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**Artigo**

## **THE LEGACY OF MACHADO DE ASSIS**

### O LEGADO DE MACHADO DE ASSIS

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**ABSTRACT:** The theme proposed in this Article is: 'The Legacy of Machado de Assis.' The development of this Article took place under the qualitative methodology with bibliographic, qualitative, referential, interpretive, descriptive and critical-dialectical methods. Reflecting on Machado is the main objective of this Article, considering the importance of Machado de Assis: one of the greatest names in Brazilian Literature, if not the greatest. Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis is the main author of Realism in Brazil: he is considered the biggest name in the movement in this country. In fact, he is considered the introducer of Realism in Brazil, with the publication of 'Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas' (1881). The Legacy of Machado de Assis helped immensely in the building of the Brazilian Literary Critique. Initially I will deal with Some Critics by Machado; later I will talk about The PostMachado Literature; and then I will weave my Final Considerations. I hope the academic environment will receive a good contribution, both practical and theoretical, by carrying out my analyses.

**KEYWORDS:** Machado, Literature, Social Injustices, Social Criticism, Realism.

**RESUMO:** O tema proposto neste artigo é: "O Legado de Machado de Assis." O desenvolvimento deste artigo ocorreu sob a metodologia qualitativa com métodos bibliográficos, qualitativos, referenciais, interpretativos, descritivos e crítico-dialéticos. Refletir sobre Machado é o principal objetivo deste artigo,



considerando a importância de Machado de Assis: um dos maiores nomes da Literatura Brasileira, se não o maior. Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis é o principal autor de Realismo no Brasil: é considerado o maior nome do movimento neste país. De fato, é considerado o introdutor do Realismo no Brasil, com a publicação de 'Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas' (1881). O Legado de Machado de Assis ajudou imensamente na construção da Crítica Literária Brasileira. Inicialmente, tratarei de Alguns Críticos de Machado; mais tarde falarei sobre A Literatura PostMachado; e então tecerei minhas Considerações Finais. Espero que o ambiente acadêmico receba um bom contributo, prático e teórico, realizando as minhas análises.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Machado, Literatura, Injustiças Sociais, Crítica Social, Realismo.



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## 1. Introduction

Machado (Assis, 1994) was a 19th century chronicler, writer and novelist, ahead of his time. Not only did he come up with restorative ideas, he also used attractive and bold language. Machado de Assis brought a realistic point of view of society, showing the most hidden pathologies of the human personality: in the sense that the human being is vulnerable. Vulnerable to pettiness and malice caused by social coexistence. Machado was a Realist: the most important writer of Brazilian Realism (Pacheco, 1963).

Both Realism and Naturalism (Carvalho, 1894; Romero, 1882; Sodré, 1965) fought against Romanticism, (Amora, 1967. v. II; Amora, 1967; Bandeira, 1949) sought to rescue objectivism and were descriptive. One of the essential aspects of Brazilian Romanticism was nationalism, and Brazilian authors idealized the colonial past and the Indians (Ferreira, 1949). The country's independence, in 1822, was the determining factor for the



emergence of a national conscience.

From it on, free Brazilian men began to face each other and to question on their own identity, whether they were Europeans or Americans. The romantic culture of the time, on the one hand, valued the homeland, a national affirmation and particularities; on the other, the critique of European urban-bourgeois civilization. In this way, they sought to value the new world, whose Indians and their forests were seen with good eyes. The Indian was no longer identified as a wild barbarian, but as the natural, pure man, not yet tainted by civilization.

In addition to the Indian, Brazil had its nature as a highlight: rivers, meadows and forests, while in Europe, the areas were already predominantly urban. Realism, on the other hand, described the crisis of institutions, be they marriage, the family, the State, the Church; the relationship between woman and man; the customs, the inner conflicts of the human being, the social relations. On the other hand, Naturalism sought to remove the makeup of Realism itself, giving it a more scientific characteristic, based on theories that arose at the time.

## **2. Some Critics by Machado**

It is possible to reflect on social inequality in the short story 'Um Apólogo,' (Assis, 1994, vol. II), by Machado de Assis. In it, Machado tells the story of the thread and the needle, which discuss among themselves which of the two has a more relevant function. The needle says it is the most important, because, according to it, it is the one who opens the way.

The thread argues that it is the most important, as it is the thread that binds one fabric to another. At the end of the story, the thread comes out victorious: it goes on the Baroness' dress to have fun at the ball, while the needle goes back to the seamstress's box, having as consolation the company of the pin, who tells it that it always stays in the same place.



Machado ends the text by saying that he told this story to a professor of melancholy and the same acquiesced with the declaration that he (the professor of melancholy) acts as a needle for mediocre threads. In this short story, Machado uses the figure of the needle, to show that some people just open the way for others, who are going to enjoy life.

Some people are like needles: they work, they get tired, and when it's time to enjoy the good things, they are useless: they project the others and then they are discarded. In addition to Machado showing how human beings can be used by someone who is opportunist, he also shows the social difference between a Baroness and a Mucama (or Seamstress as well): the Mucama washes the fabrics, the Seamstress makes the dress; but the Baroness is the one who goes out with the dress to be admired – and not the women of lower social class who made it.

Machado's social criticism is evident. Machado, in this story, refers to opportunistic people who use other people to ascend in society, taking advantage of others' merit for their own benefit: vanity and pride can corrupt human beings. Afrânio Coutinho, when criticizing the Philosophy of Life existing in the Work of Machado de Assis, states that Machado portrayed life by 'his eyes:'

#### The cotton fringe

There are those who censor the philosophy of life implicit in the work of Machado de Assis. Pessimistic and skeptical philosophy, which sees man as an irremediably corrupted and damned being, prey to evil forces, selfishness, sensuality, ingratitude, malice, scoundrel, hatred. However, between acknowledging this philosophy and condemning it, there is a chasm that cannot be crossed by criticism. One may not agree with this conception of life. But it must be admitted that Machado did nothing more than portray life and men as they were in his eyes. It is not possible to wish that he were different, for there must have been deep causes that made him so. Investigating these causes is a function of psychological criticism, not literary criticism. It is only necessary to investigate whether the author was successful, from the perspective of literary criticism, in giving artistic realization to his vision of reality (Coutinho, 1994, p. 40) (My translation).

'The cotton fringe,' was Machado's metaphor for human passions, while



the 'velvet cloak,' were the virtues: '...the virtues, daughters of heaven, are in great number comparable to queens, whose velvet cloak ended in cotton fringes. Why, I propose to pull them by that fringe, and bring them all to my church; behind them will come those of pure silk...' (Assis, 1993, p.189) (My translation).

In the excerpt 'A Borboleta Preta' (Assis, 1994, vol. I) from the Work 'Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas', Machado de Assis tells about the day when the character Brás Cubas comes across a black butterfly in his room. Brás Cubas, annoyed by its presence, hit it with a towel that made it die. Brás Cubas concludes that if the butterfly had been born blue, it would not be impossible for him to put a pin through it, or perhaps it would have survived.

Machado wrote this excerpt along with the excerpt in which Brás Cubas says goodbye to Eugênia with a kiss that was virginal to her and promises to Eugênia that he would return. But Brás Cubas did this conscious that he would not return and that he would leave her waiting forever for him and, consequently, suffering for him. And Brás Cubas, in his conclusions, just as he talked about the butterfly, says that if Eugênia hadn't been born lame and poor, maybe he would have liked her.

Afrânio Coutinho wisely states that Machado does not carry out any psychological investigation, he only portrays the man as he really is: interested only in appearance, instead of valuing people's interior, instead of valuing good feelings. Machado chose the name Eugênia, which comes from Eugenia: in other words, she was the best of the breed. And Brás Cubas was not able to see that.

One thing needs to be said before I forget. You know the two twins were beautiful and still alike; on that side they didn't suppose they had reason to envy each other. On the contrary, both found in themselves something that accentuated, if not got better, the common graces. It wasn't true, *but it's not the truth that wins, it's the conviction*. Convince yourself of an idea, and you will die for it, wrote Aires at that time in the Memorial, and added: "Nor is the





greatness of the sacrifices different, but if the truth is right with the conviction, then the sublime is born, and behind it the useful...". He didn't finish or didn't explain this sentence (Assis, 1994, p. 1056) (My emphasis and my translation).

Truth, a double-edged sword, is something that has never occupied man's heart. Man, in general, is evil by nature, and most of the time when he has to make a choice, the truth takes a back seat. The current world today is a direct consequence of man, living fixed days of qualified feelings and passions, which are powerful factors of opinions and behavior.

Certain passions like selfishness are easily put into practice, their action has become so irresistible. Man, in this way, puts his conviction in the place of truth, a conviction which, for the most part, satisfies his own interests. Instead of understanding things as they really are since their genesis and having opinions consistent with the ethics of their society, men put their passions in their activities, not worrying about the consequences of their choices.

The role of passions is very considerable. The most appropriate actions that man could take are not the most exercised by him. Kant (Kant, 2008) identified the powerful force in society of the most harmful passions. The present generation has reached a very high stage in the progress of selfishness. Human weakness presents itself extensively and intensely.

The world we live in today is a world in which truth does not play a prominent role. The man doesn't care about it, he never did. Man is evil continually, as is his imagination, thoughts, and heart. Selfishness made man become more and more arrogant, prioritizing his conviction over the truth. (Post)modern intellectuals say that we live in the midst of transition from something that we are not sure what it is, but we are in transition.

Because of this, people live fragmented lives, apart from each other and especially from themselves as human beings. Truth hurts. With it the man assumes his weaknesses, confesses his worst acts and thoughts,



declares his feelings. It is a double-edged sword: while it hurts, it also frees man's heart. After the pain, he becomes free from every oppressive yoke, with no more weight to carry.

But man is reluctant to go through the pain, putting conviction in the place of truth. He feels weak and helpless when confronting the problems in which he lives. We live in a context of growing violence in a culture of rebellion and incurable arrogance. Selfishness depersonalizes man, who becomes weaker and weaker, being guided by that same selfishness towards more fragmentation, more disbelief or faith placed in personal interests.

These are days of violence. We live in days when man incessantly seeks personal pleasure, and the truth, most of the time, hinders this search. Hence he exchanges conviction for conviction. Man, suffocated by individualism, enters a world in which the ends always justify the means, with the control and mechanization of things and people, the reification of people.

Every man can think of a better place and a better way to act, but making this place exist and act right is very difficult for man. A man can hardly and hard understand his own mind, because he only has his own mind to understand. He can also understand his heart, but he doesn't want to. Man is a creature capable of creating a machine that creates another machine, to create the machine.

Selfishness has been perpetuated over thousands of years, being continually fed. In the current generation, there is relatively a lot of religion, yet very little of the truth. Too little honest, genuine faith. Materialistic values are priority. While some live in a secular way, others have privatized the faith. Man wants gratification without compromise.

We live in days when sensations are absolute and final. 'I feel, therefore I am,' (Martins, 2009). Justice, as Plato (Platão, 2001) put it, is in man to do his duty. But for Plato, this was in part, since duty, for him, was connected with occupying his place in society: Plato was an elitist. Truth for Plato was a process, truth for him suited every kind of consciousness.



Only the philosopher king knew the truth or was closer to it. Other people had a fragment of the truth. The closer to the senses, the farther away from the intellect. I believe and defend that every man's duty is to live with the truth, even if the truth may compromise his personal interests. Kant spoke about passions from a social and moral point of view.

He worked on the concept of categorical imperative: act in such a way as if your action became a universal law. Act for duty but for duty itself. Following duty without having another intention behind it. Kant explains that when we have another intention in obedience, when I obey a rule with a view to some other purpose, some gain, then I would be acting out of selfishness, when I have another purpose in acting out of duty than for my own to owe.

If there is one thing a man must learn, it is to stop wanting to do what he feels. He needs to learn that he has to do the right thing, to the detriment of what he feels. Man's heart is deceitful, Jeremiah has already said (Tanah Complete, 2018). What he feels, most of the time, are the worst passions detected by Kant. And selfishness (Kant, 2005) is one of those passions, which never lets Justice surface, because selfishness seeks man's personal interests when executing Justice.

Machado, in the quote above, immortalized the phrase 'it's not the truth that wins, it's the conviction.' Was he right? Well, I answer Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis with himself: 'it is one thing to quote verses, another is to believe in them,' (Assis, 2015, p. 47) (My translation). With men who preach Justice, the truth always wins. We can preach justice.

### **3. The Post-Machado Literature**

At the beginning of the 20th century, both in Europe and in Brazil, there was not a uniform movement, but a diversity of artistic currents that sought to break traditional values and, at the same time, find forms of expression and techniques capable of translating the new reality that was formed.





Modern art and language sought freedom and action.

What was wanted was a break with the past, with a little irrationalism, the expression of subjectivity. The avantgarde currents wanted exactly what the name says: to anticipate the future. They presented innovative practices and believed themselves capable of understanding, first of all, what would later become common sense. They wanted to make the future happen right now, which is why their actions were so misunderstood.

These trends in Brazil were called Modernism (Andrade, 1942; Ávila, 1975), a movement that is equivalent to Expressionism (Cánepa, 2008; Cardinal, 1988) in Germany and Futurism (Bernardini, 1980) in Italy, and because of the immensity of aspects that make up Modern Literature and Art is that the modernist language cannot be characterized with as much objectivity as the previous movements.

For the western world, the beginning of the 20th century was a contradictory moment, full of ruptures and conflicts, related to most of the ideas and values of the previous century. Modern man had his conception completely changed because of the transformations that took place in all sectors of human life: cultural, social, economic, political, thus making the modern language unique.

In Brazil, the main landmark of that moment was the Week of Modern Art, held in 1922. The Week of Modern Art (Boaventura, 2000), given the depth of the changes it caused, was a watershed in Brazilian Culture. Before her, Lima Barreto was the most prominent Brazilian writer at the time: the most important writer of PreModernism (Ataíde, 1948; Bosi, 1966); his language lacked the innovation of Modernism, but it had a lot of irony about the mediocrity of government, fanatical patriots, and civil service.

After the Week of Modern Art, Brazilian Literature became more and more politicized. On the one hand, Oswald de Andrade (Andrade, 1976) and others who sympathized with the Left created the Pau-Brasil Group, launching the Anthropophagic Manifest. They wanted to devour Foreign



Culture, taking advantage of its nutritional values, but rebuilding them according to Brazilian values.

On the other hand, Plínio Salgado (Salgado, 1927) and others who defended a Conservative Nationalism created the Anta's Group. In general, Brazilian writers at the time wanted to end the colonized complex of Brazilians, make a critical review of our historical past and promote the reformulation of Brazilian culture on exclusively national bases.

Members of the Second Generation of Modernism, unlike the participants of the Week of Modern Art, did not make as much impact as those. Adopting a critical conception of social relations, the Novel of the 30s of the 20th century created several thematic lines. Graciliano Ramos (Ramos, 1969), Rachel de Queiroz (Queiroz, 2006) and Jorge Amado (Amado, 1971, 1988) portrayed the drought drama, the colonelism, the plantation crisis, the struggle for land, the *cangaço*.

Érico Veríssimo (Veríssimo, 1978) portrayed the problems of urban man. The maturity of the 1930s and 1940s brought out poetry, one of the highest points in our Literature: Drummond (Drummond, 2002), Cecília Meireles (Meireles, 1983), Vinícius de Moraes (Moraes, 2004). All the proposals of Modernism and the spirit of this generation are related to the nationalist, but critical, point of view of the Brazilian reality.

The Brazilian intellectual context dominated the scene in various manifestos, movements, works, magazines, journals and groups, in a radical and in-depth investigation of new aspects of expression and content. These researches left as fruit the implantation of the Modernist Movement and the autonomy and maturity of our Literature. In other words, what we reaped from this period was the definitive independence in Brazilian Literature.

#### **4. Final Considerations**

Machado revolutionized Literature in Brazil with his strong social critics.



He was and remains an inspiration to writers who resent social injustices. Incorporating social criticism as a fundamental element in a Work is, above all, a protest. And it's activism. Questioning behaviors, questioning social problems that generate inequality, that prevent a nation from developing socioeconomically: this is Critical Literature.

It is an honor for Brazil to have Machado de Assis in its list of writers. Through Machado, Brazilian Literature started to take social criticism to people. And the greater the number of people, the greater the potential for the results of criticism. Social criticism is a powerful tool that destroys prejudice and injustice. In this way, social criticism transforms reality. Machado's Literature has produced and continues to produce enormous positive effects for society.



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