MACHADO DE ASSIS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This article examines the complex narrative perspective in Machado de Assis's *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* through three critical lenses: formalist, existential, and sociological. The author argues that each approach captures a distinct aspect of the narrator but is insufficient on its own to fully comprehend the work's depth. The essay proposes a multifaceted interpretation that considers the novel's "free style", the narrator's self-reflective humor, and the social context of Imperial Brazil. It distinguishes between different ideological angles within Brazilian liberalism and situates Machado's skeptical moralism within Western culture. The analysis emphasizes the importance of understanding the interplay between constructive, expressive, and representative dimensions in literary interpretation.

Keywords: Machado de Assis, Narrative Perspective, Social Types, Humor

How comparative studies open the way to our Brazilian readings!
Alfredo Bosi, *Ideologia e contraideologia* [Ideology and Counter-ideology]

But, really, we Germans are very likely to fall to easily into this pedantic conceit,
when we do not look beyond the narrow circle which surrounds us.
Goethe. *Conversations with Eckermann*

Opening the series of chapters dedicated to the "intrinsic study of literature," in the last section of a manual that has for several decades enjoyed extraordinary prestige in academic circles, René Wellek and Austin Warren state: "The natural and sensible starting point for work in literary scholarship is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature

themselves."[1] If a reader of their *Theory of Literature* centers on the term "starting point," no major problem will be found with such an assertion, even if one acknowledges the insufficiencies of certain "immanent" approaches or is an adept of the procedures of Reception Aesthetics, which focus on the historical, social and cultural context where literary works appear and affect the horizon of expectations of their readers.

But, despite its instructive thoughtfulness, the statement above seems to indicate only the moment when the challenges begin for the interpreter, who is confronted with the plurality of meanings within the literary work, and with unconscious forces and cultural influences that constitute its complex structure – or even, as Alfredo Bosi suggests in the theoretical essay that closes the volume *Céu, Inferno* [Heaven, Hell], with the stubborn opacity of its images: "If the graphic signs that compose the surface of the literary text were transparent, if the eye that hits upon them suddenly grasped its meaning, then there would be no symbolic form, nor would that tenacious work called *interpretation* be necessary."[2]

From Bosi's perspective, understanding and interpreting a literary phenomenon is equivalent to becoming aware of its profiles, "which are multiple, sometimes opposite, and cannot be replaced by information external to the phenomenon as given to us." Collected amidst so many exemplary formulations, these words actuate the hermeneutic principle that prevents exegesis from operating outside the literary text, which would then not be only as "starting point," but a permanent instance of control over interpretive operations. Legitimate and often necessary, the use of extraliterary data must always be integrated with the concentric movement between the whole and the parts, in tune with the "tone" and "perspective" that shape the artistic plot, allowing the hermeneutist to apprehend ever-broader units of meaning.

Some of the essays in the aforementioned volume demonstrate how these theoretical statements translate into the praxis of analysis and interpretation. In one such essay, as the one that lends the volume its title, "Céu, Inferno," we find the comparative approach, but

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1 Austin Warren and René Wellek. *Theory of Literature* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949) p. 139.

2 Alfredo Bosi. "A Interpretação da Obra Literária." *Céu, Inferno: Ensaios de Crítica Literária e Ideológica* (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, Ed. 34, 2003), p. 461. With a similar observation, Wolfgang Iser opens his great work of maturity *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, which seeks to lay the foundations for a new literary anthropology: "Literature stands in need of interpretation for the fabrications that it verbalizes can be processed only by way of cognitive frames of reference. *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. ix.

also Bosi's differential analysis, advancing towards the "live core" of texts by Graciliano Ramos (*Barren Lives*) and Guimarães Rosa (*Primeiras Estórias* [First Stories]), guided by the task of "facing the crucial problems of determining *perspectives* and showing how these function as 'symbolic forms', according to the fruitful hypotheses Erwin Panofsky applied to the visual arts of the Renaissance." Or also the subsequent essay, titled *O Ateneu*: Opacidade e Destruição [*The Athaeneum*: Opacity and Destruction], a masterpiece of literary criticism that unveils the various profiles of this "pedagogical or terror novel" through a profound hermeneutic analysis of the unifying tone that permeates the novel from the first to the last page, while also examining the ideological contradictions at the heart of the narrative perspective chosen by the young Raul Pompéia.

Brazil and the Dialectic of Colonization (2015) also incorporates across several chapters the theoretical principles discussed in the essay *A Interpretação da Obra Literária* [The Interpretation of the Literary Work]. With clear and precise language, Bosi undertakes a transversal journey through five centuries of Brazilian history and, by engaging with texts by José de Anchieta, Gregório de Matos, Antônio Vieira, José de Alencar and Castro Alves, illuminates elements that also help to elucidate contradictions in Brazil's colonization process, examined throughout the book in both its symbolic and material manifestations. The concentric movement between the parts and the whole unfolds with admirable mastery, integrating into the interpretation insights from the economic, political and social spheres. This approach can be seen as early as the essay on "The opposite arrows of the sacred" – imagery that, in the foreground, signify the "theodicies" of the two peoples who clashed in the early days of Brazilian colonization: "Unfortunately for the native peoples, the religion of the discoverers arrived armed with horses and soldiers, harquebuses and cannons." But the reader also has the possibility of seeing in the image of the "opposite arrows," the two languages employed by Anchieta in his texts: the language of symbols with which he expressed (in Latin, Spanish and Portuguese) the restlessness and fervor characteristic of the *devotio moderna*; and the allegorical procedure, heavily supported by the Tupi language, used in the documents that aimed to catechize the indigenous peoples, leading Bosi to claim that allegory was "the first instrument of an art for masses crafted by the organic intellectuals of the acculturation."

Broad and varied, therefore, is the spectrum of themes, poets and narrators Alfredo Bosi addresses in his books, whether the two mentioned above or numerous others, such as

História Concisa da Literatura Brasileira [A Concise History of Brazilian Literature] (1970), *O Ser e o Tempo da Poesia* [Time and Being of Poetry] (1977), *Literatura e Resistência* [Literature and Resistance] (2002), *Ideologia e Contraideologia* [Ideology and Counter-Ideology] (2010) and *Entre a Literatura e a História* [Between Literature and History] (2013). *O Enigma do Olhar* [The Enigma of the Gaze] (1999) and the later *Brás Cubas em Três Versões* [Brás Cubas in Three Versions] (2006), titles draw from the essays of greater theoretical density in their respective volumes, are works exclusively dedicated to the figure of Machado de Assis, an unprecedented fact in the trajectory of a critic who had focused on a single author only in his academic works (Pirandello for his doctorate, Leopardi for his full professorship). In "O Enigma do Olhar," Bosi's hermeneutic effort scrutinizes the "enigma" of a gaze that is both local and universal, one that builds "types" but also "people-like" characters, and his interpretation traverses the broad dimensions of Machado's narrative, from *The Hand and the Glove*, *Helena*, *Iaiá Garcia*, then delves more deeply into *Dom Casmurro* and *Philosopher or Dog?*, eventually arriving at *Counselor Ayres' Memorial.*

In "Brás Cubas in Three Versions," a fresh perspective is offered on the multiple profiles of Machado's extraordinary artistic physiognomy. As the title suggests, this exploration is framed through the lens of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, a novel that partakes of the concept of "world literature" (*Weltliteratur*), advocated by Goethe in 1827, with which the author of *Ressurrection* debuts his condition of *twice-born*, to use the expression employed by Otto Maria Carpeaux to draw parallels between Machado and other famous converts in Western culture.[3]

First of all, it should be noted that, in the copious and remarkable critical fortune of this watershed in the novelistic literature of both Brazil and Machado de Assis, discussing "three versions" is not the true scope of the essay, but rather the heuristic path Bosi chose to outline a new perspective of the book that the narrator's self-dedicates to the first worm

[3] In an article published in *O Estado de S. Paulo,* on January 24, 1959, titled "Machado e Bandeira," Carpeaux portrays the "conversion" of the Italian writer Giovanni Verga, one of several examples of *twice-born*, as having the "most surprising analogy with the case of Machado de Assis." Article later included in *Ensaios Reunidos 1946-1971* (Rio de Janeiro, Topbooks, 2005, p. 456-59).

As for the concept of "world literature," Goethe said to Johann Peter Eckermann on January 31, 1827 (in a remarkable lesson in *avant la lettre* comparatism): "But, really, the truth is that if we Germans are very likely to fall to easily into this pedantic conceit, when we do not look beyond the narrow circle which surrounds us. I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature is at hand, and every one must strive to hasten its approach." Goethe, J.W. *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, translated by John Oxenford. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1850), p. 351.

that gnawed his "cold flesh." For this, Bosi's first step is to reconstruct the novel's plot in broad strokes, drawing attention to the "dual game of presence and distance" that the unusual point of view of a *deceased author* brings to a memoir framed as posthumous: the "presence" of the self as protagonist and, therefore, witness of the events, and the "distance" shaped by a narrative awareness that has already crossed the "short bridge" that separates life from death. In the body of the essay, it is precisely this duality that densifies and expands the novel's meaning that the hermeneutic approach seeks to unravel. Bosi's analysis moves beyond interpretations that place intertextual nexuses in the foreground or reduce Brás primarily to a type guided by the economic and social coordinates of the context within which he moves.

The initial considerations of the essay revolve around the "perspective" underlying the memoirs and the implications of adopting the first-person narrative focus (unprecedented in Machado's novels). The next segment, "The Other outside and within the self," focuses fundamental episodes of the plot: those of the "the muleteer," the "black butterfly," the "mysterious package" found in the street and, above all, the narrative framework surrounding Eugenia, introduced in the chapter "The Flower from the Shrubbery." Through these episodes, Bosi seeks to demonstrate, in a reflective *post-mortem* dimension, how the elaboration of experienced events can sometimes "open cracks in the underground" of the narrator's conscience, dialectizing the rentier "type" of Second-Empire Brazil, which is the actual social condition of Brás Cubas. The analysis focuses, in particular and from various angles, on the episode of the beautiful but poor and lame Eugênia, meticulously illuminating the lability of the relationship that the specious Brás establishes with the girl. This episode masterfully elucidates how the rich young man behavior is elaborated, frightened as he was by the possibility of falling in love with Eugênia, whose dignity makes her assert herself as a person, rather than reducing herself to the "typicality" to which Brás' gaze had tried to demean her. Economic condition and social *status* are undoubtedly the driving forces behind the behavior of the spoiled young man, but the narrative awareness manages to descend into the underworld of his personality and reveal other traits of the "detestable self" (*moi-haïssable*) of Pascalian extraction.

The next segment, "Three Dimensions of Brás Cubas," analyzes in detail three critical aspects indicated in the title: the "constructive," the "expressive" and the "mimetic."[4] The first is aligned with the tradition of intertextuality studies, tracing back the memoirs of Brás Cubas to the *satira menippea* of the 3rd century BC and to Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead,* written around the year of 160 AD. More recent intertexts are, as narrator himself explains in the opening section "To the Reader," the novels *Voyage autour de ma Chambre* (1794), by Xavier de Maistre, and above all, Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67). Thus, the discussion of the "constructive" or "intertextual" aspect centers on an essay originally written in English (*The Shandean Form: Laurence Sterne and Machado de Assis*), in which Sergio Paulo Rouanet, with great wealth of details, links the influence of the English novelist to the "squirrel-soul" aspects (evoking Friedrich Nietzsche's observation in *Human, All Too Human*, volume II, section 113: "The most liberated writer") of the meandering and zigzagging narrative that other interpreters will trace back to the socioeconomic condition or to melancholy and *humour* of Brás Cubas.[5]

Bosi then delves deeper into the aspect for which he reveals the greatest admiration, represented by the analyses of the "artist-critic" Augusto Meyer, whom he describes as the "most subtle of Machado's readers." A keen attention to the multiple expressions of Machado's humor enables Meyer, in the figure of the deceased author, to probe more deeply both the "subterranean man" of Dostoevskian extraction and the affinities with the later "relativism of Pirandello in the portrayal of the theater of life." This manner of reading, rooted in the methods of comparative literature as well as on the lessons of masters of Stylistics such as Karl Vossler, Leo Spitzer and Damaso Alonso, led Meyer to immediately discern the profound differences in the "dominant tone" or the "spiritual etymon" between the novels of Sterne and Machado, which already indicated the limits of the intertextual thesis. One can say that, for Bosi, Meyer's exegesis represents a pinnacle in the philological study of Machado de Assis, and this recognition will be revisited, coupled with praise for the procedures of comparative literature, in a later essay "An Ideological Knot: On Interlaced

[4] The structure of the essay in "three versions" is certainly influenced by the aesthetic philosophy of Luigi Pareyson (1918-1991), whose *Teoria della Formatività* (Milan, Tascabili Bompiani, 1954) which Bosi examines in the small volume *Reflexões sobre a Arte* [Reflections on Art] (São Paulo, Ática, 1985). For Pareyson, in *Verità e interpretazione* (Milan, Mursia, 1971), "to do," "to know" and "to express" are the three paths of artistic work. In three chapters of *Reflexões*, the Brazilian critic discusses these instances in terms of "construction," "knowledge" (which encompasses the concept of mimesis) and "expression."

[5] In Portuguese, the essay was first published in *Teresa: Revista de Literatura Brasileira*, São Paulo, n. 6/7, pp. 318-38, 2006.

Perspectives in Machado de Assis," included in this dossier, which closes the book *Ideologia e Contraideologia* [Ideology and Counter-Ideology]:

> The work of self-analysis and introjected satire discovers the *subterranean man*, the subsoil of the *Machadian self*, which Augusto Meyer illuminated under the inspiration of his readings of Dostoevsky and Pirandello. How comparative studies open the way to our Brazilian readings![6]

The last of the "three versions of Brás Cubas" reviewed is the sociological reading, which in Astrojildo Pereira's texts on Machado ("Novelist of the Second Empire" is from 1939) is grounded on a Marxism mediated by the rather simplifying tenets of the theorists of socialist realism, but will later become more sophisticated with the studies of Raymundo Faoro and Roberto Schwarz. The latter took the thesis even further, advocating the existence of a homology between the novel's stylistic structures and social structures shaped by the interplay of capitalism and slavery – or the existence of nexus, according to Bosi, "between the rentier ideology in Imperial Brazil and Brás Cubas' modes of thought, emotion and speaking." For this reading, the narrator's self is framed primarily as a "mirror or voice of his social class," with his true economic interests masked by the ideology of liberalism. Aiming to rescale the perspective outlined by Schwarz in important books such as *To the Victor, the Potatoes!* and *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*, Bosi embarks on a detailed study of liberalism's historical role in nineteenth-century Brazil, insisting particularly on the distinction between two fiercely opposed liberal currents, one so to speak "retrograde" and conservative (the equivalent of saying pro-slavery) and the other progressive, since it was organically committed to abolitionist ideals. It should also be noted that, for Bosi, the exclusionary liberal tendency, complicit with slavery, did not represent a Brazilian

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[6] Alfredo Bosi. "Um Nó Ideológico: Sobre o Enlace de Perspectivas em Machado de Assis." *Ideologia e Contraideologia* (São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2010), pp. 398-421.

Additionally, Antonio Candido, in "Esquema de Machado de Assis" [An Outline of Machado de Assis] *Vários Escritos* (São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1995, pp. 17-39), emphasizes that reading Dostoevsky and Pirandello enabled Meyer to go beyond Machado's "humorous and philosophical vision" and to show "that in his work there was much of the 'subterranean man' of the former, and of the multiple, impalpable being, of the latter."

It is worth noting that both Alfredo Bosi and Antonio Candido end their texts by affirming the primacy of Machado's work over the theoretical efforts of critics. While Candido concludes his "An Outline of Machado de Assis" advising "everyone to forget what I said, summarizing the critics, and open directly the books of Machado de Assis," Bosi ponders at the end of his study about the ideological threads woven in *Posthumous Memoirs* that "the best would be perhaps to tie them again and let them form the knot, as Machado de Assis did."

excrescence, an aberrant displacement of European ideas into our context, but rather – as articulated in the essay "An Ideological Knot" – "an aggregate of concrete economic and political measures that have governed the entire Atlantic West since the Napoleonic period and the French monarchical Restoration."[7]

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Focusing on the specificities of each of aspect outlined above and, at the same time, relating them to each other, this incursion into the critical fortune of the *Posthumous Memoirs* unfolds within a broad hermeneutic horizon. One key insight could be articulated as follows: just as the intertextual-constructive (Rouanet) and the existential-expressive (Meyer) readings cannot fully capture dimensions of Machado's novel that must be excavated from the economic and social spheres, so too does the sociological perspective reach its limits when it subordinates Brás Cubas' narrator self to his social class and overlooks the formal and existential dimensions derived from Machado's engagement with the literary and philosophical traditions of the West. As Bosi observes, the "Brazilian" Machado is also "universal," his intellect "transcends the geographic limits of the periphery."

As the reader will perceive, the exploration of these "three dimensions of Brás Cubas" is also a kind of heuristic framework for outlining a specific vision of the novel as a text shaped by a diversity of factors. Thus, one must avoid reducing critical discourse to a "single explanatory factor, the cause of causes, to the detriment of a comprehensive approach." With this caution in mind, the interpreter will seek to find in the novel's plot a live interaction between formal, existential and mimetic vectors, without attributing to any of them the ultimate, monocausal or overdetermining role. A fundamental point of this approach is diagnosing the "harsh and bitter feeling," which in Machado's own words in the prologue to the third edition of the novel, penetrates the "soul of this book, for all of its merry

[7] Alfredo Bosi. "Um Nó Idelógico," *Ideologia e Contraideologia* (São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2010), p. 400. The author further supports this hypothesis by examining historical moments prior to the Napoleonic era. For example, by reconstituting John Locke's political theory and pointing out within this source of English liberalism, the "conjugation of universalizing rhetoric and private interests," seeing that Locke, who was a shareholder in the *Royal African Company*, would have also legitimized slavery as "an act of force made legal (*a lawful conqueror*) and recognized it as an immemorial pact." On John Locke, see particularly the segments "Property and Work: From the State of Nature to the Invention of Money," in the chapter "Liberal Ideas and their Diffusion from Europe to Brazil" ("As Ideias Liberais e sua Difusão da Europa ao Brasil." *Ideologia e Contraideologia*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2010, pp. 276-302), and also "From Locke to Rousseau: The Right and the Opposite of Liberalism," in the chapter "Rousseau: From Natural Man to Social Pact" ("Rousseau: Do Homem Natural ao Pacto Social." *Ideologia e Contraideologia*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2010, pp. 23-37).

appearance." By infiltrating Brás' confessions, this bitter undertone both distances his narrative from the models of Sterne and Xavier de Maistre, and grants the work a specificity that does not compromise the breadth, depth and universality that characterize the greatest works of world literature. For Bosi, this bitterness functions as the powerful "counter-ideological dissolvent" that enabled Machado to make the deceased author of 1869 (whose posthumous point of view critiques the behavior of the protagonist Brás, born in 1805) see himself and judge himself "through the eyes of the disillusioned intellectual of 1880," a reference to the empirical dimension of the novel's creation.[8] Through this broadening and intertwining of temporalities, Machado targets not only the retrograde liberalism embodied in characters such as Cotrim, Damasceno and Brás himself, but also the progressive and democratizing liberalism that emerged in the 1860s and 1870s. This critique even extrapolates the national borders with its *moralistic* skepticism, targeting "progressivism *in general*."

Although Alfredo Bosi does not assign the "ultimate role" to any of these vectors in his examination of Machado's work, one cannot fail to notice his inclination towards the existential-expressive path opened by Augusto Meyer. The same can be seen in the later essay "The Double Mirror in a Short Story by Machado de Assis."[9] Beyond exploring intertextual connections – whether to Perrault's short story "Bluebeard" or to narratives that employed the motif of the Doppelgänger, going back at least to E. T. A. Hoffmann – Bosi outlines a solid sociological interpretation, relying above all on the concepts of "alienation," "reification" and "fetish." However, he then seeks to transcend this perspective through an existential reading, showing that the causticity of the narrator Jacobina, his distaste for dialogue and interaction with other people (the adjective "casmurro" used by Machado is said to derive from the Arabic *cadzur*, meaning "unsociable"), are indicators of an uneasy conscience that heralds a critique of the economic and social success achieved by the former lieutenant of the National Guard. From this perspective, the causticity of mature, capitalist Jacobina corresponds to the "harsh and bitter feeling" of the late author Brás Cubas:

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[8] This reflection that will be taken up again as an ideological analysis in the essay that closes the volume *Ideologia e Contraideologia*, focusing on the episode of "beautiful Marcela": "who speaks of the hare-brained young boy from 1822 and finds him immoral is the deceased author, who left life in 1869 – or, if we have not yet suppressed the author, it is Machado de Assis writing in 1880. *This considerable temporal distance has consequences for the book's ideological fabric*." (Segment "Marcela's jewels tied by three ideological threads," in the chapter "An Ideological Knot: On Interlaced Perspectives in Machado de Assis" [Um Nó Ideológico: Sobre o Enlace de Perspectivas em Machado de Assis.] *Ideologia e Contraideologia*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2010, p. 403).

[9] Alfredo Bosi. "O Duplo Espelho em um Conto de Machado de Assis." *Três Leituras – Machado, Drummond, Carpeaux*. São Paulo, Ed. 34, 2017, pp. 7-33.

> Note that, in addition to being "casmurro," Jacobina is, when speaking, caustic, that is, sarcastic. This acerbity, which cannot be concealed within the taciturn man, is the unfortunate remnant of an inner soul that survived the control of the gaze of others.

The intermediate essay focuses on Machado's most masterful short pieces, both those inspired by *faits divers* and those that deal with cultural ephemerides and national and international political events – "O Velho Senado" [The Old Senate] being one of the most accomplished examples. The study reconstructs how Machado saw the "political theater" staged by "human clay," maintaining a connection with the preceding essay, which also deals with understanding the intimate nexus between literary procedures – in special, a satirical style that hints at intense readings by Swift and Voltaire – and a broader "skeptical moralism."[10] It is fully consequential that such a critical approach fosters new material for presenting a Brazilian and universal Machado, one attentive to local stimuli, rooted in the here and now, yet reacting with responses elaborated by a refined conscience cultivated through interaction with great traditions of Western culture – responses, therefore, that "will have the complexity and depth of the individual who feels, thinks and elaborates them."

Bosi sees in the composition of Machado's short pieces and fictional narratives a "stylistic of distancing and attenuation," imposing once again the task of examining the perspective and tone that shaped them. One must dig into their deepest layers (and, in this endeavor, seek to transcend the direct relationship of the short pieces with the raw facts of political and social reality) to uncover elements that help illuminate Machado's complex intellectual and artistic physiognomy.

A somewhat surprising moment in the essay occurs when Bosi highlight's Machado's possible ideological limitations by drawing a sharp contrast with the ideas and praxis of his contemporaries, as in Raul Pompéia's *Crônicas Jacobinas* [Jacobin Chronicles] or the "liberal-

[10] When discussing Machado de Assis, the terms "moralism" and "moralist" (derived from the Latin *mores*, customs) should always be understood in the specific context of writers and philosophers who, avoiding ethical lessons or moralizing platitudes, endeavored to unravel and analyze the contradictions of human passions. The importance Bosi attributes to moralists in shaping the point of view of the chronicler and fictionist Machado de Assis can be seen in the comprehensive compilation presented in the chapter "Materiais para uma Genealogia do Olhar Machadiano" [Materials for a Genealogy of Machado's Gaze], in *O Enigma do Olhar* (São Paulo, Ática, 1999). The chapter opens with an observation by the comparativist Augusto Meyer, who places Machado in the same "race" as the moralists: "There he is, holed up in the pretext of his fiction, taking aim, lying in wait. To pierce beyond the superficial mask, gestures and words, uncovering the murky essence of man, his hidden center – there cannot be, for the 'great lascivious,' a more ardent lust."

progressive *pathos* that animates the lively pages of Joaquim Nabuco" or "the dramatic historical essays of Euclides da Cunha, an intelligence sensitive to the great fractures of race, class and culture that divided the Brazilian nation" or even the "tense protest, woven from love and hate, revolt and hope, that emanates from the abolitionist pages of Luís Gama, André Rebouças, José do Patrocínio or Cruz e Souza, indignant mulattos and blacks motivated by an ideal of a liberating future."

There is no Jacobinism, *pathos*, drama or overt protest in Machado's short pieces. A reader familiar with Bosi's analysis of some of them may emerge from this incursion with a feeling similar to that which infuses, for example, the reading Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or *A Modest Proposal* (1729), suggesting the slaughter and culinary use of poor Irish children. Machado explicitly alludes to Swift's satire in a short piece from December 1, 1895, in which he comments on the lurid cannibalism committed by an English teacher in a school in Guinea and draws parallels to instances of cannibalism in the backlands of the state of Minas Gerais). Here is an excerpt:

> It could be that the teacher wanted to explain to listeners what is cannibalism, scientifically speaking. So he took a little boy and ate him. The audience, not able to grasp the difference between scientific and vulgar cannibalism, asked for explanations. So the teacher ate another boy. The spirits of Guinea, unlikely to possess the refined comprehension of Aristotle, continued not understanding. So the teacher continued devouring more boys. In pedagogical terms, this is known as a "lesson of things."

Infused with feigned indifference (in essence, just a "lesson of things"), Machado's satire would certainly retain its potency if aimed at later forms of barbarism, and it is not difficult for 21st century readers to speculate how he might respond to daily news broadcasts. Facts often mock words, and in this sense one might rescale the earlier hypothesis of "ideological limits." As we well know, for satire everything is licit, even provoking laughter with the most shocking and horrifying truths. Deep shame, indignation and despair may be feelings hidden under the satirical surface, as Bosi points out in his comments on the December 1 short piece. However, most of the time it seems to be just skepticism or sheer pessimism that lurk behind Machado's humor, as he once confessed to Mário de Alencar having lost "all illusions about human clay."

Be as it may, the approach that unfolds in the essay "The Political Theater of Machado de Assis," closely following the surface and profound movements of these journalistic masterpieces, reveals a striking "vein of nonconformity" in the columnist's perspective that the reader might associate with the harsh and bitter aftertaste of Brás Cubas' recollections: in their shared negativity, both reveal themselves capable of unleashing the critical potential of a "counterideological dissolvent."

Closing the volume, Bosi somehow revisits one aspect discussed in the opening essay, thereby expanding the critical engagement with Raymundo Faoro's now classic work, *Machado de Assis: A Pirâmide e o Trapézio*, an exhaustive analysis of Machado's fictional universe through the lens of the political and economic life in the Second Empire. Bosi begins by highlighting the connections between this essay and another influential book by Faoro, *Os Donos do Poder*, with an entirely revised edition launched in 1975, just a year after the publication of *A Pirâmide e o Trapézio*. At the heart of Bosi's discussion of these two books by Faoro is the thesis of "two liberalisms" in nineteenth-century Brazil, which clashed openly in the 1870s and 1880s. This followed by a discussion of Faoro's rigorous Weber-inspired examination of Machado's work, with special emphasis on the moment when the sociologist seems to realize his method is insufficient to fully grasp the profoundness of Brazil's greatest novelist. It is at this moment that the hermeneutic perspective gains prominence, propelled by the realization that great literature is not merely a mirror, but also – or above all – a "reflection," a singular work of creative fantasy. An epistemological dualism lies at the heart of Faoro's argument, its richest implications unfolding in the last chapter of the book, titled "O Espelho e a Lâmpada."[11] In the conceptual imagery and dimension of Faoro's formulation, the "mirror" represents the mimetic operation, based on an aesthetics of representation. Complementing this is the "lamp," which, referring to narrative techniques, metaphorizes the "stylization of society" achieved by Machado in a dimension far beyond mere mirroring; in the context of critical analysis, the "lamp" signifies the "hermeneutic prospection" committed to tracing and illuminating the complex movements of subjectivity and narrative consciousness.

The pyramid (drawing of the vertical hierarchy of social classes) and the trapeze (depicting the horizontal structure of the estates); the mirror and the lamp; the frame and the

[11] Faoro takes these images from Meyer H. Abrams' book on English and German Romanticism: *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953); quoted in the 1972 Spanish edition *El Espejo e la Lampara* (Buenos Aires, Editorial Nova).

gaze; the explanations of exact sciences and the interpretive depth of human sciences: this study of Machado's work is not about polar oppositions, but about complementary perspectives. Bosi's discussion consistently strives to enrich the dialogue between sociology and hermeneutics, fostering an interaction that, as noted in the conclusion, "would not displease Raymundo Faoro's intellectual beacon, Weber, who throughout his works probed the intricate relations between the individual and society."

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As the reader will perceive by the end of *Brás Cubas in Three Versions*, the book's essays, although independent, are related to each other through countless communicating vessels that stem organically from Bosi's critical perspective. Thus, while the final study revisits and unfolds some aspects of the confrontation with the sociological perspective studied in the opening essay, it also retrospectively provides valuable material that reinforces the hypothesis regarding the importance of the hermeneutic approach in understanding of *Posthumous Memoirs* as a "a multilayered, multidetermined text" that arises from the dynamic interaction of formal, existential and mimetic vectors. This view of the great milestone in Machado's novel is reiterated, four years after the publication of *Brás Cubas in Three Versions*, in the aforementioned essay that closes the volume *Ideologia e Contraideologia*. In this essay, with great mastery, Bosi combines an analysis of intertwining temporalities in Brás' trajectory to identify the threads with which the deceased author wove an "ideological knot" that is ultimately inextricable to its interpreters.

To the complexity or, to borrow a term dear to Goethe, to the incommensurability of literary creation, there is no more fitting response than a ductile, multifaceted approach, rich in perspectives. Interpreting Machado's work through the lenses of Max Weber or Karl Marx (as Raymundo Faoro and Roberto Schwarz have done) proves to be extraordinarily effective, but it is no less fruitful to trace, in the formation of Machado's narrators, the marks of decisive influences on the novelist: the pessimists Leopardi and Schopenhauer;[12] Montaigne,

[12] Leopardi's thoughts and Schopenhauer's aphorisms form the last two sections of the aforementioned chapter "Materials for a Genealogy of Machado's Gaze" (Bosi, Alfredo. "Materiais para uma Genealogia do Olhar Machadiano." *O Enigma do Olhar*, (São Paulo, Ática, 1999). Schopenhauer's philosophy (particularly chapter 44 of *The World as Will and Representation*) permeates Machado's work and provides the substrate for one of his most harrowing short pieces, "O Autor de Si Mesmo" [The Author of Himself], published in June 16, 1895. He recounts the tragic case of little Abílio, who was locked up by his parents in a stable in Porto Alegre and left to endure a slow and agonizing death being pecked by chickens. In the child's last moments, Machado envisions it engaging in a discussion with Schopenhauer, who blames it all on the child's "anxiousness" to "come into this world" and causing its future parents to come together.

Pascal, La Rochefoucauld and other masters of psychological analysis who, as Nietzsche observes in *Human, All Too Human*, "are like skillful marksmen who again and again hit the bullseye – but it is the bullseye of human nature."

Hence the need, in the work of literary interpretation, of "patient excavations in the Subject and in History," as Bosi asserts in the final essay of *Céu, Inferno*, because only then can one face the challenge of "deciphering this interplay of opening and closing, so often mysterious, that the written word maintains with the unwritten." Therefore, the movement of drawing near to and retreating from the immediate effects of the text reveals itself as a quintessential hermeneutic operation, and at this point one might identify an affinity with the process of literary creation itself: not by chance, the essay "Brás Cubas in Three Versions" begins, as mentioned, by pointing to the "dual game of presence and distance" developed from the perspective of the deceased author. Thus, might one not see in this feature of the *Posthumous Memoirs* a manifestation of the paradox (discussed, among others, by Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory*) of the dual dialectical nature of the work of art – as a *fait social* rooted in society and, simultaneously, as independent and fully autonomous from it?

It can be said that Alfredo Bosi always strived to honor this conception of literature in his theoretical writings and, even more so, in his practice as an interpreter. This perspective would not be unfamiliar to the later Goethe, who observed in one of his *Maxims and Reflections*: "There is no way of more surely avoiding the world than by art, and it is by art that you form the surest link with it."[13]

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In a less macabre perspective (and with no mention to the philosopher from Danzig), this idea seems to resurface in Chapter VI of *Esau and Jacob*: "The implication is that, one way or another, what the embryo wants is to enter life. Caesar or John Doe, the whole thing is to live, to secure the succession, and go out of the world as late as possible." [Translated by Helen Caldwell]

[13] Translated by Elisabeth Stopp. It is sentence 737 in the numbering established by Max Hecker in 1907. Goethe included the same sentence in the "Diary of Otilia," the ethereal and despondent character in the novel *Elective Affinities* (Chapter 5 of the 2nd part).

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