tools for publishing books, which were still printed in Paris at the time. An example is the book *Through Brazil*, whose content was "legitimately Brazilian" (FEIJÓ, 2005, p. 458) but was printed in Paris.

From 1918, Monteiro Lobato began his career as an editor and later published his own works for children (FEIJÓ, 2005, p. 460):

In 1918, the writer Monteiro Lobato bought the company the *Magazine of Brazil*. He thus began his great publishing adventure, continuing through his other companies such as *Monteiro Lobato & Co.*, later *National Publishing Company* and finally with *Brasiliense*.

Later, with the success of *Narizinho*, the author and editor would be recognized as a pioneer in publishing works for children.

Having completed this brief look at Lobato's contributions, we conclude by noting the very favorable relationship between the rise in children's literature and the expansion of the "necessity" to educate the populace, proven by the importation and incorporation of educational ideas linked to the republican ideals of various groups at the time of the republic's founding, which exerted an extraordinary influence over the production of goods, among which, as is highlighted in this paper, is the book.

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