BRÁS CUBAS IN THREE VERSIONS

Alfredo Bosi
Universidade de São Paulo

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

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

Nos sens n'aperçoivent rien d'extrême. Trop de bruit nous assourdit, trop de lumière nous éblouit; trop de distance et trop de proximité empêchent la vue.
Pascal

With the creation of Brás Cubas, Machado de Assis adopted the first-person narrative perspective. The memoir-like style can be interpreted as a rhetorical device that lends verisimilitude to the tale. By taking on the role of the story's subject, the narrator positions

himself as the most credible witness to tell his own story. In theory, the first-person device allows the narrator to recount only what he sees, knows or thinks, and in that sense his perceptions are more realistic than those of an omniscient narrator who feigns knowing everything that happens within and outside the characters.

In the development of Brás Cubas, though, a certain degree of verisimilitude is twofold, as it surveys two different horizons. In the first, a narrator speaks who at every turn asserts his physical presence in the events he recounts, interpreting them through his own gaze without claiming the supposed universal certainty of a third-person historian. In the second, Machado introduces the fiction of the *deceased author*, an ostensibly unrealistic device chosen that allows the almost impudent exploration of all the emotions of an *ego* uncovered by the *post-mortal* condition. Alongside the eyewitness' verisimilitude, might there be an element of implausibility? Indeed, what we have is a false lack of verisimilitude and a rather jokey-serious self-analysis. Under the guise of death, life is thought out through the truth of humor. The consequences of this double game of a present and distant self are tangible at every step, and define the singular word choices of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*.

The reiteration of the *living* self contrasted with the *defunct self*. A witness of past and the point of view of a man already "freed of the brevity of the century" seek an interpretation that explains the reasons for the procedure. The purpose of this essay is to reconsider at least three versions attributed to this eccentric narrator.

Reexamining the plot is always a good starting point. Brás tells his commonplace tale of a spoiled boy from a wealthy and conservative family with aristocratic airs – a Cubas! His character over-indulged from childhood and adolescence, his lackluster legal studies in Coimbra, the pleasure trips across Europe of yesteryears, the early erotic adventures, an adulterous passion woven from exaltations, boredom and satiety, the thirst for renown – from the failed project of inventing an anti-hypochondriacal ointment to the quest for a parliamentary seat and finally to the loneliness of old age… a hectic but trite trajectory, albeit typical of a certain segment of the bourgeoisie in Brazil's history from the First and part of the Second Reign.

A long arc of national history is indirectly evoked in this journey. A representative disquisition, peculiar of documentational texts, is not obviously the aim of those pages. What

makes *Posthumous Memoirs* unique, its qualitative leap, is how the narrator's presence intertwined with the facts doubles itself into self-awareness.

Psychological and moral analysis is enhanced by the distance that mediates direct testimony and reflexive gesture catalyzed by the dead author. "In life the gaze of public opinion, the contrast of interests, the struggle of greed all oblige people to keep quiet about their dirty linen, to disguise the rips and stitches, not to extend to the world the revelations they make to their conscience. […] But in death, what a difference! What a release! What freedom!"[1] The narrator regards the social landscape of his time in a way that amplifies the testimonial account: he surprises himself being both an actor and spectator in the unfolding power relations between subjects. In this mature Machado, there is no mirror of the world disassociated from a pensive gaze, just as no picture can be drawn without the projection of perspective. That observation points to the crucial problem of the Machadian narrator, who skillfully uses a socially and historically placed character while also delving into a broader analysis of the motives of the "*detestable self*." To oppose the Brazilian Machado to the universal Machado is to arbitrarily separate the picture from its perspective, the one's mirror reflection from self-awareness. Extremes are usually easy to explore: either Machado the chronicler of Rio de Janeiro society, curious observer of newspaper's vignettes, playful commentator on news of the transient political scene; or, Machado the explorer of the abysses of human vacuity. By excluding its complementary opposite, each extreme bottlenecks the discourse of understanding and fuels misguided controversies.

THE OTHER, OUTSIDE AND WITHIN THE SELF

Perusing certain episodes of *Posthumous Memoirs* provides insights into the dual perspectives of the narrative self: the platform from which he takes off and the horizon toward which he guides his mind. In other words, the remembered material and its interpretation.

The chapter "Lame from Birth" and the three that follow – "Fortunate Are They Who Don't Descend", "For a Sensitive Soul" and "The Road to Damascus" – recount an encounter where the stark realities of social and natural asymmetry come to the forefront. Brás, rich and

[1] All quotes are from the translation by Gregory Rabassa for the Oxford University Press edition of *Posthumous Memoirs*.

able-bodied, meets Eugênia, the illegitimate daughter of an old dinner companion of the Cubas family, and lame from birth. Along with the class differences, the physical stigma. Eugênia limped, whereas Brás glowed with youthfulness, elegance and conceit.

The expected happens: Eugênia falls in love with the young man and gives him her first timid, but trusting, adolescent kiss. The two marks of asymmetry – the poverty and the limp – will inevitably weigh, leading to the abrupt end of this encounter with no future. Brás ponders the "liabilities" of the relationship and informs Eugênia of his imminent departure, using sweet but cold words, fully aware of their hypocrisy. Both a character and a self-analyst, Brás manages to simultaneously show himself as he was, as he sees himself and as he was seen: frivolous, self-satisfied with his superiority and eager to relish it, while privately disdainful of the beautiful young woman, a misbegotten daughter encumbered by a physical flaw. When he recalls the episode, however, the defunct author's lucid awareness uncovers the cruel underlying meaning of his acts and judges them with a sense of humaneness that the superficial and biased young man was incapable of embracing:

> Poor Eugenia! If you only knew what ideas were drifting out of my mind on that occasion! You, quivering with excitement, your arms on my shoulders, contemplating your welcome spouse in me, and I, my eyes on 1814, on the shrubbery, on Vilaça, and suspecting that you couldn't lie to your blood, to your origins…

Brás refers to a childhood episode when he stumbled upon Dr. Vilaça clandestinely caressing Dona Eusébia: these trysts led to the birth of Eugênia, the flower from the shrubbery.

This excerpt extends beyond the social and existential contrast between Brás and Eugênia. The narrator-self of the event is not alone; he assumes there will be a reader and foresees that this Other, endowed with a "sensitive soul," might criticize him for his cynicism – a strong word, but spelled out unequivocally. It is from this imagined and virtual *Other* that the ethical judgement arises, but it is the narrative-self that unravels and invokes it, compelled to acknowledge it and convey its voice to us. Brás pens a dialogue with the reader's sensitive soul that rebukes him. Yet it is the very same Brás, who had previously embodied the universal respectful-of-the-Other conscience, who steps in to defend himself, mitigating his guilt and alleging that, ultimately, he

had not been a cynic, but simply a man. "I was a man." This explanation allows the dead author to describe the contradictory state of his soul: a mixture of good and bad, "a hodgepodge of things and people," the *pandemonium* of being a man. The passage is an exemplary universalizing insight, but shifting from the ethics of respect to a more psychologically realistic justification. The moral rule induced *by the Other* does not coincide with the interpretation of the past *by the self*. *Interest distorts knowledge*. This realization traces back to Pascal and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century moralists that the creator of Brás Cubas read and loved.

The relationships dynamic between the self and the Other (who is both within and outside the self) is not limited to the tension between the narrator and the reader's sensitive soul. Eugênia stands before Brás in flesh and bone. How will the candid, infatuated girl react when she realizes, with "such lucid eyes," that Brás is lying, that Brás will never marry her? "A lame woman!" – he thought, as she divined early on. Like other female characters of Machado's novels from the first phase (Helena and Estela), and also Lalau from *Casa Velha* [Old House], Eugênia reacts with dignity to the stigma of discrimination, "stiff, cold, mute," maintaining her composure both before the romantic encounter and, with all the more reason, in the raw moment of disillusionment. Eugênia is the Other, irreducible to the pure typicality with which Brás, himself a mere type, perceived her and to which he reduced her.

Machado skillfully dealt with the like and the unlike, the type and the individual. Even in his early novels, an awareness of social asymmetry did not always lead to similar behaviors. Helena will be Guiomar's opposite. Estela will not shrewdly compete with Iaiá Garcia in their pursuit of a wealthy, desirable man. Helena, Estela and Lalau can barely endure, and will ultimately reject, the humiliation of seeking favor, while Guiomar and Iaiá avoid and ambitiously rise above the mechanics of the same favor. These are various responses to societal fate that bring to life Machado' gallery of female characters. There are compelling reasons to assume that, in his early novels, he was ambivalent about paternalism – a protective but degrading system, since it demands a high dose of shrewdness and hypocrisy from those who depend on it. As to the worthy ones, they are destined to live on the fringes or perish.

Let us turn our attention once again to this Other, Eugênia, as a figure integrated into Brás' consciousness. She is the image of desire that prejudice prevented from turning into love, prompting Brás defensive self-analysis through the unexpected intervention of the sensitive-souled reader. The voice of the superego, thus masked, rebukes him, calls him cynical, forcing

Brás' self to try to rationalize it; in this specific case, that his conduct was a reflection of universally human traits. Rhetorically, rationalization employs the longstanding practice of aligning the fatal contrasts inherent in the human brain, here compared to a stage, "on which plays of all kinds were presented: sacred dramas, austere, scrupulous, elegant: comedies, wild farces, short skits, buffoonery, pandemonium, sensitive soul, a hodgepodge of things and people…" The virtual interlocutor narrates the act and vehemently heightens the guilt, but later mitigates it by a universalizing declaration: "I was a man." But what is "being a man" for the deceased author? An incongruent mixture – a pandemonium?

It was certainly much easier for Brás to try to convince the hypothetical reader than face to confront Eugênia's honest gaze. Rather than flitting about with images and quotations, evading his reflexive conscience, Brás had to feign the rhetorical language of tragedy to cope with the contradictory emotions that the enamored, lame girl briefly inspired in him: pity and terror. While glossing Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus from the Acts of the Apostles, Brás says he heard a mysterious voice emerging from within himself, with dual origins, "the pity that rendered me helpless before the innocence of the little one, and the terror of truly falling in love with her and marrying her. A lame woman!" The terror, which might best be called cowardice, soon overcame pity, as would be expected from a character such as Brás', driven by the pleasure principle and the resultant aversion to making any sacrifice that his conscience might demand from him.

Once again, that predictable retreat of the subject into pure self-preservation (the cynicism that the reader's sensitive soul had accused him of) must temporarily don the mask of repentance. Brás proffers oaths of love invoking all the saints of heaven to soften the decision to leave, "all of the cold hyperbole, which she listened to without saying anything." The hypocrisy of the actor (stemming from the Greek word *hypokritikés*), known to be disingenuous, whose rhetoric of exaggeration chills rather than warms the interlocutor. Yet, the mask is nevertheless necessary, as it allows the last thread of dialogue to be stretched out:

> "Do you believe me?" I finally asked.
> "No, and I say you're doing the right thing."

For a fleeting moment, the situation of asymmetry is inverted on the moral plane. The look Eugênia gave Brás "was no longer of a plea, but a command." A command from an illegitimate, impoverished, disabled flower from the shrubbery? In the novel's ruthless narrative, Eugênia's powerful gaze will not spare her from the fate of ending her days in a slum, where she will again meet Brás and greet him with the same dry dignity. In any event, that commanding gaze would not change young Brás' life, for he who would come down from Tijuca the next morning "a little embittered but also a little satisfied."

What role does this episode play in the web of meanings of *Posthumous Memoirs*? One of its aims seems to be the dual configuration of the narrator's self, making him capable not only of villainy, as the moocher he was since childhood, but also talking about and agonizing over his villainies, subjecting himself to the judgment of the Other, i.e., that imagined reader that pierces his conscience like a wedge. By triggering this process, the posthumous narrator neither deceives himself nor proposes to deceive us. *Unlike the liar, he allows himself to be seen*. Transparency, unexpectedly seen in the Other's honest glance, will not convert our Brás, but will illuminate the nature of his character, which is frivolous in its erratic thoughts, constant unto death in its unfailing selfishness, yet capable of opening crevices of light in the subsurface of his conscience – the stark light of pessimistic, or perhaps only skeptical, morality, marking the ideological boundary of the deceased author.

In the narrator's rationale for the sensitive reader, one sees he resorts to the universal term "man" and states that he is more than confused; he is a contradictory being. The hermeneutical problem lies in ascertaining the author's degree of adherence to, or rejection of, his own existential disquisitions. If the interpretation tilts resolutely toward the side of typological satire, the answer will be straightforward: the author is denouncing the social type's rationalization of his own behavior by attributing it to the general human condition. The equally plausible alternate reading is the author's acknowledgement of the validity of contradictory feelings in all men (that is, in each man), whereby egotistical feelings prevail equally in all classes. Both hypotheses will benefit from being mutually relativized. The first one, a sociological hypothesis, provides the second with the empirical evidence of the extremely widespread behaviors centered on self-preservation that have characterized human history since its earliest days. Conversely, the second hypothesis supports the typological interpretation with the undeniable fact that, in situations of social asymmetry, victorious selfishness often favors the rich and powerful. The author of

Posthumous Memoirs seems to enjoy this relativization game of having one's cake and eating it too, at times using local satire to make accusations, at other times making interpretations according to a universalized "realist" psychology: now he sarcastically objectifies the narrator-protagonist Brás Cubas, now he identifies himself with him in a symbiosis of critique and self-critique that is by turns unforgiving or concessive and indulgent. Yet, harsh accusations are eventually mitigated and the author ultimately seems to understand everything and to acquiesce to everything, just as the character of his final novel, Counselor Aires, whose diplomatic skills of *revealing and concealing* are displayed in almost-posthumous memoirs. The disillusioned self-analysis then shifts the satirical narrative into the intricate universe of humor.

The flower from the shrubbery episode is not the only scene in which the interpreter faces the same crossroads: either unrelenting satire or the umpteenth confirmation of the "human clay." The first road, if followed without detours, necessarily leads to the question of Machado de Assis' ideology. Resolute democratic progressivism *versus* liberal-bourgeois conformity? Future *versus* past? An affirmative response to this issue means attributes to the mature Machado an unwavering ideological consistency, a faith reiterated in the ideals of the Enlightenment and, by extension, of modernity. In the wake of this ideology, the imagined reader's sensitive soul disapproves of Brás' cynicism; the portrayal of Eugênia reveals the young man's hypocrisy, necessarily imbuing the entire passage with the significance of a condemnation. Although admissible here and there, this interpretation is relativized by the internal context of *Posthumous Memoirs*. The evidences of behaviors ascribed to the blind forces of selfishness – a selfishness capable of every villainy and even gratuitous cruelty – prevent us from considering the first alternative to be indisputably absolute, no matter how engaging it might be in its progressive *ethos*.

The satirical realism rooted in local context is intertwined with a second, bitterer realism that infuses the former with an even bleaker and more desolate dimension. Brás' reactions to the randomness that erupts in daily life bring grist to the mill of a skeptical reading of History, mellowing the sharp, specific denunciations that tend to emanate from strict ideological standards. At times, the interpreter's dilemma takes on the status of an enigma: individual guilt with psychosocial origins or force of destiny, the cunning of the "genius of the species"? Libel or harsh confirmation of reality?

Eugênia will appear once again on the horizon of the defunct author's reflections. He rambles on about the great pleasure of taking off tight boots, a "cheap happiness" that life grants us – punishing us with hunger only to enhance our pleasure at mealtime. From there… the posthumous narrator again sees "the "little cripple disappearing over the horizon of the past." The living Brás quickly removed her from his heart, which "wouldn't be long in taking off its boots either"; the deceased Brás, however, now *a man capable of thinking of what was lived*, will continue to speak to that lasting image: "You, my Eugênia, never took [your boots] off. You went along the road of life limping from your leg and from love, sad as a pauper's burial, solitary, silent, laborious, until you too came to this other shore… What I don't know is whether your existence was quite necessary for the century. Who knows? Maybe one less walk-on would make the human tragedy flop." The reader departs with the feeling that, in certain passages, the dead author's world of ideas and values not only preserves, through memory, but also transcends, through reflection, young Brás' little world.

In the chapters concerning the black butterfly that was driven away and killed, the muleteer, and the mysterious package found in the street, the emphasis is on the irrational power of willpower, stinginess or a lack of scruples.

In these three instances, a negative combination of objective chance and subjective agency prevails: in all three, Brás' prior status as a wealthy man will not be the determining factor, the cause of causes, but only a contributing factor. The Pascalian hateful self – opaque, oblivious of or averse to the Other, whether it be an insect, an anonymous worker or simply a faceless stranger that lost a bundle of money – erupts in all three situations. The rejection of the Other is petulant in the case of the butterfly, miserly in the encounter with the muleteer, deceitful in the discovery of the parcel; in each episode, however, the subject feels more comfortable the less it is observed by discerning eye like Eugênia's. As La Rochefoucauld said: "We easily forget our faults when we alone know them."

Chancing upon a parcel on the beach, Brás becomes curious as to what it contained. As a first precaution, "I cast my eyes about. The beach was deserted. Some children were playing far off – beyond them a fisher-man was drying his nets – no one could have seen my act. I bent over, picked up the package, and went on my way." *No one could have seen my deed*: the emphasis is on the fear of being seen, which is already a foreboding of a guilty act, or one so considered by the Other, who, although invisible, lies in wait and penetrates the self with potential disapproval.

Fearing that it might be some boys' prank, he is overcome by the impulse the throw out the bundle, "but I felt it and rejected the idea." For the bundle had a certain feel, it promised to be "something…" After taking it home, the fear of the prank persisted in the recesses of his office: although "no outside witness" would appear there, there was always the ghost within of a mocking boy who had perhaps set a trap and might "whisper, wink, grunt, kick, jeer, cackle, do devilish things if he saw me open the package and if he saw me open the package and find a dozen old handkerchiefs or two dozen rotting guavas inside." Here, the gestures of the Other are theatricalized – an absent but present audience mocking the deceit projected onto a secret, but imaginably public, stage. The parcel is at last opened. It was money, no less than five *contos de réis* in crisp bills and coins. Dinnertime arrives and the houseboys' glances seemed to talk among themselves, as if they had caught the master in the act of counting money. But the fears were unfounded. Realizing that nothing had been seen, Brás returned to his office, examined the money once again "and I laughed at my maternal worries regarding the five *contos* – I, who was well-off."

The episode of the parcel is not an isolated stroke of luck. Fortune had already smiled days earlier, when Brás found a half doubloon coin and turned it over to the police chief to find its the rightful owner. The action had earned Brás much praise from his acquaintances and temporarily eased his conscience, at the time a little bit oppressed by the onset of his adulterous affair with Virgília. The fact is that the doubloon was quickly given back, an act accompanied by a thousand and one scruples about the great evil of keeping someone else's property. As for the five *contos*, however, his conscience did not accuse him of anything. On second thought, finding them had been great and deserved stroke of luck, surely a gift from Providence. And, hoping to one day to give the money a proper destination, perhaps by doing a good deed, Brás went and deposited the entire sum in the Bank of Brazil. All done without any witness.

The passage about the black butterfly is shorter. The butterfly had landed on a picture of Brás' father. It was first driven away, then killed with a towel in a moment of "nervous shock." The awareness of the harm he had caused, of his useless brutality, was soon placated by rationalizing that, for the butterfly, it would have been better to have been born blue. Left alone, the individual dismisses and quickly numbs the feeling of guilt. The violence of human will is exercised in the interactions between man and nature, which remains defenseless.

The reward owed to the muleteer who had saved him from a nearly fatal disaster, was dwindling in Brás' mind, and he reduces it from three gold coins to a silver *cruzado*– and even that small, modest silver coin seemed excessive, filling the rich young man with regret. Once again, no witness was present, except the mule driver's heartfelt thanks, so effusive that they reinforced Brás' discomfort of feeling he had been too lavish in the reward. Ingratitude fueled by miserliness – "I, who was well-off."

The story of the parcel is haunted by ghosts from the gazes of others, fears exorcized only by the certainty that they were futile. The final observation merits reflection. Brás *laughed at himself*, because, being rich, those five *contos de réis* should not have troubled him so much. A reader might wonder: can't a rich man not be avaricious? After all, many of Brás' relatives and friends are rich and greedy, starting with Cotrim, his prosperous brother-in-law. There is also old Viegas, a family friend, whose inheritance is coveted by Virgília, despite her being wealthy herself… It is well-known that Brás himself is a spendthrift and indulgent with his lovers, from Marcela to Virgília. His stinginess surfaces in his dealings with the poor or the unknown, and the fact that the narrator insightfully emphasizes the miserly obsessions he sees in himself is enough to give one pause. What do we have here? A trait particular to this idle rentier? Not quite, it seems. Greed, while it amplifies selfishness and takes the anxiety of self-preservation's to an extreme, captivates both the industrious and the idle. In the case of the wealthy, such as Brás, greed becomes particularly ridiculous, the object of *humorous self-analysis*: "and I laughed at my maternal worries regarding the five *contos* – I, who was well-off." Self-awareness is a double-edged sword that protects and undermines the individual. That the self-awareness of ridicule is expressed by the *still-living* protagonist only reinforces the hypothesis that the narrator is established within the author, whereby the past is subjected to the present and memory is wrought by conscience – one of the possible versions of Brás Cubas that I propose to examine later.

Confessional discourse inherently risks exposing the subject's moral malleability. Hence, the variation or mixture of self-accusations and justifications that weaves Brás-the-memorialist's dialogues with the imagined reader who exists both within and outside himself. Yes, I may have acted badly, but in the end clay is the raw material from which all of Adam's children are made. This can be seen in the narrator's plea for the reader to remember Virgília's final farewell. Brás admits he felt relief rather than descend into deep despair. Once again, the superego is asked to

moderate its possible criticisms and to lower the intensity of its moral precepts: "The reader shouldn't be irritated by this confession." The truth is that an excellent lunch at the Hotel Pharoux had given "magnificent burial" to his love affair, or rather, his love affairs – something the same reader will recognize as "pure reality," Brás says, as opposed to the "romance" of those who expected from the protagonist an expression of deep emotions. Again, we have realism on two levels: the denotative "pure reality" of acts and facts and the interpretation that connotes reality to better judge or justify it.

In the chapter "Compromise," the duality becomes obvious. The living Brás speaks of an agreement or compromise between pity and selfishness which the convinces his conscience to go see Virgília after an argument at dinner. *But the deceased author corrects the narrator's self-indulgent interpretation*: "Now, as I write this, I like to think that the compromise was a fraud, that compassion was still a form of selfishness and that the decision to go console Virgília was nothing more than a suggestion of my own suffering."

The author describes the cunning of a social type, the Brás that he once was while alive. In a continuous, understated murmur, he delivers his posthumous judgment, since he who is speaking is the deceased Brás that he now is. The knower-of-himself becomes the punisher-of-himself – a formula dear to Nietzsche that Augusto Meyer applied to the Machadian narrator.[2]

THREE DIMENSIONS OF BRÁS CUBAS

The Deceased Author and His Paradoxes

Remembering actions devoid of grandeur and preparing the about-faces of a fickle conscience, Brás develops a narrative tactic unprecedented in the Brazilian literature. Daring or daunting maxims, extravagant theories, anecdotes seemingly unrelated to the context, digressions of various types, erratic zigzags breaking the temporal and spatial order, and frequent, and at times petulant, interlocutions with the reader are part of a style reminiscent of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, and Xavier de Maistre's *A Journey Around My Room*, mentioned in the prologue of *Posthumous Memoirs* as inspirations and model for its "free style."

[2] Augusto Meyer, *Machado de Assis, 1935-1958*. Rio de Janeiro, Livraria São José, 1958, p. 48.

As Sergio Paulo Rouanet describes in a penetrating essay,[3] this "Shandean" writing most aptly reflects Brás' thought process and is a fitting medium for his unique as a liberated, posthumous author.

This is an intertextual approach explored by the analyses of narrative discourse that took over the academic scene during post-structuralism. Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal study on Menippean satire, a blend mixture of various genres, along with the category of polyphonic novel that he applied to Dostoyevsky's novel, deeply impressed readers sensitive to the contradictory content and the playful-yet-serious style of Brás Cubas' writing.[4]

From this perspective, issues of composition and language take precedence over genetic hypotheses or, more rigorously, are identified with the narrator's intent, so that the whims of form intertwine with the mind's arbitrariness and the ups and downs of passion. Form, in this case, partially or fully overdetermines the work's message. In a seminal study of *Posthumous Memoirs*, José Guilherme Merquior identified certain formal and psychological traits of traditional Menippean satire in the book's composition : a mixture of the serious and the comical, the liberties taken with verisimilitude, a penchant for aberrant states of mind, and, more fundamentally, a fondness for interpolating subgenres, from purely anecdotal fragments to the most unexpected digressive asides.[5]

Enylton de Sá Rego, in his imaginative and scholarly thesis, "O Calundu e a Panaceia: Machado de Assis, a Sátira Menipeia e a Tradição Luciânica" [Irascibility and Panacea: Machado de Assis, Menippean Satire, and the Lucianic Tradition], also attempted to establish a prolonged literary lineage for *Posthumous Memoirs* and subsequent novels.[6] Affinities with various practices found in the satirical works of Lucian of Samosata (a second-century A.D. writer read by Machado) would become part of the vibrant parodic tradition of Western literature, the

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[3] Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, "The Shandean form: Laurence Sterne and Machado de Assis." Manuscript, 2004.

[4] Among the studies on intertextuality, I recall *Metáfora e Espelho* by Dirce Cortes Riedel (Rio de Janeiro, Livraria São José, 1969); *Labirinto do Espaço Romanesco* by Sonia Brayner (Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira/MEC, 1979); and *A Poética do Legado: Presença Francesa em Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* by Gilberto Pinheiro Passos (São Paulo, Annablume, 1996).

[5] José Guilherme Merquior, "Gênero e estilo das *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*." Colóquio/Letras, no. 8, July 1972.

[6] Enylton de Sá Rego, *O calundu e a panacéia, Machado de Assis, a sátira menipéia e a tradição luciânica*. Rio de Janeiro, Forense Universitária, 1989.

Menippean satire. This mixed genre can be found in Varro (*Satyrarum Menippearum Libri*), Seneca (*Apocolocyntosis*), Erasmus (*Praise of Folly*), Robert Burton (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*), and exemplarily in the novels of Laurence Sterne.

In the well-fed catalogue of similarities, the author emphasizes the habit of using encyclopedic quotes as parody (a type of prankish erudition peculiar to times steeped in metalanguage), the ironic detachment from the characters and the narrator himself, the taunting and ultimately not moralizing moralism, and in the forefront the blending of serious and comic genres.

Rouanet's essay centers on the multiple similarities between *Posthumous Memoirs* and *Tristram Shandy*. The essayist grouped these common traits into four topics: the emphatic presence of the narrator; the free-writing technique, which lends the text a digressive and fragmentary nature; the arbitrary use of time and space; and the interpenetration of laughter and melancholy.

I will dwell upon the first topic, as the narrator's emphatic presence (or the "hypertrophy of subjectivity") largely corresponds to the characteristic already defined by Augusto Meyer as "arbitrary perspective" or "caprice as a rule of composition," and by Roberto Schwarz as "loquaciousness." But while these critics attribute the narrator's presence to the author's existential outlook or to social class bias, Rouanet understands it as a structural narrative trait, modeled after Sterne's work, as Machado himself acknowledged:

> Shandy's unyielding first-person narrative is marked by the narrator's extreme loquaciousness and by his arrogance, sometimes overt, sometimes veiled by outward deference.

Tristram Shandy is the prototype for all capricious narrators. He expounds upon all things, not least cufflinks and buttons. He is as opinionated as his father, Walter, who has ideas about Locke's psychology, the influence of names on individual destiny (but for a twist of fate, Tristram would have been named Trismegistus), the shape of noses, and the intricacies of education (he resolves to write a Tristrapoedia for his son's instruction). Tristram is a *nouveau riche* of world literature. He flaunts an understanding of all centuries and all nations in an ludicrous display of

knowledge that ranges from Cicero and Quintilian to Rabelais, Montaigne, Cervantes, Montesquieu and Voltaire.

Tristram obeys no rules, not even rules of plausibility or esthetics. He disregards every narrative convention: "I should beg Mr. *Horace's* pardon; for in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived." It is well known that in his relationship with the reader, Tristram jests, insults, humiliates and feigns to be holding a conversation, only to arbitrarily interrupt the discussion all the time. The initial tone is respectful – the reader is a "dear friend and companion" (I, 6) – but soon switches to "a great dunce and a blockhead". At times, the narrator offers his beleaguered victims the illusion that they are free: "I can give no better advice, than that they skip over the remaining part of this chapter; for I declare before-hand, 'tis wrote only for the curious and inquisitive" (I, 4). Yet, who would dare to follow that path if a few lines later one is chastised by this merciless tormentor? "How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter?" (I, 20).

Brás slides from one position to another, from one philosophical system to another. He expresses his opinion about everything. He feels jewelers are indispensable to love. The reader should not assume he has not read Pascal. Not only has he read him, he outright disagrees with him, for man is not a thinking reed, but a thinking erratum believing that each of life's seasons amends the one before. From Pascal, he goes on about boots; can there be a greater pleasure that taking off a pair of tight boots? Naturally, it is only one step from boots to Aristotle, who never discovered a truth that Brás held dear: the solidarity of human annoyance. Moral consciousness? It is a system of windows that open while others close. The relationship between the narrator and the reader traverses every variation of sadism, from a façade of deference to outright aggression. The ironic outlook appears in expressions such as "dear reader" or in passages that seem to treat the reader as an adult capable of discernment: "Let me explain briefly. You can judge for yourself." He goes to extreme lengths attributing witty comments to the reader that the reader never made, and asking for assistance in writing the book. For instance, Chapter 53 has no title and Chapter 55 has no text: please be so kind, dear reader, as to provide the title and text. […] Yet, as in Sterne, the apparent respect is misleading. The reader is infantilized: "Let the reader […] not stand there with his nose out of joint just because we haven't got to the narrative part of these memoirs." He is even more overbearing toward a sensitive reader who might dare to disapprove of Brás' behavior: "Take back the expression, then, sensitive soul,

control your nerves, clean your glasses." He can punish his readers with a flick on the nose, or threaten them with death with a scornful smile that barely conceals his homicidal tendencies: "By Diana's thigh, that insult deserves being washed away in blood, if blood can wash anything away in this world." Brás' outrages are vociferous: "Obtuse reader…" With such incompetent readers, how can one expect his book to be any good? Brás washes his hands and transfers all responsibility for his work's imperfections to the reader, "because the main defect of this book is you, reader." He disregards all narrative conventions, constantly intervening in the storytelling, interrupting the flow at his whim. He is omnipotent, capable of performing miracles such as writing a book posthumously. He identifies with Moses, the founder of a nation, because, like Moses, he depicts his own death. Actually, he is even slightly superior to Moses, at least from a literary point of view, by presenting his death at the outset of his book, sprucing its charm and originality.[7]

It might be worthwhile to further consider the relevance and contextual limits of this focus, pending a detailed analysis of other models besides Sterne's (undoubtedly the primary one), such as the purported and little studied Xavier de Maistre, Diderot's admirable and perpetually moving *Jacques the Fatalist*, and Almeida Garrett's *Viagens na Minha Terra* [Voyages in My Land], whose turns of phrases are present at various moments in *Posthumous Memoirs*.

The Subterranean Man

Anteceding the intertextual and more enduring interpretation concerning critical fortune is the emphasis on the motivations and moral and cognitive processes of the humorist/narrator that drive the memoirs of Brás Cubas.

Poorly received by Sílvio Romero, who deemed Machado's sense of humor overly sad and, thus, not truly Brazilian and somewhat contrived, the book received a warmer reception from more insightful critics such as José Veríssimo and Alcides Maia (who published an early essay shortly after Machado's death entirely dedicated to his humor, seen as definitive manner the narrator feels, thinks and speaks in *Posthumous Memoirs*[8]).

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[7] Rouanet, op. cit.

[8] Alcides Maya, *Machado de Assis (Algumas notas sobre o "humour")*. Rio de Janeiro, Livraria São José, 1912.

In *Machado de Assis: Algumas Notas sobre o "Humour"* [Machado de Assis: Some Notes on "Humour"], Maia makes a profuse examination of this peculiar symbolic behavior. Revealing great familiarity with a vast repertoire of European novels, he dismisses any causal relationship between national traits and humor, standing in contrast to Taine, who attributed this distinctive privilege to English authors.

Alcides Maia reinforces the image of a melancholic Machado (a trait he sees as inseparable from the humorist), skeptical and pessimistic verging on nihilism. Despite this, he recognizes a thread of local satire in Machado's fixation on "caricatures" of some Brazilian societal types. Nonetheless, Maia's reading leans toward a universal perspective when he detects in Machado's humoristic subjectivism certain modern Western currents that converge in Romantic liberty. Ancient comedy, and particularly Roman satire, ("satura tota nostra est," said Quintilian) drew humor from the often grotesque depiction of vicious types, although they lacked the anguished self-analysis inherent in the modern subjectivity that fuels the humorist. The epigraph to Alcides Maia's essay is significant: "Je suis moy-mesme la matière de mon livre" are the words of Michel de Montaigne, creator of the Renaissance-era essay and, broadly speaking, the modern essay. The essayist also reveals reasonable knowledge of German Idealism – which, above all in Hegel's aesthetic observations, granted humor a fundamental role in the dissolution of Romantic art.

Hegel's observations on "subjective humor," in Chapter 3 of *The Romantic Form of Art*, seem to underlie Alcides Maia's conceptual conjectures:

> In humor, […] it is the artist himself who enters the material, with the result that his chief activity, by the power of subjective notions, flashes of thought, striking modes of interpretation, consists in destroying and dissolving everything that proposes to make itself objective and win a firm shape for itself in reality, or that seems to have such a shape already in the external world. Therefore, every independence of an objective *content* along with the inherently fixed connection of the *form* (given as that is by the subject-matter) is annihilated in itself, and the presentation is only a sporting with the topics, a derangement and perversion of the material, and a rambling to and fro, a crisscross movement of subjective

> expressions, views and attitudes whereby the author sacrifices himself and his topics alike.[9]

Incidentally, are there not, in these notes, discernible traits of the playful yet destructive narrator of Brás Cubas, scornful of others and analyzer of himself?

To existentially excavate humor as a whole is a task for the most subtle of Machado de Assis' readers, the critic-artist Augusto Meyer. The fruitful comparison with the great sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French and English moralists, the affinities with the pessimism of Leopardi and Schopenhauer, the thematic coincidences (but never influences) with Pirandello's relativism manifested in the theater of life and its "naked masks," and finally the curiosity to discern the subject's unconscious motives that psychoanalysis had been exploring since the late nineteenth century – all this points to the existence of a dense cultural context and align with a family of dispositions to which Augusto Meyer was particularly sensitive. His deep familiarity with this manner of thinking about life allowed him to understand how the "yellow and morbid flower" of melancholia (which Brás recognized within his soul) had flourished in solitude, calling it hypochondria. And it is thanks to his familiarity with a constellation of dauntless analysts of the modern self that Meyer is able to craft his rich phenomenology of Machadian humor.

Humor that oscillates between a shifting playfulness on the words' surface and a bleak negativism at the heart of discernment.

Humor with an "appearance of movement" through juggling and pirouettes barely masks the monotonous certainty of the nothingness that lurks in the journey that every person undertakes from birth to the moment of death.

Humor that takes down noble or merely conventional attitudes, unveiling the motives that underlie insatiable self-love, of which vanity is the paradigm and fickleness the perfect synonym.

Humor that blends convention and sarcasm as contradictory maxims.

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[9] Hegel. Ae*sthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, translated by T.M. Knows (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 600-1).

Humor, in short, that parodies the doctrines of the century, Positivism and evolution, under the name of Humanitism, and does so through the words of a lunatic beggar. Nothing could assail the "nihilist Pyrrhonism that was at the root of his thinking."[10]

Although it may not be accurate to suggest that the essayist-poet adheres to any closed method of analyze the literary texts, it seems to me that his manner of reading seeks a fundamental feeling, a dominant tone or "spiritual etymon" that the masters of German and Spanish stylistics (Karl Vossler, Leo Spitzer, Dámaso Alonso, Amado Alonso, among others) inherited from Croce's esthetics – even if it emphasizes the formal aspects of a poem or novel that the Italian philosopher often left in the background. Consequently, his "not having a method", as Otto Maria Carpeaux flatteringly said of him, actually meant a commitment to the modulations of Machadian prose, an acute sensitivity both to the vagaries of the composition and to the sense of nothingness that the spectator of himself encountered at the heart of all human vanities.

One of the accomplishments of this only seemingly impressionist reading is an intuition of differences in meaning between the unpredictable narrator of *Posthumous Memoirs* and the garrulous Tristram Shandy. While some similarities stand out, Meyer says that "the likeness is formal; it does not penetrate beyond the sensitive surface to the permanent core. Sterne's vivaciousness is an organic spontaneity, that of the lively man […]. Sterne is a 'molto vivace' of psychological dissolution."[11] And further on: "In Machado, the semblance of movement, the pirouette and the juggling, are façades that scarcely conceal a profound gravity –or, should I say, a terrible stability. All of his trepidation leads to a standstill."[12]

Augusto Meyer gallantly tackles the interpretation of *Posthumous Memoirs* as a pseudo-autobiography. His reactions to the thesis that identifies the man within the author are complex. On the one hand, the depiction of the man Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (his empirical

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[10] Augusto Meyer, op. cit., p. 14.

[11] Augusto Meyer, op. cit., p. 13. Susan Sontag, the astute reader unconnected to the Machadian critical fortune in Brazil, confirms this observation from Augusto Meyer. In the essay "*Memórias póstumas*: o caso de Machado de Assis," drawing attention to the differences between Machadian humor and the playfulness of the Sterne's madcap character. See Stavans, Ilan (ed.) "Susan Sontag on Machado de Assis" in *Mutual Impressions: Writers from the Americas Reading One Another* (Durnham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 272-81.

[12] Id., ib.

personality, as Croce might say) seems to be the opposite of the destructive persona of Brás Cubas' creator, confirming the deceptive aspect of the pseudo-autobiography; on the other hand, the essayist takes pleasure in the image of the *subterranean man*, a notion that is also the key to his understanding of Dostoyevsky. (As an aside, in Meyer's writings, all literary theory is constructed with comparative literature as its horizon).

In addition to probing the subterranean man, Meyer explores another dimension of the Machadian narrator as an *spectator of himself*. The crux of the analysis arises from the split between the man who acts and the mind that sees itself acting and analyzes itself: "The trouble begins with an overly keen conscience, because an excess of lucidity kills the illusions that are essential to the sustenance of life, which can only happen in an atmosphere of unconsciousness, the unconsciousness of action."[13]

Excessive lucidity is followed by an "evidently introspective morbidity." Meyer continues: "But the real drama of the 'sickly conscience' is not limited to this, originating from one's consciousness for the love of consciousness, from analysis for the love of analysis – thus emerges the 'man of the underground'." Life calls, life passes, but "the voluptuous extraordinary thing is for man to insulate himself in a sea of gestures and words, of nerves and passions, and declare himself withdrawn, inaccessible, absent."[14]

It would be valuable to revisit the context of this last quote from Meyer, taken from Chapter 99 of *Posthumous Memoirs*. Brás is in the hallway of a theater where an opera is being performed to a large audience. He has just had a chance encounter with Lobo Neves, his lover's husband, and both men have to put on an act and feign composure. Shortly thereafter, Brás had to evade Damasceno, who was watching him from his theater box with the desire of making him his son-in-law. Brás returns quickly and unscathed to his seat, and retreats inward, like one who exacts revenge on others and on the crowd, "whose love I coveted until death." This is the moment of enjoyable isolation that the quoted phrase captures with subtlety and precision: "the voluptuous extraordinary thing…" The reader then perceives the uniqueness of that moment, when the *individual seems to stand out from the others, who may find this self-absorption strange*; however, "the most that they can say when he becomes himself again – that is, when he becomes one of

[13] Id., p. 15.

[14] Id., p. 16.

the others – is that he comes down from the world of the moon. But the world of the moon, that luminous and prudent garret of the brain, what else is it if not the disdainful affirmation of our spiritual freedom?" In the image of the *luminous and prudent garret of the brain*, Augusto Meyer finds validation for his fruitful hypothesis of the subterranean man, just as in *disdainful affirmation of our spiritual freedom* one sees the free attitude of the analyst of others and of himself, who retreats into the world of the moon before engaging with his societal role – a coming back to oneself that is essentially a coming back to others. This divided man – who acts and sees himself acting, who lives and sees himself living and who delights in often cruel self-analysis – resides in the Machadian narrator. It seems to me that Augusto Meyer's Pirandellian rendition does portray this figure with greater acumen and precision.

Brás is the subjective mainstay of these moments of self-reflection, providing them with a tonal unity that is surprising considering how many elements of chance there are in the plot and of arbitrariness in the narrator's interventions. Yet, the cohesive tone prevails, to such an extent that sociological readings have always presumed to see in Brás a societal type, an allegory of a certain social class, the idle rich.

This was not Augusto Meyer's preferred angle of interpretation. True to his immanent reading, he identified the origins of Brás' memories, his etymon, in the sense of the world and perception of History already manifest in some of Machado's poems from the early 1880s, collected in *Ocidentais*. It is common knowledge that between late 1879 and early 1880, the Machado's second stylistic phase begins to takes shape. But while biographical readings have suggested this period was marked by a serious existential crisis triggered by a physical breakdown, Augusto Meyer views it as a flourishing of radically negative images and concepts of nature and humanity.

The narrator who would craft the allegorical prose of Brás' delirium, who would mold the figure of a gigantic Mother-Stepmother indifferent to the fate of her creatures, who would drive the march of the centuries while draining it of any sense of progress, is the same poet of *Uma Criatura* [A Creature], *O desfecho* [The Outcome], and *No alto* [On High], whose verses bear the stigma of nihilism, the immutable flip side of the moving surface that are the words and gestures of Brás Cubas.

The Societal Type

The societal or, to be more precise, psychosocial construction of the Machadian narrator began with the biographical method. The first ripe fruit of this exploration was Lúcia Miguel Pereira's notable work, *Machado de Assis: Estudo Crítico e Biográfico* [Machado de Assis: A Critical and Biographical Study], which came out in 1936. Born Joaquim Maria, he was a poor, mixed-race and epileptic boy. But he found support in a wealthy godmother for whom his parents worked as domestic servants. Through sheer talent and impressive capacity for work, he ascended the social ladder. He left his family early on and, during the 1860s, joined liberal journalism, made influential friends, entered the civil service and married a white Portuguese woman with a great intellect. Carolina, although not of noble heritage (she was the daughter of a clockmaker from Porto), became kin to the counts of São Mamede in Rio, whom Machado visited frequently. In short, before turning thirty, Joaquim Maria had changed social classes.

Certain thematic elements of his fiction would rely heavily on this trajectory: his interest in representing common asymmetries in a society in which, apart from the enslaved, the poor were almost always day laborers; the dynamics of favor, arbitrary for the wealthy and subservient or vulnerable for their dependents; the rationale for the ambitious behaviors attributed to goddaughters of wealthy stepmothers. This is a recognizable scenario of the novels written in the 1870s (*A Mão e a Luva* [The Hand and the Glove], *Helena*, *Iaiá Garcia*) and in *Casa velha* [Old House], the exact date of which is yet to be determined. Lively themes flourish in those plots, whether humiliations endured with dignity or the covert ambition of young women compelled by fate to live in the gilded cage of favor. The narrator seems unwillingly obliged to accept the logic of paternalism, making us see now one side of it, now the other.

Pereira interprets Machado's great leap in 1879-80, with *Posthumous Memoirs*, primarily in psychological terms, if only because his social ascension at around age forty was already well-established. He had begun to rise in the late 1860s, even before he started writing his first novels.

Illness, a crisis of skepticism, "morbid" moods, a surge of pessimism, "loss of all illusions about mankind" (a confession made to Mário de Alencar), deep familiarity as a reader with the corrosive tradition of English humorists and French moralists: these are the purported immediate motivations behind the noticeable shift in perspective and tone, in composition and narrative language, that took place in the memoirs of Brás Cubas. All plausible reasons, of a

broad existential and cultural gamut, but difficult to pinpoint. Yet they underpinned Machado's turning point, signaling an erosion of conventional values still evident in his early novels.

Having no evidence of class ascension from contextual data to corroborate her interpretation of the narrator's first phase, Lúcia Miguel Pereira turns, in part, to what I have pointed out as the second version of Brás Cubas, although accompanied by a diagnosis: the self-ironic analyst is also "the first of the morbid types in which the abnormalities of the neuropath are expressed."[15] Could this nosological connotation be a nod to certain trends of biographical critique of the 1930s and 40s? It is likely. The hypothesis of an "unfolding of the personality" of the "spectator of himself" resurfaces here, a theme previously explored by Augusto Meyer, who saw Brás Cubas as a subterranean man, the hidden side of an exemplary civil servant, of an academic with diplomatic manners. Pereira briefly acknowledges the influence of the social setting – she critiques "the servile and familial organization of that time" – but overall her emphasis is on the deep relationship between author and narrator: "Brás Cubas and Machado grow undistinguishable from one another."[16]

This is the dilemma: does Brás come into the world, live, die and survive within the author Machado de Assis, as an unswerving opposite or shadow of the writer's existential dynamic? Or is Brás Cubas exterior to the author, a montage of a local type, an idle landowner who lived in the age of Imperial Brazil? Stylized narrative self-irony or the development of a specific societal type objectively judged by the author? What is the memoir's fundamental tone? Humorous or satirical?

The sociological critique of stringent observance preferred the second alternative. With various tones and styles, this critique extends from Astrojildo Pereira to Roberto Schwarz, by way of Raymundo Faoro. The heart of the argument is that the narrator-protagonist is a mirror or voice of his social class. The critics' attention is focused on typical ideological traits, at times to the detriment of probing individual differences.

In *Machado de Assis: A Pirâmide e o Trapézio* [Machado de Assis: The Pyramid and the Trapeze], Raymundo Faoro partially relativizes this thesis by proposing that the deceased

[15] Lúcia Miguel Pereira, *Machado de Assis. Estudo crítico e biográfico. 6th ed.* Belo Horizonte, Itatiaia/São Paulo, Edusp, 1988, p. 195.

[16] Lúcia Miguel Pereira, op. cit., p. 197.

author's point of view was strongly affected by the gaze of the French moralists and English humorists.[17]

Faoro developed his study based around the idea of a Brazil caught between patriarchy and capitalism, traditional but on the path to modernization: a society still being formed, where the landowning elite aspired to reach the upper tiers of the establishment. Our wealthy Brás desires to become Minister of State (the elder Cubas had exhorted him to excel in politics) or climb to the pinnacles of fame with his invention of an anti-hypochondriacal poultice. Lobo Neves cherishes the dream of earning the title of marquis, making Virgília a marchioness, a fancy that led to her first breakup with Brás… Fortunate heirs or greedy speculators from the town square, Rubião and Palma (in *Philosopher or Dog?*), Cotrim (in *Posthumous Memoirs*), Santos and Nóbrega (in *Esau and Jacob*) all wish to become titleholders in the Empire. The ambition to gain status and to look the part bestows them some common, typical traits, as Weberian sociology (one of Raymundo Faoro's matrices of thought) would classify them.

In the most drastic version, *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism* (2001), Schwarz proposes a nexus between the rentier's ideology in Imperial Brazil and Brás Cubas' modes of thought, emotion and speaking. He traces the characteristics of thought, narrative composition and style of the mature Machado (humor, skepticism, jocular-serious mix, open dialogue with the reader) back to the ideology of a bourgeois character-narrator placed in a proslavery and patriarchal context. Brás' volatile character – detected by Augusto Meyer in the humorist's playful and formal terms such as "whim" and "arbitrary perspective" – would be conditioned by the historical framework from which the protagonist arose: a backwards nation that, notwithstanding, "nonsensically" adopted liberal European ideals. Given this mismatch between ideology and reality, the ever-changing contents of Brás' mind become intelligible as an effigy or an allegory of Imperial Brazil.

Two theses overlap here: a) the fictional text's teetering free writing is conditioned by the ways of being of someone, a type, who is rich and idle; in other words, the narrator's glibness is one expression of moneyed idleness in a proslavery social structure, and is hence a subjective effect of class inequalities; b) the character type, in turn, can be further explained by the ideological context of Brazil, deemed as "out of place."

[17] Raymundo Faoro, *Machado de Assis. A pirâmide e o trapézio*. São Paulo, Cia. Ed. Nacional, 1974.

The macrosociological perspective, due to its own internal logic, tends to be totalizing because it prioritizes local situations over both formal and existential traits, the specific objects of previous inquiries. We are faced with a principle that is doctrinally reductionist, but analytically fertile: namely, that narrative form and ethos depend on the narrator's socio-economic status, a notion that can be tested directly or indirectly in various episodes of *Posthumous Memoirs*.

The Density of the Narrational Perspective

By reexamining the three versions offered by critics on the narrator and protagonist Brás Cubas, we may qualify the first as constructive, the second as expressive and the third as mimetic. Construction, expression, and representation are key terms to understand this fictional work, and correspond to its different dimensions. The social type of the idle rentier (the *representation* level) exposes, analyzes and judges himself (the *expression* level: humor, a mixture of mockery and melancholy). As to the narrative strategy, set in motion to express this contradiction, Machado chose the figure of a deceased author and a "free style," with myriad eccentricities of composition and language inspired by Sterne and self-satirical prose (the *literary construction* level).

A knotty issue arises when one of the levels takes on an overdetermining role, i.e., becomes the matrix of the others. Each unilateral determination struggles to understand what was elaborated as multiplicity, namely, the density of individualized concreteness.

Let us reexamine the three versions previously discussed.

If we confine ourselves to a formal, intertextual reading, we will first see Brás Cubas, a conjurer who enjoys manipulating various details of his imagination and cultural memory, beginning with the paradox of inventing himself as a deceased author. It is undeniable that there is in Brás' memoirs a deliberate ludic exercise of phrasing and composition. Machado openly broke with the conventional mold of the linear novel that characterizes his first phase. His references to Sterne, Xavier de Maistre and Garrett are neither empty nor unfounded. In effect, a notion-of-style guided the composition of his posthumous memoirs: "The truth is that it's a question of a scattered work where I, Brás Cubas, have adopted the free-form of a Sterne or a Xavier de Maistre. I'm not sure, but I may have put a few fretful touches of pessimism into it." But he distinguishes himself from his "models", who did not share his "a harsh and bitter feeling." Thus, it is a matter of a straightforward choice of narrative models, an act of aesthetic intentionality that should be attached, unmediated, neither to the author's generic pessimistic

philosophy, nor to the localized fact of Brás being heir to a family of property owners living in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro.

Neither abstract pessimism nor financial considerations determine this or that narrative design, these or those stylistic modes. It seems more reasonable to simply accept the specific quality of compositional eccentricity of *Posthumous Memoirs* and understand it in terms of the narrative project it accomplishes, rather than deducing it from a cohesive philosophy or reducing it to an epiphenomenon of social classes.

That said, the adoption of the "free-form" model, although it is an inherent element of the novel's structure, does not exhaust the narrator's possibilities. Everything that Brás' second dimension suggests as a foundational and existential perspective (humor, melancholy, skepticism, capturing the nonsense of individual destinies) is articulated in the author's prologue with the terse expression, "harsh and bitter feeling." Machado did his readers and critics the favor of clearly distinguishing between the formal mold and the diffuse emotions that pervade the entire work and "are far from coming from its models. It is a glass that may be fashioned by the same maker, but holds other wine" – a phrase that could serve as an epigraph to the relativizing ideas proposed in this essay. Nearly seventy years ago, Augusto Meyer revisited, as we've seen, the distinction Machado himself made:

> He made of his whims a compositional rule. And at this point he truly draws near to the free-form of Sterne or Xavier de Maistre. Yet the likeness is formal; it does not penetrate beyond the sensitive surface to the permanent core. Sterne's vivaciousness is a necessary organic spontaneity, that of the lively man who lives every minute in a vivid changeability of attitudes, enjoying the pleasure of feeling available. Sterne is a "molto vivace" of psychological dissolution. In Machado de Assis, the semblance of movement, the pirouette and the juggling, are façades that can scarcely conceal a profound gravity. All of his trepidation leads to a standstill.

The Machadian pathos was poured into an emulated mold, which is its limit, and is the limit of the intertextual thesis whose merit is having recognized the originality of the literary project that spurred the author of *Memoirs*.

The reading centered on the depiction of social types places the web of interactions within the context of the novel. Brás' journey is marked by specific places and times. He is not an everyman, but rather the inheritor of a fortune that affords him the luxury of not working. A rentier residing in Rio de Janeiro who, having been born during the time of the king, lived until the mid-Second Empire in a society that was still patriarchal and proslavery, but one already magnetized by international capitalism and, thus, by the practice of certain bourgeois customs or ideals (*which were by no means democratic ones*). The system's components are presented as objective facts and integrate the class relations in which Brás and other characters from the novel lived. Sociological critique always pursues this mimetic thread in the fictional work: a novel of the Second Reign (Astrojildo Pereira), mirror of the class pyramid and the trapeze of the social order (Raymundo Faoro), portrayal of the patriarchal mind in a mixed and nonsensical social structure (Roberto Schwarz) – *Posthumous Memoirs* necessarily alludes to aspects of Brazilian social life in the nineteenth century.

The sociological interpretation made significant contributions to building the image of a Brazilian Machado. Its perspective can become increasingly enlightening if it refrains from adopting a totalizing and monocausal approach and recognizes the multifaceted character of the text in the sense proposed by Hegelian-Marxist dialectic for understanding the concrete individual.

Astrojildo Pereira adheres to the orthodox thesis of literature as a reflection of society, aligning closely with Plekhanov's best-known works. His text matters because of the abundance of documentary elements that he extracts from the pages of Machado. Pereira' method of reading, which is mainly referential, supplants the fictional text's expressive and creative dimensions. The following quote summarizes the essayist's position:

> According to Plekhanov, "the characters' psychology acquires enormous significance in our eyes, precisely because it is the psychology of entire social classes. Thus, we can verify that the processes that unfold in the souls of various characters are the reflect the historical

> movement of their time." Here is a good key to understand the intimate connections between Machado de Assis' work and the social history of the period that it mirrors.[18]

Raymundo Faoro counterbalances his survey of social types with keen observations on the selective character of narrative mimesis. "*Machado chose and cropped only the aspects of Brazilian politics that best agreed with his skeptical vision of the public life of the Empire as a stage of shadows*." Faoro detects "a center of filtering and of evaluative selection that accentuates and highlights the singular phenomenon to the detriment of the social organization, of the political structure and of supra-individual coordinates."[19] Intentionally guided by individuals' motivations, Machado sees politics primarily as a setting for passions rather than an institutional process rooted in cohesive class and group interests. "In essence, all societal ills and all remedies would be in the heart of man, he alone responsible for events. In this focal point of contradictions, human and national destinies find their intrinsic and ultimate rationale for decisions."[20] It would be rewarding to compare historian Raymundo Faoro's reflections on the true meaning of politics in Machado with a certain recent trend to allegorically interpret documentary or journalistic accounts of daily parliamentary life during the Second Empire.[21]

At the conclusion of *A Pirâmide e o Trapézio* [The Pyramid and the Trapeze], Faoro dialectically discusses the typological approach used throughout his essay, and sees in the figures of the mirror and the lamp two narrative styles. The historian's mirror is concerned with the empirical framework of acts and facts. The novelist's lamp casts light on the web of subterranean motivations, selectively illuminating or casting shadows on images that the passive and indifferent mirror might reflect. Drawing on one of the most inventive theorists of Russian formalism, Viktor Chklovski, author *Theory of Prose*, Faoro underscores the processes of

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[18] Astrojildo Pereira, *Machado de Assis*. 2nd ed., Belo Horizonte, Oficina de Livros, 1991, p. 93. ["Romancista do Segundo Reinado" is dated April 1939].

[19] Raymundo Faoro, op. cit.

[20] Raymundo Faoro, id.

[21] Id. See John Gledson, *Machado de Assis: ficção e história*. Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 1986; Sidney Chalhoub, *Machado de Assis historiador*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2003; A. Bosi, *O teatro político nas crônicas de Machado de Assis*.

singularization and deformation that are intrinsic to the fictional style and sets it apart from documentary writing, which is purportedly neutral and objective.

There is, therefore, an epistemological dualism at the heart of Raymundo Faoro's seminal work that ultimately enriches his vision, because it opens the way for a convergence of contextual objectivity and subjective stylization. This confluence bodes well for Brás' memoirs, in which there is ample room for presence and detachment, memory and critique, testimony and irony, ground-level facts and below-ground self-awareness.

From Schwarz's perspective, there is no similar tendency toward methodological plurality. His work is entirely guided by the thesis that the writing of *Memoirs* mirrors the structure of nineteenth-century Brazilian society, characterized by the coexistence of slavery and liberalism.[22] Accordingly, in a different context, Schwarz revisits the hypothesis of "structural reduction" proposed and subtly adopted by Antonio Candido in his canonical study on *Memoirs of a Militia Sergeant*.[23] For Schwarz, the idle Brazilian bourgeois is an unstable type, as he supposedly lives in a nonsensical, if not absurd, society. This makes Brás emerge as an arbitrary, glib character. The ideological themes he assumed ultimately establish and qualify the narrator's psychological movements and those of his characters. Following the same logic of the external becoming internal, the free style that Machado acknowledged as his model for the novel's creation can be explained as a literary variant of the half patriarchal, half bourgeois ideology of Imperial Brazil, embodied in the character Brás Cubas, who performs an archetypical function that borders on allegory.

The status of idle landowner becomes an ideological and psychological framework for Brás, pre-shaping his aptitudes and defining his behaviors, thoughts, emotions and speech. An eccentric narrative form, sauciness, humor, tedium and nonsense are symbolic consequences of

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[22] Roberto Schwarz, *Ao vencedor as batatas*. São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1977.

[23] Roberto Schwarz, *Um mestre na periferia do capitalismo*. São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1990, p. 35. The essay cited by Antonio Candido, "Dialéctica da malandragem," was first published in *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, no. 8, São Paulo, USP, 1970. With regard to the relative and partial nature of the "structural reduction" that Candido applied to *Memórias de um sargento de milícias*, counterbalancing it with the insertion of archetypical and axiological factors (the figure of the *trickster* and the valorative vision of the "world without guilt"), I refer to the observations that I made in "Por um historicismo renovado: reflexo e reflexão em história literária" (in *Literatura e resistência*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2002, pp. 51-52).

Brás Cubas' way of life. I believe that what is gained in cohesive methodology risks being lost by restricting the effective scope of specific formal processes and of the pathos of bitter melancholy that pervades the narrative and informs its humorous tone.

Relativizing his concept of *ideal type*, Max Weber argues that "the abstract character of sociology's concepts accounts for the fact that they are relatively lacking in the fullness of concrete content found in historical reality."[24] This relative lack of concrete content, which Weber unsuspectingly says is inadequate to understand of historical reality, becomes even more perilous when typological frameworks are applied directly to fictional characters. The assumed structural reduction, by which the progress of a romantic text mimics the ideological movement of a certain class, proves insufficient to deal with the variety and audacity of the compositional and stylistic web crafted by Machado. The same reduction, favoring elements of local satire, overlooks the humor, that "harsh and bitter feeling" that reacts negatively by self-analyzing the traditional bourgeois ethos embodied in Brás Cubas' behaviors.

If this harsh and bitter feeling is so powerful it acts as a counter-ideological solvent, only one pressing question lingers: what is this anti-ideology? Or still: where does it originate? How was it formed in the mind of the deceased author, who at times appears to epitomize it, at others to diminish it, endorsing the character's conformist gesture that ostensibly should be the target of relentless satire? Does it involve a form of very advanced democratic thought, bordering on a socialist critique of liberal proprietorship that remained complicit with slavery for so long? Or, do we still navigate the waters of moralist skepticism, fully processed by the pessimistic lens that leads to Schopenhauer? To borrow an expression dear to a generally deterministic sociologist, Bourdieu, to which ideological camp (Brazilian or Western) does the Machado of *Posthumous Memoirs* belong?

The narrator's critical force is not exerted in only one direction, nor does it apply to only one point. Next to typological satire, so accurately traced by Schwarz, who dwells on some traits of the rentiers (class biases, cultural superficiality, petulance), what augments in the novel is a dialectic between memory and the narrator's skeptical detachment *from himself*. The final

[24] In various passages of his work, Max Weber reformulated the concept of ideal type. Perhaps the most penetrating is the passage he set down in the notable essay "Objectivity of Social Sciences and Social Policy" in *Metodologia das ciências sociais* (São Paulo, Cortez/Unicamp, 2001, pp. 107-54).

confession is the radical chapter "On Negatives," which would sound implausible if it came from frivolous mouth of a trivial character, or if were merely rooted in status as a property owner and heir. The recollections, which are strategically set down as posthumous, were made to be self-destructive to the point of nihilism. Brás' stream of consciousness shows the obverse and reverse of social objectification, making him hear, amidst familiar and complicit voices, the sensitive reader's censures, just as the narrator of "O Espelho" [The Mirror] hears whispers from out of nowhere. Because of this flow of meaning, sometimes Brás' answers to the world and to himself is yes, sometimes no, teetering in doubts and challenging with apparent impartiality the moral daily life of Rio de Janeiro, which is the backdrop of his experience. The more we perceive the unfolding of the narrative focus, the more we can overcome the impasse of mutual exclusion: *either* objective and pointed satire of a type, *or* humorous self-analysis.

Centering on the narrator's status as a rentier, Schwarz opens a window to examine the lifestyle of a certain segment of Brazilian society, discerning how Machado's extraordinary power of observation selected and cropped this societal tableau. The critical Machado would be no one less than the defunct author that, according to Schwarz, ideologically criticizes the protagonist, who is thus objectified as a social type. When discussing the Machado's ideology beginning with *Memoirs*, Schwarz assert that "Machado would insist on the retrograde nature of modernization as the prevailing and grotesque trait of progress in the Brazilian context." In that interpretation, Machado's disillusionment with modernizing doctrines would stem from observing local discord. However, what still remains to be clarified is the dialectic function of the unrelenting *moral self-analysis* that sets the humorous tone in the style of *Memórias. Brás' delirium goes against the grain not only of Brazilian progressivism, but of progressivism as a whole. Positivism, satirized in the Humanitism of Quincas Borba, is also not specifically national; it is the "religion of Humanity" of Comte and his disciples across the Western world.* Brazilian Machado is universal. Machado's mind transcends the geographic limits of the periphery. So does his humor, which the waters of the Atlantic do not prevent from being part of Western culture.

As for the historical nexus between liberalism and the perpetuation of enslaved labor (an integral aspect of all societal developments based on the plantation economy), the existence of *two conflicting liberalisms* must be considered, especially from the 1860s onward, which challenges the notion of a supposedly homogenous liberal ideology.

Conservative liberalism, rooted in an oligarchical tradition, absolved the landowner from any fault or moral doubt: its rhetoric justified itself on property-related legal principles, the foundation of all post-1789 liberal European and American codes. *It is an ideology that declares itself anti-egalitarian*. Its true god is property. In *Posthumous Memoirs*, the liberal slaveowner syndrome is typified by Cotrim and Damasceno, two characters with whom Brás interacts. The former, his brother-in-law, was cruel to the slaves, and the narrator informs us that he had "been long involved in the smuggling of slaves", an activity that was on the rise and tolerated in the 1830s and 40s, before the abolition of the trade. As for Damasceno, Cotrim's cousin and nearly Brás' father-in-law, he had expressed in the 1830s his unconditional support for the slave trade. Half a century later, the author interprets Cotrim's severity as " simply the effect of his social relations." Judgement or skeptical observation? The extended time gap between the posthumous memoirs and the narrated facts also increased the awareness that the context had changed, so that the liberalism of 1880 was in a position to judge, but also to understand, the hegemonic liberalism of the 1830s and 40s, when the slave trade increase dramatically.

In a short piece published on October 1, 1876, three years prior to writing *Posthumous Memoirs*, Machado emphasizes the changes in the mindset, or prevailing ideology, regarding the individuality of slaves:

> It has now been 5 years since the enactment of the law of September 28 [1871]. May God grant it long life and strength! This legislation was a milestone in our lives. Had it been introduced some thirty years earlier, we would be in a very different situation today.
> However, thirty years ago [*1846: Brás Cubas was then 41 years old*], the law did not come, but slaves still came, as contraband, and were sold openly in Valongo. Apart from the sale, there was the *calabouço*.[25] A man of my acquaintance yearns for the scourge.

[25] Place where slaves were sent for State-sanctioned punishment by those who "owned" them. [TN]

> "*Today*, slaves are prideful," he often says. "If we beat one up, immediately there will be someone who intervenes and even calls the police! The good days are long gone!"

Those were the days when Cotrim amassed wealth through the slave trade, maintaining the clearest conscience possible.

In the day-to-day reality of slavery, every kind of harm was ascribed to the supposed inferiority of the blacks and the evils of their coexistence with white families. Many examples can be found in the works of Brazilian conservative liberals, such as *As Vítimas Algozes* [The Slaughtering Victims], by Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, and *O Demônio Familiar* [The Family Devil], by José de Alencar. The rationale of democratic liberalism is the opposite, blaming landowners for their greed and inhumanity. This will become the abolitionists' argument. It was not simply a matter of two ideologies, two sets of ideas, but rather of two mindsets, with all of the weight of interests and passions that the concept implies.[26]

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[26] The concept of "out-of-place ideas" proposed by Schwarz in *Ao vencedor as batatas* (São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1977) seems incompatible with the historical functions of both the old exclusionary liberalism and the more democratic "new liberalism" that invigorated the abolitionist movement. These ideological currents, originally developed in Europe, played a central role in the political life of Imperial Brazil, each occupying its place in its time. I suppose Marx and Engel's general thesis is no different; in *The German Ideology* they strongly link it to the "process of true development" and to the lived praxis of the ruling classes.

Oligarchical liberalism was the ideology favored by the nation's ruling class, rooted on the liberalism of the export economy and on census-based parliamentary representation. This model was not unique to Brazil, as it was adopted in plantation economy. The ideology's consistency stem from the ironclad logic of the interests at play: proprietorship has persistently inhibited the attainment of social equalitysince the nineteenth century. Liberalism capitalized on forced labor in the French Antilles, sanctioned by the parliaments of the Metropolis until the Revolution of 1848, a half-century after the Declaration of the Rights of Man. By compensating slave owners, the French Second Republic in effect recognized the property rights of man over man. Portugal, in turn, permanently abolished slavery in its African colonies only in 1874. In Cuba, sugar slavery persisted under the rule of Madrid's *cortes liberales* until the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. A similar and equally strange combination was defended by liberal landowners and armed cotton plantation masters in the Southern United States, which resisted abolitionist laws until the Civil War (1865). Political economy professors did not hesitate to teach that slavery was and should continue to be the cornerstone of Southern society. Liberals and oligarchs of Andean states cruelly oppressed indigenous laborers throughout the nineteenth century. Across the Western world, liberalism systematically opposed egalitarianism.

Fueled by the resurgence of trafficking and forced labor, liberal praxis ignored or suppressed ethical concerns, and exploited its main source of profits to the fullest extent. "Property," according to Marx and Engels, quoting "the modern economists," "is the power to control the strength of other people's work." From the point of view of abstract theoretical doctrine, this might seem nonsensical, but it can be said that, in practice (Machiavel's "verità effettuale della cosa"), the symbiosis of brutal exploitation of labor and formal liberalism remained the norm in the post-1789 Western world. Liberal constitutions sanctioned the market's incursions. This is the backdrop and context of *Posthumous Memoirs*. Brás' Brazil did not spin away from the orbit of an unapologetically antidemocratic West. It was the Brazil of Cairu, and it would be the Brazil of the supporters of Regressivism, that combined commercial liberalism with political reactionaryism. "Gentlemen, let us say, since it is true, at the time when 50,000 or 60,000 Africans came over each year, when speculations on Africa were carried out on a massive scale, many individual were to some extent directly engaged in this trade. Who among us did not have connections with one or other person involved in the trade while it was not yet stigmatized by public opinion?" (Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paulino José Soares de Sousa, to the Chamber of Deputies, June 4, 1852, in *Visconde do Uruguai*, organized and introduced by José Murilo de Carvalho, São Paulo, Editora 34, 2002, p. 602).

After the abolition of the slave trade in 1850, objective conditions facilitated the rise of the "new liberalism," which played a crucial role during this period, as can be observed in young Machado's short pieces written in the 1860s. Machado, an shrewd political observer, supported an ideological current led by his colleagues of the press, such as Quintino Bocaiúva, a future republican leader, and Saldanha Marinho, a Jacobin and a mason. In poetry, the oratory style known as *Condoreira* began to predominate, having Victor Hugo as the ideal model for the new ideology. In the 1870s and 1880s, figures such as Joaquim Nabuco, following the trail blazed by Tavares Bastos, along with André Rebouças and Rui Barbosa strengthened the progressive vein of English liberalism, an ideology underpinning the abolitionist campaign followed sympathetically and discreetly by Machado. Resistance to liberal proprietorship came from the Rio de Janeiro sugar barons and from the São Paulo coffee planters who voted against the Law of the Free Womb enacted in 1871. The phrase "liberals versus liberals" aptly describes the conflict marked by libelous statements between two prominent biracial abolitionists, Luís Gama and José do Patrocínio. Yet there are no traces of this liberalism in the characters in *Posthumous Memoirs*: Brás Cubas, his family, his friends, his rich and poor acquaintances, masters, slaves, and household servants live in a climate of the most onerous conservatism prevailing in the first half of the nineteenth century. Born in 1805 in a still colonial Brazil, Brás reaches maturity when Regressivism is in full force and becomes politically active in the 1840s, during the *Saquarema* period, the height of the slave trade, fully accepted at the time and defended by nearly all classes at the onset of the Second Reign.

Bourgeois norms, which Schwarz overestimated, had as little impact on them as the United Nations' Principles of Universal Peace on the warmongering governments' decisions in the twenty-first century, despite being fully supported by hundreds of millions of post-modern liberal citizens. Or, to remain in the context of that time, the propertied class of Brás's day reacted to the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man with the same indifference that inhibited and held back the French parliamentarians during the years of the

When composing *Posthumous Memoirs* between 1879 and 1880, Machado de Assis *continued to be a democratic liberal, that is, he was anti-oligarchical and an abolitionist*, although from 1867 onward he would no longer a militant of the oppositional press. His ideological position remained consistent, but was tempered by a growing skepticism toward political parties and the optimistic doctrines of the time. By creating the character of Brás Cubas in 1880, who would write after his death (1869), Machado, a satirical critic of bourgeois-patriarchal values, fashioned his narrator both with a set of attitudes emblematic of his class (the Brás who acts as an unscrupulous rentier) and as the "harsh and bitter" chronicler who exposes the villainy of the rich and observes and judges himself as a man. A democratic liberal who does not believe in the moral progress of mankind: to which national "ideological camp" would he belong? A narrow-minded historicism, captive of its time and space, will have trouble answering this question.

The new and progressive liberalism that emerged during Machado's youth (the liberalism of the crisis of 1868 and the fight for the Law of the Free Womb in 1871) was adept at critiquing the exclusionary and pro-slavery forms of earlier liberalism, but failed to self-critique and recognize its limits, lest it yield to revolutionary hope or bitter skepticism. The latter was the ideological refuge of the mature Machado, capable of seeing Brás, born in 1805, through his

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Restoration and of Louis Philippe's liberal monarchy whenever the topic of abolishing slave labor came up. In his opposition to any reform of the *Code Noir*, Charles Dupin said the following in the Chamber of Peers in April 1845: "Let us continue to respect and promote good order, thrift and discernment among the black workers as we do among the white workers in France (*Le moniteur universel*, April 5, 1845, cited by R. Castel, *As metamorfoses da questão social*. Petrópolis, Vozes, 1998, p. 343). Cotrim, Brás's slave-owning brother-in-law, would have happily agreed with these words spoken by an overseas liberal legislator. In every continent there would always good reasons to both cry and laugh at the world's disarray.

An in-depth study of public tensions during the Second Reign is indispensable to understand the two facets of liberalism. Signs of the transition from old to new liberalism concerning slavery were well documented by Nabuco in *Um estadista do Império*, Book IV, ch. IV, and Book V, ch. II. A reform-minded culture succeeded in paving the way for significant change throughout the 1860s. See also Joaquim Nabuco, *O abolicionismo*, 4th ed., Petrópolis, Vozes, 1977 (originally published in 1883); Rui Barbosa, *Emancipação dos escravos,* Rio de Janeiro, Typographia Nacional, 1884; Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, *Ordem burguesa e liberalismo político*, São Paulo, Duas Cidades, 1978; Ilmar R. de Mattos, *O tempo saquarema*, São Paulo, Hucitec, 1987. On liberal European capitalism's structural relationship with slaveholding or servile governments of the nineteenth century, see Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital, ch. 26, 1912*.

after-death eyes in 1869, but also capable of making Brás see and judge himself through the eyes of an disillusioned intellectual of 1880.

Revisiting the phrase from several lines ago, "Self-awareness is a double-edged sword that protects and undermines the individual," it seems to me that readers of Machado are presented with a unique ideological system. As a critic of both the conservative mentality and the old oligarchical paternalism, and a liberal shaped by the journalistic militancy of the 1860s (prior to his entire narrative production), Machado survives in the satirical observer Brás Cubas, a specific social type. However, the impudent observer of all ideologies, including the progressive ones, looms over and permeates the deceased author *who denounces the Other that he also recognizes in himself* – the common clay of humanity. Humor does not erase satire: rather, it imbues satire with an additional dimension and another quality, as the social type becomes his own spectator, the subterranean man identified by Augusto Meyer's keen eye.

Observations on Method

Converging factors only gain strength and full significance at the moment of interpretation, when we succeed in assessing them in their reciprocal relationship. Together, a brazen perception of humanity and free-form create distinctive humorous effects. However, this confluence of perspective and style does not yet fully capture the narrator's complexity, for he still lacks the local distinctiveness of an idle wealthy heir living in the Imperial capital in the mid-nineteenth century.

A variety of converging indications enhances the understanding of the individual (ultimately, an *individuum ineffabile*), granting him historical and literary density. Clearly, relying to a single explanatory factor, the cause of causes, forces the interpreter's argument toward doctrinarian dogmatism to the detriment of a more comprehensive approach. For the dogmatist, says Hegel, "the unilateral determinations of understanding are retained as opposing determinations are excluded."[27]

[27] Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (1830) §32. Hegel concludes the paragraph: "The battle of reason consists in overcoming what learning established." For the dialectical thinker, learning is limited to collecting finite, isolated representations that are external to each other and inherently unilateral because of their limitations. The concrete, dense individual (in our case, the narrator Brás Cubas), results from an interplay between different profiles: the deceased author who expresses himself in "free style;" the social type exemplified particular by the

Summing up

By itself, adherence to the Shandean form does not produce the quality of the passions and thoughts that inhabit the book's monologues, dialogues, and metanarrative digressions. What can be said *a posteriori* is that the author made a successful choice of expressive means. Thus, to take shape, the pathos and moralist viewpoint resorts to strategies previously explored in the tradition of humor by which the narrator tuned his tone.

On the other hand, belonging to a particular social class fashions the design of Brás' ideological physiognomy, does not in itself create all the intricacies of that irregular composition, nor the zigzags that could, *mutatis mutandis*, be adjusted to depict other individuals living in other spatial and temporal circumstances. One of the solid achievements of Stylistics is the principle that there is no immutable one-to-one correspondence between literary processes and extraliterary facts. The use of metaphors, metonymies, antitheses or ellipses is not structurally linked to this or that theme. But the reverse is also true: a particular social situation can be expressed in many ways, through different motifs, words, figures or elegant turns of phrase.

Although inherent in the semantic momentum of *Memoirs,* neither the corrosive humor, oscillating between melancholy and sardonicism, nor the moralist conscience derives from Brás' position in the economic hierarchy of nineteenth-century Brazil. Local impetuses belong to the here and now, but the responses to them will have the complexity and depth of the individual who feels, thinks about and elaborates them. Between the stimuli and the response, psychological, cultural, and specifically literary interventions prevail, *making Posthumous Memoirs a work of fiction*.

Analyzing an original work of the stature of *Posthumous Memoirs* challenges the notion of a compact autonomy of the constructive, expressive, and representative dimensions of a literary work. A unique combination of formal, existential and mimetic vectors, rather than a singular cause regulating and overdetermining everything, seems to better way to address the recurring inventive conundrums of this challenging work.

rentier; and the subterranean man, a spectator of himself or a self-analyst who lends his tone to the humorist's voice.

SUMMARY

Machado de Assis composed *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* adopting the strategy of a first-person "deceased author." The approach enabled him to combine Brás' two narrative timeframes: the remembrance of his behavior in life and the interpretation provided by his *post-mortem* self-judgement. Memory is thereby processed by a critical eye that, at times, emanates from the imagined reader. The Eugênia episode illustrates the dual dimension of the narrative.

Critics have studied this eccentric narrator from three perspectives: 1) A formalist reading by which the deceased author develops Sterne's "free-form" and the work would thus fall under the tradition of Menippean satire; 2) A cognitive and existential reading centered on the figure of the melancholic humorist who recognizes himself in the subterranean man and utilizes self-chronicling discourse; 3) A sociological reading focused on Brás as a social type within the ideological context of Imperial Brazil.

Each approach captures one facet of the narrator, but none alone suffices to understand the density of the Machadian perspective. The free style is evident, but the author cautions that the wine offered is of a different nature, coarse and bitter; the self-analyst's humor deepens and universalizes the recollections, but must undergo a process of local contextualization; the social type of the rentier is represented in Brás, but is not sufficient to explain the free style's artistic forms or the reflective complexity of the subterranean man.

With regard to the Brazilian context, this essay distinguishes three ideological angles. The hegemony of exclusionary liberalism governs Brás' entire biography, which begins in the colonial era. The new democratizing liberalism of the 1860s and 70s fuels the narrator's local satire. Lastly, skeptical moralism shapes the book's overall perspective, resistant to the progressive certainties inherent in the new liberalism. The two facets of liberalism – the complicit and the critical – took their place in the Western culture to which nineteenth-century intellectuals Brazilian belonged.

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