# AN IDEOLOGICAL KNOT –
# ON INTERLACED PERSPECTIVES IN MACHADO DE ASSIS

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**Abstract:** In this text, originally published in *Ideologia e contraideologia: temas e variações* (2010), Alfredo Bosi uses the metaphor of the knot – and specifically, a knot formed from multiple strands – to describe the ideological weave of Machado de Assis's *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1881), his most formally and thematically complex novel. He elucidates the novel's interweaving of narrative viewpoints and ideological perspectives, and ties its complex structure to a dialectical opposition he observes between the mature Machado's "democratic liberalism" and his "moralistic pessimism." Bosi also draws out the novel's strand of anti-deterministic philosophical parody. Finally, he provides a perceptive interpretation of Brás's deathbed delirium, and offers a number of intertextual points of contact. In sum, Bosi "unwinds" *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* for us.

**Keywords:** Machado de Assis; *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*; Brazilian literature; nineteenth century; knot

Foreword and translation by Robert Patrick Newcomb
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One of the touchstones of Alfredo Bosi's later criticism is his engagement with Machado de Assis, and in particular with the first novel of Machado's "mature phase," *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas, 1881). It is fitting, then, that after publishing two books on Machado, *Machado de Assis: o enigma do olhar* (1999) and *Brás Cubas em três versões* (2006), Bosi would return to *Memórias póstumas* in "Um nó ideológico – sobre o enlace

de perspectivas em Machado de Assis," the final chapter of his last major critical statement, *Ideologia e contraideologia: temas e variações* (2010). Here Bosi uses the metaphor of the knot – and specifically, a knot formed from multiple strands – to describe the ideological weave of Machado's most formally and thematically complex novel. Elsewhere in his critical oeuvre, and particularly in *Dialética da colonização* (1992), Bosi observes the elucidative – and, in a literary sense, enriching – contradictions between "ideology" and "counter-ideology" that are present in the work of writers such as Gregório de Matos and Antônio Vieira, and in the Brazilian "new liberalism" of the 1870s. In "Um nó ideológico" he applies his thoughtful brand of historicist literary analysis to *Brás Cubas*. He elucidates the novel's interweaving of narrative viewpoints (between the living Brás and the "dead author") and ideological perspectives, and ties the text's complex structure to a dialectical opposition he observes between the mature Machado's more-or-less concealed "democratic liberalism" and his much more apparent "moralistic pessimism." The latter, Bosi cautions, can be paralyzing if abstracted and generalized – though he implies that the reformism Machado displayed in his early newspaper chronicles continued in his later years to represent for him a salutary, moderating force against utter disenchantment. In this chapter Bosi also draws out the novel's strand of anti-deterministic philosophical parody, in its presentation of Quincas Borba's positivistic-evolutionist mishmash philosophy, "Humanitism." Further, he provides a perceptive interpretation of Brás's deathbed delirium, and offers a number of intertextual points of contact, particularly with the French moralists (La Rochefoucauld, Vauvenargues) and with Giacomo Leopardi. In sum, Bosi "unwinds" *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* for us. Notwithstanding the acute intelligence and formidable erudition Bosi displays in the chapter, he concludes with an observation that, in light of his passing in 2021, speaks movingly of the modesty that lay at the heart of his democratic critical practice: "[T]he best course of action now may be to tie [the strands] back together, reforming them into the knot tied by Machado de Assis."

**An Ideological Knot - On Interlaced Perspectives in Machado de Assis**

**by Alfredo Bosi**

A knot seems a useful descriptive metaphor for the ideological weave one encounters in Machado de Assis's fiction.

Why an ideological knot? Because this figure conjures the image of strands intricately overlaid, such that one cannot trace one strand without touching all the others. The process by which the critic unties the knot and untangles the strands only makes sense in historical and narrative terms if the strands can be tied back together again.

To tie this to a contemporary strand of thought – deconstruction: by untangling the strands, we may perceive how they were first tied together. If we are to understand the work as a whole, we must retie the knot – that is, restore all of the strands' points of contact with each other.

We must orient our analysis toward identifying each ideological process that occurs within the narrative, if our aim is to achieve an interpretive synthesis in which all of the strands are tied back together such that we may apprehend the knot as a whole.

Certain episodes from *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* lend themselves to this sort of operation.[1]

In the chapters dedicated to Brás's relationship with Marcela, the narrator depicts himself as the spoiled son of a wealthy father, as he uses his family's largesse to shower his lover with expensive jewelry. Marcela's venality and Brás's impulsive behavior are described in the manner of a *crônica de costumes*, that is, a chronicle of unmistakably local customs. Brás's behavior is the characteristic flailing about of a "well-born," idle young man who was a child during the time of the king,[2] and who reached young manhood during the first years of Brazil's independence.

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[1] English-language translations from *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* are taken from: Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis. *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. Trans. Gregory Rabassa, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997. – Trans.

[2] The "tempo do rei" (time of the king) refers to the period between 1808 and 1821 in which Dom João VI of Portugal resided in Rio de Janeiro. The phrase was used in the opening line of Manuel Antônio de Almeida's *Memórias de um sargento de milícias* (1852-53): "Era no tempo do rei." – Trans.

At a certain moment, when Brás humorously observes that Marcela didn't die of love for her previous suitor, but rather lived from it, it occurs to him to comment on the importance of jewelers to love affairs.

**The ideological backdrop: an exclusionary liberalism**

If we were to pause our reading of the passage at this point, we would be able to trace only one ideological strand, that corresponding to the still quite conservative, dominant bourgeois class in the years surrounding 1822.[3] Machado specifically mentions this date in the episode concerning Marcela, and in that year Brás is seventeen years old. This is a period in which a governing apparatus based on a franchise that was limited by income, and that was therefore exclusionary, and an economic system that was highly dependent upon plantations, export-oriented agriculture, and slave labor, were both installed. Brás is the son of a wealthy landowner whose forebearers prospered during the colonial period. Brás, born in 1805, was alive during the final years of the old regime.

There is a vast national and international bibliography concerning this ideology, which we might term *exclusionary liberalism.*[4]

This ideology was remarkably successful and it reproduced itself with great consistency in all of the regions of the Americas that were dominated by the plantation: the Brazilian Northeast, the Paraíba Valley, the French, English, and Spanish Caribbean (Guiana, Martinique, Guadalupe, Jamaica, Cuba), the cotton-growing South of the United States.

The singular feature of the plantation as a slavery-based agricultural-commercial complex was that it flourished *alongside* liberal constitutions promulgated in the metropolis: the Charters of the Restoration and the July Monarchy; England at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which was governed by a robust form of bourgeois parliamentarianism; Spain in the time of the

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[3] Here Bosi references Brazil's independence from Portugal, declared by the Prince Regent, crowned Emperor Dom Pedro I (r. 1822-31), on September 7, 1822. – Trans.

[4] See, for example, the simultaneously innovative and conservative work of the Viscount of Cairu, sharply analyzed by Pedro Meira Monteiro (*Um moralista nos trópicos*. São Paulo, Boitempo, 2004), and the pro-slavery liberalism of Araújo Lima, Bernardo de Vasconcelos and Paulino de Sousa, all leading members of the *Partido Regressista*. Ilmar Rohlf de Mattos's *O tempo saquarema* (São Paulo, Hucitec, 1981), is a model of academic historiography for this period. For a broader perspective, see Domenico Losurdo's *Contra-história do liberalismo* (Aparecida, Ideias & Letras, 2006). Pierre Rosanvallon analyzes the liberal conservatism of the Restoration and the July Monarchy in *Le moment Guizot* (Paris, Gallimard, 1985).

*cortes liberales*; and, in our case, a newly-independent Brazil, whose constitution, promulgated in 1824, assimilated elements of the English and especially the French systems.

This is the backdrop of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. Machado depicts Brás's brother-in-law Cotrim, and Cotrim's brother-in-law Damasceno, both of whom defend the rights of landowners and who also profit from the slave trade at the end of the 1840s (Chapter 92), as exemplars of this liberal, slave-holding mentality. Damasceno, annoyed at British pressure on Brazil to end the slave trade, and fearful of democratic ideals, goes as far as to warn that "revolution [is] knocking at the door."[5]

"The English could go to hell! Things would never be right until they all sailed away."[6]

Here we are in the neighborhood of 1848.

The United States' Declaration of Independence preceded France's Declaration of the Rights of Man and served as an example to emancipatory movements in the Ibero-American colonies. Despite the ostensible defense of liberty as the supreme value that one finds in these documents, slavery in the US South and rural servitude in the new Andean nations were not only maintained, but were intensified in the former colonies, which were now governed by liberal constitutions. The slave trade, both legal and clandestine, intensified considerably during the first half of the nineteenth century. It is not a coincidence that France waited until a half-century after the Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man to free its slaves (who numbered approximately 260,000). As occurred in the English colonies, the former French slave owners were generously compensated for their losses. Here and there alike, liberalism and slavery established a *modus vivendi* that merits some reflection.

I've suggested, beginning in *Brazil and the Dialectic of Colonization*, that this exclusionary liberalism was not a Brazilian misapplication of European liberalism – that is, a misplaced idea – but rather amounted to a complex set of political and economic measures that governed the

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[5] Bosi quotes the phrase "a revolução está às portas," though in Machado's text, the phrase, taken from Chapter 92, "Um Homem Extraordinário" (An Extraordinary Man), reads as follows: "*a revolução estava outra vez às portas*." Rabassa translates this as "revolution was knocking at the door again." – Trans.

[6] In Portuguese: "Que os levasse o diabo os ingleses! Isto não ficava direito sem irem todos eles barra fora." – Trans.

Western, Atlantic world beginning in the Napoleonic period and continuing into the period of the restored French monarchy.[7]

The *economic measures* in question consisted of free trade and the opening of ports to international commerce. These were the cornerstones of the laissez-faire, English-style capitalism that was established at the end of the eighteenth century. The Industrial Revolution overlapped to a great degree with a historical period in which forced labor was utilized.

As for the *political measures,* these were guided by the explicit idea of "finishing the revolution," a phrase used by the Directory, and repeated by Napoleon and by all campaigns of restoration. They established a system of constitutional monarchy in which the electorate would consist only of *citizen-landowners.*[8] In his treatise *De l'esclavage moderne*, from 1839, Lamennais wrote the following on the brutal political exclusion that occurred in France during the liberal reign of Louis-Philippe:

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[7] I made this argument in the chapter "A escravidão entre dois liberalismos," in *Dialética da colonização.* The expression "as ideias fora de lugar" (misplaced ideas) is the title of Roberto Schwarz's well-known essay, from *Ao vencedor as batatas* (São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1977; published in English in 2020 as *To the Victor, the Potatoes!*), in which the author characterizes the exclusionary liberalism of imperial Brazil as a misapplication and as ideological farce. My interpretation differs, given that liberal ideology was hegemonic throughout the West during the first half of the nineteenth century, and was responsible for the massacre of slave laborers in the colonies and former colonies and of salaried workers in countries that were undergoing industrialization. In other words, during this period capitalism systematically extracted surplus value from labor, and *used ideology to justify its violence*, whatever form that violence took. The center and periphery, the Old and New Worlds alike, experienced, albeit with some differences, the exploitation of labor and the political exclusion that were peculiar characteristics of the system. See Domenico Losurdo's essay, *Contra-história do liberalismo* for the roots of this coexistence of liberalism and slavery, and particularly for his analysis of the ideological rationalizations made by John Locke, the father of English liberalism.

[8] See Olivier Duhamel. *Histoire constitutionnelle de la France.* Paris, Seuil, 1994. The vote was severely restricted in both European constitutional regimes and in the former Latin American colonies. The ideological foundation for the restricted franchise is found in *Principes de politique applicables à tous les gouvernements représentatifs et particulièrement à la Constitution actuelle de la France – 1815*, by Benjamin Constant, the principal theoretician of exclusionary liberalism in France: "Only property can render men capable of exercising political rights" (in *Écrits politiques.* Paris, Gallimard, 1977, p. 367; translation taken from *Principles of Politics Applicable to all Governments.* Trans. Dennis O'Keeffe, ed. Etienne Hofmann, intro. Nicholas Capaldi, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 2003, p. 166). Benjamin Constant is resolute in denying the vote to all salaried workers. He is reluctant to allow liberal professionals and scientists to vote, and hesitates to include urban industrialists. In short, his ideal electorate is comprised exclusively of rural landowners. Here and there alike…

> And this slave People – of what is it composed? No longer only of proletarians, of men deprived of all property; but of the whole nation, with the exception of two hundred thousand privileged persons, under whose domination shamefully crouch thirty-three millions of Frenchmen, veritable serfs of the present era: since their lords and masters at two hundred francs exclusively invested with the right of assisting in the composition of the law – dispose of them, their persons, their liberty, and their effects, at the pleasure of their caprices; and, properly understood, solely in accordance with their particular interest.[9]

Guizot, one of the political and ideological pillars of the Orléanist parliamentary monarchy (1830-48), was celebrated for making the following two statements to the French Assembly: "Enrich yourselves," a piece of advice that synthesizes the whole of the bourgeois way of thinking then on the ascent, and; "the time of universal suffrage will never come again," a prediction that the Republic would prove false, and an expression *par excellence* of anti-democratic liberalism. It is not a coincidence that Brás Cubas would cite Guizot in the program he wrote for his short-lived opposition newspaper (see "The Prospectus").

Both aspects of this post-revolutionary, anti-revolutionary ideology, first conceived in Europe, were adapted to the reality of post-colonial Brazil and Latin America through legislation that confirmed oligarchical power, just as in France the Charter of 1814 and the monarchy of 1830 confirmed bourgeois dominance.[10] The Napoleonic Civil Code, which enshrined the right to property, *jus utendi et abutendi*, and concealed the troubling existence of slavery and of various other forms of compulsory labor in the colonies, served as a paradigmatic formulation of

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[9] Félicité Robert de Lamennais. *De l'esclavage moderne*. Ed. Michael Löwy, Paris, Le Passager Clandestin, 2009, p. 56. English translation taken from Lamennais. *Modern Slavery*. London, J. Watson, 1840, p. 16.

[10] Argentina's liberal Constitution of 1826 denied the vote to all "salaried workers," as well as manual and day laborers. In order to be eligible, candidates for the office of deputy needed a minimum annual income of four thousand pesos. For candidates to the Senate the annual figure was ten thousand. Perhaps the most complete exposition of exclusionary liberalism belongs to the Argentine politician Juan Bautista Alberdi, whose *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* inspired the Constitution of 1853. Sadly, the passages in which Alberti denies citizenship and even humanity to Amerindians became well-known.

property rights in the European metropolises, and throughout Latin America's new, so-called constitutional regimes.

Brás's Brazil was not free from the West's gravitational pull; on the contrary, with the opening of its ports in 1808 and its movement toward independence, which was encouraged by England, the country made its definitive entrance into the circuits of international capitalism as an agricultural exporter whose preservation of slavery was not a chance occurrence, but was instead the result of structural factors.

Slavery was only abolished in the French colonies in 1848, with indemnification for former slave owners; Brás would have been forty-three when this occurred.

In the cotton-growing South of the United States, slavery was only abolished thanks to the Civil War, which occurred when Brás was approaching sixty years of age. Here and there alike…

Thus, it seems inaccurate to state that in writing Brás's memoirs, Machado de Assis was merely satirizing Brazilian liberalism, as if this were a singular example of ideological farse and backwardness in comparison to the modern West. Machado's nonconformism, when it manifested itself, always went further and dug deeper. In order to understand the ideological struggle, which here is described beginning in the 1860s, one must recognize the political and cultural contradiction that existed between the old slaveholding, exclusionary liberalism, and the new democratic liberalism, whose touchstone was the abolitionist campaign. Twenty years before he wrote *Posthumous Memoirs*, a then-young Machado, as a writer of political newspaper chronicles, participated in this debate, which was partially informed by the democratic ideas issuing from Europe circa 1848.

**Marcela's jewels, overlaid on three ideological strands**

Let us return to Marcela. This episode does not end with the assertion that jewelers are important to love affairs. Brás makes a second comment, a correction to his first. He considers it an "immoral reflection." At this moment the reader holds the second strand in his hands: the man who speaks of the superficial youngster of 1822 and judges him immoral is the dead author who passed on in 1869, or, if we reveal the figure of the actual author, it is Machado de Assis, writing

in 1880.[11] *The considerable amount of time that has passed here has implications for the ideological weave of the book*.

In other words, a frivolous recounting of the doings of a semi-colonial bourgeoise in 1820 gives way, in terms of tone and perspective, to critique and satire, given that the prevailing political ideal in the 1860s was an idealistic, ethical liberalism – the liberalism of Teófilo Ottoni, Nabuco de Araújo (who, during that decade, migrated from the Conservative to the Liberal Party), Silveira da Mota, Luiz Gama, Pedro Luís, Castro Alves, Saldanha Marinho, Quintino Bocaiuva, and Tavares Bastos. This would soon become the democratic liberalism of André Rebouças, José Bonifácio, the Younger, the young Joaquim Nabuco (who in his abolitionist writings coined the term *new liberalism*), Sousa Dantas, Rui Barbosa, and José do Patrocínio. This is the liberalism of the first generation of republicans from Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, and Rio Grande do Sul; in short, it is the critical liberalism of the Generation of 1870.[12]

This counter-ideology, which would make its debut in the battle over the Law of the Free Womb (1871), had little time for the habits and rationalizations of the proponents of exclusionary liberalism, who hypocritically defended social inequalities. As slavery's direct or indirect beneficiaries, they were guilty by association. Of greatest interest to us here, Machado, writing in 1880, used his dead author, recalling events from the vantage point of 1869, to satirize the mental and moral climate in which Brás Cubas operated in 1822. In sum: we have two ways of thinking that, for their own reasons, both claim the then-respectable designation of "liberalism." Each strand is in its place, and in their entanglement, they reveal the form of the knot.

The conservatism of this period, and its rejection by its opponents, would monopolize the work of ideological contextualization we are undertaking here if we were to focus exclusively on

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[11] Here Bosi refers to Brás's formulation "não sou propriamente um autor defunto, mas um defunto autor," from Chapter 1. Rabassa translates as follows: "I am not exactly a writer who is dead but a dead man who is a writer." – Trans.

[12] See Vamireh Chacon. *História dos partidos políticos brasileiros.* 3rd ed., Brasília, Ed. Universidade de Brasília, 1998, for the programs and initiatives of the liberals of the 1860s. The Manifesto of the Liberal Center, published in 1869, cited measures put in place by the Liberal Party in Belgium in 1848 and English electoral reforms supported by Gladstone. It called for direct elections in Rio de Janeiro, provincial capitals, and major cities, though it retained the income requirement enshrined in the Constitution. Further, it advocated freedom for children of slaves born in Brazil, and the gradual emancipation of remaining slaves. The best analysis of the liberalism of 1860 is found in José Murilo de Carvalho. *A construção da ordem. A elite política imperial.* Rio de Janeiro, Campus, 1980.

*this* Machado, the writer who vehemently defended democracy in his contributions to the opposition press between 1860 and 1867. Jean-Michel Massa's book, *A juventude de Machado de Assis* capably charts the activities of the young, fiery, newspaper chronicle-writing Machado year by year, and month by month, as he attacked a Conservative Party that during the 1860s was attempting to slow the pace of political change to a crawl, and that resisted any and all progressive initiatives.[13]

But… after describing his observation on the venality of married women and lovers as "immoral" – that is, as cynical – just as Counselor Aires would do many years later, the dead writer shifts the terms of his judgment. Concealing what earlier he had revealed, he describes in frankly "realistic" terms what in an earlier age the *moralistes* had denounced as a cult of appearances, connected to the universal vanity of mankind. Rather than offering a condemnation, pure and simple, of this "immoral reflection," let us listen to how he justifies himself: "What I'm trying to say is that the most beautiful head in the world will be no less beautiful if ringed by a diadem of fine stones, neither less beautiful nor less loved" (Chapter 16).[14]

One strand, corresponding to an idealist critique of the conduct of a superficial young man, splits in two and reveals a third strand, finer but no less resistant than the others. Brás's reflection on his behavior, which following a rigorously ethical criterion, he had judged *immoral*, just as he had rejected all forms of venality and the luxurious enjoyment of sparkling jewels, is now re-elaborated in more charitable terms, recalling the diplomatic style of one accustomed to giving even as he takes. Ultimately, it seems that the brilliance of rare gems may well complement a woman's beauty and the love a paramour dedicates to her. First, reveal; then, conceal. First, accuse, then limit the scope of one's accusation. The satirist's bite is painful, but the dead author's icy breath dulls the pain. *The third strand makes its appearance here, and will be revealed in its entirety elsewhere.*

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[13] Jean-Michel Massa. *A juventude de Machado de Assis.* Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1971. Joaquim Nabuco's political biography of his father, Tomás Nabuco de Araújo, *Um estadista do Império*, is the classic account of the transition from the old to the new liberalism. Another necessary reference is *Os donos do poder* (5th ed., Porto Alegre, Globo, 1979), by Raymundo Faoro, who is also the author of *Machado de Assis. A pirâmide e o trapézio* (São Paulo, Cia. Ed. Nacional, 1974), which I examined in "Raymundo Faoro leitor de Machado," in *Brás Cubas em três versões.* São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2006.

[14] In Portuguese: "O que eu quero dizer é que a mais bela testa do mundo não fica menos bela, se a cingir um diadema de pedras finas; nem menos bela, nem menos amada." – Trans.

**Portugal in the 1820s – "liberalism in theory" and "faith in written constitutions"**

Let us move forward a bit in our reading of *Posthumous Memoirs* and accompany Brás during his years at the University of Coimbra, which he describes as a series of romantic adventures, euphemistically termed "romanticism in practice," and which he garnishes with fashionable political ideals that he characterizes as "liberalism in theory." It is the second term that will be of interest in our investigation of ideology in context. Joined with a "pure faith in dark eyes" (an allusion to a girl he courted as a student) we find another phrase, "faith in […] written constitutions," which is synonymous with his "liberalism in theory."[15]

This is a clear reference to the discourses proffered by the Portuguese liberals who were impotent when confronted with the absolutism of the House of Braganza. The assembly that demanded the immediate return of Dom João VI to Portugal was convened for the specific purpose of drafting a liberal constitution that, as is well-known, would exist only on paper. This was the liberalism in theory and the faith in written constitutions that the dead author, writing in 1869, associated with his years as a law student in Coimbra.

The dead author would reflect ironically on this ideological verbiage and its corresponding "written constitution" forty years later. Liberal rhetoric and a written constitution coexisted with the Portuguese political order at the end of the 1820s. Meanwhile, the country was drowning in a quagmire of conservatism, and was the faithful servant of English capitalism, while at the same time the government of Dom Miguel of Braganza (1826-34) followed the dictates of the Holy Alliance to the letter. A Portugal that worshipped using the hymnal of Adam Smith's laissez-faire political economy while maintaining conditions of semi-servitude in the countryside and outright slavery in its African colonies was an easy target for Machado's democratic liberalism, which he was formulating during the 1860s.

**The perspective of the dead author**

Brás returns to Brazil at his father's behest, as his mother lies on her deathbed. He narrates this episode in two contrasting chapters. In the first, "Sad, But Short," he meditates on the absurdity

[15] In Portuguese: "romantismo prático"; "liberalismo teórico"; "pura fé dos olhos pretos e das constituições escritas" – Trans.

of suffering and death. In the second, "Short, But Happy," he exults in the absolute freedom granted to him by virtue of being dead:

> Perhaps I'm startling the reader with the frankness with which I'm exposing and emphasizing my mediocrity. Be aware that frankness is the prime virtue of a dead man. In life the gaze of public opinion, the contrast of interests, the struggle of greed all oblige people to keep quiet about their dirty linen, to disguise the rips and stitches, not to extend to the world the revelations they make to their conscience. And the best part of the obligations comes when, by deceiving others, a man deceives himself, because in such a case he saves himself vexation, which is a painful feeling, and hypocrisy, which is a vile vice. But in death, what a difference! What a release! What freedom! Oh, how people can shake off their coverings, leave their spangles in the gutter, unbutton themselves, unpaint themselves, undecorate themselves, confess flatly what they were and what they've stopped being! Because, in short, there aren't any more neighbors or friends or enemies or acquaintances or strangers. There's no more audience. The gaze of public opinion, that sharp and judgmental gaze, loses its virtue the moment we tread the territory of death. I'm not saying that it doesn't reach here and examine and judge us, but we don't care about the examination or the judgment. My dear living gentlemen and ladies, there's nothing as incommensurable as the disdain of the deceased.[16]

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[16] In Portuguese: "Talvez espante ao leitor a franqueza com que lhe exponho e realço a minha mediocridade; advirta que a franqueza é a primeira virtude de um defunto. Na vida, o olhar da opinião, o contraste dos interesses, a luta das cobiças obrigam a gente a calar os trapos velhos, a disfarçar os rasgos e os remendos, a não estender ao mundo as revelações que faz à consciência; e o melhor da obrigação é quando, à força de embaçar os outros, embaça-se o homem a si mesmo, porque em tal caso poupa-se o vexame, que é uma sensação penosa, e a hipocrisia, que é um vício hediondo. Mas na morte, que diferença! que desabafo! que liberdade! Como a gente pode sacudir fora a capa, deitar ao fosso as lentejoulas, despregar-se, despintar-se, desafeitar-se, confessar lisamente o que foi e o que deixou de ser! Porque, em suma, já não há vizinhos, nem amigos, nem inimigos, nem conhecidos, nem estranhos; não há plateia. O olhar da opinião, esse olhar agudo e judicial, perde a virtude, logo que pisamos o território da morte; não digo que ele se não estenda para cá, e nos não examine e julgue; mas a nós é que não se nos dá do exame

These fiery reflections wholly untangle the third strand of the ideological knot. The expression serves to buttress the idea that it is the perspective of the dead author that allows for the radical disillusionment of he who would speak the truth about others and even more so, about himself. The self-analysis and the satire introjected into the novel uncover the *underground man*, the subterranean layer of the Machadian *I*, which Augusto Meyer illuminated in his readings of Dostoyevsky and Pirandello. See how comparative studies open paths for us as readers of Brazilian literature!

The overlaying of the *lived present* and the *reflected past* is an inherent aspect of the composition of *Posthumous Memoirs*. If this overlaying were ineffective or inconsistent, the reader would become lost with regard to the narrative time and ideological meaning of each episode. In every one of Brás's comments we must distinguish between what was said in the moment that he recounts and what the dead author later considers and judges. The narrator is aware of the risk of chronological and semantic confusion, and at a certain juncture he feels it necessary to clarify his method to an eventual critic of his book. He does this in the brief Chapter 138, "To a Critic."

> My dear critic,
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> A few pages back when I said I was fifty, I added: "You're already getting the feeling that my style isn't as nimble as it was during the early days." Maybe you find that phrase incomprehensible, knowing my present state, but I call your attention to the subtlety of that thought. I don't mean I'm older now than when I began the book. Death doesn't age one. I do mean that in each phase of the narration of my life I experience the corresponding sensation. Good Lord! Do I have to explain everything?[17]

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nem do julgamento. Senhores vivos, não há nada tão incomensurável como o desdém dos finados." – Trans.

[17] In Portuguese:

"Meu caro crítico,

Algumas páginas atrás, dizendo eu que tinha cinquenta anos, acrescentei: 'Já se vai sentindo que o meu estilo não é tão lesto como nos primeiros dias'. Talvez aches esta frase incompreensível, sabendo-se o meu atual estado; mas eu chamo a tua atenção para a sutileza daquele pensamento. O que eu quero dizer não é que esteja agora mais velho do que quando comecei o livro. A morte

These lived and felt memories conjure for the reader the image of strands that are intertwined rather than placed side by side.

The narrator may then re-tie or untangle the knot as he pleases. Brás will at times simply recount his romantic exploits and the shameless acts he committed as an irresponsible moneybags, and at others will satirize them from a progressive point of view. On yet other occasions he will mold the same material into pithy observations on the fragility of the human subject, in the best tradition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century moral analysis. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive, and in fact are intertwined within the narrative weave.

**The case of Eugênia: pandemonium and tragedy**

The third, quintessentially Machadian dimension that will be thematized follows the dead Brás's declaration of intent in which he advises the reader that nothing will prevent him from removing society's masks.

This is the chapter entitled "In Tijuca." Brás, shaken by his mother's death, takes refuge in a country house owned by his family, where he intends to keep his own company and dull the pain of his recent loss. After spending a few days in solitude, a boredom that is both sensual and irritating invades him; this "sensuality of boredom" causes "that yellow, solitary, morbid flower" of hypochondria to bloom within him.[18] Here existential self-analysis is at the center of the narrative, leaving ideology temporarily in the shadows and foregrounding the phenomenology of the underground man.

But then his feelings change. Eager to return to the company of his family and friends, Brás has his bags packed and is ready to leave the country house when Prudêncio informs him that Dona Eusébia, Brás's mother's old and dedicated friend, has moved to a nearby house with her daughter. He asks that Brás pay them a courtesy visit. Thus, we arrive at the story of Eugênia, the flower in the shrubbery.[19]

Eugênia appears during Brás's visit. Brás and the girl fall for each other. For him, this is one more fling; for her, it's first love. Their meeting will reveal two marked asymmetries. Brás is

não envelhece. Quero dizer, sim, que em cada fase da narração da minha vida experimento a sensação correspondente. Valha-me Deus! é preciso explicar tudo." – Trans.

[18] In Portuguese: "volúpia do aborrecimento"; "essa flor amarela, solitária e mórbida" – Trans.

[19] In Portuguese: "a flor da moita." This is the title of Chapter 30 of the novel. – Trans.

a strapping young man, full of life and ambition. Eugênia is lame. Brás is rich, while Eugênia is a poor, illegitimate girl, a flower in the shrubbery, the fruit of secret encounters. Brás, after a brief period of enthusiasm, pulls back from Eugênia, concerned that she, a lame, poor girl, expects a marriage proposal, which for him seems impossible. He invents excuses to flee from her and return home. Eugênia understands everything in a flash, and she makes it clear that she rejects Brás's pitiful, hypocritical excuses and accepts her disappointment with dignity.

At first glance, we are confronted with two narrative dimensions: one corresponding to the living Brás Cubas, who acts frivolously, and another, to a self-critical, dead Brás Cubas, who is aware that his conduct was cowardly and prejudicial.

Returning to the metaphor of the ideological strands, we find that:

a) in the first of these moments, what prevails is a predatory, conservative and exclusionary mentality, according to which certain classes deserve their privilege and other classes are by nature destined to be used and marginalized (this mentality was hegemonic during Brás's youth);

b) in the second of these moments, the narrator describes the supposed reaction of a certain reader, a "sensitive soul," who, aligned with a progressive, liberal-democratic way of thinking, labels the narrator a "cynic."[20]

Let us proceed to the opening of the chapter in question, in which the author describes the relationship between reader and narrator, and which acts as a break in the body of the narrative: "There among the five or six people reading me is some sensitive soul who must surely be a bit upset with the previous chapter and who begins to tremble over Eugênia's fate and, perhaps…yes, perhaps deep down inside is calling me a cynic."[21]

This same idealistic, ethical strand, corresponding to the social Romanticism of the 1860s would, in the voice of the imaginary reader, wrap itself ever more tightly around the strand corresponding to the old, unjust order, which put self-interest and prejudice ahead of feelings.

But the dead author follows another path, which corresponds neither to the old nor to the new liberalism, neither to the young cynic nor to the idealistic reader. Rather, he defends himself

[20] In Portuguese, "alma sensível" and "cínico." These are taken from Chapter 34, "A Uma Alma Sensível" (For a Sensitive Soul). – Trans.

[21] In Portuguese: "Há aí, entre as cinco ou dez pessoas que me leem, há aí uma alma sensível, que está decerto um tanto agastada com o capítulo anterior, começa a tremer pela sorte de Eugênia, e talvez...sim, talvez, lá no fundo de si mesma, me chame cínico." – Trans.

in the name of a universalizing way of thinking centered on the existential exploration of the human being: "No, sensitive soul, I'm not a cynic, I was a man."[22]

We as readers are naturally curious to know what "being a man" means for this narrator who wants to avoid judgment according to the democratic standards of his more demanding readers. We come to understand that to be a man is, above all else, to be contradictory, to be the refracted image of the sort of person this morality demands of us:

> No, sensitive soul, I'm not a cynic, I was a man. My brain was a stage on which plays of all kinds were presented, sacred dramas, austere, scrupulous, elegant comedies, wild farces, short skits, buffoonery, pandemonium, sensitive soul, a hodge-podge of things and people in which you could see everything, from the rose of Smyrna to the rue in your own backyard, from Cleopatra's magnificent bed to the corner of the beach where the beggar shivers in his sleep. Crossing it are thoughts of varied types and shapes. There wasn't only the atmosphere of water and hummingbird there, there was also that of snail and toad. Take back the expression, then, sensitive soul, control your nerves, clean your glasses – because this is sometimes due to glasses – and let's be done with this flower from the shrubbery.[23]

The basis of this true *métaphore filée* is the image of a stage, of a platform, which speaks to a theatrical understanding of human life, but of life as something more than representation; we might describe this life, along with Schopenhauer, as a life formed of will and representation – or better still, of shadows and representations. Fleeting sensations fuel changing images.

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[22] In Portuguese: "Não, alma sensível, eu não sou cínico, eu fui homem." – Trans.

[23] In Portuguese: "Não, alma sensível, eu não sou cínico, eu fui homem; meu cérebro foi um tablado em que se deram peças de todo gênero, o drama sacro, o austero, o piegas, a comédia louçã, a desgrenhada farsa, os autos, as bufonerias, um pandemônio, alma sensível, uma barafunda de cousas e pessoas em que podias ver tudo, desde a rosa de Esmirna até a arruda do teu quintal, desde o magnífico leito de Cleópatra até o recanto da praia em que o mendigo tirita o seu sono. Cruzavam-se nele pensamentos de vária casta e feição. Não havia ali a atmosfera somente da água e do beija-flor; havia também a da lesma e do sapo. Retira, pois, a expressão, alma sensível, castiga os nervos, limpa os óculos, – que isso às vezes é dos óculos, – e acabemos de uma vez com esta flor da moita." – Trans.

It is apparent that on this stage the rules of classical unities are not respected. Here it seems that anything goes, and the narrator delights in evoking the most varied dramatic forms, both sacred and profane, and which collectively we may describe as *pandemonium*, an expressive term that refers to chaos. The term, created by Milton, appears in *Paradise Lost*, and refers to the place of all the devils.

How can one demand moral consistency and an equanimous nobility of sentiments of this soul if both the eagle and the hummingbird, the snail and the toad, reside within it? This is a soul that soars and darts between flowers, but also that hops to and fro on the ground and slides through the mud.

La Rochefoucauld, one of the most perceptive of the French moralists and a writer to whom Machado is particularly close in spirit, turned his gaze toward the dissonances and strident notes each of us contains within, and wrote: "We sometimes differ more widely from ourselves than we do from others."[24] And I recall a similar thought from Vauvenargues, another perceptive moralist, and one who managed to admire the opposing styles of Pascal and Voltaire. Writing in the mid-eighteenth century, he observed the following:

> Know that the same genius that gives a person virtue sometimes also produces great vices in him; valor and presumption, justice and callousness, wisdom and voluptuousness, confound each other, succeed each other, and are tied to each other in a thousand places; extremes meet and unite within us. Let us therefore never let them discourage us. It is just as unreasonable, my very dear friend, to blush at having weaknesses as to blush at being human.[25]

In truth, these are variants of the *topos* of *concordia discors*, which are transformed into their inverse, *discordia concors* – that is, recognition of the vast contradictions that converge and coexist in the same man.

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[24] La Rochefoucauld. *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales*. Paris, Garnier, 1954. English translation taken from *Reflections; or Sentences and Moral Maxims*. London, Simpson Low, Son, and Marston, 1871.

[25] Vauvenargues. "Conseils à un jeune homme". *Œuvres choisies*. Paris, Garnier, 1954, p. 233. *Maxims and Thoughts*. English translation by Tim Siniscalchi, http://frenchphilosophes.weebly.com/vauvenargues.html

Consider the arbitrary combination of genres, tones, and moods to be perceived in the various, divergent scenes performed on this stage. Each scene, animated by a particular feeling, lasts for but a moment, whether this moment is brief or drawn-out, though its sustaining force and duration are not dependent on a firm, coherent force of will. Putting it in psychoanalytic terms, might we say that the impulses under consideration here, which are the products of the Unconscious, take on imaginary forms that resist the moral conscience?

We find a concise, classical description of emotion as an involuntary condition in La Rochefoucauld's maxims: "*La durée de nos passions ne dépend pas plus de nous que la durée de notre vie*" (fifth maxim). The tenth maxim is even more incisive, and better describes the instability of the conflicting moods and genres contained in Brás's soul: "*Il y a dans le cœur humain une génération perpétuelle de passions; en sorte que la ruine de l'une est presque toujours l'établissement de l'autre.*"[26]

La Rochefoucauld lays bare this human heart, which through the work of metonymy is reduced to its existential core of self-love, in a passage that is admirable for its intuition and force. I'll quote just a few lines from this foundational text, which the author excluded from the 1666 edition of his works. The theme of all of these lines is self-love:

> Nothing is so headstrong as its desires, nothing so well concealed as its designs, nothing so skilful as its management; its suppleness is beyond description; its changes surpass those of the metamorphoses, its refinements those of chemistry. We can neither plumb the depths nor pierce the shades of its recesses. […] There it is often to itself invisible; it there conceives, there nourishes and rears, without being aware of it, numberless loves and hatreds, some so monstrous that when they are brought to light it disowns them, and cannot resolve to avow them. […] It is made up of contraries. It is imperious and obedient, sincere and false, piteous and cruel, timid and bold. […] It is inconstant, and besides the changes which arise from strange causes it has an infinity born of itself, and of its own substance. It is inconstant through inconstancy, of lightness, love, novelty, lassitude and distaste. It is capricious […] it lives everywhere and upon everything; it subsists on nothing […] Here then

[26] Bosi cites these maxims in the original French. – Trans.

> is the picture of self-love whereof the whole of our life is but one long agitation. The sea is its living image; and in the flux and reflux of its continuous waves there is a faithful expression of the stormy succession of its thoughts and of its eternal motion.[27]

Pascal, another one of Machado's authors of reference, went further in mocking our presumptive claims to be rational beings in this apostrophe, using the superlative form of Italian: *O ridicolosissimo eroe!* This is a mixture of the comic and the epic.

In passing: Pascal, though he recognized the opposed forces that struggled within man, said that man is neither angel nor beast, "*ni ange ni bête*": Brás dares to correct the philosopher: seeing Nhã-loló in the theatre, he felt that he contained within him both the chaste angel and the lascivious beast.[28]

What is the context of this image of a being that is simultaneously marvelous and monstruous? Those who are familiar with Pascal, with Racine's *Phèdre*, and with the writings of the Jansenists will find similarities between these and the phenomenological description given in *Posthumous Memoirs*, where, however, any sort of comforting religious contextualization is lacking. At heart Brás seems an unbeliever, someone who operates outside of the conventional Catholicism in which he was born and raised.

We are again confronted with the knot's third strand, which is woven from pure perplexity. What is the meaning of individual life? Is there coherence to be found within the *I*? And there is another, even more pressing question: what meaning is there in the existence of Eugênia, the flower from the shrubbery?

Returning to the city from Tijuca, Brás justifies himself with the most pitiful rationalizations ("I went along saying to myself that it was right to obey my father, that it was

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[27] La Rochefoucauld. *Œuvres*. Paris, Gallimard/Pléiade, 1964. English translation taken from *Reflections; or Sentences and Moral Maxims*. London, Simpson Low, Son, and Marston, 1871.

[28] Here Bosi refers to Chapter 98, in which Brás observes: "Alongside the charming maiden I seemed to be taken with a double and indefinable feeling. She was the complete expression of Pascal's duality, *l'ange et la bête*, with the difference that the Jansenist wouldn't admit the simultaneity of the two natures, while there they were quite together – *l'ange*, who was saying certain heavenly things – and *la bête*, who…" In Portuguese: "Ao pé da graciosa donzela, parecia-me tomado de uma sensação dupla e indefinível. Ela exprimia inteiramente a dualidade de Pascal, *l'ange et la bête,* com a diferença que o jansenista não admitia a simultaneidade das duas naturezas, ao passo que elas aí estavam bem juntinhas, – *l'ange,* que dizia algumas coisas do céu, – e *la bête,* que…" – Trans.

fitting to take up a political career…that the constitution…that my bride…that my horse…").[29] Immediately upon reaching his father's house he takes off the boots that were pinching his feet. He breathes a sigh of relief, and philosophizes on the experience of wearing boots that are too tight, for, he muses, it is their tightness that allows the man who wears them the pleasure of taking them off. From this deep reflection Brás moves on to the figure of the crippled girl, who he could see "disappearing over the horizon of the past."[30] In turning his back on her, Brás concludes that his soul has also taken off a pair of uncomfortable boots.

Is this another expression of cynicism? – asks the reader, perhaps the same sensitive soul to whom Brás refers. Yes and no. The temporal and existential distance that separates the dead author from the living Brás explains the *no* that follows the *yes*. Consider what the narrator feels and thinks from the perspective of eternity:

> You, my Eugênia, never took them off. You went along the road of life limping from your leg and from love, sad as a pauper's burial, solitary, silent, laborious, until you, too, came to this other shore…What I don't know is whether your existence was quite necessary for the century. Who knows? Maybe one less walk-on would make the human tragedy a failure.[31]

The theatrical metaphor persists. But where previously it had been diffuse, here it becomes concentrated and gains force. Brás's *I* was a stage on which a confused assemblage of works of various genres was portrayed. Their presentation was coordinated by the arbitrary nature of Brás's life, in which easy money allowed for the enjoyment of a thousand irresponsible experiences. But in the existence of the *other* – Eugênia – the narrator ultimately recognizes a life that *tragedy*, a weighty word, describes better than any other.

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[29] In Portuguese: "Vinha dizendo a mim mesmo que era justo obedecer a meu pai, que era conveniente abraçar a carreira política...que a constituição...que a minha noiva...que o meu cavalo..." – Trans.

[30] In Portuguese: "perder-se no horizonte do pretérito" – Trans.

[31] In Portuguese: "Tu, minha Eugênia, é que não as descalçaste nunca; foste aí pela estrada da vida, manquejando da perna e do amor, triste como os enterros pobres, solitária, calada, laboriosa, até que vieste também para esta outra margem... O que eu não sei é se a tua existência era muito necessária ao século. Quem sabe? Talvez um comparsa de menos fizesse patear a tragédia humana." – Trans.

In order to understand the meaning of this episode's final sentences we must examine their semantic context. Let us reread these lines: "What I don't know is whether your existence was quite necessary for the century. Who knows? Maybe one less walk-on would make the human tragedy a failure."[32]

There is a great deal of doubt in this sequence of sentences: first, *what I don't know*, second, *who knows?*, and third, *maybe*. We too, as readers, share in Brás's perplexity. What does the verb *patear* mean? The accepted definition is to stamp one's feet – in this case, *patas* – so as, for example, to heckle actors on a stage. In this case, the verb's meaning hinges on a syntactical shift, and we might paraphrase the sentence in question as follows: *Perhaps human tragedy would have been heckled if a lesser actor had been at work*. In other words, if the unfortunate player Eugênia did not exist, then human tragedy would deserve to be heckled.

Here we have a writer who is familiar with classical style, though who here and there allows bits of vernacular language to pepper his vocabulary. For this reason, and pricked by doubt, I turned to the Moraes dictionary and found a second definition for *patear*, which is almost a variant of the first. Patear *also means* to succumb, to end badly, to be defeated. *This does not contradict, but rather reinforces, the first definition.* In this case, the sentence's meaning would be:

*Perhaps the lack of one player (Eugênia) would result in the failure of human tragedy.* If this is true, then Eugênia's fate is sadly necessary to this story, and an example of tragedy as a solemn, dramatic genre for which, as we know, unity is necessary.

At any rate, the episode of the flower from the shrubbery is one that allows the reader to draw out the dead author's strand of universalizing reflection, and to contrast it with the petty, prejudiced mentality responsible for the living Brás's conduct.

**The interest and cooption of conscience and memory**

The operating method of *Posthumous Memoirs* shifts between narration and digression. The narrator's employment of digression, which Sérgio Paulo Rouanet skillfully analyzed in an essay on the work's Shandyian form, occurs both when the dead author fills in the capricious Brás's biography and when he engages in self-analysis.[33] In line with the metaphor of the knot, I would

[32] In Portuguese: "O que eu não sei é se a tua existência era muito necessária ao século. Quem sabe? Talvez um comparsa de menos fizesse patear a tragédia humana." – Trans.

[33] See Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, *Riso e melancolia* (São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2007), a text I recommend for the richness of its observations and its incisive interpretation.

say that the author alternately tugs at the strand corresponding to classism, which was particularly suffocating between 1830 and 1850, thereby allowing for a democratic critique of this ideology to emerge, and pulls at the strand corresponding to skeptical thought, engaging in this way in an intertextual conversation with Western literature's moralizing tradition.

The critic may choose to analyze any of the novel's episodes, all of which reveal at least one of these strands of thought. The case of the mysterious package, which the narrator begins recounting in Chapter 52, provides a perfect example of the capitulation of the moral conscience, this being one of moralism's favorite themes. Brás justifies his decision to keep the money he finds on the beach (it was five *contos de réis*!) by stringing together several specious arguments. The careful reader will perceive that the hidden, singular rationale for his tortuous conduct is quite simple: no one saw him pick up and conceal the package with the money in it. La Rochefoucauld notes the anesthetizing effect that occurs when no one witnesses our actions: "We easily forget those faults which are known only to ourselves."

In Chapter 72, Brás's need for self-justification is made more acute by another of his objectionable acts: in order to alleviate the scruples of Dona Plácida, who is uneasy about being a party to an extramarital affair, Brás buys her complicity with the same five *contos de réis*, which he had deposited in the bank so that he could use them later…for a good investment.[34] Vauvenargues's maxim, "conscience is the most changeable of rules," seems applicable to the majority of Brás's self-justifying actions. Dona Plácida is the only witness to his secret romance with Virgília, which occurs in the little house in Gamboa, and for that reason it is necessary that he pay her off. Brás does not hesitate to buy her silence, despite the fact that more than once he has raised the price of the old *agregada*'s absolute loyalty to her old charge Virgília.

The mutability of the human conscience, presented in more dramatic, terrible terms, is the theme of Machado's short story "O enfermeiro," which this variation on La Rochefoucauld's maxim effectively describes: "When only we know of our crimes, they are easily forgotten." In the story no one witnesses the struggle that causes the death of a gravely ill man: later, the same nurse who killed him unexpectedly becomes his inheritor. He feels remorse, he feels scruples, but "the years rolled by, and with time the memory became grey and faint"…[35]

[34] This episode actually occurs in Chapter 70 of the novel. – Trans.

[35] In Portuguese: "os anos foram andando, a memória tornou-se cinzenta e desmaiada" – Trans.

**Is there an "ideology" or a "counter-ideology" in Machado de Assis's mature work?**

If we attempt to apprehend the ideological perspective behind Machado's mature work, it will likely be easier for us to locate the targets of his satire than it will be to identify a particular line of thought or action to which he adheres. This is precisely the definition of a skeptic.

Distrustful of any doctrine that provided a hopeful vision of humanity's future, the author of *Posthumous Memoirs* discretely but firmly rejected the prevailing philosophical currents and political ideologies of the second half of the nineteenth century. The Brazilian intellectuals who came of age (for the most part, prematurely) during the 1860s and 1870s had at least three branches of thought at their disposal: democratic, monarchical, or republican liberalism (which Nabuco would baptize as the "new liberalism"), positivism, and evolutionism. By this period there existed a degree of synchronicity between our intellectual life and contemporary European currents of thought.

The Machado who appears in the newspaper chronicles he wrote during the 1860s opted for the first of these branches of thought, which he would apply to a militant journalism that at first was frankly nonconformist, but that over time he leavened with a form of light humor. It would probably be accurate to say that the mature Machado remained faithful to democratic liberalism, even as he abstained from any partisan identification and refrained from public declarations that would give the impression of political radicalism.

As for the age's principal philosophical doctrines, neither positivism nor evolutionism attracted him. To the contrary, the idea of human history as progressive, and as moving toward some definite end, which the disciples of both Comte and Spencer defended, seemed to Machado a nonsensical idea deserving only of mockery.

With very rare exceptions, images of the future and hopeful thoughts are absent from the so-called second phase of Machado's narrative production. His characters and first-person narrators journey from the present to the past, through the realms of memory, and return disillusioned. Brás, Bento-Casmurro and Aires are exemplary cases. They tend to occupy a fleeting present, without the possibility of a happy fate, awaiting a future of solitude, or disenchanted or perhaps diplomatic old age.

If in *Esau and Jacob* and *Counselor Aires's Memorial* one perceives a generalized skepticism toward the century's certainties, in *Posthumous Memoirs* one easily recognizes moments of satire that are unmistakably counter-ideological in orientation.

**Satirizing positivism and the religion of progress**

The first of these moments, which extends across several chapters, narrates Brás's encounter with Quincas Borba, who was once an elegant young man and Brás's schoolmate, and is later a filthy beggar who accosts Brás on the street, asks him for money, and finally, in embracing him, steals his watch. From this character, whose introduction amounts to an apparent digression from the central narrative (which concerns Brás's and Virgília's love affair), springs a satire of positivism. As is well-known, in his later years August Comte minted a truly counterfeit version of Catholicism, with its own dogmas and liturgy centered on the cult of the Great Being, and in which Humanity evolves toward redemption in accordance with his doctrine.

> "Humanitas," he said, "the principle of things, is nothing but man himself divided up into all men. Humanitas has three phases [*in Comte humanity also passes through three great phases*]: the *static*, previous to all creation; the *expansive*, the beginning things; the *dispersive*, the appearance of man; and it will have one more, the *contractive*, the absorption of man and things." […] Love, for example, is a priestly function, reproduction a ritual.[36]

Borba the philosopher adds elements of evolutionism to his positivistic Humanitism: for instance, the struggle for life, "since fighting is the main function of humankind, all bellicose feelings are the ones that best serve its happiness"; or, "war, which looks like a calamity, [but] is a convenient operation."[37]

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[36] In Portuguese: "– Humanitas, dizia ele, o princípio das coisas, não é outro senão o mesmo homem repartido por todos os homens. Conta três fases Humanitas: a *estática*, anterior a toda a criação; a *expansiva*, começo das coisas; a *dispersiva*, aparecimento do homem; e contará mais uma, a *contrativa*, absorção do homem e das coisas. […] O amor, por exemplo, é um sacerdócio, a reprodução um ritual." Bosi begins his citation with "– Humanitas, dizia Quincas Borba" instead of "– Humanitas, dizia ele," as it is in the original. The parenthetical observation on Comte is Bosi's. – Trans.

[37] In Portuguese: "sendo a luta a grande função do gênero humano, todos os sentimentos belicosos são os mais adequados à sua felicidade"; "a guerra, que parece uma calamidade, é uma operação conveniente." – Trans.

There is a sardonic allusion here to Comte's final work, which synthesized his political doctrine: "The last volume was a political treatise based on Humanitas. It was, perhaps, the most tedious part of the system, since it was conceived with a formidable rigor of logic."[38]

Quincas reappears at the end of the novel, having gone mad, as an odd, sick man who is aware of his mental state. Despite his madness he remains devoted to his new religion, and before a stunned Brás Cubas he performs a ceremonial dance that falls somewhere between the lugubrious and the grotesque. In 1880, when Machado was recording Brás's memories, the positivist liturgy was already being celebrated at the orthodox temple in Rio de Janeiro.

There is in Machado's aversion to Comtism a frank reluctance to view historical time as imbued with imminent meaning. For this reason, he rejected the century's progressivism, whether this took the form of the positivist system or Spencerian evolutionism. The latter doctrine, which worshipped at the altar of Darwinism, applied a naturalistic standard to the history of humanity, according to which each generation should celebrate the victory of the strongest and the fittest – that is, the top competitors in the battle for survival. Machado, it should be said, was well aware of the cruelty inherent in this process, given that his plots often center on the importance of force and cunning in mediating the relations between men. However, Machado did not offer a scientific or philosophical justification for their triumph; rather, his tone is one of stoic or melancholy observation. As seems obvious, a pessimist has no reason to rejoice over the weight of the inevitable. Rather, he limits his gaze to one of disillusioned and at times, diplomatic, and at heart, comic acceptance.

**The delirium, an anti-promethean allegory**

I can think of no passage in *Posthumous Memoirs* that describes with greater truth the encounter between this vision of History and the subject's sense of precariousness than the chapter that describes Brás's delirium. Is this an anti-progressive allegory *par excellence*?

The placement of this episode within Brás's *memories* cannot be coincidental. A feverish allegory of Nature and History, the deathbed vision experienced by Brás precedes the dead author's reconstruction of his biography. Having read the novel as a whole and with the somber

[38] In Portuguese: "O último volume compunha-se de um tratado político; fundado no Humanitismo, era talvez a parte mais enfadonha do sistema, posto que concebida com um formidável poder de lógica." – Trans.

note of its final sentence – "*I haven't transmitted the legacy of our misery to any creature*"[39] – resounding within us, let us return to its first pages and prolong the journey into the absurd that is Brás's oneiric voyage to the origins of human existence.

Philosophies of progress, which were the coin of the realm during Machado's lifetime, were based on the hypothesis that time possessed a positive and cumulative quality. Vital and historical time, stirring within living beings, had uprooted man from his primitive, animal life and elevated him through biological and social struggles to a degree of civilization that the nineteenth century exemplified. The role that had been assigned to Divine Providence from time immemorial was thereby replaced by the evolution of the species and the survival of the fittest. We have seen how positivism fashioned a strange, secular religion of progress. In the novel's penultimate chapter, entitled "Semidementia," Quincas Borba declares that Humanitism is "the true religion of the future."[40]

For its part, evolutionism replaced the sacred icons with a sober cult of science. But in both philosophies, the perfectability (a Comtian term) of the species was an irrefutable certainty – hence the centrality of the future for both. The scientific poetry of the 1870s, which was held in low regard by Machado de Assis as a literary critic, presented visions of the future, and portrayed the man of science as a new, indomitable Prometheus.

Compare the myth of Prometheus, as magnified in the social and libertarian Romanticism of José Bonifácio, the Younger, and Castro Alves, with the Machadian Prometheus, who is a figure of definitive failure:

> Prometheus shook his shackled arms
> And seeing the centuries roll by,
> Slowly, like the ringing of a death bell
> He begged for eternal compassion.
>
> Another ten, hundred, thousand, billion.
> Some bathed in light, others in blood…
> Suddenly, flapping its wings with a storm's fury,

[39] In Portuguese: "não transmiti a nenhuma criatura o legado da nossa miséria." – Trans.
[40] In Portuguese, this chapter is entitled "Semidemência" and the quotation reads: "era a verdadeira religião do futuro." – Trans.

The eagle looks upon him, shock in his eyes.

For the first time, the hero's liver,
Which the great bird eternally pecks,
Is not reborn from the consuming furies.

An invisible hand loosens the chains,
Cold and inert, a dead body sinks into the abyss;
As his torture ends so too does his life.[41]

This poem is entitled "The End," and is included in the collection *Ocidentais*, comprised of pieces that for the most part, Machado composed shortly before he wrote *Posthumous Memoirs*. Perceptive readers like Lúcia Miguel Pereira and Manuel Bandeira have found in these poems evidence of the writer's transition from his first to his second literary phase.

The gulf between evolutionism's understanding of History and Brás's delirium could not be wider. The hallucinating Brás is mounted on a hippopotamus and carried off from the present to the remotest part of the past. But this mad dash toward the origin of life does not conclude with his marvelous discovery of an earthly paradise that was lost thanks to the sinfulness of the first human couple. In place of radiant images of a biblical Eden the traveler sees only endless

41 "O desfecho," in Portuguese:
Prometeu sacudiu os braços manietados
E súplice pediu a eterna compaixão,
Ao ver o desfilar dos séculos que vão
Pausadamente como um dobre de finados.

Mais dez, mais cem, mais mil, mais um bilhão.
Uns cingidos de luz, outros ensanguentados...
Súbito, sacudindo as asas de tufão,
Fita-lhe a águia em cima os olhos espantados.

Pela primeira vez a víscera do herói,
Que a imensa ave do céu perpetuamente rói,
Deixou de renascer às raivas que a consomem.

Uma invisível mão as cadeias dilui,
Frio, inerte, ao abismo um corpo morto rui;
Acabara o suplício e acabara o homem. – Trans.

plains covered in white show. Only snow. The sun itself is made of snow. The background from which the impassive figure of Nature emerges is a deathly whiteness that is the opposite of living color.

The allegory presents us with the figure of a gigantic, indifferent woman who produces, reproduces, and destroys each generation. We know the source of this image. Otto Maria Carpeaux, with his luminous erudition, demonstrated in a now-classic article that Machado found the figure of Nature-as-stepmother, the inverse of the consoling *topos* of Mother Nature as developed by Rousseau and the Romantics, in Giacomo Leopardi's *Dialogue between Nature and an Icelander.*[42]

As in Leopardi, the woman, though enigmatic, deigns to speak with the delirious Brás. Her message is fundamentally the same as that of Leopardi's Nature. Neither benign nor malignant, she abandons to their fate the creatures she births through the centuries. In response to the indignant lamentations of the poor Icelander, who is revolted by the indifference of a being everyone considers a mother and the source of all life, Nature has only these words:

> Evidently, you have not considered that in this universe life is a perpetual cycle of production and destruction – both functions being so closely bound together that one is continuously working toward the other, thus bringing about the conservation of the world, which, if either one of them were to cease, would likewise dissolve.[43]

In *Posthumous Memoirs* the helpless traveler asks Nature: "Who put this love of life in my heart if not you? And since I love life why must you hurt yourself by killing me?"

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[42] Otto Maria Carpeaux. "Uma fonte da filosofia de Machado de Assis." *Reflexo e realidade.* Rio de Janeiro, Fontana, 1978, pp. 215-8.

[43] Giacomo Leopardi. "Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese." *Tutte le opere di Giacomo Leopardi.* Ed. Francesco Flora, 4th ed., Milan, Arnaldo Mondadori, 1951, p. 888. The dialogue is taken from the *Operette morali* and according to Flora, was written in May 1824. Machado would have read it in the original Italian. English translation taken from Giacomo Leopardi, *Operette Morali. Essays and Dialogues.* Trans. and ed. Giovanni Cecchetti, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982, p. 199.

Nature responds: "Because I no longer need you. […] Selfishness, you say? Yes, selfishness, I have no other law. Selfishness, preservation." [44]

*Conservation* is the key word here, and it appears both in Brás's delirium and in Leopardi's dialogue.

This moment aside, the texts move along differing paths. In Leopardi, the *operetta morale* has by this point nearly reached its conclusion. The Icelander is unable to continue his vain protesting, as two famished lions appear and devour him, satisfying their hunger for the rest of the day, at least. But the narrator adds another possible account of the Icelander's death: "an extremely fierce wind arose, threw him down to the ground, and raised over him a majestic mausoleum of sand, under which, perfectly desiccated and turned into a beautiful mummy, he was later discovered by some travelers and placed in the museum of a European city."[45]

In *Posthumous Memoirs* our delirious hero experiences further travails. Nature carries him to the top of a mountain so that he may contemplate, through a mist, a parade of centuries – an allegory of History. He sees a succession of images. Civilizations appear and disappear, some rising from the ruins of others. The spectacle, which has the makings of grandeur, becomes a nightmarish vision. The passage of time accelerates toward the present. Production, destruction, and the eternal conservation of Nature continue at the expense of succeeding generations, "all of them punctual for the tomb." "The minute that's coming is strong, merry, it thinks it carries eternity in itself and it carries death, and it perishes just like the other one, but time carries on."[46] Brás can hardly distinguish the coming centuries from each other, given their rapid succession and uniform appearance. There is no reason to have hope for the future.

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[44] In Portuguese: "Quem me pôs no coração este amor da vida, senão tu? e, se eu amo a vida, por que te hás de golpear a ti mesma, matando-me?"; "Porque já não preciso de ti. […] Egoísmo, dizes tu? Sim, egoísmo, não tenho outra lei. Egoísmo, conservação." – Trans.

[45] Bosi appears to translate from the original ("un fierissimo vento, levatosi mentre che l'Islandese parlava, lo stese a terra, e sopra gli edificò un superbissimo mausoleo di sabbia; sotto il quale colui diseccato perfettamente, e divenuto una bella mummia, fu poi ritrovato da certi viaggiatori, e collocato nel museo di non so quale città di Europa"), though he does not quote Leopardi's text. The English translation here is Cecchetti's. – Trans.

[46] In Portuguese: "todas elas pontuais na sepultura"; "O minuto que vem é forte, jucundo, supõe trazer em si a eternidade, e traz a morte, e perece como o outro, mas o tempo subsiste." – Trans.

We may now understand the meaning of the sentence with which the dead author concludes his biography as a universally applicable observation. What the generations transmit to those that succeed them is the legacy of their misery.[47]

The question of whether the term *ideology* aligns with this tradition of reflection on human beings and their history, which we have generically described as moralistic, albeit with skeptical and pessimistic elements, is more than nominal.

It is helpful here to recall Mannheim's distinction between the *strong political and value-based* and the *generalized cultural* meanings of the term.

The first derives from Marx's and Engels's *The German Ideology*: here ideology is understood as thought that legitimates the power of the dominant class and justifies as natural and universal differences between socioeconomic classes and political strata. Ideology, here, basically amounts to manipulation, distortion, concealment.

The second definition is the product of historicism and the sociology of knowledge. It was inspired by Dilthey and developed by his successors, all quite distinct from one another: Max Weber, Scheler, and Mannheim. Ideology here is synonymous with a vision of the world, a conception of man and of History, the style of an age: in sum, it amounts to all those representations and values that typify a given country or culture.[48]

In principle, the second definition would seem more amenable to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century moralism and to the style of thought that produces disillusioned observations on the forces that motivate human behavior, and that reduces these forces to self-love and self-interest, which in turn lead to the most varied rationalizations and warp one's moral conscience.

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[47] Leopardi observed: "One of the peculiar features of works of genius is that, even when they fully represent the nullity of things, even when they clearly demonstrate and make us feel the inevitable sadness of life, even when they express the most terrible despair, even so, for a great soul who finds himself in a state of great despair, disillusionment, nothingness, tedium and apathy toward life […] these works will always offer consolation and encouragement, and even if representing nothing more nor less than death, they will return to him for a moment at least the life that he has lost. And so that which, in reality, torments the heart and kills the soul, as imitation or in any other form, in works of genius (as, for example, in lyricism, which is not precisely imitation), opens and reanimates the heart" (*Zibaldone di pensieri*, in *Tutte le opere di Giacomo Leopardi*. Ed. Francesco Flora, 4th ed., Milan, Arnaldo Mondadori, 1951, vol. I, pp. 252-3). Schopenhauer observed on more than one occasion the redemptive quality of the deepest pessimism in works of art.

The above quotation from Leopardi is translated from Bosi's Portuguese translation of the Italian original. – Trans.

[48] Karl Mannheim. *Ideologia e utopia*. Trans. Sérgio Santeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Zahar, 1972 [1929].

However, we should historicize this universalizing strand of thought – which incidentally is quite old, being present in Ecclesiastes, a book that Machado de Assis cites several times in his work. We should verify in each case if this thought is expressed by an intellectual – a moralist, in this case – who is working in isolation and whose sphere of action is limited, or if it has wider purchase within its context, and represents a broader social tendency. In rethinking the concept of ideology, Lukács rejects the idea that it can be tied to an individual and insists on the necessity of relating it systematically to the objective interests and motivations of a social class that is attempting either defensively or aggressively to achieve or maintain hegemony.[49]

If we accept Lukács's restriction of ideology to social classes, as opposed to individuals, then we should not speak of a "Machadian ideology." However, to the extent that the goal of disillusioned moralism is to denounce the dominant ideology, and to demystify the self-interested optimism of the bourgeoise or of the state, then its role should be seen as resistant and counter-ideological. As such, when prevailing ideology draws on a given age's supposedly scientific certainties to legitimate domination by a certain class or nation (the latter occurring when imperialism manipulates evolutionism for its own ends), the pessimism that challenges it, or the skepticism that casts doubt upon it, serves a healthy critical function.

It may be, however, that moralism's critical role conceals within it an inhibiting agent that imposes a limit upon it. The *pars destruens* of the skeptical tendency may be more powerful than the *pars construens*. Disbelief in humanity, when abstracted and radicalized, impedes any sort of universal or localized project aimed at regeneration. Skepticism, announced when one negates, becomes paralyzing when one proposes an action, a gesture that necessarily requires a minimum of hope. In its most extreme form, the counter-ideology of pessimism devolves into an ideology of defeatism, which reinforces, even if involuntarily, the forces in power.

Returning to Machado de Assis, we must now describe in dialectical form what we have discovered from examining his work in ideological terms. The critical spirit that permeated all of his writing led him first to denounce the exclusionary, prejudicial, old oligarchical liberalism (here we have the democratic writer who satirizes certain cruel features of our conservative social life), and then to universalize his pessimistic gaze, and to expand his field of vision to encompass the whole of humanity. This is a radically skeptical view of things.

[49] See pp. 396-97 from Lukács's *Ontologia do ser social.*

The novels and stories of Machado's mature phase lead one to conclude that both of these tendencies are present in his plots and especially in his characters. It is a question of examining his works case by case.

As for his newspaper chronicles, that fact that Machado wrote these throughout his journalistic career should prompt the critic to undertake a selective examination. Machado wrote chronicles that directly satirized the political life of the Second Empire, and countless can be found in his earliest writings, composed between 1860 and 1867. There is also a quite uniform corpus of chronicles from Machado's later years in which he expressed profound disillusionment not only toward Brazilian politicians but toward politics in general.[50]

Without drawing entirely schematic chronological distinctions, I would offer that we may recognize two counter-ideological tendencies in Machado's intellectual career: the democratic liberalism of his youth, the high point of which was the abolitionist campaign, and a pessimistic moralism that clearly distinguishes Machado from the currents of Jacobin republicanism, positivism, and evolutionism that prevailed during his lifetime.

Having disentangled the existential and ideological strands wound up in *Posthumous Memoirs*, the best course of action now may be to tie them back together, reforming them into the knot tied by Machado de Assis.[51]

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[50] I examined some of these in "O teatro político nas crônicas de Machado de Assis," in *Brás Cubas em três versões*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2006.

[51] Here Bosi uses the verb *enovelar*, which I have translated as "to wind up." The translation loses the suggestion of novelizing (*novelar*), and of novelizing-as-winding, knotting, or weaving together, which Bosi achieves in employing the verb *enovelar*. – Trans.

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