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ASPECTS OF PLOT STRUCTURE, NARRATION, THEME, AND CHARACTERIZATION  
IN MAJOR NOVELS OF MACHADO DE ASSIS

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

"Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, 1839-1908, a mulatto, was Brazil's greatest Prose Fiction writer." <sup>1</sup>

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis has long been considered the greatest prose fiction writer in all of Brazil's history. This view is not only held by Brazilian critics, but is the consensus of scholars all over the world. Machado de Assis was a mulatto born in 1839 in Livramento, in the province of Rio de Janeiro, to Francisco José de Assis and Maria Leopoldina Machado. Francisco José was the grandson of Brazilian slaves. Maria Leopoldina's family originally came from the Island of São Miguel in the Azores. <sup>2</sup>

Very little is known about Machado's childhood. Early critics believed that Francisco José was a poor house painter and Maria Leopoldina a simple laundress. Lúcia Miguel Pereira, in *Machado de Assis* (1936), Afrânio Coutinho, in *A Filosofia de Machado de Assis e outros Ensaio* (1940), and Agrippino Grieco, in *Machado de Assis* (1960), maintain that Machado's humble origins and childhood of poverty as well as his misfortune to be born a man of color explain both the pessimism and the greatness of his works. Yet one must keep in mind that, during Machado's lifetime, Brazilians somewhat obscurely defined race and color, as they do today, especially by comparison with North American attitudes. Although upward mobility was admittedly difficult for *gente de côr*, Machado was by no means unique in overcoming the difficulty.

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Some modern critics, sensitive to this issue, have painstakingly delved into his biography and found that earlier critics had used a great deal of artistic license. As Valentim Facioli summarizes:

O pai de Machado era assinante do célebre Almanaque Laemmert. De profissão, pintor decorador. Talvez Francisco José fosse um artesão ligado ao Livramento, pelo menos a partir do momento em que lá passou a residir, isto é após o casamento. A mãe do escritor não era lavadeira, como tantos biógrafos afirmaram; provavelmente executava funções compatíveis com sua formação, cultura e sexo: costura, bordado, trabalhos de agulha; talvez até um pouco de atividades de ensino.<sup>3</sup>

Machado's lifetime spanned an era of great transition in Brazil. João VI, acting as Regent for his ill mother, Maria I, had moved the Portuguese Court to Brazil in January, 1808, after Napoleon invaded Portugal in late 1807. João VI was welcomed with great enthusiasm when he arrived in the former colonial capital, Salvador da Bahia. Six years later, on December 16, 1815, Brazil was declared a kingdom of Portugal. Soon after, however, João returned to Portugal to reign as King when Maria I passed away.

King João VI left Brazil in 1821 in the hands of his son, Dom Pedro I, as Regent. Within his first year as Regent, hostilities between Brazil and Portugal grew intense, and by December of 1822, with the support of all Brazil, Dom Pedro I declared Brazil to be an independent empire, and himself Emperor. Although the struggle for independence created a strong bond of nationalism, Dom Pedro I was still, nevertheless, Portuguese, and he continued to represent a Portuguese influence, regardless of his genuine dedication to the new empire. He was faced with the task of centralizing a diverse, vast territory, a task which at times put him in direct opposition to the already established Brazilian elite. As monarch, Dom Pedro I made great trade and

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political concessions to Great Britain and Portugal which were unpopular with the majority of Brazilians. Later, in 1825, a war between Brazil and Argentina began over an old territorial dispute. After three years of fighting, both countries agreed to create a buffer territory, later recognized as the country of Uruguay. The great loss of Brazilian lives and the resulting financial disaster, without any victory to show for it, alienated Brazil from Dom Pedro I. In 1831, Dom Pedro I abdicated, leaving his son, Dom Pedro II, heir, on his eighteenth birthday. Born in Brazil, Dom Pedro II did not face the anti-Portuguese feelings his father dealt with, nor did he have the strong ties with Europe to defend. In 1840 began the reign of Dom Pedro II and the last era of imperial Brazil. The influence of Dom Pedro II on his country was a result of his habits of study, and his interest in books and serious matters, as opposed to the romantic ideals of his father. He was a strict moralist, and, along with his empress, Tereza Cristina Maria de Bourbon, encouraged a Victorian morality in the country. <sup>4</sup>

Machado was born in 1839, a year before Dom Pedro II would begin his reign. During the next fifty years, Brazil would have its first Brazilian ruler, and would then exhaust her dependency on a monarch. These and other momentous events provide the backdrop for Machado's novels. However, his characters remain apathetic toward them. Their apathy, in addition to contributing to his elusive perspective, has inclined critics to view him as pessimistic.

With the fall of Dom Pedro II in 1889 began the First Republic, signifying yet another dramatic change for all Brazilians. This time also marked a shift in literary movements. Machado's writing coincided with the beginning of the end of Brazilian Romanticism, which lasted roughly

from 1830 until 1870. Not surprisingly, this movement arrived in Brazil much later than it began in Europe. It was readily welcomed as it served to express the ideals and frustrations of a nation fascinated by its new independence, its variety of peoples, and its immense resources. Perhaps for this reason, it is closely associated with nationalism.

Romanticism saw the emergence of the Brazilian novel as a major genre and Machado's name is often associated with the movement, as a poet as well as a novelist:

Agrário Meneses (1834-1863) . . . , Pedro Luís (1830-1884), Bruno Seabra (1837-1876) . . . , Joaquim Serra (1838-1888). Other now forgotten poets who were popular during their lifetimes include Luís Guimarães Jr. (1845-1898; BAL: 1897), and the very late romantic Augusto de Lima (1859-1934; BAL: 1903). Machado de Assis should also be mentioned among the romantic poets. . . . Finally, despite their relative restraint in plot and rhetoric, the early novels of Machado de Assis, for example, *A mão e a luva* and *Helena*, can be considered romantic works. <sup>5</sup>

Roberto Schwarz also addresses the idea of Romanticism in Machado's works, but with a different result from that which was seen in earlier criticism. In his comparison of the Brazilian and European movements, he maintains that such qualities defined as Romantic in the first four novels constitute instead an original manifestation of Brazilian Realism. <sup>6</sup>

European Realism, which also came late to Brazil, lasted from about 1874 until 1905. It was during this same period that the Naturalist movement began. Due to coinciding dates and similar techniques, at times it becomes rather difficult to distinguish the two, and, in the mind of many Brazilians, they seem to form a single movement, *Realismo*. Occurring within these dates are Machado's major novels, and it is within one of these two movements that his works are most often classified. As Maria Tai

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Wolff states: "Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis is universally acknowledged as Brazil's major realist writer; nevertheless, the technical innovations that allow him to present his critical portrait of urban society also remove him from the mainstream of European Realism." <sup>7</sup>

Although other critics have classified Machado as a Realist, it is impossible to accept Wolff's statement that he is "universally" acknowledged as such. Many critics point to his Romantic qualities, while many more classify him as a Naturalist, including Alfredo Pujol, in *Machado de Assis* (1934), Engênio Gomes, in *As Influências Inglesas de Machado de Assis* (1939), and Eloy Pontes, in *A Vida Contraditória de Machado de Assis* (1939).

Yet another movement claiming Machado is Regionalism. This movement exists as somewhat more of a technique than an "ism," given the fact that Brazilians frequently use this term to refer to local color. Because of the constant themes of nationalism and self-identity, many Brazilian works are classified as such. When one examines the diverse geography of Brazil--the rich coastline, the avant garde Rio de Janeiro, the provincial northeast with its deteriorating economy, the dry hinterland of the *sertão*, the vast Amazon forest--one can easily see how the land itself encouraged writers to incorporate Regionalistic elements in their works. In this context Machado's novels provide great insight into the culture, customs, social classes, dress, political and social attitudes, and geography of turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro. His novels do not, however, respond to the Regionalist aesthetic as later articulated by, for example, Miéco Tati, Monteiro Lobato, or Mario de Andrade. <sup>8</sup>

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Having demonstrated that Machado did not belong to the Romantic school, many critics do indeed classify him a Realist. Yet he himself attacks both the Realist and Naturalist movements, particularly the latter:

It was with particular virulence that Machado de Assis attacked the naturalist movement which he referred to as *realismo*. In his view, the naturalist poetics could only reach perfection when they could tell us the exact number of threads in a handkerchief or scouring pad. His advice to young writers in Portugal and Brazil was not to be seduced by a doctrine which, despite its novelty, was already obsolete.<sup>9</sup>

These sentiments are visible in Machado's essays criticizing Eça de Queirós, whose first novel, *O crime do Padre Amaro*, was patterned after Zola's *La faute de l'Abbé Mouret*. Machado's criticism referred to the second novel of Eça de Queirós, *O Primo Basílio*, also patterned after Zola. In two published articles, he not only expressed severe disapproval of Eça's representation of *Realismo*, but also accused him of including scandalous love scenes which had no literary justification, simply to sell copies of his book.<sup>10</sup> Machado also accurately noted many flaws in Eça's attempts to follow the Naturalist formula, such as his use of a *deus ex machina* to end what he intended to be a Naturalist work.<sup>11</sup> By doing this, Machado demonstrated his knowledge of what constituted Naturalism, thus giving credibility to his statements denying that his own works were part of that movement. Other than his greatness, there seems to be little else that critics agree upon.

Machado de Assis wrote nine novels between 1872 and 1908. The first four--*Ressurreição* (1872), *A Mão e a Luva* (1874), *Helena* (1876), and *Iaiá Garcia* (1878)--have accurately been considered experimental. They do contain a number of the techniques for which Machado has become well

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known, but they do not demonstrate either the complex and unpredictable plots or the fully developed characters seen in the last five, commonly regarded as his major works--*Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1881); *Quincas Borba* (1891); *Dom Casmurro* (1899); *Esaú e Jacó* (1904); and *Memorial de Aires* (1908). Machado also incorporates passionate love existing outside of, but initially based on, the conventions of Romanticism. However, passionate love does not end in death and destruction, nor in happiness, but in boredom. Machado often uses his narrator as critic, creating a story within a story and a struggle between rationality and insanity. Within these Machadean diversities lie his characters. The main characters are more shallow and nondescript than the minor ones, who may make only one appearance, an arrangement which provides many possibilities for the irony that forms a constant in Machado's work.

Machado portrays bourgeois society in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro against a background of social and political upheaval, although specific major issues such as the abolition of slavery and the fall of the Empire receive only passing attention. In keeping with his detached attitude, political events and social changes are discussed from all points of view, and the truth seems to be of little or no consequence to the narrator.

Machado has taken techniques common to Romanticism and created a barely perceptible but entirely credible background for what seems to be a predictable storyline. However, expectations of a climax begin to disintegrate as the predictable outcomes slowly diverge from the background.

The following study will discuss plot structure, narration, themes and characterization within Machado's major novels. It is within these areas that the distinctive characteristics of his works can be seen. The ideas of impor-

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tant literary critics will be summarized and discussed. The study will conclude with an analysis of why Brazilians regard Machado as their greatest author, and consequently, where he belongs in the history of Latin American literature.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Maria Luisa Nunes, *The Craft of An Absolute Winner, Characterization and Narratology in the Novels of Machado de Assis* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> Valentim Facioli, "Várias histórias para um homen célebre," in *Machado de Assis*, ed. Alfredo Bosi (São Paulo: Câmara Brasileira do Livro, 1982), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Facioli, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> See E. Bradford Burns, *A History of Brazil* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 212-255.

<sup>5</sup> María Tai Wolff, "Romanticism," in *Dictionary of Brazilian Literature*, ed. Irwin Stern (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 297-298.

<sup>6</sup> See Roberto Schwartz, *Ao Vencedor as Batatas* (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> María Tai Wolff, "Realism," *Dictionary of Brazilian Literature*, p. 274.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of Regionalism, see Earl E. Fitz and Irwin Stern, "Regionalism," in *Dictionary of Brazilian Literature*, pp. 275-280.

<sup>9</sup> Nunes, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Assis, Machado de, "Eça de Queirós: O primo Basilio," *O Cruzeiro*, 16 e 30 abr. 1878.

<sup>11</sup> See Alexander Coleman, *Eça de Queirós and European Realism* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), pp. 102-33, 124-28.

<sup>12</sup> See Nunes, pp. 18-46.

## CHAPTER II

### *MEMORIAS POSTUMAS DE BRAS CUBAS*

Machado's first major novel was published in 1881. It begins with the death of the main character and then follows the highlights of his life as he narrates them from beyond the grave. From the very beginning of *Memórias*, the reader is reminded of Laurence Sterne. In his note to the reader, Machado's narrator points this out: "Trata-se, na verdade, de uma obra difusa, na qual eu, Brás Cubas, se adotei a forma livre de um Sterne ou de um Xavier de Maistre, não sei se lhe meti algumas rabugens de pesimismo. Pode ser." <sup>1</sup> Although the novel begins with the death of Brás, rather than his birth, the importance of opinions, rather than actions, comes from the influence of Sterne. These commonages can be seen in the first paragraph of *Tristram Shandy*:

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly considered how much depended upon what they were then doing;--that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;--and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost: --Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly,--I am very persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world from that in which the reader is likely to see me. <sup>2</sup>

As seen below, the beginnings differ, but Brás's hypothetical presentation of his death is reminiscent of Shandy's birth:

Algum tempo hesitei se devia abrir estas memórias pelo princípio ou pelo fim, isto é, se poria em primeiro lugar o meu

nascimento ou a minha morte. Suposto o uso vulgar seja começar pelo nascimento, duas considerações me levaram a adotar diferente método: a primeira é que eu não sou propriamente um autor defunto, mas um defunto autor, para quem a campa foi outro berço; a segunda é que o escrito ficaria assim mais galante e mais novo. Moisés, que também contou a sua morte, não a pôs no intróito, mas no cabo: diferença radical entre este livro e o Pentateuco. (p. 13)

Here one can see the similarities in style and the overabundance of irrelevant opinions. Helen Caldwell comments:

Like *Tristram Shandy*, *Braz* gives minute analyses not only of his own thoughts, but smells out the secret opinions, feelings, and ambitions of all the other characters as well. It is through these opinions and sentiments, rather than through their actions, that Assis's personages, like Sterne's, come alive, grow on our affections, and move our pity or laughter.<sup>3</sup>

It is also evident that Machado, like Sterne, would confuse the numbers of his chapters, at times adding nonsense, such as seen in Chapter CXXXIX, "De Como Não Fui Ministro D'Estado," which is only a page with a series of evenly spaced dots. The two differ, however, in Machado's iconoclasm, which should not be mistaken for political activism, but is rather, political criticism; the ideas behind the jesting at times reveal a cynicism worthy of modern day Kurt Vonnegut.<sup>4</sup>

Upon Brás's death, he is visited by a nondescript woman dressed in black. He then informs the reader that this same woman was the love of his life. The two main characters, Brás himself and Virgilia, are contextually the most ambiguous and apathetic characters in the novel. However, they indulge in an unexpected illicit affair, and, together, they recreate one another, becoming the two most passionate lovers in the best tradition of the Romantic movement. Ironically, their affair climaxes not with secrets stolen

or a dramatic public atonement, but, rather, with the realization by both partners that they bore each other. The anti-climactic boredom which ends Brás's affair with Virgilia demonstrates the failure not only of the relationship itself but, on a broader scale, the failure of Romantic conventions as a reliable norm for human behavior. Thus Machado questions the established values and mores of a society which had long not only read its Romanticism but also tried to live it.

In addition to containing many Romantic conventions, the story-line is reminiscent at times of the picaresque. In its plot structure, Helen Caldwell has compared *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* with the picaresque novels of Dickens, Sterne and Le Sage.<sup>5</sup> In her analysis she discusses the pattern of Le Sage's picaresque novels: a young boy, usually from an upper-class family, is introduced to less respectable members of society and involved in many shady activities. After some time, when the man reaches his mid-forties, he finds a young, innocent girl to marry. She then proves to be a very good wife and guides him toward being, once again, a respected member of society who will have at least two model children.

Caldwell suggests that Le Sage's *Gil Blas de Santillane* best compares to *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*. The two names *Brás* and *Blas* are interchangeable. In addition to this, Machado's novel is set up to follow initially the same pattern. Marcella introduces Brás to the less respectable circles, and he falls into the illicit affair with Virgilia. In his forties, Brás also meets a very young, innocent girl he plans to marry, Eulália. Yet before they can be married, Eulália dies, thus ending the comparison with the Le Sage plot.

As, in effect, it outlasts its anticipated Romantic or perhaps picaresque story, *Memórias* follows the ex-lovers' return to their normal, dull roles in society. In addition to being dull, the roles are negative. Virgilia continues as the "faithful" wife, although "faithful" to herself in the role of wife, not to her husband. Brás is determined to become famous for a medicinal plaster which he plans to invent and sell. He describes the plaster as something which will cure mankind's depression, although he regards the cure as incidental to the fame he would acquire as the inventor, thus revealing the selfishness of his motivations. Brás clears himself of any accusations of altruistic motives in chapter two:

Agora, porém, que estou cá do outro lado da vida, posso confessar tudo: o que me influiu principalmente foi o gosto de ver impressas nos jornais, mostradores, folhetos, esquinas, e enfim nas caixinhas do remédio, estas três palavras: *Emplasto Brás Cubas*. Para que negá-lo? Eu tinha a paixão do arruído, do cartaz, do foguete de lágrimas. Talvez os modestos me arguam esse defeito; fio, porém, que esse talento me hão de reconhecer os hábeis. (p. 14)

Brás's vanity, seen in this passage, constitutes a major source for his motivation, and Helen Caldwell has addressed it as follows:

Vanity begets ambition, which in Braz's world is what stokes the engine of human progress. Ambition, he shows us, promotes science (exemplified in his invention), politics and letters (to cite himself, Neves, and Luiz Dutra), and snobbery, or social distinction if preferred, like Bento Cubas's. Vanity is the very essence of sexual love and fidelity: it was in great measure responsible not only for Braz's love of Virgilia, but also for his faithfulness to her over so many years.<sup>6</sup>

Brás epitomizes vanity. As Caldwell points out, he continues his faithful relationship with Virgilia because of it. The love between them, manifested by vanity on both parts, quickly dissolves when it is no longer self-

gratifying. The moment he puts Virgilia behind him, Brás rationalizes his ambitions through his enthusiastic espousal of the bogus philosophy known as Humanitism. In this vein, and to maintain his constant self-gratification, as opposed to any feeling of loss, he treats himself to a special meal. Thus, he pushes Virgilia out of his mind, playing counterpoint to the refilling of his physical self with gourmet food. In the passage below he justifies this process, an example of how at the base of Humanitism lies nothing more profound than self-gratification:

Não a vi partir; mas à hora marcada senti alguma coisa que não era dor nem prazer, uma coisa mista, alívio e saudade, tudo misturado, em iguais doses. Não se irrite o leitor com esta confissão. Eu bem sei que, para titilar-lhe os nervos da fantasia, devia padecer um grande desespero, derramar algumas lágrimas, e não almoçar. Seria romanesco; mas não seria biográfico. A realidade pura é que eu almocei, como nos demais dias, acudindo ao coração com as lembranças da minha aventura, e ao estômago com os acepipes de M. Prudhon. . . . Jamais o engenho e a arte lhe foram tão propícios. Que requinte dos temperos! que ternura de carnes! que rebuscado de formas! Comia-se com a boca, com os olhos, com o nariz. (pp. 116-117)

Brás's justification of self-gratification is not something new, which appears simultaneously with Humanitism, but, rather, an old inclination with a new justification. In Chapter 20, Brás also went through this process of replacement, replacing Marcela with a Bachelor's Degree and expressing it as follows:

Um grande futuro! Enquanto esta palavra me batia no ouvido, devolvia eu os olhos, ao longe, no horizonte misterioso e vago. Uma idéia expelia outra, a ambição desmontava Marcela. Grande futuro? Talvez naturalista, literato, arqueólogo, banqueiro, político, ou até bispo,--bispo que fosse,--uma vez que fosse um cargo, uma preeminência, uma grande reputação, uma posição superior. A ambição, dado que fosse águia, quebrou nessa ocasião o ovo, e desmendo a pupila fulva e penetrante. Adeus, amores! adeus, Marcela! dias de delírio, jóias sem preço,

vida sem regime, adeus! Cá me vou às fadigas e à glória; deixovos com as calcinhas da primeira idade. (p. 41)

Brás's Bachelor's Degree clearly equates with ambition, while Marcela symbolizes failure, not only as Brás's first love, but also in a continuing fashion, as evidenced by her reappearance later on, visibly marked by illness and premature old age: "As bexigas tinham sido teríveis; os sinais, grandes e muitos, faziam saliências e encarnas, declives e aclives, e davam uma sensação de lixa grossa, enormemente grossa" (p. 57).

Upon seeing Brás again, Marcela's first instinct is to hide: "Vi-lhe um movimento como para esconder-se ou fugir; era o instinto da vaidade, que não durou mais de um instante. Marcela acomodou-se e sorriu" (p. 57). After talking with her, Brás evaluates the situation, measuring her present worth against all the sacrifices he regards himself as having made for her, or, at least, his investment in her. She fails to win the comparison, and, as he looks into her eyes, he concludes that she has no worth, only greed: ". . . os olhos me contavam que, já outrora, como hoje, ardia neles a flama da cobiça. Os meus é que não souberam ver-lha; eram olhos da primeira edição" (p. 58). Here ambition surfaces as vanity and greed, rather than Brás's self-gratification. As seen before, it leads to failure, which is not only said to exist, but also physically evident in Marcela's case. Moreover, in Marcela's situation, the failure seems in turn to demand another round of ambition, setting up a vicious circle, which ends only upon her death.

Brás receives his introduction to Humanitism from its founder, Quincas Borba, whose name appears as the title of the next novel and who, according to Brás, related the new philosophy to Brahmanism:

Explicou-me que, por um lado, o Humanitismo ligava-se ao Bramanismo a saber, na distribuição dos homens pelas diferentes partes do corpo de Humanitas; mas aquilo que na religião indiana tinha apenas uma estreita significação teológica e política, era no Humanitismo a grande lei do valor pessoal. (p. 118)

This comparison seems ridiculous, since the two systems share neither theology nor purpose. In their superficial similarity alone, the philosophy presented is perhaps more reminiscent of Taoism. Taoism, too, focuses on the self as the most important part of life, although it aims thereby to promote purity through the avoidance of conformity with an impure society: "The wise therefore rule by emptying hearts and stuffing bellies, by weakening ambitions and strengthening bones. If people lack knowledge and desire, then intellectuals will not try to interfere. If nothing is done, then all will be well." 7

Humanitism accepts full bellies, weak ambitions, strong bones, and non-interference by intellectuals, but it sees them as goals instead of methods to achieve purity. Purity has no part in Humanitism and selflessness quickly becomes the selfishness--abhorred by Taoism--by which Machado's characters live.

During this time period, however, Brazilian society concerned itself with three major European philosophies: the Enlightenment; Evolution, as articulated by Charles Darwin and as adapted to society by Herbert Spencer; and Positivism, *à la* Auguste Comte. 8 It has been noted before that Machado's Humanitism is without a doubt a parody of Comptean Positivism:

The superficial resemblances between Borba's philosophy and Comte's are numerous. For example, there is a similarity of terminology: "humanitas" and "humanité." Corresponding to Positivism's four stages, the theologic, metaphysical, abstract, and positive, there are four phases of Humanitism. They are not

the same as Comte's but a kind of pseudoscientific parody of them: the static, prior to all living things, the expansive, which is the beginning of things, the dispersive, which is the appearance of men; and finally the contractive, which is the reabsorption of men and things into humanitas. <sup>9</sup>

Progress, represented in all three European philosophies, is the central focus of Positivism. Longing for progress, Brazil accepted Positivism blindly, to a much greater degree than Europe. Machado, on the other hand, unable to accept it, used his novels to reduce it to the absurd. With this in mind, Humanism's chief proponent, Brás Cubas, accomplishes absolutely nothing at all, thus making a mockery of the Positivist motto, "Ordem e Progresso," to this day emblazoned across the Brazilian flag.

Perhaps Brás's failure can best be illustrated when he addresses the accomplishments of his life. The last chapter of *Memórias* is titled, "Das Negativas:"

Não alcancei a celebridade do emplastro, não fui ministro, não fui califa, não conheci o casamento. Verdade é que, ao lado dessas faltas, coube-me a boa fortuna de comprar o pão com o suor do meu rosto. Mais; não padeci a morte de Dona Plácida, nem a semidemência do Quincas Borba. Somadas umas coisas e outras, qualquer pessoa imaginará que não houve mingua nem sobra, e conseqüentemente que saí quite com a vida. E imaginará mal; porque ao chegar a este outro lado do mistério, achei-me com um pequeno saldo, que é a derradeira negativa deste capítulo de negativas: -- Não tive filhos, não transmiti a nenhuma criatura o legado da nossa miséria. (p. 144)

From this last chapter William L. Grossman took the inspiration for the title of his English translation of *Memórias* : *Epitaph of A Small Winner*. Finding himself at the end of his life, without surplus or deficit in the area of accomplishments, Brás concludes that at least he has not left behind any children to inherit the misery of human existence. This last scene seems to

be the only time that he takes a serious look at his own existence and the world around him. Within his introspective analysis, shades of nihilism present themselves, as Brás denies the value of success and rejects the normal aspirations of society. Like Turgenev's Bazarov, he reaches the end of his life without ever expecting rewards in terms of society's given values. Published in 1869, *Fathers and Sons* may have been a source for Machado. However, in regard to the amount of humor, and the fact that Brás expected some rewards for himself, such as self-gratification, the extreme pessimism kin to nihilism could better be interpreted in *Memórias* as an absurd representation of the rewards sought by the bourgeoisie of Rio, an iconoclastic view with a mordant, sarcastic twist. Brás's own self-admiration contradicts the nihilistic lack of concern for one's self.

To contrast with Brás and Virgilia, Machado provides a supply of minor characters who, if they do not carry the weight of the world on their shoulders, at least keep the society around them running. They occasionally stand for values lacking in the main characters. Although a few of them are depicted as negative, such as Marcela, with her greed, for the most part they portray the positive counterbalance in the real society around Brás and Virgilia. Dona Plácida supplies one useful example. She does participate in the love affair between Brás and Virgilia, as a go-between, and later acts as the owner of their hide-away, but she does so as a mother figure to Virgilia. She wants the very best for Virgilia, and does not want to believe that any wrong is being committed. Therefore, when Brás makes up a story about how the love-struck couple had been forbidden to marry, and describes how cruelly Virgilia was treated by her real husband, Dona Plácida accepts every word. She appears to the reader as a faithful, loyal person who has worked

hard all of her life, despite being ridiculed by Brás. He considers her entertaining to manipulate at first, and later dehumanizes her, summing up her life's worth only in terms of how she was of use to him:

Depois do almoço fui à casa de Dona Plácida; achei um molho de osos, envolto em molambos, estendido sobre um catre velho e nauseabundo; dei-lhe algum dinheiro. No dia seguinte fi-la transportar para a Misericórdia, onde ela morreu uma semana depois...se não fosse Dona Plácida, talvez os meus amores com Virgília tivessem sido interrompidos, ou imediatamente quebrados, em plena efervescência; tal foi, portanto, a utilidade da vida de Dona Plácida. (p. 135)

Eugênia is a character with a much smaller part than Dona Plácida, yet more important. Brás meets her upon his return from Europe. He is captured by her beauty, calling her "A flor da moita" (p. 51), and he compares her with a butterfly: ". . . e ela sorria, com os olhos fúlgidos, como se lá dentro do cérebro lhe estivesse a voar uma borboletinha de asas de ouro e olhos de diamante . . ." (p. 51). He compares Eugenia's brain, or essence, with the butterfly; he is not merely speaking of her fluttering eyelashes or sparkling eyes. This introduction is interrupted by the appearance of a real butterfly that is completely black on the veranda. The reader is informed that black butterflies are considered to be very bad luck, as Brás scoffs at the superstition and the fear shown by Eugênia's mother. In the very next chapter, Brás encounters another black butterfly, this time in his own home. His own scoffing stops, and he becomes slightly afraid himself as the butterfly wheels and dives, then lands on his forehead. He brushes it off and proceeds to kill it. Soon afterwards, Brás laments its death, asking nature why it had been born black, why it had such a special beauty. Why had it not been born blue? Blue butterflies, of course, stand for good luck.

In the next chapter, Brás realizes that Eugênia, whom he had called "the flower of the thicket," is lame. He laments also for her in the same way as he had for the black butterfly he killed earlier:

Também por que diabo não era ela azul? disse comigo . . . .  
Veio por ali fora, modesta e negra, espaiecendo as suas borbole-  
tices, sob a vasta cúpula de um céu azul, que é sempre azul, para  
todas as asas. (p. 52)

O pior é que era coxa. Uns olhos tão lúcidos, uma boca tão  
fresca, uma compostura tão senhoril; e coxa! Esse contraste faria  
suspeitar que a natureza é às vezes um imenso escárnio. Por que  
bonita, se coxa? por que coxa, se bonita? (p. 54)

Eugênia personifies the black butterfly. Not only is she allowed to enter Brás's life, as the black butterfly entered his home, but she is also allowed to give him her first kiss, much like the butterfly alighting on his forehead. Brás himself imagines that the butterfly regards him as the creator of all butterflies, and thus wants to kiss him in honor. He regards the kiss from Eugênia not only as her giving honor, but even as a debt from an honest debtor. Much like his treatment of the black butterfly, Brás in effect kills Eugênia with his rejection. Years later, Eugênia appears again in *Memórias*. Brás sees her in a state of extreme poverty. In the same fashion as he had watched the black butterfly die and be eaten by the ants, he does nothing, thinking to himself that she is still lame, just as the butterfly remained black.

One of the more controversial minor characters is Brás's childhood slave-playmate. When Brás tells of his childhood, he recounts episodes of abusing the slaves in his house. He once hit a slave over the head, making her bleed when she refused to let him sample the dessert she was preparing.

He then ruined the dessert and claimed she ruined it herself so that he could not taste it. The most graphic episode that he describes, however, is the tale of Prudêncio:

Prudêncio, um moleque de casa, era o meu cavalo de todos os dias; punha as mãos no chão, recibia um cordel nos queixos, à guisa de freio, eu trepava-lhe ao dorso, com uma varinha na mão, fustigava-o, dava mil voltas a um e outro lado, e ele obedecia--algumas vezes gemendo--mas obedecia sem dizer palavra, ou, quando muito, um --"ai, nhonhô!" --ao que eu retorquia: --"Cala a boca, besta!" (p. 26)

Prudêncio was given his freedom while Brás went to study in Europe. Many years later Brás encounters Prudêncio again, a free man who is whipping his own Negro slave. Brás is upset at first and asks him to stop. Prudêncio responds and kisses his hand, as if Brás is still his master. When Brás reflects upon the matter later, he sees it in a different light:

Era um modo que o Prudêncio tinha de se desfazer das pancadas recebidas, --transmitindo-as a outro. Eu, em criança, montava-o, punha-lhe um freio na boca, e desancava-o sem compaixão; ele gemia e sofria. Agora, porém, que era livre, dispunha de si mesmo, dos braços, das pernas, podia trabalhar, folgar, dormir, desagrilhoado da antiga condição, agora é que ele se desbancava: comprou um escravo, e ia-lhe pagando, com alto juro, as quantias que de mim recebera. Vejam as sutilezas do maroto! (p. 84)

Here Machado presents the phenomenon of the abused child reproducing the same horrifying events for his own children, a problem whose psychology alarms modern society. Brás callously finds Prudêncio's actions not only acceptable, but also somewhat humorous, once he understands why Prudêncio is behaving in this way. A psychological interpretation of Prudêncio's actions will suffice as a justification for Brás.

The very few, brief appearances by Prudêncio caused discontent among many critics and readers during Machado's time. Slavery was one of the most controversial issues in the mid to late 1800s. As the last nation in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery, Brazil was under pressure from the rest of the world. In 1850, Brazil's slave trade with Africa was brought to a halt. At that time, almost half of the population of Brazil consisted of slaves. The end of the slave trade came at a time when the demand for labor reached a new peak due to the expansion of the coffee plantations. Leaders were torn between the pressure from the rest of the world and the knowledge that the Brazilian economy would fail if the slaves were immediately freed. In 1864, the emperor brought forth the idea of freeing the children born to slaves within the years to come. Due to the conflict of interests, and the onset of the Paraguayan War, the question of slavery was not addressed until 1871, when the "Law of The Free Womb" was passed. Eighteen years later, following Cuba's decision of 1886, Brazil abolished slavery completely. <sup>10</sup>

In Machado's novels, the theme of slavery and its consequences seems of little importance. Slaves are at times treated well, at other times inhumanely. It would appear to be strange for a mulatto, the grandson of slaves, writing during the late nineteenth century, to be without opinions on the subject. Yet, at the same time, to hold strong opinions about anything would be a failure of Machado's technique. Schwarz addresses this idea as well:

Entretanto, é fato que estes livros não são a representação direta de nenhuma das grandes correntes ideológicas que agitavam o momento. Não são adeptos da filosofia determinista (nem positivistas, nem darwinistas, nem monistas etc.), não são abolicionistas (a abolição da escravatura é de 88), não são republicanos (a República é de 89), e não se curvam á escola literária

trionfante do Naturalismo. E o que é pior, tratam de todos estes assuntos--de uns mais, de outros menos--sempre com ironia. Uma distância que os contemporâneos notavam, para lamentar ou para achá-la insuportável, nunca para aprová-la, mas que estranhamente não os impediu de reconhecer a primazia ao escritor. Passados os anos, esta distância aparece como a expressão mesma de sua superioridade, da afinidade profunda de Machado com o processo brasileiro. <sup>11</sup>

Schwarz has underscored very well Machado's lack of attention to various subjects of immense importance for the given time period, and argues that early criticism failed to understand the writer or his point of view. Abolition was only one of the major changes taking place in Brazil and it is treated with the same apparent apathy as any other. This detachment from philosophies, ideas and events is a major characteristic of Machado's style.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, 11th ed. (São Paulo: Atica, 1985), p. 12. Further references to this work will appear parenthetically within the text.

<sup>2</sup> Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London, 1760-1767; rpt. New York: Airmont Publishing Co., 1967), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Caldwell, *Machado de Assis, The Brazilian Master and His Novels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> See Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions; or Goodbye Blue Monday!* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Caldwell, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> Caldwell, p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> [A Description of The Tao] (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), n.pag. See, e.g., Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, trans. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Burns, pp. 207-209.

<sup>9</sup> Caldwell, pp. 89-90.

<sup>10</sup> Burns, pp. 255-260.

<sup>11</sup> Roberto Schwarz, "Duas Notas Sobre Machado de Assis," in *Que Horas São?* (São Paulo: Companhia Das Letras, 1987), p. 178.

## CHAPTER III

### *QUINCAS BORBA*

*Quincas Borba* was published ten years after *Memórias*, in 1891. It begins where *Memórias* left off, retelling the final days of Quincas Borba. In *Memórias*, Borba appeared first as a begger, in a state beyond recognition as the former schoolmate of Brás Cubas. Borba evokes more disgust than pity from Brás, and, before they part, he steals Brás's watch. The character of Borba returns later as a very wealthy man who inherited a fortune from an aunt in Barbacena. He sends Brás a watch of equal value to the one he had stolen. A new friendship between the former schoolmates develops, and Borba enlightens Brás with the philosophy of Humanitism. Thus, a brief introduction to it as a philosophy that runs through *Quincas Borba*, begins in *Memórias*. It is somewhat vague there, and its vagueness enables Brás to accept it, adapting it--reshaping it where necessary--to his personal needs. Now in *Quincas Borba*, it turns markedly bizarre, no longer simply poking fun at the current whims of society, but becoming distorted. It no longer has any predictable or rational association, but, rather, resembles a type of insanity.

Insanity is not a new theme for Machado. The same year he introduced Quincas Borba in *Memórias*, in 1881, he wrote "O Alienista," a well-known short story dealing with insanity.<sup>1</sup> In it, he deals with a psychiatrist who declares that everyone in his town is insane. Once he realizes that he is the only person who is really sane, he concludes that for present-day society, insanity is the norm. *Quincas Borba*, published ten years later, employs the

same ideas as a leitmotif throughout the work, converting them into the backdrop the backdrop which functions as the society in which the novel takes place.

In plot, *Quincas Borba* differs considerably from *Memórias*. Even though it begins with the death of the main character, as did *Memórias*, the main character is notably insane, and cannot play a further role in the book. Thus the book picks up at the end of his life and follows that of his protégé, Rubião. To achieve this, the story is told by a third person, omniscient narrator. Previous critics have claimed that this shift places *Quincas Borba* with Machado's novels from his earlier writing stage, which were also third-person narratives, lacking the depth of the latter novels. However, the style does not seem to affect the depth of the novel. Rather, it allows the story to continue where *Memórias* ended, an impossible task for an insane narrator.

Although Quincas dies within the first few chapters, his spirit remains throughout the book, much like the spirit of Caesar in Shakespeare's tragedy.<sup>2</sup> Quincas' main goal in life was to be remembered after death for his great wisdom and profound philosophy. Yet he was aware that the bulk of the public would not be well-read and might not be able to comprehend his ideas. Thus, he named his dog Quincas Borba as well, in hopes that, when people who did not understand his philosophies saw the dog, they would be reminded of him. Therefore, he would have some immortality among the masses as well.

Quincas' ambitions to be famous failed. The more avidly he developed his philosophy, the more people were inclined to consider him insane. Likewise, at times it is difficult not only for the critic, but for the narrator as well, to determine whether the book was named for the philosopher or his dog:

"Mas, vendo a morte do cão narrada em capítulo especial, é provável que me perguntes se ele, se o seu defunto homônimo é que dá o título ao livro, e por que antes um que outro, --questão prenehe de questões, que nos levariam longe. . . ." <sup>3</sup> In a way, by naming his dog Quincas Borba, Quincas the philosopher has erased his own existence from the memories of many, who will instead recall the dog. <sup>4</sup>

Quincas finds his protégé, Rubião, when he returns to Barbecena from a long stay in Rio de Janeiro. Rubião is the brother of a widow with whom Quincas falls in love. Before they can marry, the widow dies, and soon after, Quincas develops a serious fever. The young schoolmaster, Rubião, closes his school to nurse Quincas back to health. While the rest of the town scoffs at Rubião for his association with the insane Quincas, Rubião sees him as eccentric and wise. Rubião also has a selfish motive, thinking he might inherit some of Quincas' money upon his death. Although the nursing is a success, and Quincas does recover, he dies soon after, on his next trip to Rio. Before he dies, Quincas imparts to Rubião the philosophy of Humanitism. Not being able to understand it, Rubião blames himself for being ignorant, but he memorizes Quincas' words, thinking that something very profound exists within them.

Not only does Quincas leave Rubião with his philosophy, but he also designates him as sole heir to a great fortune, including his houses, his money, and the dog, Quincas Borba. However, Rubião does not have the experience or the intelligence to manage his inheritance, and his decision to live in Quincas' home in Rio de Janeiro places him in a world too cosmopolitan for a provincial young man.

During his trip to Rio, Rubião encounters Cristiano Palha, who, upon hearing of Rubião's great inheritance, soon becomes his best friend and new business partner. It is here that Rubião meets Sofia, Palha's wife, and falls madly in love. Although the love affair could become as passionate and illicit as the affair between Brás and Virgília, in this novel it functions rather as a minor part of the central plot. The affair between Rubião and Sofia is one-sided, existing only in the mind of Rubião. His affections are never returned by Sofia, although she often gives him false hopes. Still, the emotions Rubião experiences could not be stronger, had the love indeed been consummated.

This love affair does not dominate the novel as did the love affair in *Memórias*. Rather, it is symbolic of the Machadean characteristic of inactivity, and instead, constitutes a complication for the bogus philosophy that runs through *Quincas Borba*. It is just one example of the chaos Rubião finds in Rio de Janeiro. The knowledge that Quincas had taught him does not help Rubião understand life in the cosmopolitan city. Instead, it makes him unsure of a world that does not fall into cut and dried patterns, and this self-doubt creates an internal struggle. The dichotomies of egotism and guilt, and ambition and failure, struggle within him. They drain his energy and leave him insane, and his insanity is his final inheritance.

The lectures Quincas gives Rubião before his death augment the philosophy of Humanitism that was presented in *Memórias*. The first lecture dealt with the death of Quincas' grandmother, who died after she was run over by a team of mules and a carriage, when she was leaving the Royal Chapel, walking toward her own litter. This would seem to be a tragedy, but for

Quincas it is an example of Humanitism at work, and as a consequence, neither good nor bad:

O dono da sege estava no adro, e tinha fome, muita fome, porque era tarde, e almoçara cedo e pouco. Dali pôde fazer sinal ao cocheiro; este fustigou as mulas para ir buscar o patrão. A sege no meio do caminho achou um obstáculo e derribou-o; esse obstáculo era minha avó. O primeiro ato dessa série de atos foi um movimento de conservação: Humanitas tinha fome. Se em vez de minha avó, fosse um rato ou um cão, é certo que minha avó não morreria, mas o fato era o mesmo; Humanitas precisa comer. Se em vez de um rato ou de um cão, fosse um poeta, Byron ou Gonçalves Dias, diferia o caso no sentido de dar matéria a muitos necrológios; mas o fundo subsistia. O universo ainda não parou por lhe faltarem alguns poemas mortos em flor na cabeça de um varão ilustre ou obscuro; mas Humanitas (isto importa, antes de tudo) Humanitas precisa comer. (p. 18)

When Rubião fails to understand how the death of Quincas' grandmother is not a tragedy, Quincas tries to give him another example of Humanitism. He tells of two famished tribes who both encounter one potato field. If the tribes were to split the potatoes, then they would all die, because there were not enough potatoes for all. Therefore, they must fight over the potatoes; one tribe will win and have enough potatoes. One tribe will live; one will die. He ends with the moral: "Ao vencido, ódio ou compaixão; ao vencedor, as batatas" (p. 19). Again Rubião fails to understand completely and worries about those who were exterminated. Quincas claims that they do not really exist, but that humanity is rather like bubbles in boiling water that come and go. Rubião then worries about the bubbles.

Caldwell points out that the story of Quincas' grandmother's death alludes directly to Darwin's theory of natural selection. Its gross interpretation sheds light on Machado's own views of Darwin's ideas, and further reaction to Spencer's "survival of the fittest." She also interprets Quincas'

second tale of the two starving tribes as a reference to Malthus' principle of population.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the second allusion is harder to see. Malthus' concerns were based on his theory that world-scale food supply grows only in linear proportions, while world population increases on a geometric scale. He concluded that the population would exceed the food supply, resulting in world catastrophe.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the allusions, Quincas' theory seemed more concerned with the idea of hunger or food than the situation at hand. Both examples deal with food. Quincas' grandmother dies because the owner of the carriage is hungry. Humanity must eat. The victorious tribe must get the potatoes. Humanitism revolves around the primal instinct for food. It seems that perhaps the narrator's interpretation of these current trends of thought is that selfishness is the key to survival. Rubião never understands what Quincas says. At one point, perhaps, he feels that potatoes are special, and at another, when he has proven to be Quincas' sole heir, he feels he has won the potatoes:

Tão simples! tão claro! Olhou para as calças de brim surrado e o rodaque cerzido, e notou que até há pouco fora, por assim dizer, um exterminado, uma bolha; mas que ora não, era um vencedor. Não havia dúvida; as batatas fizeram-se para a tribo que elimina a outra a fim de transpor a montanha e ir às batatas do outro lado. Justamente o seu caso. Ia descer de Barbacena para arrancar e comer as batatas da capital. Cumpria-lhe ser duro e implacável, era poderoso e forte. . . . Ideou as batatas em suas várias formas, classificou-as pelo sabor, pelo aspecto, pelo poder nutritivo, fartou-se antemão do banquete da vida. Era tempo de acabar com as raízes pobres e secas, que apenas enganavam o estômago, triste comida de longos anos; agora o farto, o sólido, o perpétuo, comer até morrer . . . . (pp. 28-29)

Although Rubião envisions himself as a victor in a battle, it seems that he still literally perceives potatoes as the spoils of war, which indeed may be

the very backbone of such a bogus philosophy. Upon the death of Quincas Borba, the pressure of trying to understand the meaning behind humanitism becomes less important to Rubião, and he will soon forget the lectures.

Like *Memórias*, the sequel contains a set of very shallow main characters. The third person narrator allows insight into their thoughts, unlike the story told by Brás. Yet they are not particularly reflective, and are just as inactive as the first group. One notable change, however, is the character of Rubião. Rubião is used as a vehicle for the story to continue after the death of Quincas Borba. He is indeed shallow and, more importantly, naive. While there is nothing bad about him, he simply lacks enough substance to exert either a positive or a negative force. He does exhibit a genuine fondness for the dog Quincas Borbas, perhaps the only creature in the book that represents love, trust, and loyalty. He also has a genuine obsession for Sofia. He has used his inheritance to put himself within a society full of people like Brás and Virgília. There he remains, unable to play the games he does not understand, used and abused by the other players. Therefore, while the main characters in *Memórias* abuse those around them, the main character in *Quincas Borba* is abused by those around him.

Sofia stands in direct contrast to Rubião. She is concerned with attaining power and prestige through her husband, whom she helps to achieve these same ends. She recognizes the fact that she is beautiful and young. She charms Rubião for her own benefit, interesting him in pursuing business projects with her husband. The narrator points out that her manipulation of others is not just for her husband's benefit, but also, in large part, for herself:

E aqui fazemos justiça à nossa dama . . . . Não a fazemos mais santa do que é, nem menos. Para as despesas da vaidade,

bastavam-lhe os olhos, que eram ridentes, inquietos, convidativos, e só convidativos: podemos compará-los à lanterna . . . [que] fazia parar toda a gente, tal era a lindeza da cor, e a originalidade dos emblemas; parava, olhava e andava. Para que escancarar as janelas? Escancarou-as, finalmente; mas a porta, se assim podemos chamar ao coração, essa estava trancada e retrancada. (p. 42)

Sofia is not interested in an affair with Rubião, for she does not see that one would benefit her. Her interest in Rubião stems from his giving her the public attention she longs for. She is aware that this simultaneously associates him with her husband in matters of business as well as pleasure.

Rubião is confronted with Sofia's charms within the first few months of their relationship, when he finds her returning his stare during a dinner. In his naivete, Rubião confronts Sofia alone in the garden with his feelings. Sofia retreats, her bluff called, and cannot enjoy his company again without annoyance. Rubião, however, sees her annoyance as a startled reaction to his romantic, poetic approach. Thus his obsession for her intensifies.

For Sofia, the mistake on his part is unforgivable, and she tells her husband, Palha, the very same night. Palha, who has indebted himself to Rubião by means of a large loan, reacts calmly to the news. He dismisses Rubião's actions, and blames Sofia for being so pretty. This constitutes a crucial breaking point in the relationship between Sofia and Palha, as Sofia is annoyed that her husband lacks the courage to confront Rubião.

The very next morning Sofia finds herself attracted to a young man passing by on horseback. It seems only fitting that Sofia falls in love with Carlos Maria, a person very much like herself, who will lead her on only for the purpose of public attention. Sofia seems truly broken when Carlos Maria marries her young cousin.

*Quincas Borba* ends with the death of Rubião in Barbecena. Upon his death he is raving mad, much like Quincas Borba, the philosopher. While Quincas Borba died believing that he was Santo Agostinho, swearing that ". . . a dor era uma ilusão, e que Pangloss não era tão tolo como o inculcou Voltaire . . ." (p. 24), Rubião dies believing he is a king, asking to have his crown taken care of. Quincas Borba, the dog, dies three days later after a desperate search for his master. The world remains as mad as it was before. Sofia remains beautiful and inviting, but unavailable. Carlos Maria remains the supreme narcissist. Dona Tonica, a forty-year-old spinster who is often seen in the company of Sofia, and who suffers by the comparison, finally finds a fiancé. Yet he dies before the wedding. As a result of Rubião's madness, he loses all his friends. The same ones who loved his riches, to the extent that they spent most of them, abandon him in his illness.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Machado de Assis, "O Alienista," 13th ed. (São Paulo: Editora Atica, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Caldwell, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Machado de Assis, *Quincas Borba*, 6th ed. (1969; rpt. São Paulo: Atica, 1985), p. 191. All further references to this work will appear parenthetically within the text.

<sup>4</sup> This same question can well be illustrated by the fact that *Philosopher or Dog?* was the name given to the English translation of *Quincas Borba* by Clotilde Wilson (1954).

<sup>5</sup> Caldwell, p. 130

<sup>6</sup> See David Victor Glass, *Introduction to Malthus* (New York: Wiley, 1953).

## CHAPTER IV

### *DOM CASMURRO*

The third major novel of Machado's second writing phase was published in 1899 or 1900. <sup>1</sup> *Dom Casmurro* is his best known and most popular work. It is more complex and perhaps more powerful than *Memórias* or *Quincas Borba*, as well as far more sober and distressing. While Rubião's insanity can be viewed as sad, it is somewhat comical as well. His provincial nature is humorous when he arrives in the manipulative high society of Rio de Janeiro. Yet the situation of the wealthy, well-educated Bento Santiago, the protagonist of *Dom Casmurro*, is far from comical.

Like Brás Cubas, Bento narrates his own story. However, he does so at fifty years of age, instead of after his death. He writes the story for two reasons: first, simply because he is bored; secondly, and more importantly, to connect the two ends of his life together. He first explains his nickname, Dom Casmurro. He defines "Casmurro" as "withdrawn, morose, quiet and bad-humored." Caldwell, however, has noted some other important definitions:

In Assis's day, they defined casmurro as "obstinate stubborn, wrong-headed." And this, perhaps is the more important definition for the understanding of the novel. Santiago did become casmurro by his definition, but he also had in his nature that "resistance to persuasion" found in Sophocles' tragic heroes. <sup>2</sup>

The "Dom," he declares, is used mockingly, to imply that he put on aristocratic airs.

He begins his story at the age of fifteen, when he feels the impact of his first love, a forbidden love since he is destined to become a priest, as his mother promised before his birth. His struggle is to find a way out of the situation. The greater part of the novel is dedicated to this struggle, and to his love for Capitu. Capitu is the girl who lives next door. She and Bento grow up as playmates, but when he reaches fifteen, he realizes his relationship with her has changed. She dominates his thoughts, and all his actions revolve around her. He thinks of her as the essence of beauty, kindness and goodness. He places her on a pedestal.

Capitu is beautiful, but she is also manipulative, always aiding Bento with his schemes. She endears herself to Bento's mother, Dona Glória, constantly telling her what a good priest he will become. She is deceitful, and, as Bento relates, she is a very good actress:

. . . mas se conto aqui, tais quais, os dois lances de há quarenta anos, é para mostrar que Capitu não se dominava só em presença da mãe; o pai não lhe meteu mais medo. No meio de uma situação que me atava a língua, usava da palavra com a maior ingenuidade deste mundo. A minha persuasão é que o coração não lhe batia mais nem menos.<sup>3</sup>

Bento goes to the seminary, but promises Capitu that he will not take orders, and that they will marry when he is through. His troubles seem to be over when his best friend Escobar suggests that his mother sponsor another young man for the priesthood instead. Even his mother is enthusiastic about this idea, especially since she knows that Bento does not have the call to become a priest.

Capitu and Bento marry soon after he completes law school. Capitu's childhood friend, Sancha, marries Escobar. The four friends live close

together and see each other often. Bento's increasing jealousy forshadowed tragedy, however. His jealousy was noted even in the earliest stages of their relationship. Although jealousy is common enough, it becomes a monster in Bento. Upon one of his first trips home from the seminary, he sees Capitu watch a man pass by on horseback and flies into a rage. He seals himself up in his room, refusing to see her for one whole day of his visit. His feelings toward her are not only those of hurt and anger, but they are vindictive and harmful as well:

Jurei não ir ver Capitu aquela tarde, nem nunca mais, e fazer-me padre de uma vez . . . . Capitu ria alto, falava alto, como se me avisasse; eu continuava surdo, a sós comigo e o meu desprezo. A vontade que me dava era cravar-lhe as unhas no pescoço, enterrá-las bem, até ver-lhe sair a vida com o sangue. (pp. 90-91)

Bento's jealousy continues after their marriage. In public he is aware of how men admire his beautiful wife, and he begins to dress her modestly. His actions are the opposite of Cristiano Palha, who dressed the lovely Sofia in the most provocative fashions he could find. The jealousy he feels brings about long periods of depression, increased by the desire to have a child, which they have attempted for five years. The child finally does come, a boy, and Bento's state of depression lifts. They name the child Ezequiel, after their friend, Ezequiel de Souza Escobar.

When Ezequiel reaches the age of five, the four friends discuss plans for a trip to Europe. In this important scene, Bento feels that Sancha is overly friendly towards him. He envisions a relationship with her and relishes the idea briefly. After they part, however, an overwhelming sense of guilt falls upon him. The very next morning they are informed that Escobar has drowned at sea.

During the funeral, Bento notices Capitu's grief, and suddenly he is convinced that Escobar was her lover. He begins to note that Ezequiel resembles Escobar, and decides he was his son. Bento sends Capitu and Ezequiel to Europe, after he contemplates suicide, or killing his wife and her child. Capitu dies in Europe after many years without contact, and Ezequiel returns as a young man to visit his father. Bento thinks that the young man looks exactly like the Escobar of his youth. The visit is short, and Ezequiel dies of typhoid fever on a scientific expedition a few months later. Bento is glad never to have to see him again.

If one takes the narrator at his word, the book assumes a very realistic ambiance, separation being a common ending for betrayal. Yet the narrator, following the same ambiguous style of Machado's previous works, also creates reasons for the reader to doubt his conclusion. Perhaps most important are his own misinterpretations. The night before Escobar drowns, Bento is thoroughly convinced that Sancha has inclinations to be unfaithful to her husband:

Não havia meio de esquecer inteiramente a mão de Sancha nem os olhos que trocamos. . . . O retrato de Escobar, que eu tinha ali, ao pé do de minha mãe, falou-me como se fosse a própria pessoa. Combati sinceramente os impulsos que trazia do Flamengo; refeitei a figura da mulher do meu amigo, e chamei-me desleal. (p. 131)

The very next day, however, Bento sees Sancha crying over the dead Escobar, and decides that he has misread her intentions, and that she was the most faithful of wives: "Tinha já comparado o gesto de Sancha na véspera e o desespero daquele dia; eram inconciliáveis. A viúva era realmente amantíssima. Assim se desvaneceu de todo a ilusão da minha vaidade" (p.

136). It is on this same occasion that Bento decides Capitu and Escobar were lovers, basing his decision on Capitu's mournful stares at the dead Escobar.

While Bento maintains that Ezequiel is beginning to resemble Escobar as evidence that indeed he must be Escobar's son, he also comments often about the odd way Ezequiel mimics others, their gestures and expressions, Bento and Capitu are speaking in the following dialogue:

--Sim, não sairá maricas, repliquei; eu só lhe descubro um defeitozinho, gosta de imitar os outros.

--Imitar como?

--Imitar os gestos, os modos, as atitudes; imita prima Justina, imita José Dias; já lhe achei até um jeito dos pés de Escobar e dos olhos. . . . (p. 124)

--Meu anjo, como é que eu ando na rua?

--Não, atalhou Capitu; já lhe vou tirando esse costume de imitar os outros.

--Mas tem muita graça; a mim, quando ele copia os meus gestos, parece-me que sou eu mesmo, pequenino. Outro dia chegou a fazer um gesto de D. Glória, tão bem que ela lhe deu um beijo em paga. Vamos, como é que eu ando?

--Não, Ezequiel, disse eu, mamãe não quer.

Eu mesmo achava feio tal sestro. Alguns dos gestos já lhe iam ficando mais repetidos, como o das mãos e pés de Escobar; ultimamente, até apanhara o modo de voltar da cabeça deste, quando falava, e o de deixá-la cair, quando ria. (p. 128)

In addition to the discussions over Ezequiel's bad habit, Bento also twice mentions talking with Sancha's father, before he married Capitu, when they looked at a portrait of Sancha's mother:

Gurgel, voltando-se para a parede da sala, onde pendia um retrato de moça, perguntou-me se Capitu era parecida com o retrato.

Um dos costumes da minha vida foi sempre concordar com a opinião provável do meu interlocutor, desde que a matéria não me agrava, aborrece ou impõe. Antes de examinar se efetivamente Capitu era parecida com o retrato, fui respondendo que

sim. Então ele disse que era o retrato da mulher dele, e que as pessoas que a conheceram diziam a mesma coisa. Também achava que as feições eram semelhantes, a testa principalmente e os olhos. Quanto ao gênio, era um; pareciam irmãos.

--Finalmente, até a amizade que ela tem a Sanchinha; a mãe não era mais amiga dela. . . . Na vida há dessas semelhanças assim esquisitas. (pp. 97-98)

Sancha's father's reflection about how sometimes uncanny resemblances occur between unrelated friends is not added by Bento for the sake of small talk, but, rather, to suggest a parallel resemblance. Instead, ironically, it suggests another coincidence. Capitu, the child, resembles Sancha's deceased mother. Ezequiel the child also resembles the deceased Escobar. If possible in Capitu's case, can it be possible in Ezequiel's? If many people find Ezequiel's mimicry so good that they see themselves in him, could not Bento see Escobar in Ezequiel if he were determined to do so? Many questions are raised, and yet the dilemma will never be solved. Indeed a new twist is added to the genre of betrayal.

Many critics have battled back and forth over the answer to "did Capitu, or did she not?" Helen Caldwell uses the term "betrayal" within quotation marks, and says:

It is he [Bento] who makes the choice between good and evil, and, although time hardens his cold heart, he cannot rid himself of twinges of guilt. That is why he tells his story. The interplay of natures is within him--his generous, loving nature fighting against and finally overcome by the strong powers of evil. Although these latter are within himself, he projects them upon others--especially upon Capitu; but, as he himself tells us, he carried "death on his own retina." <sup>4</sup>

Yet, the answer may not be of great importance. This point of view is taken in a recent book by Paul Dixon, who states:

What is important is not to choose sides in the debate but to acknowledge the existence of the dichotomy. Gradually, we are beginning to see Dom Casmurro and Machado's other works as plays between great opposing forces in which the truth lies not at one pole or the other but somewhere in the middle. <sup>5</sup>

Dixon's critique of Dom Casmurro contains many interesting ideas. Two of importance are his discussion of the theme of adultery and his discussion of plot with regard to the quest myth. Dixon notes that two of Machado's novels are listed in Tony Tanner's book, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression*. <sup>6</sup> In this work Tanner portrays adultery within some twenty works, including: *La nouvelle Héloïse*, by Rousseau; *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, by Goethe; *Madame Bovary*, by Flaubert; *Anna Karenina*, by Tolstoy; *Effi Briest* and *Unwiederbringlich*, by Fontane; *Le rouge et le noir*, by Stendahl; *La femme de trente ans*, *La muse du département*, *Gobseck*, and *La Duchesse de Langeais*, by Balzac; *The Scarlet Letter*, by Hawthorne; *The Awakening*, by Chopin; *The Age of Innocence*, by Wharton; *One of Our Conquerors*, by Meredith; *Orley Farm*, by Trollope; *Jude the Obscure*, by Hardy; *The Good Soldier*, by Ford; *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, by Lawrence; *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, and *Dom Casmurro*, by Machado de Assis.

Dixon states that *Dom Casmurro* differs from all of the others in Tanner's list:

Each of the twenty others is unequivocal about the basic facts. In a couple of cases adultery is only "adultery in one's heart," but it is always clear that there has been at least an emotional breach of proper loyalties. In all other cases it is somehow established that the physical act has taken place. This is, I think, rather remarkable because it is so far from the real life that many of these novelists were so intent on portraying. <sup>7</sup>

Machado's portrayal of the roles of men and women seems perhaps as advanced as his portrayal of the struggles existing within man's self. Dixon has at least implied that he treated adultery with greater realism than did the other authors on Tanner's list, including the Naturalists. If this is the case, then perhaps Machado's intense dislike of the movement had more to do with his opinion of its formulas than its actual point of view. Along these lines, Dixon also says:

Machado's novel may be seen as his final answer to Eça de Queirós, for it treats the theme of adultery, the same we find in *O primo Basílio*, in terms of human nature instead of circumstance. . . . In his earlier critique, Machado saw the difference between fortuitous, controlling circumstances and those that merely assist in bringing out the characters' passions. <sup>8</sup>

A second approach of interest in Dixon's treatment of *Dom Casmurro* is his comparison of the plot structure with the quest myth. Dixon's research on mythical structure is impressive; he quotes Joseph Campbell on basic plot structure: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men."<sup>9</sup> Dixon cites further:

A helper, often in the form of a wise old man or woman, gives the hero needed orientation as he embarks. His separation from society is generally marked by the crossing of some significant threshold. Once the separation is accomplished, the hero commonly faces severe tests which threaten his life, and at times he seems even to die. Even so, he eventually triumphs over his enemy, often with magical aid from another helper. He is occasionally rewarded with a sacred marriage to a supernatural goddess. . . . He commonly crosses another threshold as he returns to society. As he returns, he often has a renewed quality,

as if he had been resurrected, and frequently he transfers this revitalization to his community. 10

In Dixon's analysis, *Dom Casmurro* fits into the structure of the quest myth. Bento is the hero, and his call to adventure is represented by his love for Capitu. The act of separation literally takes place on a threshold, for he listens from behind the parlor door to his mother tell of her plans to send him away to the seminary. The seminary itself separates him both from his family and society. In keeping with the quest myth structure, the seminary represents one of the trials he must face, denying him the possibility of marriage with Capitu. Not only the seminary, but his mother's promise to God to make him a priest, represents another trial. He could pass through the seminary without taking orders, and still marry, thus having only a temporary separation. However, the promise made by his mother demands a permanent commitment. With Capitu herself, Bento faces all the normal problems and tribulations of a young couple in love, compounded by his own situation.

Upon entering the seminary, Bento experiences depression and finds himself in an unbearable situation. His salvation, as will be recalled, comes through meeting Escobar. It is not love for a woman that confronts Escobar, but, instead, a desire to be a businessman. Escobar can resolve his problem if he decides not to take orders for the priesthood. He does not reveal his own desire to leave the seminary until Bento tells him of his problems. Dixon points out that Escobar is a wizard with math, a talent which will assist him in his career as a businessman. Perhaps this mathematical ability also aids him in his role as the helper of the quest myth's unfolding.

Escobar finds the solution to Bento's problems, and thus saves him from becoming a priest. His suggestion that Bento's mother find another young man to sponsor at the seminary immediately gives Bento a way out, and allows peace for Dona Glória. With Escobar's help, he thus conquers the problem and returns to society. Dixon suggests that Capitu be seen as a "goddess," and that Bento's marriage to her be seen as his reward.

The story follows the structure of the quest myth without deviation until Bento's marriage with Capitu. In the same way *Memórias* follows the structure of the picaresque, or perhaps the "passionate love leading to death and destruction," but only up to a point. Dixon continues his quest myth comparison to explain the obvious deviation at the end of the book:

It is some time after his wedding that Bentinho experiences his second, ironic call to adventure. This time it is a call to suspicion, jealousy, and resentment instead of to love and hope. The beginning of this adventure, as with the first one, is signalled by the crossing of a threshold. Bentinho goes to the opera one night, leaving Capitu at home, and upon returning discovers Escobar "à porta do corredor" (at the front door). He crosses the threshold into a transformed, bitter world. Bentinho's voyage of discovery takes him deeper and deeper into the underworld, imaginary or real, of monstrosities, treachery, and nothingness. As before, Escobar assumes the role of the helper. This time, however, the role is played with irony, for Escobar urges him into a bottomless pit. Even after his death, Escobar's spectre spurs Bentinho to go deeper and deeper. This second, ironic adventure brings about Bentinho's separation from his wife and more generally from his entire society and even himself. . . . The book constitutes the final return phase of the protagonist/narrator's mythic cycle. Again, though, it is an ironic return--not the triumphant homecoming of a hero, but a regress that trumpets its own failure, proclaiming the impossibility of true return and the failure of its own efforts to achieve such a goal. <sup>11</sup>

Dixon's analysis of the second cycle is interesting, but improbable. The first cycle of the myth is well supported. There is a definite point in

time in which Bento recognizes that indeed he is in love with Capitu. At this same moment, he also realizes that he will be sent to the seminary:

La entrar na sala de visitas, quando ouvi proferir o meu nome e escondi-me atrás da porta. A casa era a da Rua de Mata-cavalos, o mês novembro . . . o ano era de 1857.

--D. Glória, a senhora persiste na idéia de meter o nosso Bentinho no seminário? E mais que tempo, e já agora pode haver uma dificuldade.

--Que dificuldade?

--Uma grande dificuldade.

Minha mãe quis saber o que era. José Dias, depois de alguns instantes de concentração, veio ver se havia alguém no corredor; não deu por mim, voltou e, abafando a voz, disse que a dificuldade estava na casa ao pé, a gente do Pádua.

--A gente do Pádua?

--Há algum tempo estou para lhe dizer isto, mas não me atrevia. Não me parece bonito que o nosso Bentinho ande metido nos cantos com a filha do Tartaruga [Pádua], e esta é a dificuldade, porque se eles pegam de namoro, a senhora terá muito que lutar para separá-los. (pp. 13-14)

Tudo isto me era agora apresentado pela boca de José Dias, que me denunciara a mim mesmo, e a quem eu perdoava tudo, o mal que dissera, o mal que fizera, e o que pudesse vir de um e de outro. Naquele instante, a eterna Verdade não valeria mais que ele, nem a eterna Bondade, nem as demais Virtudes eternas. Eu amava Capitu! Capitu amava-me! (p. 24)

As demonstrated above, Bento's love for Capitu and the trials he will have to face to succeed in his quest present themselves in an instant. As Dixon states, this instant can be seen as a call to adventure. However, the incident in which Bento finds Escobar at his door when he is supposedly at the opera does not seem to represent a life change, nor does it pass accompanied by jealous feelings. They meet at the door, Escobar saying he had come to discuss some business matters. They proceed to discuss the business matters, Escobar leaves, and Bento ends the evening by worrying about his mother. There are no jealous feelings, no days that will pass in agony; in short, no life-changing moment.

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The incident functions rather as a foreshadowing of things to come. In a similar way the portrait of Sancha's mother and Ezequiel's odd habit of mimicry foreshadowed the uncanny resemblance between Ezequiel and Escobar. Likewise, Bento's inability to poison the trusting dog (p. 124) foreshadowed his inability later to poison his own son (p. 143), who trustingly took from him the cup of coffee which would certainly kill him.

Dixon maintains that this moment is Bento's call to suspicion, jealousy, and hate. Yet, Bento's suspicions do not begin until Escobar's funeral. Jealousy has long been a part of Bento's relationship with Capitu, beginning before the two were married. Even if one were to view the funeral as the threshold instead, there is very little of the novel left. The only visible battle is a discussion between Capitu and Bento in which Bento accuses her of being Escobar's lover. She responds by laughing at him, accusing him of being jealous of dead men. She prepares for a separation, and thereafter, the story unfolds without much participation from any of the characters. There remains only a summary of where they went, when they died, and a vague, unemotional interpretation by Bento.

The conclusion of *Dom Casmurro* is best viewed, not as beginning a second quest myth, as Dixon suggests, but, rather, as a Machadean ending to such a myth, in that anticipated plot structure ends, yet the story does not. Its doing so follows the pattern established in his previous major works. One indisputable fact about Dixon's analysis of the latter part of the story, certainly, is that the final result is failure on Bento's part. However, even though Bento's is more macabre, the protagonist's failure, too, is part of the earlier pattern.

The strange combination of ambition and failure is also present in *Dom Casmurro*. Bento's ambition is not wealth or fame. In a sense it is not even having Capitu. It is, in fact, his own self-gratification, which was realized best by his relationship with Capitu. That relationship has more to do with his own interpretation of her purpose in his life. His jealousy occurs because the interpretation is not accurate, and in this sense, it constitutes selfishness. It is similar to the selfishness seen in Brás Cubas, Virgília, Quincas Borba, Sofia, and Palha. Selfishness also created the conflict of values within Rubião and drove him into insanity. Here the result transforms Bento into Dom Casmurro and costs him his family, his friends, his future; in effect, a life worth living. Nunes also treats Bento's jealousy as failure:

Jealousy is more an aspect of self-love than love for another and consequently the narrator's attempt at catharsis through the telling of his story reflects a great deal of guilt.

Lack of self-esteem or personal inadequacy are closely related to the experiencing of extreme jealousy. Thus Bento's admiration of Escobar's mathematical ability is the first sign of this. Bento's self-doubt increases when he is unable to sire a child like Escobar's and culminates in his recognition of his friend's superior masculinity. . . . The final step in the loving Bento's transformation to the destructive Casmurro is his projection of guilt over an adulterous impulse toward Sancha. For him, the pressure of Sancha's hand and his own was a moment of madness and sin. His subsequent attack of violent jealousy over Capitu's reaction to Escobar's death, the imagined resemblance of his child to his friend, the intention of suicide and murder, and the accusation of adultery with its consequent separation and destruction of his life all follow most logically from Bento's psychology. Bento's Jealousy may thus be viewed as another example of the monomanias afflicting many of Machado de Assis's characters. <sup>12</sup>

Nunes maintains that Bento's failure is a result of a selfishness, which grows to the point of monomania, an extreme preoccupation with one subject, himself. Selfishness, moreover, is a quality that has been seen to

appear in many of Machado's characters. His selfishness causes his failure, which in turn marks the end to the quest myth, simultaneously bringing into view Machado's original adaptation of that myth to his own view of human nature.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Paul Dixon mentions that there is evidence of *Dom Casmurro* in production as early as 1899, yet it was not made available to the public until 1900. See Paul B. Dixon, *Retired Dreams, Dom Casmurro, Myth and Modernity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Caldwell, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Machado de Assis, *Dom Casmurro*, 17th ed. (São Paulo: Atica, 1986), p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Caldwell, pp. 146-147.

<sup>5</sup> Dixon, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> See Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). The source of this reference came from Paul Dixon's work on Machado.

<sup>7</sup> Dixon, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Dixon, pp. 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: World, 1956), p. 30. Quoted within Dixon, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Dixon, pp. 26-27.

<sup>11</sup> Dixon, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Nunes, p. 103.

## CHAPTER V

### *ESAU E JACO*

Following Machado's best-known novel, *Dom Casmurro*, his least-known novel, *Esaú e Jacó*, was published three years later, in 1904. It differs from the preceding three in that it involves the reader in the political scene of turn of the century Rio. This involvement of the world outside the personal lives of the main characters is new for Machado and he presents the emancipation of the slaves, the fall of the Empire, and the birth of the Republic.

The book begins with a notice that its original title was *Ultimo* and that it was found in the study of Conselheiro Aires, upon his death, with the rest of his diaries. Aires functions as both the omniscient narrator and a main character. The character Aires exists in the third person; his thoughts and actions provide an interesting insight into Aires as narrator and allow the reader to understand the narrator's own views on certain events and actions that result from them. However, all this may help very little in understanding Brazilian history, since Aires' main characteristic is a fine appreciation of beautiful women. He is a retired diplomat, having served as counselor to the Emperor and worked in foreign relations overseas for many years. At the time in his life when he performs the role of character and narrator, he has also retired from the passions of society, although not society itself. At best, he is an ambiguous narrator concerning almost every subject. Roberto Schwarz calls him, "o narrador volúvel":

Isto é, o narrador que a todo momento está se desidentificando da posição que ocupava na frase anterior ou no epi-

sódio anterior. . . . E uma espécie de desidentificação permanente, que leva, sucessivamente, ao abandono de todas as posições ideológicas importantes do tempo, não só brasileiras como, digamos, da cultura ocidental disponível para um brasileiro culto. Para exemplificar esse processo: o narrador numa frase toma o acento bíblico, na frase seguinte o acento científico, na seguinte é um cronista mundano, depois é comerciante descarado e assim por diante. Temos, então, uma espécie de máscara retórica, em que vão sendo percorridas as posições ideológicas do tempo. . . . Este processo de desidentificação permanente é que é, na minha opinião, a chave do estilo do Machado de Assis, a chave do seu humor. <sup>1</sup>

The narrator plays with this detached style throughout the novel. Even Aires' flashbacks of earlier times with the diplomatic service keep in step with this formula. He thinks back to a time in Caracas, when he served as an attaché to the legation, and a lovely girl named Carmen:

Estava em casa, de palestra com uma atriz da moda, pessoa chistosa e garrida. De repente, ouviram um clamor grande, vozes tumultuosas, vibrantes, crescentes...

--Que rumor é este, Cármen? perguntou ele entre duas carícias.

--Não se assuste, amigo meu; é o governo que cai.

--Mas eu ouço aclamações...

--Então é o governo que sobe. Não se assuste. Amanhã é tempo de ir cumprimentá-lo. . . .

A ascensão de um governo, --de um regímen que fosse, -- com as suas idéias novas, os seus homens frescos, leis e aclamações, valia menos para ele que o riso da jovem comediante. <sup>2</sup>

Aires' apathy at the fall of the government of the country in which he was an attaché to the legation is both humorous and representative of the apathy he exhibits as character and narrator towards the fall of the Brazilian Empire, and the rise of the Republic, throughout the book. His position, as character, is that of friend to the Santos family. The Baron Santos and his wife both consider him a close friend. His friendship with Natividade, the Baroness, is somewhat unexpected, due to the previous male-female rela-

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tionships presented by Machado. Aires admits an attraction for Natividade that was not reciprocated at an earlier time. Instead, a trust and friendship developed. They are not lovers, yet he still considers her beautiful, and she still feels flattered by his inclinations of years past. They talk in great confidence, keep company together, and travel together. This type of platonic relationship does not exist in the previous three novels.

At Natividade's request, Aires functions as a mediator in the novel for her identical twin sons, who cannot make peace between themselves. They differ on political viewpoints: Pedro is very conservative and has strong ties to the Empire, while Paulo, on the other hand, helps with the revolution and the implementation of the new Republic. The narrator's detachment is most noticeable here, particularly in his apathy toward the political situation, and this is reflected in his story, as neither of the twins ever triumphs over the other. Paulo is called hot-headed and aggressive, but, in the same breath, Pedro is called deceitful. Aires as mediator does not stand up for either one. He listens to them, remaining ambiguous, or perhaps silent, on sensitive subjects which provoke differences, and leads them into discussions on topics of little importance, such as the performance last night at the theatre. One would think history itself, with the fall of Pedro's Empire and the triumph of Paulo's Republic, would suggest a preference between the two. However, the sides remain ambiguous, as Pedro becomes less conservative, and accepts the Republic, whereas Paulo becomes dissatisfied with the new government for not living up to the radical changes it promised in the beginning.

The story begins with Natividade and her sister Perpétua climbing the Morro do Castelo [Mount of the Castle] to seek the predictions of the

*cabocla*, an Indian woman who could foretell the future. Natividade is curious about the future of her twin sons, who are infants at the time. Caldwell notes the historical importance of the Morro:

The Morro do Castello is here a monument of Brazil's past, a symbol of the history of Brazil's capital. There was no real city until the first Portuguese settlement removed to this rock. It was from there that the Portuguese drove the French from the bay in 1581. It was on this hill that Father Manuel de Nóbrega founded the great Jesuit college in the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The *cabocla* tells Natividade that her sons will turn out to be great men, but that since they fought in her womb they will continue to fight as men. Natividade, happy with the prediction, hopes that she will live long enough to see them as great men and that she can prevent them from fighting. She remembers having a difficult pregnancy and decides that the twins indeed must have been fighting inside her. On the way down from seeing the *cabocla*, Natividade becomes so excited about the destiny of her sons that she gives a large bank note to an alms collector for the church. He has never seen such a large donation, and he pockets the note.

The boys grow quickly, fighting through their youth. To add to their confrontations, they both fall in love with the same girl, Flora. Pedro goes to medical school in Rio, and Paulo goes to law school in São Paulo. Both the men spend all of their free time with Flora. She, likewise, longs to spend her time with them. Even after they have completed their degrees, neither can tear himself away to begin his career. Taking Aires' advice, they form a pact which allows Flora to choose between them, with the loser to accept the decision. Flora, however, cannot choose. She sees one twin within the other and cannot envision being without them both.

Thus Flora decides to leave them both and moves into the house of Aires' sister, Rita, to escape the situation. Two new suitors arrive, one a poet, the other a new millionaire who is none other than the alms collector who had stolen Natividade's note many years before. The first never gains the courage to speak with Flora and she rejects the latter. Then she becomes very ill. At the beginning of her delirium, she sees the twins as one person. When they ask to be allowed to see her, she can not understand how there could be two of them. She dies soon after.

The twins make a second pact upon Flora's death, this time to be united and live as friends. For a short while the pact holds but their natures are too strong and they grow apart again. Later they are both elected as Deputies to the Legislature and they battle against one another over legal matters. Not long after they take office, Natividade dies. On her death bed she unites their hands together and makes them swear to be friends. They agree, but she dies unhappily, not having seen them become great men.

Again they try to make peace. For a time they arrive at the office together, vote together, and work for the same causes. Soon it occurs to them that they can do some things apart, vote differently, and still remain friends. They begin to drift apart, then to fight again. The book ends with someone asking Aires what he thought the twins were fighting over. Aires concludes by saying they fought in their mother's womb, and such things are destined to be.

The story has no predictable plot line and it seems to leave off at an unexpected point, as if it had gone on too long. Unlike Machado's previous works, in which many characters simply allude to other literary characters, *Esau e Jacó* is full of specific references to great characters and famous

works. The novel begins with the line: "Dico, che quando l'anima mal nata..." which is identified as coming from Dante's *Inferno*. This translates as "I say that when the ignobly born soul..." and speaks of men who have great talent and ability to accomplish difficult tasks, but who have been predestined by God never to complete them. Pedro and Paulo have been associated with destiny since Natividade's visit to the cabocla, yet at the end of the book, they still have not fulfilled their destiny to become great men.

Caldwell points out a second allusion to Dante, when Natividade and Perpétua climb the mountain:

First a playful allusion to Dante's mountain of repentance (which, appropriately, was located in the Southern Hemisphere): the ladies climbed up the steep, stony path "as if it were penance." Contrary to Dante's mountain, however, where the ascent became easier the higher one went, here it was "better coming down than going up."<sup>4</sup>

A third reference to Dante follows in chapter CXIII: "Flora, se visse os gestos de ambos, é provável que descesse do céu, e buscasse maneira de os ouvir perpetuamente, uma Beatriz para dois. Mas não viu ou não lhe pareceu bem descer. Talvez não achasse necessidade de tornar cá, para servir de madrinha a um duelo que deixara em meio" (p. 147). Here Flora becomes Beatriz, above in heaven, although there happen to be two seekers instead of only one.

There are many Biblical references as well. The title itself, *Esaú e Jacó*, refers to the twins in the Bible who fought over their birthright. The apostles Peter and Paul also had significant disagreements. Santos' friend, Plácido, calls his attention to the Bible to explain the prophecy of the *cabocla*:

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O doutor foi à estante e tirou uma Bíblia, encadernada em couro, com grandes fechos de metal. Abriu a Epístola de S. Paulo *aos Gálatas*, e leu a passagem de capítulo 2, versículo 11, em que o apóstolo conta que, indo a Antioquia, onde estava S. Pedro "resistiu-lhe na cara." (p. 31)

Other Biblical allusions are scattered throughout the work: "Eis aí vinha a realidade do sonho de dez anos, uma criatura tirada da coxa de Abraão, como diziam aqueles bons judeus, que a gente queimou mais tarde" (pp. 18-19). Also, chapter XLVII is titled: "S. Mateus, IV, 1-10" The Bible verses themselves tell of Christ's temptation by Satan, after fasting forty days and nights in the desert. In much the same way, Flora's mother tries to convince Flora's father to change political parties.

The narrator playfully associates the *cabocla* with the ancient Greek oracle: "'Relê *Esquilo*, [considered the creator of the Greek tragedy] meu amigo, relê as *Eumêndides* [the three furies], la verás a *Pítia* [priestess of Apollo's temple], chamando os que iam à consulta: "Se há aqui Helenos, venham, aproximem-se, segundo o uso, na ordem marcada pela sorte" (p. 11). Machado's references to works of Voltaire (p. 104), Goethe (p. 112), Musset (p. 130), and Shakespeare (pp. 71, 143) are sprinkled throughout the work. These seem to be neon signs for the reader to indicate there is an overall allegory: Brazil. It is a political allegory in which the historical events of the late 1800s occur within the microcosm Machado creates. He uses the allusions involving momentous themes and events in much the same way he used Positivism and other European philosophies in his previous works. In a Machadean fashion, the great prophecies, classical literary heroes, and biblical parallels mock the Brazilian society which could

play an important part in the political changes seen in *Esau e Jacó*, but does not do so.

The novel spans thirty-eight years, beginning with Santos' arrival in Rio in 1855. The narrator supplies dates throughout the novel: Santos marries Natividade in 1857, she tells Santos she is pregnant on the way home from João de Mello's funeral in 1869, the twins are born on April 7, 1870. The dates continue until 1893. The characters within the novel form a microcosm of Brazil, participating in the historical events that happen within these dates, each providing a different perspective and representing a different part of the society.

The fighting between the twins is best seen as the disharmony between conservative and liberal factions of the Brazilian government. The boys develop strong political sentiments at early ages and express them often:

Naquele ano, uma noite de agosto, como estivessem algumas pessoas na casa de Botafogo, sucedeu que uma delas, não sei se homen ou mulher, perguntou aos dois irmãos que idade tinham.

Paulo repondeu:

--Nasci no aniversário do dia em que Pedro I caiu do trono.

E Pedro:

--Nasci no aniversário do dia em que Sua Majestade [Pedro II] subiu ao trono.

As repostas foram simultâneas, não sucessivas, tanto que a pessoa pediu-lhes que falasse cada um por sua vez. A mãe explicou:

--Nasceram no dia 7 de Abril de 1870. (pp. 39-40)

Here one can see their differing viewpoints. As they grew older, not only did they maintain the will to oppose one another, but they also set roots in opposite ideologies. One day when passing a store of paintings they both bought portraits for their room: "Pararam alguns instantes, olhando à toa. Logo depois, Pedro viu pendurado um retrato de Luís XVI, entrou e

comprou-o por oitocentos réis; . . . Paulo quis ter igual fortuna, adequada às suas opiniões, e descobriu um Robespierre" (p. 41). Thus, while Pedro's sympathies lay with the beheaded King of France, whose actions were direct causes for the French Revolution, Paulo's sympathies lay with Robespierre, one of the most radical of the revolutionaries, who also was later overthrown and beheaded. The two portraits represented the twins's hatred for one another, expressed through their evolving political perspectives, and depicted in the two portraits. Like Luís XVI, Pedro would become too conservative; like Robespierre, Paulo would become too radical.

The year 1888 brought the emancipation of the slaves in Brazil. The Law of the Free Womb appears much earlier in the book when the twins were little boys. Santos, the boy's father, represents an economic point of view in the issue: "Ia pensando nela e nos negócios da praça, nos meninos e na Lei Rio Branco [free birth law], então discutida na Câmara dos Deputados; o banco era credor da lavoura" (p. 24). While Santos' main concerns with the ideology of slavery seem to be of an economic nature, the twins agree in part on the justice of the act, yet each for different causes:

Não esqueça dizer que, em 1888, uma questão grave e gravíssima os fez concordar também, ainda que por diversa razão. A data explica o fato: foi a emancipação dos escravos. Estavam então longe um do outro, mas a opinião uniu-os.

A diferença única entre eles dizia respeito à significação da reforma, que para Pedro era um ato de justiça, e para Paulo era o início da revolução. Ele mesmo o disse, concluindo um discurso em S. Paulo, no dia 20 de maio: "A abolição é a aurora da liberdade; esperemos o sol, emancipado o preto, resta emancipar o branco." (p. 55)

The opinions of the twins become louder and louder. They argue and tear apart the portraits of Luís XVI and Robespierre, foreshadowing the

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revolution to come in Brazil. Their careers are also instructive. Pedro the doctor aims to cure the physical condition of man, while Paulo the lawyer promotes justice and change from any undesirable condition. Although their methods differ in every way, their final goal is one and the same. Both strive for a perfected Brazil, Pedro by way of amending the old, Paulo by implementing the new. Flora symbolizes this ambition. The narrator and Aires the character associate Flora with perfection throughout the book. When he meets Flora, she seems mysterious to him. He explains: "Tudo está, porém, na definição que dermos a esta palavra. Talvez não haja nenhuma certa. Suponhamos uma criatura para quem não exista perfeição na terra, e julgue que a mais bela alma não passa de um ponto de vista; se não muda com o ponto de vista, a perfeição. . ." (p. 49). Flora represents beauty and eternity. The beauty of perfection is contrasted with decay of reality when the narrator describes her in the home of D. Rita: "A mocidade de Flora na casa de Dona Rita foi como uma rosa nascida ao pé de paredão velho. O paredão remoçou. A simples flor, ainda que pálida, alegrou o barro gretado e as pedras despidas" (p. 133).

Like the flower her name suggests, Flora is fragile: "poderia compará-la a um vaso quebradiço ou à flor de uma só manhã" (p. 49). Just as the ideal does not exist, neither can Flora. Her untimely death, before either of the twins can win her hand, symbolizes the fruitless search for Utopia. Also, the fact that she never preferred one twin over the other indicates that neither solution to problems was adequate; no single conservative or radical position would work perfectly in Brazil. Her desire to unite the warring factions explains the love she divides between the twins.

Natividade symbolizes Brazil of the time. The powerful love the twins exhibit for their mother symbolizes love of their country. She is the womb of ideas. She sympathizes with them and loves them. She cries when they fight to change her. She is beautiful, and although Aires as both character and narrator is enchanted with her, he also finds fault with her. Referring to Aires' affection for her, Caldwell sums up many of her bad traits:

Although he was charmed by Natividade in particular, he does not conceal from us that she was vain, passionate, selfish, snobbish, unreasonable, and somewhat mean to start with. Motherhood and time gradually changed her. As Ayres phrased it, she rounded the Cape of Storms with only a torn sail or two, quickly mended them, and calmly pursued the route to India.<sup>5</sup>

Natividade dies without seeing her sons become great men, as the old Brazil falls without witnessing a change for the better. The perfection that Flora represented, and, in effect, died with her, cannot be realized by the Republic, which soon falls as well; history repeats itself. Brazil does not die, however. Its factions continue. The twins are elected to serve in the government. Because of their promise to their mother, at times they work together and agree. Yet, as two different ideas, they will be forced to disagree in the future, at times violently. Hope, or aspiration for a perfected state, will also continue, as demonstrated in the book's last paragraph when Aires is asked if he thinks the twins were fighting over their mother's inheritance: "Aires sabia que não era a herança, mas não quis repetir que eles eram os mesmos, desde o útero. Preferiu aceitar a hipótese, para evitar debate, e saiu apalpando a botoeira, onde viçava a mesma flor eterna" (p. 155).

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Although the novel's ending is certainly negative, the pessimistic message is muted by the ironic humor when Aires is asked to summarize what truly happened between the twins, or, in effect, Brazil's political situation itself. His apolitical, apathetic, nature remains in full character as he agrees with explanations he knows are not true. The irony is carried even farther as Aires points to the flower in his buttonhole; it has long outlived the hope it symbolizes.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Roberto Schwarz, "Mesa-redonda," in *Machado de Assis*, ed. Alfredo Bosi (São Paulo: Câmara Brasileira do Livro, 1982), p. 316.

<sup>2</sup> Machado de Assis, *Esau e Jacó*, 2nd ed. (1904; rpt. São Paulo: Atica, 1985), p. 60. All further references to this work will appear parenthetically within the text.

<sup>3</sup> Caldwell, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Caldwell, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Caldwell, p. 169.

## CHAPTER VI

### *MEMORIAL DE AIRES*

*Memorial de Aires* was Machado's last novel, published in 1908, a few months before he died. It functions as a sequel to *Esaú e Jacó* in the same way as *Quincas Borba* follows *Memórias*. It does not pick up where *Esaú e Jacó* left off, nor does it mention any of the characters from the previous book, with the exception of Aires himself and his sister Rita. However, *Memorial* is mentioned frequently in *Esaú e Jacó*, as the manuscript found along with the novel and as the diary that Aires kept. It is in the form of a diary, having entries by dates instead of conventional chapters. It spans a year and a half, beginning with: "9 de janeiro" [1888], and ends with an undated entry, following: "30 de agosto" [1889].

*Memorial* contains three distinct themes. One is the political context, paralleling the historical content in *Esaú e Jacó* but this time reduced to the issue of emancipation. The second and primary theme is the life of an older couple and their "adopted" children. The third theme emerges from the second: a change in Aires himself. The Aires of *Memorial* is the retired diplomat of *Esaú e Jacó*, who has not only left the diplomatic service, but also withdrawn from emotional involvement with society as well; he now passes his life as a bystander.

In *Esaú e Jacó*, the narrator provided an array of characters, all passionately determined to achieve their goals. Their fervor was so strong that Aires' often humorous detachment seemed rational by comparison. In *Memorial*, however, his apathy is out of place. He is surrounded by charac-

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ters whom he considers completely good-hearted. They are in direct contrast with the characters of the earlier novel. Aguiar is a banker whose main interests lie with his family, particularly his wife. He is kind, fair in business, and, unlike previous bankers, not consumed by greed. His wife, Dona Carmo, is the perfection that all other women characters fail to reach in Machado's novels. Machado publicly stated that he based her character on his own wife, Carolina. She is tender and kind and devoted to her husband. She does works of charity out of the goodness of her heart rather than to be in society's spotlight. Her preoccupations focus on her family and things that exist outside of it are not important to her. The marriage is flawed only by a lack of children, as was Machado's own marriage.

Aguiar and Dona Carmo make up for their childlessness by taking two young people into their lives to become, in effect, their step children. The first is Tristão, their godson. Aires tells of a closeness the couple shared with the boy in his youth. The mutual affection was so great that Dona Carmo became a second mother to the boy and at times fulfilled that role with more success than his true mother. Tristão's family traveled to Europe for a six-month vacation during his first year of Law School. There they made the decision to stay, and Tristão, enchanted with Portugal, entered the Lisbon School of Medicine and changed his career. This decision devastated Aguiar and Dona Carmo. Tristão's correspondence grew more and more infrequent with time and distance, leaving a hole in their lives. Tristão reenters their lives as an adult years later, during the time that Aires writes his journal.

Their second adopted child is a young widow, Fidélia. Aires is informed by his sister Rita that the girl has been a widow for more than two

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years and that she still is in mourning. Fidélia's marriage had been very brief. She had married the son of her father's enemy. Without a blessing from either side, their marriage isolated them completely. Even after her husband's untimely death, she remained unreconciled with her father. Since her mother was also dead, she literally had no one. When Aguiar and Dona Carmo took her into their family, she gave them all of the love they would have received had she been their own daughter.

Tristão's return coincides with the death of Fidélia's real father. She tends to him in his illness and they are reconciled at his deathbed. When she returns to Aguiar and Dona Carmo, she brings back a sense of peace and is ready to start her life again. The two young people are united through the older couple, and within a year a romance begins. His family in Europe is happy for them and, with their blessing, they marry. All would appear to be happy, but Tristão has a career waiting in Portugal. He is informed that he will be elected a deputy to the legislature and he returns to Europe, taking Fidélia. They leave on the pretense of meeting his parents. The general assumption is that after spending a year in Portugal they will return. However, with Tristão's impending political appointment, the young couple know as they leave that they will not return. Aguiar and Dona Carmo are left behind, only to find out the young man's plans by way of a letter sent from Europe. They feel they have truly lost both of their children and their lives are empty.

As in *Esaú e Jacó*, Aires functions as a friend of the family. He is often a dinner guest and thus able to watch the story unfold. In *Memorial*, his detached attitude no longer seems humorous, but, rather sad, in comparison to the strong love and devotion the other characters exhibit. This

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point becomes abundantly clear through his allusion to his reading Shelley. When he meets Fidélia at dinner at the Aguiar's home, he finds her attractive and dedicates a long paragraph in his journal to her beauty, then in a reflection, he states:

Eu, depois de alguns instantes de exame, eis o que pensei da pessoa. Não pensei logo em prosa, mas em verso, e um verso justamente de Shelley, que refera dias antes, em casa, como lá ficou dito atrás, e tirado de uma das suas estâncias de 1821:

*I can give not what men call love.*

Assim disse comigo em inglês, mas logo depois repeti em prosa nossa a confissão do poeta, com um fecho da minha composição: "Eu não posso dar o que os homens chamam amor... e é pena!"<sup>1</sup>

Aires here calls attention to the fact that he himself does not have the ability to love. Although his reflection does not seem to dampen his mood, he does note it is a pity. He had seen Fidélia before, in the cemetery, praying at her husband's grave. At that time, Rita gave him a history of the widow and claimed that she would never remarry. Aires scoffed at this idea, thinking her beautiful, and this fact alone would insure that she remarried one day. In reply, Rita dared him to court her and ask for her hand. It was in this same frame of mind that he saw Fidélia in the home of Aguiar. Focusing on her physical beauty, he felt it a pity he was not up to the dare.

On Aires's entry for "6 de fevereiro, à noite" (p. 28) is a full history of Fidélia, told in detail by Rita. Aires does not admit being moved by the account but does admit that the widow is stubborn. The following entry, "11 de fevereiro" (p. 31), is also dedicated to Fidélia. In this short entry he questions where her name came from. He had never heard of a woman with such a name, "fidelity." Later he writes four entries for the month of March, two

of which speak of her. In the first entry for April, he tells of her father falling ill and the hardship she faces due to her bad relations with him. Again, the thought of a love relationship with her is tempting:

Ora, pergunto eu, valia a pena ter brigado com o pai, em troca de um marido que mal começou a lição do amor, logo se aposentou na morte? Certo que não. Se eu propusesse concluir-lhe o curso, o pai faria as pazes com ela; ai! era preciso não haver esquecido o que aprendi, mas esqueci, --tudo. I can not, etc. (Shelley). (p. 33)

However, his thoughts about her begin to change. Three days later, he sees Dona Carmo and Fidélia together walking near the church. He stops to speak with them and once he has taken his leave, he cannot overcome the urge to look back over his shoulder. He does not find what he expects, perhaps a returned stare, or at least the figure he had described earlier as follows: "Parece feita ao torno, sem que este vocábulo dê nenhuma idéia de rigidez; ao contrário, é flexível. Quero aludir somente à correção das linhas, --falo das linhas vistas; as restantes adivinham-se e juram-se" (p. 20). Instead, he sees the two ladies together and notes the powerful friendship they share: ". . . vi as duas damas, com os braços cingidos à cintura uma da outra, vagarosas e visivelmente queridas" (p. 33). Aires begins to see the person within Fidélia, not simply her beauty. He migrates from a physical attraction to respect. He finally reaches an admiration which results in true platonic love, not only for Fidélia, but for Dona Carmo, Aguiar, and Tristão as well. The change in attitude is not only seen by the reader but is perceived by Aires himself as well. When Fidélia has returned to Rio, after her father's death, Aires writes:

Fidélia chegou, Tristão e a madrinha chegaram, tudo chegou; eu mesmo cheguei a mim mesmo, --por outras palavras,

estou reconciliado com as minhas cãs. Os olhos que pus na viúva Noronha [Fidélia] foram de admiração pura, sem a mínima intenção de outra espécie, como nos primeiros dias deste ano. Verdade é que já então citava eu o verso de Shelley, mas uma coisa é citar versos, outra é crer neles. (pp. 60-61)

Aires' diary becomes full of the sadness caused by Fidélia's absence as she leaves to take care of her father. His sentiments are interrupted by the political concerns that become paramount in 1888. First come uncertain rumors, and then the government truly begins to emancipate the slaves. Aires refers to the fact that Brazil is the last country to have slaves and thinks the measure is overdue. On May 13, 1888, his diary states that the law has been passed: "Enfim, lei. Nunca fui, nem o cargo me consentia ser propagandista da abolição, mas confesso que senti grande prazer quando soube da votação final do Senado e da sanção da Regente" (p. 36).

Later, when Fidélia's father has died, she decides to give her plantation to the slaves who had worked it for so many years. Aires' reflections on her decision are not from an economic or moral viewpoint, but rather from a modern social one:

Aplaudi a mudança do plano, e aliás o novo me parece bem. Se eles não têm de ir viver na roça, e não precisam do valor da fazenda; melhor é dá-la aos libertos. Poderão estes fazer a obra comum e corresponder ê boa vontade da sinhá-moça? E outra questão, mas não se me dá de a ver ou não resolvida; há muito outra coisa neste mundo mais interessante. (p. 121)

It is during this time period that the Aguiars receive Tristão's letter which tells of his travel plans to Brazil. With characteristic ironic humor, Aires compares his letter with the emancipation of the slaves.

Emancipation of the slaves is still welcome, although long overdue, much like Tristão's letter. Tristão is mentioned early in Aires' diary, when

he introduces Aguiar and Dona Carmo. He does not leave a favorable impression. Aires cites his lack of communication over the years with the people who love him most in the world. This fact is mentioned again, when Rita tells Aires of a letter in which Tristão begs forgiveness for not writing. It is Dona Carmo's reply which Aires notes: "A resposta, disse-me mana Rita que é em tom verdadeiramente maternal. Não sabe mostrar-se magoada; é toda perdão e carinho" (p. 40). The forgiveness on the part of Dona Carmo interests Aires. The bond between them must be very strong for her to pardon such an act with tenderness.

Within the first few days of Tristão's arrival, Aires likes him and immediately forgets his years of silence, as do Aguiar and Dona Carmo. Through the older couple, Aires begins to understand their longings and their commitments as well. His entries about Tristão, too, begin to change, as do those about Fidélia:

Tem agradado muito o Tristão, e para crer que o merece basta dizer que a mim não me desagrada, ao contrário. É ameno, conversado, atento, sem afetação nem presunção; fala ponderado e modesto, e explica-se bem. Ainda lhe não ouvi grandes coisas, nem estas são precisas a quem chega de fora e vive em família; as que lhe ouvi são interessantes. (p. 55)

O que lhe notei bem é que em qualquer parte gosta da política. Vê-se que nasceu em terra dela e vive em terra dela. Também se vê que não conhece a política de ódio, nem saberá perseguir; em suma, um bom rapaz . . . . (p. 118)

The relationship between Tristão and Fidélia develops slowly from the friendship and the love they feel with Aguiar and Dona Carmo. When they do decide they love one another and plan to marry, Aires embraces Tristão. This is an uncommon act for the old diplomat. His journal becomes a reflec-

tion on life and love. Fidélia's resurrection from widowhood, the reconciliation with her father, Tristão's resurrection from the past, his reconciliation with Aguiar and Dona Carmo, and the emancipation of the slaves with the ideal of a reconciliation within society--all function as symbols of Aires' reconciliation with himself. As he puts the past and the future together, he writes:

Os mortos param no cemitério, e lá vai ter a afeição dos vivos, com as suas flores e recordações. Tal sucederá é própria Fidélia, quando para lá for; tal sucede ao Noronho, que lá está. A questão é que o que foi da vida e da morte. Creio nas afeições de Fidélia; chego a crer que as duas formam uma só, continuada. (p. 120)

Fidélia's two loves, forming one unbroken circle, remind one of Flora's two loves in *Esau e Jacó*. The symbols are not the same, yet the achievement is a success in the case of Fidélia. Flora made a similar attempt, but could not put the two parts of her puzzle together.

As the young couple embarks for Europe, Aires comments to Campos, Fidélia's uncle, how easy it is for young people to leave behind the dead and the dying, referring to Fidélia's dead husband, and to their step-parents, whom the couple will probably never see alive again. In this astute social analysis, Aires reveals his own pain at the couple's departure; he will be left behind as well. The last chapter addresses those left behind, as he visits Aguiar and Dona Carmo:

Ao fundo, à entrada do saguão, dei com os dois velhos sentados, olhando um para o outro. Aguiar estava encostado ao portal direito, com as mãos sobre os joelhos. D. Carmo, à esquerda, tinha os braços cruzados à cinta. Hesitei entre ir adiante ou desandar o caminho; continuei parado alguns segundos até que recuei pé ante pé. Ao transpor a porta para a rua, vi-lhes no rosto e na atitude uma expressão a que não acho nome certo ou claro;

digo o que me pareceu. Queriam ser risonhos e mal se podiam consolar. Consolava-os a saudade de si mesmos. (p. 131)

Aires ends his journal with this reflection. The older couple is very sad, life and love are very hard, but they do have love. Aires has already determined Shelley's line to be a lie: ". . . eu desmentindo Shelley com todas as forças sexagenárias restantes. Ah! basta!" (p. 129). He has achieved the ability to give love by the end of his journal. The self-love and megalomania are not a part of this work. Nunes states a similar conclusion:

If man wishes to achieve fulfillment and to correct social ills, he must realize love both in a platonic and a personal way but in both cases, his starting point should be himself. Counselor Ayres' Memorial may be seen as a final comment on Machado de Assis's artistic production and a further illumination of his world view. Art and the values he expressed through it constituted the meaning of his existence.<sup>2</sup>

Machado's final novel serves its purpose well. Not only does it enchant the reader with its dry humor and wit, but unlike the preceding novels, it has a simultaneous ending of plot and story. Furthermore, the ending is successful and complete, because the loss has made the characters care about one another.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Machado de Assis, *Memorial de Aires*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Atica, 1976), p. 20. All further references to this work will appear parenthetically within the text.

<sup>2</sup> Nunes, p. 62.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The culture into which Machado de Assis furnishes such profound insight is the same one that restricts him to national recognition rather than an international recognition he justly deserves. Even Brazil's closest Latin American neighbors share little with her intellectually due in part to the language barrier between Spanish and Portuguese. The "Latin American Novel" has reached a sophisticated refinement in the twentieth century and become a well-known part of world literature, but Brazil, which constitutes over one third of Latin America, remains left aside.

Paul Dixon's recent work, *Retired Dreams*, points to the characteristics of the Spanish American novel, beginning in the 1950's, determined by Carlos Fuentes and outlines the following five characteristics: <sup>1</sup>

1. Mythification--a transition from documentary realism to the portrayal of reality in its affinity with universal myths.

2. The alliance of criticism and imagination--a transition from the pamphleteering tendency of earlier social criticism to a more subtle, creative treatment that still maintains its commitment.

3. Ambiguity--the abandonment of "epic simplism" in favor of forms of expression that more accurately reflect the complexity of modern life.

4. Humor and parody--the tendency to adopt the stance of unseriousness, even to make some very serious points.

5. Personalization--in the realm of characterization, the abandonment of stereotypes for more complex characters; in the domain of style, the movement away from linear, prosaic narration in order to cultivate several types of individualized, "defamiliarizing" techniques. <sup>2</sup>

Dixon discusses Dom Casmurro with these characteristics in mind, yet one could just as easily find them in Machado's other major novels as well.

Mythification, which reaches magical realism in such authors as García Márquez, José Donoso, and Carlos Fuentes himself, can also be found in Machado. Dixon goes to great lengths to extract the myth from *Dom Casmurro*, but other works contain a trip to the oracle in *Esaú e Jacó*; a dead man's ghost narrating in *Memórias*; a dog that talks in *Quincas Borba*; apparent resurrections in *Memorial*; and even bookworms that speak in *Dom Casmurro*.

In terms of alliance of criticism and imagination, both *Esaú e Jacó* and *Memorial* are directly related to the historical events of the time, while *Memórias*, *Quincas Borba*, and *Dom Casmurro* describe the Brazilian society of the late 1800s. Machado uses both absurdity and tragedy to criticize the Brazilian bourgeoisie and the politics and philosophies of his time. His criticism, however, is tied to ambiguity, Fuentes' third characteristic. Using narrators without opinions, main characters without a purpose, and love affairs that might or might not have come to pass, Machado criticizes without making social statements. Instead, he gives Brazilians a comical yet sometimes simultaneously tragic look at themselves.

The humor in Machado's works is generally ironic and dry. Parody is prevalent, especially in *Memórias* and *Quincas Borba*, where Machado creates bogus philosophies to debunk current intellectual trends. The other three novels are clearly parodies of Brazilian society, a problematic microcosm without solutions at hand.

The final category, personalization in terms of character development, was one of Machado's fortes. A movement away from linear, prosaic narration is evident when the narrator is also a character within the book, who is addressed at all times in third person, as in *Esaú e Jacó*. Likewise, a

"defamiliarizing" technique could be demonstrated by having your narrator dead to begin with, as was the case of *Brás Cubas*. And Bento's narrative is partly a lie, directed at his own guilty conscience.

The characters within the book deviate from stereotypes as well. Brás and Virgília's love affair is based on self-love, or perhaps lust, but not love. They both are too selfish to love anyone else. This provides them with the security of a painless separation. This detachment does not fit the stereotype of the Romantic lovers seen most often in that genre. Also, Rubião does not fit the stereotype of the tragic hero, due to his incompetence, and constant social errors. Sofia appears to be a femme fatale, yet only in public and because of her husband's wishes. Instead of being a true tragic hero, Bento turns out to be his own monster. Due to his narrative, Capitu remains an enigma. Although she plays an important role throughout the novel, one cannot trust the narrator's portrayal. Pedro and Paulo are inseparable enemies. Each has the qualities the other lacks and only together do they form a whole. Aires, is a strange protagonist for a political novel, given his apolitical nature.

In the previous chapters, one finds all of these characteristics. This places Machado's novels at least fifty years ahead of the blooming Spanish American novel of the 1950s. Critics use the term "Latin American" novel to refer only to the above category, indicating their unfamiliarity with Brazilian literature, which of course did not begin or end with Machado de Assis.

Besides being difficult to assign to any single, specific literary movement, Machado's novels, as well as other Brazilian works, are often left out

of discussions of literary movements altogether. However, the scholars who do study Brazilian literature, as well as Brazilians themselves, argue that Machado deserves international recognition. To support this claim one can point to his modernity and universality. His major novels, like the works of many of the great literary masters he alludes to throughout them, present ideas and problems which transcend time and culture. Due to the detached narrator who does not give strong opinions about the events around him, one can perceive an objectivity, as if he were writing about events which occurred in the distant past, without consequence or particular interest for the reader of the future.

In the same way the novels transcend time, they are not culture bound. Many Brazilians have criticized Machado for not having stronger opinions about Brazilian problems. As a mulatto he did not promote the abolition of slavery and as an intellectual he did not support one government over another within his novels. Indeed, if one were to remove the geographical descriptions of Rio de Janeiro from his novels, the stories themselves could occur in any location. In fact, he wrote about human nature. He wrote about the way people think and analyzed their motivations. His ideas on psychology often anticipated Freud, who would write a few years later. Although it was Brazilian society from which he gathered his ideas, Machado's novels are not limited to it.

For this reason, one can read Machado's novels a century later and be amused at his wit and disappointed at his characters' failures. The problems he focuses on between husbands and wives, such as selfishness, a failure in communication, the misinterpretation of needs and wants, the importance of faithfulness, and a lack of mutual support, are all still paramount in relation-

ships today. His portrayal of women, unhappy in their marriages, lacking recognition for themselves and pushing their husbands to obtain it for them, fortells the arrival of strong Brazilian women's movements a century later. In short, Machado's modernity and his universality make him a precursor of twentieth-century Latin American literature.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *La narrativa hispanoamericana* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), pp. 24-27. The source of this reference is Dixon.

<sup>2</sup> Dixon, p. 9.

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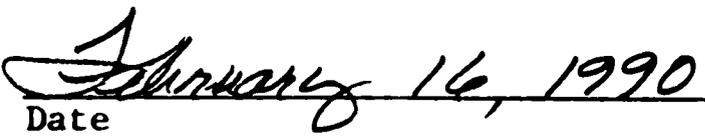
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