

## Introduction: Machado de Assis—The Location of an Author<sup>1</sup>

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That Stendhal should have confessed to have written one of his books for a hundred readers is something that brings on wonder and concern. Something that will cause no wonder and probably no concern is whether this other book will have Stendhal's hundred readers, or fifty, or twenty, or even ten. Ten? Five, perhaps.

—Machado de Assis, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (5)

### The Location of a (Utopic) Question

On a recent trip to Brazil, Salman Rushdie confessed his appreciation of the work of Machado de Assis.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, on the occasion of the release of his latest film, *Match Point*, Woody Allen expressed his admiration for the author of *Dom Casmurro*.<sup>4</sup> Cultural supplements in newspapers and magazines have enthusiastically reprinted these encomiums for the author of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. Is it possible that a “master on the periphery of capitalism” —to use Roberto Schwarz's expression<sup>5</sup>—can achieve full recognition in the “world republic of letters”—as Pascale Casanova calls the structure of the international literary marketplace? Casanova provides the answer: “Notwithstanding the ecumenical ideology that presides over literary celebrations, writers in *small* languages are apt to find themselves marginalized” (277; my emphasis).<sup>6</sup>

To begin, the question of the international reception of Machado de Assis' oeuvre is at once unavoidable and irrelevant.<sup>7</sup> It is unavoidable: Brazilian culture continues to search for legitimacy, which preferably comes from abroad. However, this question is ultimately irrelevant, for this legitimacy usually implies that Brazilian authors have satisfied exotic expectations imposed on

them from outside.<sup>8</sup> That this (false) question lingers today reveals more about the anguish of an academic and artistic system that sees itself as marginalized than it helps to understand the intellectual and artistic production of this location. Finally, the marketing of symbolic goods is (and has always been) far more docile than we would like it to be, and thus tends to reproduce the same hegemony that dominates the economic and political arenas. As a result, casting one's sight anxiously to foreign reception can lead to the regrettable phenomenon of self-exoticism,<sup>9</sup> the frequency of which remains overwhelming, especially in certain expressions of contemporary Brazilian cinema and popular music, earning them the dubious epithet of "art for export."<sup>10</sup>

In the case of Machado de Assis, the restricted international reception of his oeuvre also reflects (unfavorably) on Brazilian criticism. Indeed, for many decades the central debate of Machadian studies practically reduced the parameters of the discussion to possible ties between the author's work and local reality. This prolific debate can be summarized by a pair of predictable oppositions: explicit alienation from, and subtle allusions, to Brazilian society; a deliberate act of obscuring his family origins; coded descriptions of social inequality. This colorful game of critical divergences unnecessarily circumscribes Machado de Assis' work within the dilemmas of Brazilian history, instead of placing him in the realm of the "world republic of letters." Of course, it is not a matter of simply reversing this process and overlooking local conditions—a critical gesture that would reveal an ironically misplaced and misleading fascination with the promises of an outmoded concept of *Weltliteratur*.

However, if such a concern with local conditions clarifies the subtle critique of Machado's gaze relative to nineteenth-century Brazil, it also obscures a fundamental aspect of his work that may constitute his most relevant contribution to the rewriting of literary tradition. This contribution would place Machado's work at the center of contemporary critical concerns. It is here that the mediocre repercussions of his work abroad can also be attributed to a perverse (and unexpected) effect of criticism's focus on the false problem of Machado's "alienation"; after all, such a debate primarily concerns specialists in Brazilian culture, therefore it limits the potential of Machado's oeuvre to attract a wider readership.

A set of radical (and absurd) illustrations will clarify my perspective. Imagine equating Goethe's and Schiller's works with learning how German writers at the end of the eighteenth century overcame their inferiority complex vis-à-vis French culture.<sup>11</sup> Imagine someone reading *Madame Bovary* to

primarily become acquainted with the social transformations that were taking place in French society from the vantage point of a small town. Does anyone believe that the repercussion of Dostoyevsky's novels can be explicated through an uncontrollable desire to better understand Russian culture in the nineteenth century? It is true that *the matter of nationality cannot (naturally) be sublimated*, as it is vital to explaining the uniqueness of any author. However, *the matter of nationality should not be (exclusively) emphasized*, or we condemn Machado's work to a very restricted reception—the five readers of Brás Cubas. Of course, we should not ignore the fecund contributions of the school that has dedicated itself to the project of rescuing Machado's commitment to his country. However, the very success of this school depends on the opening of new paths. *The Author as Plagiarist—The Case of Machado de Assis* constitutes a first step in this critical direction.

As a result, new readings of Machado's work come to the fore when we discuss his legacy in a broader context. Therefore, we should emphasize the circumstances of an author who boldly experimented with literary genres, freely appropriated the literary tradition, developed an irreverent rapport with the reader through a series of experiments with the narrative voice, attributed to the act of reading a central role in the act of writing, and played with the process of rewriting the text as the text is being written through the act of ironically commenting on the process of composition. Machado de Assis is a very provocative writer, regardless of his geographical coordinates. Indeed, Machado seems to write (also) in order to think about literature. He narrates in order to propose narrative problems; his oeuvre thus embodies a form whose content is the problematization of literature itself, its conditions of readability and the status of interpretation in the age of printing press.<sup>12</sup> As soon as we bring questions such as these to the fore we see a new Machado de Assis appear, one who is a precursor of Jorge Luis Borges; a precursor to that family of authors who always knew that writing is a byproduct of reading. When this is achieved, Machado will finally find abroad more than the five readers of Brás Cubas.

### The Location of Places

In this context, we can propose that Machado de Assis was only able to create groundbreaking work when he came to terms with the circumstance of Brazil as a “peripheral” country. This particular location allowed him to develop what I would call “belatedness as a critical project.” Let me clarify these concepts; otherwise, my approach could be readily misunderstood.

First of all, I am using the concept of “peripheral” not as an objective description of a given place but rather as a complex set of politically, culturally, and economically asymmetrical relationships—the “peripheral” pole being located in a hierarchically secondary position—and these positions are naturally dynamic and change in the course of a historical process. Therefore, instead of simply doing away with the concepts of center and periphery, as certain contemporary critical trends propose, we must render them ever more complex, stressing their relational nature. Otherwise, we will lack the analytical tools to understand the growing inequalities of a so-called globalized world.

For instance, Casanova proposes the definition of “median literary spaces—ones that are neither central nor located on the remote periphery, such as those of small European countries [...]” (277). Regarding one of these countries, Portugal, formerly a great colonial empire, Boaventura de Sousa Santos developed the thought-provoking notion of the “semiperipheral condition,” which implies “an intermediate economic development and a position of intermediation between the center and the periphery of the world economy” (9). Further in his innovative essay, Sousa Santos expounds the cultural consequences of the semiperipheral condition, while defining a Janus-like figure, the “Portuguese Prospero”: “Being neither an emancipatory nor an emancipated identity, he oscillated between Prospero and Caliban as if in search of Guimarães Rosa’s third margin of the river” (36).<sup>13</sup> Antonio Candido calls this impossible margin the “semicolonial condition” of Brazilian culture,<sup>14</sup> and most of Machado’s achievements might be re-read in the light of this concept, for it implies an appropriation of the tradition based on a fundamentally irreverent fashion.

In the late 1970s, in the context of Italian art history, Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg had already proposed a highly complex model for reframing this discussion, calling into question the assumption underlying the common definition of the concepts of center and periphery.<sup>15</sup> Their approach is particularly illuminating to the project of *The Author as Hagiarist—The Case of Machado de Assis*. According to Castelnuovo and Ginzburg:

If the center is by definition the location of artistic creation and periphery simply means distance from the center, then one cannot but consider periphery synonymous with artistic belatedness. Of course, this is a tautological scheme, which eliminates the difficulty although it aims at solving it. [...] Seen under a polyvalent perspective, the relationship between center and periphery reveals itself to be

very different from a peaceful image [...]. This is not a matter of diffusion, but of conflict, which can be observed even in situations in which the periphery seems to limit itself to faithfully follow the directions of the center. (286)

The authors then show how, in the Italian context, more than an artistic center responsible for dictating aesthetic values, one finds the emergence of a polycentric structure, dynamic in its relationships, variable in its patterns of dominance. Of course, their model is highly suggestive, especially in the contemporary position of the globalized world. An author such as Machado de Assis has always already created a personal polycentric library,<sup>16</sup> whose shelves host “influences” from different cultural centers *and* peripheries, not to mention the overlapping of several historical moments. In Machadian terms, the contentious nature of the encounter between central and peripheral instances translates itself as a specific form of appropriation of literary tradition, which entails the possibility of unfolding “belatedness as a critical project.”

I am not using the concept of belatedness to imply that a “peripheral” writer is always coming or existing after the expected time, which would be defined by the so-called “central powers”—a Manichean comprehension of cultural history that Castelnuevo and Ginzburg’s quotation calls into question. Rather, I am appropriating Jorge Luis Borges’ “técnica del anacronismo deliberado y de las atribuciones erróneas.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, “belatedness as a critical project” presupposes a skeptical detachment from the hierarchy usually attributed to tradition, and favors an ironic gaze regarding contemporary values—trademarks of Machado de Assis’ work. Moreover, although I am aware of the pitfalls implied by any “triumphant interpretation of our backwardness,”<sup>18</sup> at the same time I insist that this awareness should not obscure the critical potential of a location that does not (and cannot) see itself as being the very center of the cultural movement in a given time. Georg Lukács keenly acknowledges this potential: “It is a phenomenon that causes surprise; however, it is frequent that a new human type appears for the first time in the literature of a young country, and from there—with all its complexities—penetrates the literature of the whole cultivated world.”<sup>19</sup>

As a matter of fact, the issue of a belated modernity has always haunted Latin-American writers and social thinkers. In Brazilian cultural history, an issue of paramount importance is the question of and the quest for modernity, that is, economic progress, social justice, and, above all, the desire to be up-to-date with the latest trends. Brazilian cultural history, then, engages in

a phantasmagorical race towards what has not yet been clearly indicated, and therefore cannot be fully achieved. In this context, however fast you travel, you will always arrive late. You are always already belated, especially if you run restlessly. Thus, a more fertile alternative might be pursued by an author who decides to deliberately espouse anachronism as a method.<sup>20</sup>

#### A Belated Writer—Ahead of his Time

Machado de Assis' first innovative novel, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, was published in serial form in the *Revista Brasileira* in 1880 and in book form a year later. This groundbreaking work has been praised as a masterpiece by writers and critics such as José Saramago, Carlos Fuentes, Susan Sontag, John Barth, and Harold Bloom, among others—not to mention Brazilian readers. Nonetheless, until the writing of *Brás Cubas*, although he was already a noted author, respected among his contemporaries, Machado de Assis did not have yet the “edge” to his work that we have learned to admire—such is the state of the art in Machadian studies. Therefore, one of the most pressing questions for Brazilian literary criticism is the need to provide a reasonable explanation for the authentic quantum leap manifested in Machado's works after 1880.<sup>21</sup> In this introduction, I will not provide a summary of the state of the play concerning this topic. Instead, I will invite readers to open the novel to the first page. There they will find a note, “To the Reader,” a part of which I used as the epigraph of this introduction:

That Stendhal should have confessed to have written one of his books for a hundred readers is something that brings on wonder and concern. Something that will not cause wonder and probably no concern is whether this other book will have Stendhal's hundred readers, or fifty, or twenty, or even ten. Ten? Five, perhaps. The truth is that it's a question of a scattered work where I, Brás Cubas, have adopted the free-form of a Sterne or a Xavier de Maistre. I am not sure but I may have put a few fretful touches of pessimism into it. It's possible. The work of a dead man. I wrote it with a playful pen and melancholy ink. (5)<sup>22</sup>

This is a key passage; indeed, this is Machado de Assis' rite of passage. After the very beginning of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, the narrator fashions himself as an author who fully acknowledges that, above all, he is a *reader*, a statement that undermines Romantic notions of authorship.<sup>23</sup> It is clear that within this construct, Harold Bloom's theory of “the anxiety of

influence” reveals itself as a Romantic projection of the notion of “genius,” which is precisely what authors such as Machado de Assis call into question. From 1880, the surface of his texts is ever more populated by innumerable references to authors, topics, and tropes from the literary tradition. If Machado consciously assimilates Sterne’s technique of digression, he does so with Montaigne’s flavor, for his digressions usually start or end with literary references. As Alfred Mac Adam notes: “Through this reference to *De l’amour*, which blurs essay, fiction, and poetry, and his later references to Sterne and Xavier de Maistre, Brás creates antecedents for his disconnected *Posthumous Memoirs*” (97). Had Jorge Luis Borges read Machado’s novel, then the Argentinean could well have written a new essay—“Machado and his Precursors.” And it should be noted that Brás Cubas is a “deceased author,” who starts his career in a special way: after his death.<sup>24</sup> This uncanny “delegation of the writing to the dead man displaces the fiction toward an intransitive and artificial authorial freedom,”<sup>25</sup> which engages the reader in a new fictional pact. Machado not only fashions himself as a reader, but he also compels the readers of his novels to acknowledge their role in the constitution of the fictional play.

As a matter of fact, since his first novel, *Ressurreição*, published in 1872, Machado portrays himself as a worker who is determined to craft his skills in a genre in which he is a beginner.<sup>26</sup> In *Posthumous Memoirs*, especially in the note “To the Reader,” Machado takes a step further. He not only renders explicit the authors with whom he is dialoguing but also provides a conceptual framework for this dialogue: he is interested in the “free-form.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, he imposes upon this form a particular twist. Machado does not digress endlessly or travel around his chamber, propelled by witty humor as the pilot of his journey.<sup>28</sup> As he states clearly, his itinerary demands a co-pilot; that is, to the “playful pen” he adds a “melancholy ink.” Machado, therefore, brings together the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in the figures of Sterne, Xavier de Maistre, and Stendhal, as well as injects humor into the somber mood of melancholy. Machado had already envisioned the technique of the “deliberate anachronism” in this overlapping of historical times and literary genres. Modernity as an unfinished process is not necessarily experienced as an impasse but rather as an opportunity to simultaneously encompass different horizons. Thus, Machado is not nostalgic for an idealized view of Brazilian history, to be preserved against the process of modernization. Moreover, he is not enthusiastic about the promises of modernity: the free-

form of his prose responds to the free-form of his thinking—and vice versa. In other words, the complexity of Machado's understanding of the literary tradition requires an equally elaborated linguistic expression, and his linguistic experimentation encourages an irreverent reading of classical authors. Machado's breakthrough is neither an exclusively literary achievement nor primarily an intellectual accomplishment; as a matter of fact, both deeds are simultaneously engendered: one fosters the other.

The explicit acknowledgement of the simultaneity of different historical epochs produces an awareness that distinguishes Machado's achievements. It is as if peripheral writers have to face a phenomenon that could be called the "compression of historical time"; namely, they simultaneously receive information from several historical periods without the "benefit" of a linear chronological order or an already stable interpretive framework. In Brazilian literature this problem has always already been there; after all, "the novel has existed in Brazil before there were Brazilian novelists. So when they appeared, it was natural that they should follow the European models, both good and bad, which had already become entrenched in *our reading habits*" (Schwarz, *Misplaced* 41; my emphasis). The usual answer to this situation is the development of what could be called an "anxiety of up-to-datedness," which obliges the writer to engage in an impossible race, for there can never be an adequate starting point—wherever you begin, you cannot compensate for the ground already covered. Carlos Fuentes humorously targets such anxiety: "The imitations of the independence era move beyond logic in their belief in a Nescafé civilization: we could become modern instantly, overlooking the past and ignoring tradition" (10).

Nonetheless, there is an alternative, exercised by an author such as Machado de Assis,<sup>29</sup> for whom the clash of historical perceptions becomes a literary device of unparalleled strength. This device renders productive at the formal level, the historical precedence of *reading* over *writing*. Machado brings to the structure of his composition the fact that, in Latin America and not simply in Brazil, "the novel has existed before there were novelists." Therefore, the first novelists were necessarily the attentive and sometimes critical readers of at least two centuries of European novels—in that sense, from its onset, Latin American literature is always wider than Latin America, since it has to encompass several traditions. It is true that, to a degree, this circumstance applies to all literatures—this acknowledgement is indispensable, in order to avoid another naïve eulogy of belatedness. In the case of Latin America, how-



ever, where the colonial past was recent, the prevalence of the act of reading produced a predictable and collective “anxiety of influence.” On the contrary, towards the end of the century, Machado welcomes the notion of a fundamental lack of originality, which becomes a liberating force. If there is no possibility of fashioning oneself as an “original” writer, then the entire literary tradition might be freely appropriated. Thus, Machado’s conflation of several centuries of literary tradition, literary genres, and, above all, of the acts of reading and writing fully enunciate Borges’ “deliberate anachronism.” In an astute reading of the Brazilian author, Carlos Fuentes remarks:

And nonetheless, the Latin American hunger, the desire to embrace everything, to appropriate all traditions, all cultures, including all their aberrations; the utopian desire to create a new horizon under which all places and times are simultaneous, makes a brilliant appearance in *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* like a surprising vision of the first Aleph, prior to the very famous one imagined by Borges [...]. (24)

Therefore, Machado transforms the notion of belatedness, which accompanies the process of peripheral modernization, into a critical project.<sup>30</sup> Is it not true that, at the time of the prevalence of the French school of comparativism throughout the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century, a “peripheral” author was commonly interpreted as an outcome of “influences” received from metropolitan writers? If so, Machado seems to ponder: might I allow this author to become at once a malicious reader, an imaginative writer, and, above all, a skeptical critic regarding hierarchies and literary glories?

Machado’s undermining of traditional notions of authorship also expresses his divergence with the established views of his time. He takes his insightful answer to the problem of literary modernity in Latin America through the questioning of the acts of reading and writing further in his next novel, *Quincas Borba*, published in 1891. In chapter CXIII, the reader is introduced to the following situation: Rubião, the faithful but foolish follower of the philosopher Quincas Borba, inherits his master’s fortune, and begins spending it recklessly. One of his enterprises is the funding of a political newspaper, whose owner—Camacho, an unscrupulous lawyer and journalist—is only interested in taking advantage of Rubião’s naïveté. One day, Rubião visits the newsroom and casually reads an article. Even more randomly, he suggests minor changes in its composition. Naturally, Camacho adopts his patron’s

suggestions. Rubião is delighted, and, through a humorous chain of associations, decides that he is the true author of the entire piece. In Machado's words, Rubião's reaction could provide the title for a new chapter: "How Rubião, satisfied with the correction made in the article, composed and pondered so many phrases that he ended up writing all the books he'd ever read." (160)<sup>31</sup> There is, of course, a logical problem in this uncannily fast transition from reading books to being their author. Machado offers a solution:

There is a gap between the first phrase saying that Rubião was co-author and the authorship of all books read by him. What certainly would be the most difficult would be going from that phrase to the first book—from there on the course would be rapid. It's not important. Even so, the analysis would be long and tedious. The best thing is to leave it this way: For a few moments Rubião felt he was the author of many works by other people. (160)<sup>32</sup>

This passage is akin to the spirit of the most celebrated short stories by Jorge Luis Borges, especially the ones devoted to the issues of readership and authorship. As Silviano Santiago insightfully remarks, based on an innovative reading of "Pierre Menard, autor de Quijote": "[...] the Latin American writer is a devourer of books. He reads constantly and publishes occasionally" (40). If we follow Rubião's method, we understand that Latin American writers do not publish more often because there is no volume that potentially was not written by their hungry eyes.

In Machado's next novel, *Dom Casmurro*, published in 1899, the question of authorship is once more of paramount importance. For instance, Bento Santiago, the first-person narrator, clarifies that the title of the novel stems from an unfortunate incident. One day, returning home on a train, he meets a neighbor, a young man; indeed, he is a "poet" who decides to recite his complete works. Naturally, Santiago falls sleep, infuriating the unknown "genius."<sup>33</sup> As revenge, he decides to nickname his inconsiderate neighbor, and chooses to call him "Casmurro." The narrator elucidates the epithet: "[...] the [meaning] the common people give it, of a quiet person who keeps himself to himself."<sup>34</sup> Or, in other words, Casmurro is someone who is not polite enough to spend some minutes listening to embarrassing poetry. "Dom" was added in mockery, since Bento Santiago certainly was not of aristocratic stock. However, instead of being upset, the narrator transforms the nickname into the title of his memoirs: *Dom Casmurro*. He even bestows on the young poet an unexpected possibility:

Still, I couldn't find a better title for my narrative; if I can't find another before I finish the book, I'll keep this one. My poet on the train will find out that I bear him no ill will. And with a little effort, since the title is his, he can think that the whole work is. There are books that only owe that to their authors: some not even that much. (4)<sup>35</sup>

### The Author as Plagiarist

Therefore, Machado de Assis affirms his uniqueness through the role of a reflective reader who eventually becomes a self-reflective author, whose text is primarily the written memory of his private library. Thus, it is not surprising that, in Machado's oeuvre, there are constant allusions to and rewritings of Shakespeare's works. No other author is so important to the reader Machado de Assis. *Dom Casmurro* is a radical reading, that is, a rewriting of *Othello*. Helen Caldwell examines the case in her groundbreaking *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis: A Study of Dom Casmurro*. As a matter of fact, Machado is obsessed with this particular play: "Shakespeare's *Othello* is brought into the argument of twenty-eight stories, plays, and articles" (1). Machado's rewriting brings to the fore a potential contradiction. Is it not true that, as important as Iago's malice, it is Othello's own insecurities regarding the position he occupies that allows Iago's intrigues to work on him? Machado creates an Othello who is also his own Iago. Thus, Othello's drama is re-enacted, but with the suppression of the character of Iago. This clever artifice reveals the nature of jealousy, portraying it as a feedback system that, regardless of objective evidence, feeds on itself.<sup>36</sup> Bento Santiago, the first-person narrator of the novel, spends more than two hundred pages trying to convince the reader (and, above all, himself) that his wife, Capitu, has betrayed him with Escobar, allegedly his best friend. And the more he tries to present his case to the jury, that is, to the readers, the less he seems able to persuade them—without an Iago to blame, how can he justify an increasing jealousy, apparently uncalled for, if not by pointing to the jealous person instead of charging his partner? Thus the novel stages "a parody of tragedy, a systematic falsifying of all evidence, the text is a literature on literature, a fiction on fiction" (Hansen 43). Moreover, Machado's rewriting is literally a reflection on the inter-relations between the acts of reading and writing.

Machado offers yet another beautiful homage to Shakespeare, which once more highlights his thoughtful undermining of traditional concepts of authorship. In a chapter properly entitled "The Opera," the narrator remem-

bers the curious theory of an old Italian tenor, according to whom the world was neither a dream nor a stage, but an opera. Literally so Marcolino explains: “God is the poet. The music is by Satan. [...]” (*Dom Casmurro* 18).<sup>37</sup> After his expulsion from Heaven, Satan stole the manuscript from the Heavenly Father and composed the score, which, at first, God did not want to hear. Upon Satan’s insistence, He decides to stage the opera, creating “a special theatre, this planet, and invented a whole company” (19).<sup>38</sup> Some paragraphs later, the reader finds the corollary to Marcolino’s theory:

The element of the grotesque, for example, is not to be found in the poet’s text: it is an excrescence, put there to imitate *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This point is contested by the Satanists, with every appearance of reason. They say that, at the time when the young Satan composed his opera, neither Shakespeare nor his farce had been born. They go as far as to affirm that the English poet’s only genius was to transcribe the words of the opera, with skill and so faithfully that he seems to be the author of the composition; but of course he is a plagiarist. (19-20)<sup>39</sup>

This perhaps sounds like an odd eulogy. After all, how can we concede that an author excels in his creation exactly when he allows himself to become an original plagiarist? The paradox seems unavoidable, but only if we hold Romantic notions of authorship, in which the “anxiety of influence” is as contagious (and unfounded) as Othello’s and Bento Santiago’s jealousy. However, if an author envisages his own location as precarious, then, the acknowledgment of previous “influences” (and let us use the term in order to engage with Bloom’s theory) cannot be experienced as anxiety; rather, they become liberating, for the act of being influenced opens up the doors of the literary tradition as a whole. Caldwell perfectly explains Machado’s appropriation of literary tradition: “The best way of comprehending the universal soul of mankind, said Machado, was through study of great writers the world over; the best way of portraying it was by ‘plagiarizing’ them” (*Brazilian Othello* 165).<sup>40</sup> Among others, Enylton de Sá Rego shows the amplitude of Machado’s readings, underscoring his affiliation to the Menippean Satire.<sup>41</sup> Machado makes it clear that a creative author is above all a malicious reader of the tradition, which then becomes a vast and tempting menu, whose list of options is to be appreciatively savored and, to use a metaphor that Machado was particularly fond of, ruminated on as many times as needed for a proper digestion, that is, the composition of the next book. Once more, this

is the literary device that transforms belatedness into critical project. After all, Machado himself explains the “difference between literal quotations—which simply invoke someone else’s authority—and the really artistic quotations—which creatively rewrite the quoted authors” (Sá Rego, “Preface—Warning” xvii). Thus, there can hardly be any higher praise than considering an author to be an authentic metonymy of plagiarism—Shakespeare.

Is it not true that, by definition, the plagiarist has to come *after* his model’s historical time? Therefore, Machado did not excel as an author in spite of his time and place; instead, he developed a highly original approach to the notions of authorship and readership because, as we have seen, he was “a master on the periphery of capitalism.” John Gledson offers the best synthesis of Schwarz’s theory:

The great achievement of *A Master*, I think, is to explain an apparent paradox: how is it that a writer so rooted in his own time, writing in a slave-owning cultural backwater, is also, in many ways, so *advanced*? Schwarz’s great perception [...] is that the modernity paradoxically arises, to a considerable degree, out of the backwardness, and does not merely happen in spite of it. (ix)

Moreover, precisely by not being located at the center of the capitalist world in his provincial Rio de Janeiro, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Machado is able to direct an especially keen critical gaze at notions that were presumed to be universal. The parody of scientific theories of the age, embodied in what he called “Humanitism,” is a perfect illustration of a sophisticated mockery of Positivism, Social Evolutionism, Behavioral Psychology, and even Spiritualism. In chapter CXVII of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, there is an overt parody of Comte’s philosophical system, focusing on the arbitrary establishment of three phases throughout the course of mankind’s history: “[...] Humanitas has three phases: the *static*, previous to all creation; the *expansive*, the beginning of things; the *dispersive*, the appearance of man; and it will have one more, the *contractive*, the absorption of man and things” (162).<sup>42</sup> The three moments are suddenly transformed into four steps—after all, why not two phases, or five periods? The arbitrariness, disguised under the rationale of a scientific discourse, is brought to the fore by Machado’s fictional derision.<sup>43</sup>

This witty disposition associated with a skeptical view of “human nature”—a notion already phenomenologically bracketed in Machado’s fic-

tion—justifies John Barth's interest in the Brazilian author. The following quote is one of the most acute definitions of Machado's achievements:

I discovered by happy accident the turn-of-the-century Brazilian novelist Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis. Machado—himself much under the influence of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*—taught me something I had not quite learned from Joyce's *Ulysses* and would not likely have learned from Sterne directly, had I happened to have read him: how to combine formal sportiveness with genuine sentiment as well as a fair degree of realism. Sterne is Pre-Romantic; Joyce is late or Post-Romantic; Machado is both Romantic and romantic: playful, wistful, pessimistic, intellectually exuberant. He was also, like myself, a provincial [...]. (vi-vii)

A provincial is a plagiarist by the very location of his culture. The gesture of reproducing other cultures always implies, at least potentially, the gesture of mockery, the attitude of critical detachment. Moreover, Barth conflates in Machado's work two opposing historical perceptions: Machado would be "Pre" as well as "Post," no matter what concept one attaches to his fiction. Once more, the "playful pen" and the "melancholy ink" come to the fore. Susan Sontag also notes the strength to be derived from the simultaneous perception of contradictory viewpoints:

Our standards of modernity are a system of flattering illusions, which permit us selectively to colonize the past, as are our ideas of what is provincial, which permit some parts of the world to condescend to all the rest. Being dead may stand for a point of view that cannot be accused of being provincial. *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* is one of the most entertainingly unprovincial books ever written. And to love this book is to become less provincial about literature, about literature's possibilities, oneself. (39-40)

Peripheral, provincial: different names to voice what Machado really is: a creative reader, a plagiarist. I may then conclude by proposing another definition of the plagiarist. He is an author who "refuses to accept the traditional notion of artistic invention since he himself denies the total freedom of the artist" (Santiago 37). He is a writer whose originality is his awareness that no author should *desire* to be portrayed as "original." After all, an "original" writer is someone who ultimately is not sufficiently well-read or whose library only contains uninteresting volumes. If it is true that there are authors who

publish more than they write,<sup>44</sup> then, conversely, the plagiarist is an author who has read much more than he could ever publish.

Machado de Assis is an author who is fully aware that he is first and foremost a *reader*.<sup>45</sup> Jorge Luis Borges has already christened the plagiarist who becomes a great author. His name is Pierre Menard. The Machadian plagiarist, nonetheless, is a successful Pierre Menard. After all, if the project of copying the integrity of *Don Quixote* had been brought to fruition, then, Cervantes would have become the plagiarist, as Satan's libretto ends up being contaminated by one of Shakespeare's plays. However, and in spite of the fact that, as Susan Sontag guessed, "Borges, the other supremely great writer produced on that continent, seems to have never read Machado de Assis" (39), Borges would not disagree if different names were attributed to the plagiarist; as the old Italian tenor claims: Shakespeare, or an obsessive reader of *Othello*, Machado de Assis.

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### Notes

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<sup>3</sup> See Rushdie.

<sup>4</sup> See Allen.

<sup>5</sup> I am alluding to Schwarz's *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*. Later, I will return to Schwarz's reading of Machado's fiction.

<sup>6</sup> In spite of her unquestionable commitment, Casanova's book is traversed by an almost naïve usage of awkward adjectives, such as *small* languages, that contradict the premises of her own argument.

<sup>7</sup> Most likely, Machado would read the following passage with an ironic (although self-contained) smile: "Machado de Assis is no longer unknown among us. Four of his novels and some fifteen or so short stories have now appeared in English and have been greeted with a kind of indignant wonder that this Brazilian author who was born in 1839 and died in 1908 was not even a name to us" (Caldwell, *Machado* 3).

<sup>8</sup> Although important, this discussion digresses from the main purpose of this introduction. Nonetheless, let me recommend Earl Fitz's analysis of the problem. See his *Machado de Assis*, where he asks the question: "why has it taken so long for Machado to begin to receive the international acclaim he deserves?" And he provides the answer: "Portuguese [...] is simply not widely recognized as a literary language in which quality literature is written." Therefore, "the truth, unfortunately, is that Brazilian literature is not recognized as constituting a significant part of Western literature" (10-11).

<sup>9</sup> A cultural phenomenon that Edward Said, referring to another context, has called "self-orientalizing." I owe this remark to Ross Forman.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth remembering that in 1924 Oswald de Andrade launched the "Manifesto da poesia pau-brasil," according to which "brazil-wood poetry" should be exported. However, it would not be a natural but a cultural commodity that was to be exported, suggesting that Brazil would only achieve autonomy through its culture, rather than through its natural resources, as



is commonly stated. In the current situation of “art for export,” the critical potential is most times replaced by an accommodation to foreign expectations. The *Manifesto da poesia Pau-Brasil* was first published in the *Correio da Manhã* on 18 March 1924. There is an English translation available, by Stella M. de Sá Rego (see Works Cited).

<sup>11</sup> In his study on the French reception of Wagner, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe remarks: “With respect to this perfection of ‘Latin’ art since the Renaissance, there is an inferiority and a backwardness to the German nation, artistically and culturally ‘colonized’ [...]. This is why, according to Wagner, German art really begins with Goethe and Schiller, who converted this inferiority into an advantage” (42).

<sup>12</sup> Regarding this issue, see Süsskind and Baptista.

<sup>13</sup> On this same issue, from the perspective of the African literatures of Portuguese expression, see Salinas Portugal, especially 15-20.

<sup>14</sup> See Candido 70.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Burke offers a succinct definition of their approach: “The authors argue that the relation between centre and periphery is both a complex and a variable one. They deny the assumption that all lags are peripheral or that all peripheries lag” (xiii).

<sup>16</sup> See Jobim.

<sup>17</sup> Here is the famous passage, from Borges’ “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote”: “[...] this new technique is that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution. [...] This technique fills the most placid works with adventure. To attribute the *Imitatio Christi* to Louis Ferdinand Céline or to James Joyce, is this not a sufficient renovation of its tenuous spiritual indications?” (44). The original reads: “[...] la técnica del anacronismo deliberado y de las atribuciones erróneas. [...] Esa técnica puebla de aventuras los libros más calmosos. Atribuir a Louis Ferdinand Céline o a James Joyce la *Imitación de Cristo* ¿no es una suficiente renovación de esos tenues avisos espirituales?” (*Obras* 450).

<sup>18</sup> Schwarz, “Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination” 7. Some paragraphs earlier, the argument is made even clearer, through a comment on Foucault’s and Derrida’s work: “One can easily appreciate how this would enhance the self-esteem and relieve the anxiety of the underdeveloped world, which is seen as a tributary to the central countries. We would pass from being a backward to an advanced part of the world, from a deviation to a paradigm, from inferior to superior lands (although the analysis set out to surpass just such superiority)” (6).

<sup>19</sup> Lukács 155. Lukács’ approach seems to be an ingenious adaptation of Lenin’s theory of “the weakest link in the imperialist chain” to the realm of cultural history. I am proposing to re-read Lukács’ insight through the notion of “belatedness as a critical project.”

<sup>20</sup> Casanova also develops the notion that “Anachronism is characteristic of areas distant from the literary Greenwich meridian” (100). However, I am more interested in proposing the concept of “compression of historical time,” in which the simultaneity of cultural appropriations of several historical moments is brought to the fore, instead of supposing the linearity of a succession of aesthetic movements dictated by an invariable center.

<sup>21</sup> Roberto Schwarz has formulated perfectly this problem: “The discontinuity between the *Posthumous Memoirs* and the somewhat colorless fiction of Machado’s first phase is undeniable, unless we wish to ignore the facts of quality, which are after all the very reason for the existence of literary criticism. However, there is also a strict continuity, which is, moreover, difficult to establish” (*Master* 149).

<sup>22</sup> Assis, *Posthumous Memoirs* 5. The original reads: “Que Stendhal confessasse haver escrito um de seus livros para cem leitores, é coisa que admira e consterna. O que não admira, nem provavelmente consternará é se este outro livro não tiver os cem leitores de Stendhal, nem cinquenta, nem vinte, e quando muito, dez. Dez? Talvez cinco. Trata-se, na verdade, de uma obra difusa, na qual eu, Brás Cubas, se adotei a forma livre de Um Sterne ou de um Xavier de

Maistre, não sei se lhe meti algumas rabugens de pessimismo. Pode ser. Obra de finado. Escrevia-a com a pena da galhofa e a tinta da melancolia [...]" (*Memórias póstumas* 97).

<sup>23</sup> Bluma Waddington Vilar proposed an insightful reading of this problem in her PhD dissertation: "Escrita e leitura: citação e autobiografia em Murilo Mendes e Machado de Assis." See especially the chapter, "Citação e autobiografia: *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*" (118-151). Vilar combines Machado's undermining of traditional notions of authorship with a careful study of what she calls "Machado de Assis' system of citation."

<sup>24</sup> As Brás Cubas explains to the reader: "[...] I am not exactly a writer who is dead but a dead man who is writer, for whom the grave was a second cradle [...]" (*Posthumous Memoirs* 7). The original reads: "[...] é que eu não sou exatamente um autor defunto, mas um defunto autor, para quem a campa foi outro berço [...]" (99).

<sup>25</sup> Hansen 42. For an innovative reading of this issue, see Victor Mendes' essay in this volume. See also Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's essay for another approach to Machado's narrative devices as instances of a "second-order observer," according to Niklas Luhmann's definition.

<sup>26</sup> "Already in the 'Warning to the Reader,' put at the beginning of *Ressurreição* [*Resurrection*], after introducing himself to the critics as a 'worker,' [...] and concedes all creative power to 'reflection' and 'study.' He finally rejects for himself the condition and law of genius [...]" (Santiago 65).

<sup>27</sup> Sergio Paulo Rouanet is currently developing an important reading of the relationship between Machado de Assis and the authors quoted in *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. See Rouanet's essay in this volume.

<sup>28</sup> See Antonio Candido's essay in this volume for a critical appraisal of Machado's dialogue with Sterne and Xavier de Maistre.

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in the sequence of the passage just quoted, Fuentes concludes: "Machado's genius is based on exactly the reverse: his work is permeated by one conviction: there can be no creation without a tradition to nurture it, just as there can be no tradition without a creation which replenishes it" (10).

<sup>30</sup> For the concept of "peripheral modernity," see Sarlo.

<sup>31</sup> The original reads: "De como o Rubião, satisfeito da emenda feita no artigo, tantas frases compôs e ruminou, que acabou por escrever todos os livros que lera. [...]" (245).

<sup>32</sup> The original reads: "Há um abismo entre a primeira frase de que Rubião era co-autor até a autoria de todas as obras lidas por ele; é certo que o mais que mais lhe custou foi ir da frase ao primeiro livro;—deste em diante a carreira fez-se rápida. Não importa, a análise seria ainda assim longa e fastidiosa. O melhor de tudo é deixar só isto; durante alguns minutos, Rubião se teve por autor de muitas obras alheias" (246).

<sup>33</sup> In Gledson's translation: "The journey was short, and it may be that the verses were not entirely bad. But it so happened that I was tired, and closed my eyes three or four times; enough for him to interrupt the reading and put his poems back in his pocket" (3). The original reads: "A viagem era curta, e os versos pode ser que não fossem inteiramente maus. Sucedeu, porém, que como eu estava cansado, fechei os olhos três ou quatro vezes; tanto bastou para que ele interrompesse a leitura e metesse os versos no bolso" (67).

<sup>34</sup> The original reads: "[...] mas no [sentido] que lhe pôs o vulgo de homem calado e metido consigo" (67). Helen Caldwell mistrusts the narrator's elucidation, and asks keenly: "The definition he did not want us to see is this: 'an obstinate, moodily, stubborn, *wrong-beaded* man.' Perhaps we will decide that this older definition fits Santiago better than the one *he* offers" (*Brazilian Otello* 2).

<sup>35</sup> The original reads: "Também não achei melhor título para a minha narração; se não tiver outro daqui até ao fim do livro, vai este mesmo. O meu poeta do trem ficará sabendo que não lhe guardo rancor. E com pequeno esforço, sendo o título seu, poderá cuidar que a obra é sua. Há livros que apenas terão isso dos seus autores; alguns nem tanto" (67).

<sup>36</sup> Caldwell provides an insightful remark concerning this issue: “Jealousy never ceased to fascinate Machado de Assis. [...] Jealousy has a fat part in seven of his nine novels; the plots of ten short stories turn upon the ugly passion—though in seven of the latter, to be sure, it receives an ironic if not rudely comic treatment” (*Brazilian Othello* 1). Silviano Santiago has also stressed this factor in Machado’s fiction, explaining “[...] how the problem of jealousy arose in the Machadian universe. It comes [...] from the character’s conception of the nature of love and marriage, as well as, on the other hand, the delicate games of *marivaudage* that man and woman have to represent to be able to arrive at union” (66). See also Param 198-206.

<sup>37</sup> The original reads: “Deus é o poeta. A música é de Satanás [...]” (78).

<sup>38</sup> The original reads: “Criou um teatro especial, este planeta, e inventou uma companhia inteira [...]” (78).

<sup>39</sup> “O grotesco, por exemplo, não está no tetxo do poeta; é uma excrescência para imitar *Mulheres patuscas de Windsor*. Este ponto é contestado pelos satanistas com alguma aparência da razão. Dizem eles que, ao tempo em que o jovem Satanás compôs a grande ópera, nem essa farsa nem Shakespeare eram nascidos. Chegam a afirmar que o poeta inglês não teve outro gênio senão transcrever a letra da ópera, com tal arte e fidelidade, que parece ele próprio o autor da composição; mas, evidentemente, é um plagiário” (79).

<sup>40</sup> In the sequence, Caldwell quotes Machado’s own words: “The French Revolution and *Othello* have been written: still there is nothing to prevent one from lifting this or that scene and using it in other dramas: thus are committed, literarily speaking, acts of plagiarism” (165-166). This passage was extracted from one of the *crônicas* from *A Semana*, published in *Gazeta de Notícias*, 28 July 1895. The original reads: “A Revolução Francesa e *Otelo* estão feitos; nada impede que esta ou aquela cena seja tirada para outras peças, e assim se cometem, literariamente falando, os plágios” (Assis, *A Semana* 434).

<sup>41</sup> “Machado julgava necessário que o escritor brasileiro, sem deixar de ser brasileiro, estivesse consciente de que sua obra pertencia a uma tradição universal: a literatura” (Enylton Sá Rego, *O calundu* 5). In this context, it is important to recall José Guilherme Merquior’s pioneering essay “Gênero e estilo nas *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*” (*Colóquio/ Letras* [1972]: 12-20).

<sup>42</sup> The original reads: “Conta três fases Humanitas: a *stática* anterior a toda a criação; a *expansiva*, começo de todas as cousas; a *dispersiva*, aparecimento do homem; e contará mais uma a *contractiva*, absorpção do homem e das cousas” (260).

<sup>43</sup> In “O alienista” (“The Psychiatrist”), Machado developed the parody of scientific discourse to its utmost. See *The Psychiatrist and Other Stories*.

<sup>44</sup> I owe this remark to Henning Ritter.

<sup>45</sup> Machado, then, is part of the tradition of “Atlantic” writers, according to Irene Ramalho Santos’ keen definition. Atlantic authors know that “there is no literature, only interliterature; no culture, only interculture.” This awareness implies a methodology developed “in the light of a post-nationalist analytical paradigm, a paradigm capable of analyzing the literary and cultural production in the very process of its extroversion, as it loses itself while searching for identifications that can only exist in the act of searching for themselves” (5).

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