

MACHADO, LIBERAL: A READING OF 'INSTINTO DE NACIONALIDADE'

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Abstract: This article proposes a reading of Machado de Assis's 1873 essay, "Instinto de nacionalidade", as a liberal and nationalist text, which anticipates Machado's own later narrative work. Using an economic metaphor, Machado proposes that literary independence be achieved through openness to foreign influences while preserving an "intimate sentiment" which makes the writer "a man of his time and country". We examine Machado's liberalism in the article in light of dominant theories about liberalism in the Second Brazilian Empire. Using different examples from Machado's novels, such as *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* and *Quincas Borba*, as well as selected short stories, the article proposes that the "intimate sentiment" is linked, in Machado's own literature, to his social critique.

Keywords: Machado de Assis, Liberalism, Nationalism, World Literature.

Machado de Assis's 1873 essay, "Notícia da atual literatura brasileira: Instinto de nacionalidade", has long been the source of debate among critics. Perhaps no other critical Machadian text has garnered more attention than "Instinto de nacionalidade", an essay whose opposing interpretations correspond to a broader debate on the essence of Machado's work: was he a national writer whose influences and impact are to be found exclusively in the sphere of Brazilian letters, or a cosmopolitan writer who took more from Shakespeare and Sterne than from his local contemporary and predecessors?¹

¹ Roberto Schwarz. "Leituras em competição". *Martinha versus Lucrecia: ensaios e entrevistas*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2012, pp. 13-14.

Different ideologies find their respective correspondent in a text that in accordance with Machado's oblique style, does not necessarily say what it first appears to say.

The importance of "Instinto de nacionalidade" lies in its complex argument, in its anticipation of much later texts dealing with national identity in Latin America such as Jorge Luis Borges's "El escritor argentino y la tradición",² in its relevance to Machado's own work, and in its rare status as a relatively translucent window to Machado's own thoughts and opinions, not filtered through his ubiquitous ironic gaze. Notably, "Instinto de nacionalidade" predates Machado's finest work by almost a decade – he wrote it after the publication of his first novel, *Ressurreição*, in 1872, some few good years before his 1880 turning point with *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*. Unlike earlier critical texts, the essay is the work of a mature thinker, largely free from overtly Romantic ideas. It is also a text that strongly resonates with Machado's later work, as I will show later in this paper.

The controversies regarding "Instinto de nacionalidade" have been fueled, beyond the critics' divergent perspectives and agendas, by the text's own ambiguities and subtleties. As Abel Barros Baptista shows in his book *A formação do nome*, the essay has been misread by critics as a mere patriotic-nationalistic text, without accounting for its many subtleties, reservations and contradictions, to reinforce Machado's growing status as a national writer, the founder of Brazilian letters.³ Even the essay's title has been read (or misread) by critics in radically different and contrasting ways. Baptista shows, for example, how Afrânio Coutinho used the terms *instinto de nacionalidade* and *espírito de nacionalidade* interchangeably,⁴ ignoring the specificities in Machado's use of "instinto".

While early critics understood "Instinto de nacionalidade" as a straight-forward celebration of literary nationalism, it is generally interpreted as a call for a more cosmopolitan literature, and as a reserved, cautious statement about national and nationalist culture. Yet "Instinto de nacionalidade" can be read as exactly both those things at the same time: an essay promoting cosmopolitanism in the service of a nationalist cause. It seeks to examine and clarify that which is truly (rather than falsely or superficially) national in Brazilian letters. By maintaining that Brazilian literature be more national, i.e. more independent, the more it opens itself to outside influences while staying true to that which is authentically national, Machado echoes a broader liberal ideology that was prevalent in his circles.

² John Gledson. "Introduction". in: Roberto Schwarz, *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2001, p. xvi.

³ Abel Barros Baptista. *A formação do nome: Duas interrogações sobre Machado de Assis*. Campinas, Editora Unicamp, 2003, p. 46.

⁴ Baptista, p. 47.

Building on this notion of Machado's liberalism as it is posited in "Instinto de nacionalidade", we shall place it in the broader context of his work.

Machado wrote "Instinto de nacionalidade" at the request of José Carlos Rodrigues, the editor of *O Novo Mundo*, a Portuguese-language journal printed in New York. Rodrigues was a liberal who fled Brazil to the United States in 1867 after having been (justly) accused of fraud.⁵ He founded *O Novo Mundo* in New York in 1870 as a liberal journal aimed at educating Brazilian readers about the United States.⁶ *O Novo Mundo* reflected its editor's liberal agenda, both socially (advocating for the abolition of slavery and democratic reform) and economically, focusing on trade. Another notable fact about Rodrigues was his conversion to Protestantism, already in São Paulo, under the influence of a North American missionary.⁷

On 22 September, 1872, Rodrigues asked Machado for "um bom estudo sobre o caráter geral da literatura brasileira contemporânea, criticando suas boas ou más tendências, no aspecto literário e moral".⁸ Though the study's original audience were presumably *O Novo Mundo*'s Brazilian readers, Rodrigues added that the study would be subsequently translated to English and published in New York. Machado finished writing the essay by December, and it was published in the following March issue of *O Novo Mundo*. Though he had already laid out his thoughts on national literature in other essays, it is remarkable that a commissioned journal essay for a non-professional audience has become his most profound meditation on the subject, has continued to serve as reference in Brazilian thought and criticism, and can be viewed more generally as a landmark text dealing with Latin American national literature in a postcolonial context.

"Instinto de nacionalidade" includes Machado's general ideas and opinions on national literature and the notion of literary independence, as well as a summary of the achievements and shortcomings of Brazilian letters, divided into categories of genre: novel, poetry, theater and language. The essay also underlines the crucial role of criticism in the development of national literature. Though "Instinto de nacionalidade" has been understood as the entire essay's subtitle and has pretty much substituted its original title ("Notícia da Atual Literatura Brasileira"), it should be noted that in the essay's original layout on *O Novo Mundo*, "Instinto de nacionalidade" appears in the same type as the

⁵ George C. A. Boehrer. "José Carlos Rodrigues and *O Novo Mundo*, 1870-1879". *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. 128.

⁶ Boehrer, p. 127.

⁷ Boehrer, p. 128.

⁸ Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis. *Correspondência de Machado de Assis, tomo II – 1870-1889*. Rio de Janeiro, Academia brasileira de letras, 2009, pp. 78-79.

rest of the essay's subsection.⁹ Thus, it is possible that "Instinto de nacionalidade" was only intended to be the title of the first section in the essay, the one containing Machado's most enduring ideas on national literature.

According to the argument elaborated by Machado in the essay, Brazilian literature is a collective, multi-generational effort carried forward by writers of different genres and by critics. Much like its political counterpart, the Brazilian literary project has a clear telos, namely, achieving literary independence. This achievement, unlike political independence, has not and will not be accomplished in a single day or by a single declaration: "Esta outra independência não tem Sete de Setembro nem campo de Ipiranga".¹⁰ It is rather an ongoing project, fueled by the writers' national instinct or their "general desire to create a more independent literature".¹¹

Machado's appropriation of political terminology to the literary field leaves some questions open: what is it exactly that makes a literature more national and, therefore, more independent? In what terms should we understand the opposite status of a dependent literature or culture? It is far easier for Machado to explain what is not essentially national. Opposing the Indianist trend in Brazilian letters followed by many of his contemporaries, as well as the romantic-nationalist notion of local color, Machado rejects the idea that indigenous culture is "the exclusive heritage of Brazilian literature", and maintains that "Brazilian civilization is not tied to the Indian element, and has not been influenced by it" (1178). That is, Machado argues that the most explicitly nationalist writers in Brazilian history, such as Gonçalves de Magalhães, failed to create what for him is fully formed national literature. Nevertheless, Machado does recognize some works of Indianist literature, produced both before and after 1822, as milestones in the development of national literature, and commends Basílio da Gama and Santa Rita Durão for "seeking around themselves the elements of a new poetry".¹² While Indianismo falls short of being a true expression of Brazil's national culture, Machado does not reject incorporating indigenous elements in Brazilian literature, since it is part of the Brazilian and universal legacy which should not be denied or ignored (indeed, Machado himself used indigenous themes in his poetry collection *Americanas*, published two years later). He then makes another reservation, holding that the "national spirit" does not reside exclusively in "works dealing

⁹ Machado de Assis. "Notícia da actual litteratura brasileira". *O Novo Mundo*, No. 30. New York, 24 March 1873, p 107.

¹⁰ Machado de Assis. "Notícia da atual literatura brasileira: Instinto de nacionalidade". *Obras completas, vol. III. 3ª edição*. São Paulo, Editora Nova Aguilar, 2015, p. 1177.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

with local themes”.¹³ Notably, “national” and “local” are not synonyms, and the national quality of literature does not necessarily reside in its (superficially) local features.

To make his point, Machado uses an economic metaphor: “Não há dúvida que uma literatura, sobretudo uma literatura nascente, deve principalmente alimentar-se dos assuntos que lhe oferece a sua região; mas não estabeleçamos doutrinas tão absolutas que a empobrecam”.¹⁴ Thus, literary independence requires that a country’s literature gain (literary) wealth. Being unable to produce enough wealth through its existing resources, Brazilian literature must import “foreign goods”, that is, outside influences and themes.

However, still holding onto the economic metaphor, not every form of importation or introduction of foreign corporations results in the enrichment of the country. Independence is to be achieved only if the author who incorporates foreign influences maintains something essentially national: “O que se deve exigir do escritor antes de tudo, é certo sentimento íntimo, que o torne homem do seu tempo e do seu país, ainda quando trate de assuntos remotos no tempo e no espaço.”¹⁵

The national instinct, thus, resides not in a superficial feature of literature but rather in an “intimate sentiment”, something much more profound. “Instinto de nacionalidade”, as a literary manifest, realizes that which it advocates for: Machado uses examples from other literatures – namely, North American, English and French, citing authors such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and William Shakespeare – to illustrate a argument about Brazilian literature: “e perguntarei mais se o *Hamlet*, o *Otelo*, o *Júlio César*, a *Julietta e Romen* têm alguma coisa com a história inglesa nem com o território britânico, e se, entretanto, Shakespeare não é, além de um gênio universal, um poeta essencialmente inglês.”¹⁶

The incorporation of foreign influences in national literature is therefore not an end in itself; it should rather be practiced in the service of a national goal. We can consider it a form of cultural importation, or rather, foreign investment, designed to increase the gross national literary product. This form of nationalism differs sharply from other 19th century expressions of cultural nationalism in Latin America. In his famous essay “Nuestra América”, Cuban nationalist intellectual José Martí maintains that local cultural and intellectual production should be based on creation rather than importation, even if the result might be inferior to foreign production: “Crear es la palabra de pase de

¹³ “Instinto de nacionalidade”, p. 1179.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

esta generación. El vino, de plátano; y si sale agrio, ¡es nuestro vino!”¹⁷ Machado, in turn, realizes that total self-sufficiency is an impossible nationalist fantasy.

Machado’s nationalism is perhaps more akin to that of the German Romantics, arguably the originators of modern nationalism. In the writings of thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder and Friedrich Schlegel, cosmopolitanism, openness to foreign cultures and nationalist ideas go hand in hand. For the German Romantics, cultural importation through translation was essential for the development and enrichment of their own literature and language. Herder maintained that

If someone were to translate Homer for us, the father of poetry – what a timeless contribution to German literature and an invaluable aid to writers of genius”; and that “A language before all translations is like a maiden who has not yet lain with a foreigner and borne a child of mixed blood: for the time being she is still pure and innocent, a true image of the character of her people. She is also poor, obstinate, and unruly; and as she is, so is the original and national language.”¹⁸

Schlegel went even further to claim that “Universality, cosmopolitanism is the truly distinctive German characteristic [...] It is, therefore, no mere sanguine optimism to suppose that the time is not distant when the German language will become the speaking voice of the civilized world.”¹⁹

Machado’s insistence of openness to outside influence is therefore not at odds but quite in line with romantic nationalism, though he is much more reluctant to speak of any innate genius the Brazilian spirit may or may not have. His view of literature as a national, collective project should also be seen in light with his ongoing effort at building institutions for national culture, including the Brazilian Academy of Letters which he co-founded in 1897. His cosmopolitan nationalism can be understood, rather, in line with the liberal agenda of Brazilian intelligentsia, as well as with the gradual opening of the Brazilian market to ever growing investments from foreign actors, especially from the 1850s and especially British, a fact which greatly impacted the modernization of the country.²⁰ Notably, the construction of railroads between the major ports and the heartland was, in part, the result of investments by foreign companies interested in profiting from the coffee production industry.²¹ Brazil’s independence from Portugal may be understood mainly as the opening of the economy to other markets, or as the transition from dependence on the Portugal to other international markets,

¹⁷ José Martí. “Nuestra América”. *Nuestra América*. Caracas, Fundación Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2005, p. 37.

¹⁸ Douglas Robinson. *Western Translation Theory: From Herodotus to Nietzsche*. London, Routledge, 2014, p. 208.

¹⁹ Robinson, p. 221.

²⁰ Richard Graham. *Britain and the Onset of Modernization in Brazil, 1850-1914*. 1968, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 25, 125.

²¹ Graham, p. 51.

above all the British. Machado's linking between literary independence (first from the Portuguese tradition) and international influence should be understood in this context.

Granted, defining Machado as a liberal is itself problematic. As Alfredo Bosi shows in his essay "A escravidão entre dois liberalismos", the history of liberalism in Brazil – understood in both economic and civil terms – has been closely tied to the interests of slaveholding elites. For them, liberalism was the defense of the right to produce, sell and buy; the right for political representation; the right to hold slaves; and the right to purchase lands.²² Thus, civil and economic rights enabled both independence from Portugal and the forced holding of enslaved people. Obviously, this idea cannot but appear contradictory, as it defends servitude in the name of freedom. Through this logic machinery, free trade and unfree labor were intricately tied.

Bosi's study of Brazilian 19th century liberalism in Brazil came in response to Roberto Schwarz's famous critique of Brazilian liberalism as a misplaced idea (or, literally, an "idea out of place"). While Bosi's analysis doesn't contradict Schwarz's argument about "a disparidade entre a sociedade brasileira, escravista, e as idéias do liberalismo europeu",²³ he contends that there were not one but two liberalisms – one pro-slavery, one abolitionist – and that Brazilian liberalism should be understood in its own history, rather than just through the European model. More than a merely superficial, exploitative appropriation of a foreign idea, liberalism played an important role in the elites' struggles against competing forces, e.g. the crown.

Whether we view liberalism as an idea out of place or as an original adaptation of an idea to local conditions, its contradictions in the Second Empire are undeniable. The liberal class is frequently and harshly scrutinized in Machado's work, a fact which is the basis for Schwarz's historical-literary analysis. In his major studies of Machado, Schwarz presents the novelist's development as a writer from his early novels until his artistic breakthrough with *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*. According to Schwarz, this process included both a growing and ever-more complex understanding of Brazilian society, and the honing of his artistic talents capable of translating his view of his society to novelistic form.²⁴ The question, then, is how to reconcile Machado's own liberalism with his critique of Brazilian liberalism?

²² Alfredo Bosi. "A Escravidão entre Dois Liberalismos". *Dialética da Colonização*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, pp. 199-200.

²³ Roberto Schwarz. *Ao Vencedor, As Batatas*. São Paulo, Duas Cidades e Editora 34, 2000, p. 12.

²⁴ Roberto Schwarz. *Um Mestre na Periferia do Capitalismo*. São Paulo, Duas Cidades e Editora 34, 2000, p. 30.

If “Instinto de nacionalidade” should be read as a manifest written by an artist, rather than merely a piece of criticism by a critic who happens to also be a writer – that is, assuming that Machado does not only makes his observations about what Brazilian literature should be but actually works to realize his vision – then we should look for answers to this question in his narrative work.

Arguably, through Roberto Schwarz’s critique, reading Machado as a critic of liberalism has been made far easier than reading him as a liberal. In many of his novels and short stories, Machado delivers his social critique by painting portraits of the members of the upper classes of Brazilian society, depicting them as morally abominable, often in an implicit and oblique way, without passing direct judgment. This also applies to characters representing the capitalist type in the Second Empire. In *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, Cotrim, Brás’s brother-in-law, is an importer constantly busy with prudent financial calculations; he is also a sadistic slave smuggler, whose brutality is a direct result of his business affairs. In Brás’s apologetic words, Cotrim

tinha inimigos, que chegavam a acusá-lo de bárbaro. O único fato alegado neste particular era o de mandar com frequência escravos ao calabouço, donde eles desciam a escorrer sangue; mas, além de que ele só mandava os perversos e os fujões, ocorre que, tendo longamente contrabandeado em escravos, habituara-se de certo modo ao trato um pouco mais duro que esse gênero de negócio requeria, e não se pode honestamente atribuir à índole original de um homem o que é puro efeito de relações sociais.²⁵

We find a similar, if somewhat less overtly brutal character in *Quincas Borba*. Palha, the husband of Rubião’s object of desire, Sofia, is a Rio businessman who drains the protagonist’s capital, bankrupting his friend while enriching himself. When he first appears in the novel, sitting opposite Rubião on the train from Vassouras to Rio, the topic of slavery is casually brought up in their conversation: “Da lavoura passaram ao gado, à escravatura e à política. Cristiano Palha maldisse o governo, que introduzira na fala do trono uma palavra relativa à propriedade servil”.²⁶

This offhand remark points to a correlation between liberal economic practices – investments, importing and exporting – and pro-slavery ideology. Both characters – Cotrim and Palha – are presented, respectively, as gratuitously brutal or opportunistic. Economic liberalism, in their cases, is a means for legitimizing sadistic violence and shameless selfishness as acceptable “social relations”.

Machado’s liberalism, defined as openness to world influences while adhering to the “instinto de nacionalidade” or to a “certo sentimento íntimo”, is a defining element in his work. His novels and

²⁵ Machado de Assis. *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras e Penguin, 2014, p. 297.

²⁶ Machado de Assis. *Quincas Borba*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras e Penguin, 2012, p. 74.

short stories abound with global influences: the influence of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Journey Around My Room* on *Memórias póstumas*, of *Othello* on *Dom Casmurro*, and of *Don Quixote* on *Quincas Borba*; countless allusions to the Bible, Greek and Roman antiquity, Dante, Shakespeare, Camões and French literature, as well as world history.

João Cezar Castro Rocha has used the term “emulation” to analyze Machado’s technique of applying different influences, models and references from other sources. What separates emulation from imitation is that the emulator seeks to overcome his source of influence by adding something of his own, thus modifying the source.²⁷ Being a man of his time and of his country, Machado’s addition to the source is the manifestation of his “sentimento íntimo”. Various critics writing on the appropriation of European culture in Brazilian cultural production, all of them influenced by Oswald de Andrade’s antropofagia,²⁸ view this process as the creation of difference vis-à-vis the source. This difference corresponds to Machado’s “sentimento íntimo”.

It is interesting is that all too often, the same characters portrayed negatively as hypocrites and cynics are those in whose mouths Machado inserts his world influences. Brás Cubas, for example, seems to be namedropping ad nauseam, using every possible source. This creates an effect of excess and superfluity. Not only does he flash his erudition shamelessly, but he goes as far as claiming to have overcome the classics or the Scriptures. Thus, in the beginning of the first chapter of *Memórias póstumas*, Brás compares his book to the Pentateuch and himself to Moses, calling himself superior, since in his case the death of the author comes right at the beginning of the work, while the Hebrew prophet waited until the end of Deuteronomy to recount his own death.²⁹

Brás throws around cultural references gratuitously, in a way that underlines his presumptuousness. He comes across as pompous and vain, not as a citizen of the world. But isn’t Machado, when he puts all those references in Brás’s mouth, also being pompous? Is he not also speaking? He is, but at the same time he ridicules his character for being pompous, in the same way that Don Quixote, as a parody, is at the same time a burlesque on chivalric romances and a chivalric romance.

²⁷ João Cezar Castro Rocha. *Machado de Assis: Por Uma Poética da Emulação*. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 2013, p. 107.

²⁸ These include: Roberto Schwarz. “Nacional por Subtração”. *Que Horas São?* São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1987; Silviano Santiago. “O Entre-Lugar do Discurso Latino-Americano”. *Uma Literatura nos Trópicos*. São Paulo, Editora Perspectiva, 1978; Haroldo de Campos. “Da Razão Antropofágica: Diálogo e Diferença na Cultura Brasileira”. *Metalinguagem & Outras Metas*. São Paulo, Editora Perspectiva, 1992.

²⁹ *Memórias póstumas*, p. 33.

Machado employs a similar strategy in his story “Aurora sem Dia”. The story was first published in 1870 and again in 1873 in the collection *Contos Fluminenses*, that is, around the time Machado wrote “Instinto de nacionalidade”. The main character, Luís Tinoco, is a young man who decides to become a poet. He does that not because of a certain artistic inspiration or talent, but because he is convinced that he is destined to great things and envies other people’s glory. As expected, his poetry is pompous and lacking in any talent:

Luís Tinoco confessava singelamente ao mundo que fora invadido do cepticismo byroniano, que tragara até às fezes a taça do infortúnio, e que para ele a vida tinha escrita na porta a inscrição dantesca. A inscrição era citada com as próprias palavras do poeta, sem que aliás Luís Tinoco o tivesse lido nunca. Ele respigava nas alheias produções uma coleção de alusões e nomes literários, com que fazia as despesas de sua erudição, e não lhe era preciso, por exemplo, ter lido Shakespeare para falar do *to be or not to be*, do balcão de Julieta e das torturas de Otelo.³⁰

Luís Tinoco and Brás Cubas are inauthentic men devoid of substance. Put in their mouths, world literary references lose their ability to nourish Brazilian literature, precisely because they lack the necessary “sentimento íntimo”. Machado, in turn, is licensed to use these pompous, flashy references because they serve his social critique of such types. Machado’s social critique is his “sentimento íntimo”, as it is aimed at Brazilian society, at the problems of his time and of his country. It is this ironic twist that makes Machado’s work both cosmopolitan-liberal and nationalist, while ridiculing liberal and nationalist types in Brazilian society.

One of Machado’s most fascinating meditations on art is his story “Um homem célebre” (1888). The protagonist, Pestana, wants to be recognized as a composer of classical music, an equal to the gallery of portraits that hang on his wall, including Mozart, Beethoven, Bach and Schumann; instead, all he can compose are polkas that are increasingly popular. They bring Pestana fame (as well as fortune), but not the type he wanted. He is a successful composer of popular dance music, not an admired composer of symphonic music. José Miguel Wisnik reads the story as a representation of the competition in Brazilian society between high, elite musical forms and low, popular dance music, as well as between European and local music. The polka, though imported from Central Europe to Rio ballrooms in the 1840s, would later be transformed into something else, much more local in nature. “[A] década de 1870 acusa já o processo de transformação da polca naquela outra coisa que se chamará maxixe, por obra dos deslocamentos rítmicos que acompanham a africanização abasileirada dessa

³⁰ Machado de Assis. “Aurora sem dia”. *Obra completa, Vol. II. 3ª edição*. São Paulo, Editora Nova Aguilar, 2015, p. 200.

dança europeia.”³¹ This is how Wisnik interprets the polka in “Um homem célebre”, as he goes on to compare Pestana to Ernesto Nazareth, the renowned 19th century choro and maxixe composer.³² Pestana is in fact a consummate national artist, whose music is the realization of the ideals set forth in “Instinto de nacionalidade” – it is local while absorbing world influences, remaining of its time and of its country. He even composes polkas based on current affairs, with matching titles. Comically, as he is about to die, he is asked to compose a polka for the occasion of the 1885 victory of the conservatives, he then composes another one, in case the liberals gain power.³³

To his tragedy, being a captive of his Eurocentric biases, Pestana cannot appreciate his own art and dies an ill, miserable man. “Um homem célebre” is a story about a Brazilian culture unable to appreciate its own genius as it tries to follow a foreign, prestigious model. Though Pestana and Luis Tinoco are two very different characters – the former a tragic genius, the latter an empty nitwit – but both end up frustrated by their inability to realize their ambitions.

Conclusion

Writing about “Instinto de nacionalidade”, Abel Barros Baptista poses a historiographic problem: being an essay written during Machado’s early, supposedly unremarkable phase when, according to Manuel Bandeira, his prose output equaled his poetry in its mediocrity, “será sempre preciso decidir se o ensaio se afirma no meio dessa reputada mediocridade por suas próprias forças ou se se destaca às costas do conjunto da obra romanesca machadiana”.³⁴ As I have tried to show in this paper, the essay’s value comes from its acute understanding of the problems of national literature and identity in a postcolonial moment, as well as from its applicability to Machado’s best literature. It is also a rare occasion where the voice of the mature Machado can be heard, not through the imitation of some unsavory character.

“Instinto de nacionalidade” presents a liberal Machado, applying an economic metaphor to the literary field. However, his liberalism is idiosyncratic: it takes influence from the romantics and from what Alfredo Bosi calls Brazil’s “first” liberalism – i.e. a nationalist, free-market liberalism – and leaves out the liberal-slaveholders’ hypocrisy, as well as the romantics’ excessive reliance on local color. Machado’s liberalism strives to achieve literary independence through the creation of a robust national

³¹ José Miguel Wisnik. “Machado Maxixe: O Caso Pestana”. *Sem receita: ensaios e canções*. São Paulo, Publifolha, 2004, p. 25.

³² Wisnik, p. 32.

³³ Machado de Assis. “Um homem célebre”. *Obra completa, Vol. II. 3ª edição*. São Paulo, Editora Nova Aguilar, 2015, p. 457.

³⁴ Baptista, p. 45.

literature. This, according to “Instinto de nacionalidade”, can be achieved through openness to foreign influences while maintaining the “sentimento íntimo”, which makes the literary work and its author intimately tied to its time and place. This model then proves generative for Machado’s own work, especially his later, highly admired novels and short stories. Thus, by reading his social critique as a manifestation of his “sentimento íntimo”, even Machado’s critique of liberalism can be seen as compatible with his own liberalism.

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