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# Emerging Dialogues on Machado de Assis

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*Editors*

Lamonte Aidoo  
Duke University  
Durham, North Carolina, USA

Daniel F. Silva  
Middlebury College  
Middlebury, Vermont, USA

New Directions in Latino American Cultures

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## FOREWORD: MACHADO DE ASSIS: THE BRAZILIAN MASTER THEN AND NOW<sup>1</sup>

*“Life is an opera and a grand opera.... God is the poet. The music is by Satan, a young maestro with a great future, who studied in the conservatory of heaven.”*

—*Machado de Assis, Dom Casmurro (1899)*

Machado de Assis’s prestige as a world-class writer stands primarily upon his contribution to the novel and the short story, where his mordant sociopolitical criticism of Brazilian society and his deft perception of the human condition prevail. In addition, his *crônicas* and correspondence furnish vivid insights into the daily social and political life of his time. Moreover, despite the pervasive popularity of his work, adapted in Brazil for stage, cinema, television, and other venues of art and performance, Machado’s prose is, above all, recognized for its uncanny invocation of the Brazilian ethos as well as its insidious and duplicitous play of psychological relationships dramatized in the universal comedies of men and women. The above epigraph evokes another of the major themes reverberating in most of Machado’s works, one orchestrating the opera of good and evil within the human condition but complicating and populating this drama with ambiguous situations and enigmatic characters. The epigraph also serves as a good example of Machado’s use of irony, paradox, and intertextuality when he identifies Satan as having studied in the conservatory of heaven.

With all-too-human, flawed Brazilian tenors, baritones, sopranos, divas, and choruses, acting out the social maladies of nineteenth-century Brazil,

Machado set his novels and stories against the backdrop of the former Portuguese colony, declared grandiloquently as empire after independence in 1822. This Empire of Brazil, a monarchy lasting approximately 70 years of nearly status-quo sociopolitical structures until abolition in 1888 and its republic in 1889, reflected the continuing practices of patrons or power elites, notable vestiges of colonialism, but within a postcolonial frame of ongoing slavery, while simultaneously projecting political independence and professed liberalism. In short, with its ancient regime dictating the social and political realms, and its intellectuals and writers contributing to the romantic, nation-building, foundational literary project going beyond the first half of the nineteenth century, Brazil clearly posed a challenge for later antiromantic novelists with realist aspirations. According to contemporary Brazilian scholar Roberto Schwarz (2014), Brazil's social maladies were stimulated by the dissonance between paternalistic, patriarchal authorities as well as a growing bourgeoisie with pseudoliberal, modernizing ideas from Europe on the one hand and an unjust master-slave structure riddled with dependent souls living at the whims of elite indifference on the other. While projecting liberalism and modern progress, this scenario attempted to camouflage the nation's delayed sociopolitical development, what João Cezar de Castro Rocha (2005, xxiii) calls "belated modernity"<sup>2</sup>—an imbalance characterized by the asymmetrical behavior of a callous patriarchy toward its slaves and other subalterns, which for Machado became a richly aesthetic resource for his literary project. However, alongside Schwarz's perceptive thesis with its Marxist ideological underpinnings, there are many interpretations or approaches up for option in deciphering Machado's prose, particularly when one considers that Machado's universal appeal also transcends Brazil's national socio-historical borders and performs very successfully on the level of universal human behavior.

To achieve this goal, Machado raised his literary opera to the level of grand opera, not romantic melodrama but a unique version of realist expression—evoking quotidian scenarios, verisimilitude narration, but with antirealist aesthetics, such as having one of his aggravating bourgeois protagonists, the fickle and presumptuous Brás Cubas, narrate his own life story after he has died. In this vein, Machado created literary grand opera by focusing most astutely on the divided self and challenging, with deft psychological, social, and philosophical insights, the very idea of a unified identity. God may have written the libretto of life but its music and rhythm certainly belong to the satanic impulse within human beings. In this sense,

it is understandable why Machado is frequently referred to as a modernist *avant la lettre* and, in some critical views, even a postmodernist. The intimate treatment of the self grappling with multiple points of view, including all its contradictions and ambiguities, takes center stage in Machado's operatic human theater, evident in his sly, devilish creation of unreliable narrators, complex characterizations, and ironic discourse—techniques he gleaned from reading eighteenth-century French and British literatures.

First-person narrative techniques that comprise the majority of Machado's prose served, then as well as now, as the seductive trap for nineteenth-century readers. Repeatedly called upon by engaging yet untrustworthy and complex narrators, developed sometimes over weekly newspaper installments, those readers were forced to become intimate witnesses or narratees to the protagonist/narrator's privileged and cultured self who nonetheless still manifested what some postcolonial scholars such as Walter Mignolo refer to as the "coloniality of power" (2001, 426). Machado's construction of intricate and persuasive subjective voices did occasionally show these as admitting to being subjective; however, they also insistently professed to being primarily objective. Despite their authoritarian roles as paternalist fictional autobiographers, these voices cleverly and persuasively guided different readers to relate intermittently to psychologically splintered selves who invariably still struggled with the inconsistencies of existence. In so doing, these narrator/protagonists operate between questionable memory and misguided self-analysis. In a word, Machado's readers had to be self-reliant in order to stay afloat in the Machadian psychological sea of inner turbulence and exterior complacency.

For purposes of focusing on Machado's central contributions, I have thus far emphasized the writer's so-called second period of five major novels whose narrative approaches are primarily subjective due to his masterful technical exploitation of first-person narration in four of these volumes. Calling special attention to this narrative technique is warranted here because each of these novels appears to be written by three first-person minds—the fictional narrator who tells the story, the real or implied author who constructs the novel with a proposition or plan within and beyond the narrative voice, and the self-reliant or duped reader. Readers' input is elicited by the many direct invocations of themselves as narratees whose mental rewriting of the story stems in part from their own *gestalt* or human experience. This incisive, intimate, ironic but ambiguous narrative treatment is what makes Machado so universal and enduring. Notwithstanding Schwarz's Marxist interpretation underscoring

nineteenth-century Brazil's imbalanced and unjust socioeconomic structure, above all, Machado's narrative pull is drawn principally from his play of the demonic musical tones of the grand opera in our fickle, vulnerable, and self-delusional heart and soul.

Born in 1839, poor, mulatto, a stutterer, later epileptic, Machado was sensitive to the callous daily practices embedded in ruthless behavior during the nineteenth-century period of nation building, when personal and social gains among the bourgeoisie took precedent. As a nation yearning for a nationalist and liberal image of progress, Brazil was critically read by Machado in light of the mad drive to be a civilized society during a period of sociopolitical and financial ambition, yet still dependent on slaves. As a political and outspoken journalist in his twenties and thirties, very active in the Liberal Party, Machado witnessed the contradictions and masked insincerities within individuals. During his thirties, he also became more and more critical of the reigning romantic movement and the younger generation of aspiring writers. He challenged the latter vociferously in his famous essay "Nationalist Instinct" (1873) by calling for a literature that expressed Brazil's ethos instead of stressing descriptive scenarios of local color. In that seminal essay, Machado recommended that writers look outside Brazilian culture in order to engage in intertextual dialogue. For Brazil, the spirit of literary romanticism, inspired primarily by the French masters, stressed the local and the native, which fueled the nineteenth-century foundational narratives of a new nation with exotic and colorful images, captured best by the great literary legacy of José de Alencar. Perceiving that the literary approach of fusing local color with nationalist themes did not contribute to delving into the cultural impulse inherent in the Brazilian ethos, Machado, as literary critic, spoke not only against literary romanticism, but also vehemently opposed the mere realist documentation as well as the emerging naturalist movement with its commitment to scientific formulae above human sentiment and psychology.

Although Machado's novels, short stories, chronicles, poetry, theater, and correspondence repeatedly cast potent depth charges into the capricious actions of upper-crust Brazilian society, Machado's overall target was the intimate self, a vast and fathomless psycho-social realm where his insights into the insidious blindness of the powerful pointed to their weaknesses as vain, volatile, and despotic individuals living the social mores of a misplaced national ideology. Throughout Machado's narratives, the reader repeatedly comes across inured patriarchs who are also portrayed as persons fraught with existential uncertainties and fears. In fact, it is the cri-

tique of human folly performed within a quotidian Brazilian bourgeoisie scenario that explains Machado's special brand of mordant irony, justified skepticism, and surreptitious humor. Machado's critique of the Brazilian power structure served as his thematic basis for creating a context to evoke the human drama and as an incisive mode for analyzing sociopolitical and historical Brazil from a humanist point of view—a sort of reciprocal discursive strategy involving the universal and the local. The major difference between Machado's early novels and his later major works rests principally with his decision to reconstruct the points of view of the bourgeoisie instead of siding with the downtrodden, since the latter approach would only replay the one-note theme of oppression at the expense of unmasking the multilayered shenanigans of the powerful, who alternate between their capricious paternalism and destructive class prejudices across all layers of society.

Critics tend to agree that the emergence of Machado's new narrative strategy, gradually but firmly developed during the 1870s, reached a level of sophisticated insight in the late 1870s, for him a period of serious physical illness marked by a restful stay away from Rio, thereby affording Machado the critical distance needed to forge ahead and finish his first major work after having published theater, poetry, chronicles, numerous stories, and his first four short novels. However, Machado's wry use of narrative point of view to unearth his dissatisfaction with the abuses of the upper echelons of society regarding class, race, and status can also be discovered as subtle intimations permeating his early work. His first major work, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (1881), a substantive novel sparked by the dramatic conceit of a wealthy and privileged narrator telling his story from the grave, definitely challenged the imitation-of-life approach found in realist novels or sordid and scabrous naturalist tales. Furthermore, this groundbreaking novel was not a mere imitation of a deathlike existence, but rather a display of death as a trope or ploy for exploiting a supposedly nothing-to-gain stance in order to reveal instead the individual's all-consuming and never-ending self-interest and desire for life that resonate beyond the grave, thereby leaving vestiges of their pervasive destruction. This narrative position enabled Machado to uncover, despite their higher station, how the privileged and, by extension, all individuals strategically nurture, inflate, and deceive themselves as sincere beings. Although individuals adhere to the implacably fierce and incommensurable demands of making ethical and moral choices, Machado dramatizes how these choices are frequently inhibited by social

norms, appearances, finances, prestige, responsibilities, courtships, and pressures that inevitably smother any healthy form of self-knowledge. It is safe to state that the intimate portrayal of the unconscious in Machado via troubled identities that modernism was to develop regarding the self—and here Machado prefigures Freud—not only applies to Brazil, but also to the rest of Western civilization because, despite the different social constructs and political ideologies, all nations in the West, and particularly in Central and South America, were deeply tainted in one way or another by the insidious vestiges of colonizing power structures. Furthermore, these power structures prevailed amid the advent of modernizing practices, ultimately resulting in erratic and imbalanced societal relations and intricate psychological configurations.

Machado was born in a Rio de Janeiro of about 300,000 inhabitants, half slaves, to a humble, free black father from Rio and a Portuguese mother from the Azores who were workers and “attached” dependents or *agregados* of the household of a wealthy widow. Here Machado was tutored early on but gradually paved his way as an autodidact with little formal education from cashier to typographer, copyeditor, poet, popular playwright, journalist, writer, and public servant, reaching the pinnacle of national intellectual and literary prestige, reserved only for the very few—even to the point of being one of the founders of the Brazilian Academy of Letters (1896) and serving as its first president. How do we explain this rise? And more than 100 years after his death in 1908, how do we read him and his vibrant heritage today within and beyond the framework of the nineteenth century? How can we consider him to be a world-class writer and perhaps the greatest Brazilian writer, if in world literature he is often bypassed and not acclaimed as equal to a Henry James or Flaubert or Balzac, as a few world-class critics and scholars such as Harold Bloom have registered—despite Bloom’s reference to Machado as “the supreme black literary artist to date” (2002, 674)? How do we understand his ascendance in a slave-holding society if, for example, as a young mulatto male, his correspondence reveals that he supposedly rarely encountered overt racial prejudice, and moreover, his literature never placed the iniquities of slavery on the center stage of his fiction, but rather in his journalistic production? As alluded to earlier, the strategic choice of focusing socially and psychologically on a flawed elite was indeed a deliberate move to show how power mongers and other ruthless individuals often treat dependents as well as each other as throwaway pawns on the chessboard of life. Owing to the many social-class positions occupied by Machado during his life-

time, the modern reader can easily apply to him Jean Starobinski's (1975) term, the "outsider within."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the modern reader can also marvel at how the playful, witty, amorous, bohemian, and music-loving young artist in the late 1870s gradually transformed himself into the mature, wise, political, and acclaimed novelist of devastating irony. Moreover, after the death, in 1904, of his beloved wife, Carolina—his critical eyes and ears—how Machado, though slipping into the role of a melancholy and despondent soul, nevertheless became loved and hailed as a great Brazilian writer. As a great, if not the greatest, Brazilian writer, should Machado be considered a satirist, realist, antirealist, pre-modernist, modernist, or a profoundly skeptical author? Even though some critics who labeled him a pessimist have been debunked, how does the reader interpret the ubiquitous tragedies, ambiguities, and skepticism rampant in his fiction?

Prior to addressing some of these issues, it is paramount for the modern reader to recognize Machado's intense ongoing popularity in today's Brazil. Thus, in the spirit of reception, the "Now" of our title will be treated followed by the "Then," concluding with a return to the "Now." Beyond the usual attention afforded to the critical celebration of any author, Machado's oeuvre has indeed passed the test of time because, over the years, he has become the guiding light or virtual mentor for most twentieth-century Brazilian writers as well as required reading for Brazilian school children since he is regarded as the major voice of the Brazilian ethos and promoted as the iconic figure of Brazilian wit, grace, and intelligence.

All of Machado's major works have been translated into English and numerous other languages, such as Arabic, Catalan, Dutch, Danish, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Swedish, Czech, and Turkish. Many of his works have also been adapted for the theater, radio, television, cinema, opera, children's literature, and comic books. Film festivals have been dedicated to adaptations of his works; they are available on DVD, and there have been thousands of reeditions and hundreds of bookstore launchings. Interestingly, the Nós do Morro theatrical group from the favela of Vidigal in Rio, founded in the mid-1980s, had already performed Shakespeare in Portuguese in 2006 at Stratford-on-Avon in England, and then in 2008 decided, for the celebration of the Machado centennial, to read the author again, this time over a three-month period of intense discussion, study, research, and rehearsal, in order to adapt and perform his novella/short story *O alienista* (The Psychiatrist, 1881), a witty and biting tale challenging the

thin line between madness and reason as well as pretentious but naive all-consuming beliefs in scientific progress. The result was an acclaimed performance—Machado on a prestigious Rio stage—a resounding musical of corrosive irony and social satire.

In addition to the countless scholarly volumes and thousands of critical articles on Machado since his death, including the proliferation of studies in anticipation of the 2008 centennial year, there is the venerable issue of *Cadernos de Literatura Brasileira* (nos. 23–4, July 2008) dedicated to Machado and published by the Moreira Salles Institute, a volume providing one of the most lucid bio-bibliographic critical publications to date after José Galante de Sousa's (1969) bibliographic resources. Also of note is ambassador and critic Sérgio Paulo Rouanet's (2008–2015) comprehensive publication of Machado's correspondence in five volumes, with volume 1 of 200 letters from his youth (20 unpublished), revealing a bohemian, lively, outgoing fellow in contrast to earlier portrayals of Machado as a timid soul. In this correspondence, Machado also emerges as a bold defender of abolition in his journalistic writings and even in the forgotten short stories published prior to abolition—"Virginius (narrativa de um advogado)" ("Virginius, Narrative of a Lawyer") in the *Jornal das famílias* in 1864 and in the same publication, "Mariana" in 1871, both portraying how low social position and race lead to devastating consequences. For many decades, critics had taken Machado to task because his only well-known stories about slavery—"O caso da vara" ("The Rod of Justice") (1891) and "Pai contra mãe" ("Father versus Mother") (1906)—were published after abolition, suggesting that Machado was extremely cautious in protecting himself and even masking his racial background or abolitionist advocacy. These earlier stories, in addition to his sociopolitical activism in newspapers, disprove that misguided reading. Machado was an avowed abolitionist, and Eduardo de Assis Duarte's 2007 study addresses the misconception and documents Machado's social activism and literary contributions to racial issues.

In later volumes edited by Rouanet, the correspondence conveys a very political Machado as well as a patron-client Brazil full of pleas for employment, social favors, and attempts at all sorts of political pull. The correspondence also names a considerable number of intellectuals of Machado's circle who had Afro-Brazilian backgrounds. For example, Machado became apprentice to and was mentored to be a journalist by the well-known mulatto typographer Paula Brito. Many of the letters in the second volume of Rouanet's compilation had never before been published. In short, this correspondence depicts the pluralist or multiple faces

of Machado and thus will fill in some of the biographical gaps, but above all will provide more psychological and literary dimensions to the man and his work. In addition to the ongoing flurry of publications and studies, there are innumerable critical online sites dedicated to Machado with bibliographical references, including critical studies by scholars that can also be accessed online via the Brazilian Academy of Letters. Moreover, in view of the ever-growing online highway, my own research in 2008 revealed more than 1000 items in English and Portuguese by or about Machado at Amazon.com.

Regarding Machado's reception, there is a long, intermittent and at times intense history of studies, interpretations, opinions, and myths about the writer and his literary production. During his thirties Machado was already recognized as a productive poet, playwright, translator, chronicler, and author of four novels. However, even after his major novels received critical praise as well as some mordant criticism, especially from the Brazilian critic, Silvio Romero (1897, xii), his high reputation as a genius and a stylist became the critical focus but was curiously always accompanied by some voiced aesthetic discomfort—that it was insufficiently nationalist because it did not describe the Brazilian landscape or local customs, or that it did not deal openly with political questions of the period such as slavery or the decadence of the Empire—all of which he actually did dramatize in his prose but always obliquely or in a subtle manner as alluded to above. Criticized for having been too influenced by French or English writers, Machado was way ahead of his time for Brazil, since in today's climate of reevaluating what constitutes world literature, Machado was actively reading international authors like Shakespeare and consciously rereading aspects of their texts and inventively applying them to his own fiction, that is, intertextually, which Rocha (2005), in high praise, considers to be “creative” plagiarism. On the other hand, his reputation as a gifted stylist was to be the critical hallmark that his countrymen bestowed on Machado during his lifetime, and for several decades after his death, he was enshrined primarily as a great stylist. On the international scene, six months after his death, on April 3, 1909, the Académie Française held an event at the Sorbonne to honor Machado and later that year published the volume, *Machado de Assis et son oeuvre littéraire* (Machado de Assis and His Literary Work) with a preface by Anatole France.

It was only decades after his death that Machado's reception led to new pathways of exciting, innovative readings. According to Hélio de Seixas Guimarães (2008), Machado's critical reception can be divided into sev-

eral periods that disclose a myriad of diverse readings, a characteristic that prestigious Brazilian literary scholar Antônio Cândido (1977) believes to represent the mark of a great writer whose work invokes a treasure trove of meanings, inviting critics and readers of different periods to offer their insights, whether they be in the form of divergences, polemics, dissensions, or new discoveries. During the 1850s, Machado received critical praise for his plays and since then the body of critical studies has increased exponentially to reflect his prodigious output in poetry, drama, journalism (chronicles), and prose. These critical treatments are cast within social, political, cultural, psychological, philosophical, ideological, and literary contexts. Following Hélio de Seixas Guimarães's (2008) idea of a chronological format<sup>4</sup> and paraphrasing some of his observations, my presentation will divide the critical work into four periods.

The first of these periods points to how Machado was recognized and consecrated during his lifetime, beginning especially during the 1860s and 1870s, when he was known as a celebrated writer but was often misunderstood. Several of the so-called flaws alluded to earlier, such as the omission of nationalist and local themes in his writings, were fodder for negative commentary, which became more pronounced during the 1870s and 1880s, when he was referred to as cold, unsentimental, and unimaginative. However, in 1882, the most negative and vicious criticism came from the then well-known Brazilian critic and historian Sílvio Romero, who read *As memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* as musty and sluggish. Romero also labeled Machado an opportunist in view of his growing prestige and went so far as to call him a "tapeworm" (1882, 341–367). Romero excluded Machado from his *History of Brazilian Literature* (1888) and reserved much of his anti-Machado bile for his book, *Machado de Assis: Estudo Comparativo da Literatura Brasileira* (*A Comparative Study of Brazilian Literature*, 1897), which, regrettably, was the only book dedicated entirely to Machado during his lifetime.

Fortunately other critics, such as José Veríssimo, responded to Romero's unjust attacks, which went so far as to employ deterministic and evolutionary elements to explain why a poor, humble, unschooled, and supposedly unpatriotic writer, overly influenced by foreign literary traditions, was a supreme failure. According to Hélio de Seixas Guimarães (2008, 278), these unjust attacks were actually an indication of Machado's importance as an original writer because they reflected how his fictional work was out of step with the limited expectations of the time when in fact he was a visionary, ahead of his time.

In defense of Machado, during his lifetime, José Veríssimo (1903, 33–45) was the first critic to single out the novelist's special use of the first person as a filter for understanding the narrative's central drama, a very significant observation that will only be developed in depth in the second half of the twentieth century. Frustrated by not being able to classify Machado in a specific literary school, Veríssimo labeled him a humorist and set him apart from the rest of Brazilian writers (1892, 1–2). This critical view of him as humorist was to be repeated and developed in the first posthumous study on Machado, by Alcides Maya (1912). Other biographical and literary studies were published in 1917, 1930, 1936, and 1938.

The second critical period presented new views by other national critics as well as a delicate topic revisited by the French sociologist Roger Bastide, whose 1940 study, “Machado de Assis, paisagista” (landscape artist), revealed how Machado's work did indeed include dimensions of Brazil's nature and locale. This period is, above all, dominated by national critics, especially Astrojildo Pereira, Lúcia Miguel Pereira, and Augusto Meyer, who emerged with major studies in the late 1940s and 1950s, but Lúcia Miguel Pereira (1936) had already put forth the concept that Machado's novels as a whole followed his social and cultural ascension, underlying the theme of social ambition so prevalent in his work. Her biographical and somewhat pathological study was inspired by psychological theories prevalent at the time and, although her publication reflects a traditional type of literary study—*The Man and His Work*—devoid of theoretical and critical literary mediation, her perceptive insights are nevertheless valid today. However, it is due to the advent of the centennial of Machado's birth in 1939 as well as the larger political and cultural context of dictator Getúlio Vargas and his *Estado Novo* (New State) constructing new national myths that another flurry of publications surged from 1939 onward, projecting the official image of Machado being the poor mulatto man of the people and the exemplary public servant who ascended to the top of Brazil's cultural scene. Interestingly, it is the celebration of centennials and half-century commemorations that will inspire critics and academics, primarily Brazilians, to produce an increasing number of studies, resulting in a relatively steady critical output after this period. In terms of accessibility to Machado's works on an international scale via foreign translations, to date there have been approximately 150 translations, the earliest being the first Spanish translation of the *Posthumous Memoirs* in 1902, followed by a French translation in 1911 and an Italian version in 1929. In 1924, one of Machado's short story collections (*Contos fluminenses*) was translated

into German. Besides English, Spanish is the only other foreign language in which all of Machado's major titles have been published over the course of the twentieth century. The only translation into Russian is a collection of selected stories published in 2007. During the first half of the twentieth century, the production of translations appears to have exceeded the production of foreign criticism, which in turn increased dramatically after the 1960s.

Lúcia Miguel Pereira (1950) dedicated a chapter to Machado and omitted the pathological and psychological interpretations of her earlier study but at the same time focused on how Machado the man was indeed representative of Brazilian culture and how his writings denoted an aesthetic model for Brazilian literature. Augusto Meyer, in a series of essays begun in 1935 and later published in the volume *Ensaio escolhidos* (*Selected Essays*) in 1958, stressed Machado as author, excluding his origins and psychological profile and comparing him to Pirandello, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky. Later, Astrojildo Pereira became the critic who contextualized Machado within a historical frame by referring to him as “the writer of the Second Kingdom” (1944). Although there are other bio-critical studies between this second critical period and the beginning of the third in the late 1970s—such as that of the French scholar Jean-Michel Massa (1971) and Raimundo Magalhães Júnior's four-volume *Vida e obra de Machado de Assis* (1981), which followed earlier studies in the mid-1950s by Magalhães Júnior—another Brazilian critic, Eugênio Gomes, received attention for drawing philosophical parallels between Machado and Schopenhauer as well as addressing the enigmatic elements in his prose. An insightful bio-literary essay by Antônio Cândido (1977), the prominent literary critic at the time and today Brazil's venerable scholar, became a benchmark in Machado criticism. Other volumes appeared at this time, affording special attention to Machado's foreign sources, a line of research that continues today and is relevant in light of the attention given to world literature and Machado as author of Brazilian and world literatures. Moreover, in 1951, Machado's reception by the international market was given an added boost with the first translation into English of a Machadian novel, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, titled in some editions as *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, by William L. Grossman. (A new translation of *Brás Cubas* by Gregory Rabassa was published in 1997 as *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*). In 1963, Grossman and Helen Caldwell translated *The Psychiatrist and Other Stories*, a notable publica-

tion in hardcover and paperback for presenting Machado de Assis to an English-speaking audience as a gifted short story writer.

Interestingly, eight years after the first English translation, it was the work of another American, Helen Caldwell, also a prodigious translator of Machado's novels into English, who contributed substantially to Machado criticism with her pioneer work, *The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis: A study of Dom Casmurro* (1960). This study rocked Machado criticism because it not only focused on Machado's intertextual reading of Shakespeare, but offered a completely new reading of the famous 1899 novel's primary dramatic crisis or dilemma—the supposed adultery of the heroine Capitu. In this novel, the first-person narrator, Bento Santiago, condemns his wife out of suspicion of her adultery with his best friend. Deconstructing the narrator as symbolic Iago/Othello, Caldwell read *Dom Casmurro* as a tour-de-force narrative of ambiguity since the supposed adultery never takes place in the novel. Superstition and insecurity within the demonic mind of the narrator-husband motivate him to condemn his wife. Thus, Caldwell shifted the guilt from the heroine to the male narrator, in contrast to earlier readings, inspiring many later gender interpretations about women in Machado's nineteenth-century Brazil. Another line of thinking suggests that Machado, as the Wizard of Cosme Velho, as he was called, had duped, trapped, or allowed earlier patriarchal or male readers to believe without question in the enigmatic Capitu's guilt. It is as if Machado had been accurately reading the flawed patriarchal elite of his country while awaiting an alternative or outside view to add another interpretive dimension. This reversal of the then-dominant misreadings of *Dom Casmurro*—considered later to be the perfect Brazilian novel, similar to the status of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, for its deft use of narrative technique—opened the floodgates for a multitude of studies acknowledging Machado's sophisticated narrative artistry and technical mastery. Most importantly, Caldwell's reading convinced Brazilian and foreign readers not to trust Machado's narrators, for they were deceptively unreliable. From this point onward, Brazilian and foreign criticism of Machado's works increased markedly.

Caldwell's work may serve as the precursor to the third period of criticism, led in the late 1970s by the pioneering work of Roberto Schwarz as mentioned above, noted for his Marxist reading of the dissonance between patriarchal authority, slavery, and professed liberalism, which he referred to as "misplaced ideas." His *Ao vencedor às batatas* (*To the Winner Go the Potatoes*, 1977) and later *Um mestre na periferia do capi-*

*talismo: Machado de Assis (A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism, 1990)*, very much influenced by the work of critic Antônio Cândido, also stand as notable hallmarks of Machado criticism. The other recognized scholars of Schwarz's generation are the Brazilian Alfredo Bósi (1999, 130), who focused on Machado's philosophical, psychological, and existential leanings without dismissing the sociohistorical context, which the British scholar John Gledson (1984; 1986) systematically develops in accordance with Brazilian history and class conflicts and also via studies of Machado's chronicles. Gledson continues this work with more emphasis on characterizing Machado's narrators in *Por um novo Machado de Assis (Toward a New Machado de Assis, 2006)*. Another recognized scholar of this generation is Sérgio Paulo Rouanet (2007), who zeroes in on the influence of Laurence Sterne's "Shandian form" on Machado.

This third period includes other respected contemporary Brazilian scholars like Raymundo Faoro and North Americans such as Earl Fitz, Paul Dixon, and Maria Luiza Nunes and occasional journalistic essays by such luminaries as Susan Sontag's (1990) article about Brás Cubas and Machado's skillful narrative aesthetics. Also, José Raimundo Maia Neto (1994) provides the first in-depth study in English of Machado as a skeptic by comparing him to Pyrrho of Elis and his brand of skepticism of suspending judgment and achieving tranquility.

Given the significant productivity of the third period, although the dates of some of their publications will overlap, it is reasonable to suggest a fourth period of writers and scholars who manifest more recent critical dedication to Machado's oeuvre: the Portuguese Abel Barros Baptista (2003a, 2003b); Sidney Chaloub (2003), a very discerning reading of Machado as a source for writing history; João Luiz Passos (2007), focusing on Machado's main protagonists as dramatic personae; Hélio de Seixas Guimarães (2004); João Cezar de Castro Rocha's voluminous critical edition (2005), with Rocha's original introduction speaking positively of Machado's intertextual plagiarism and underscoring the critical value in understanding his use of Brazil's "belated modernity." (xxiii). In addition to these publications, there is journalist Daniel Piza's very accessible bio-bibliographical volume (2006) with its epigraph by Machado: "Ninguém sabe o que sou quando rumino" (Nobody knows what I am when I ruminate); Marta de Senna's lucid comparative study (2008), and most recently, K. David Jackson's (2015) text that contextualizes Machado as a world author via diverse readings.

Indeed, after more than a century of ever growing Machado criticism, new editions, and a mounting number of translations, while the author himself may remain a mystery considering the famous epithet “O bruxo” (the wizard), recognition and study of his work are expanding at a steady pace. The 2008 centennial inspired the lush scholarly and bibliographical issue published by the Instituto Moreira Salles (2008), as well as Luiz Antonio Aguiar’s (2008) celebratory centennial volume, written for a very broad audience and chock-full of information, curiosities, and literary sorceries, hexes, and witchcrafts, the latter suggesting Machado’s skill at literary *abracadabra*. For Machado scholars and specialists, the invaluable *Dicionário de Machado de Assis: Língua, estilo, temas* (2010) by Castelar de Carvalho is a significant reference work of high caliber.

The image of Machado as sorcerer weaving and manipulating his wizardry relates to his skillfulness as a writer but above all to how this skill affects the reader—how he wields his magic upon us. Appropriating Hélio de Seixas Guimarães’s view, it is as though while trying to read Machado, we have simultaneously been read by him (2008, 291). Recalling the above reference to those readers who were duped by Machado’s *Dom Casmurro*, believing for decades that the heroine was the guilty party, what does not remain a mystery is Machado’s sharp analysis of his own society, especially of human behavior in general, but above all his readers, then and now. If in Machado’s grand opera of human comedy, human beings manifest uneven and unbalanced behaviors of good and evil, who can say that we as readers are not part of his narrative aim? The insidious and deceptive intimacy he ironically recreates between characters, narrators, and readers still affects us profoundly, even today, implying that while, after more than one hundred years, we may still not be able to read or fully grasp his personal life and his provocatively ambiguous narratives, he, on the other hand, has insidiously been reading us for more than a century.

Nelson H. Vieira

## NOTES

1. This foreword is drawn from excerpts of a keynote I delivered for “The Languages of Machado de Assis: A Symposium” (co-coordinated by Lídia Santos) at New York University (September 17, 2008) on the occasion of the centennial of Machado de Assis’s death. In addition, during that centennial year, the original inspiration for presenting Machado de Assis to a wider

public had begun with an exhibit on Machado at the John Hay Library, Brown University (April 15–June 5), curated by Ana Catarina Teixeira and Patrícia Figueroa in collaboration with myself.

2. Here, Castro Rocha’s term is an allusion to Brazil’s status as a periphery nation, not dissimilar to the periphery developed in Schwarz’s significant study (1990). The term nevertheless stresses the importance of reading “belatedness as a critical project” (Castro Rocha 2005: xxiii), thereby freeing the nation from hierarchical traditions and categories.
3. Starobinski (1975) develops this concept of the “outsider within” as it applies to individuals victimized or marginalized by racial, ethnic, and economic prejudices.
4. I am deeply indebted to Hélio de Seixas Guimarães for his informative article, “O escritor que nos lê” (2008) in terms of its scope for my preparation of the sequence of critical periods on Machado. Although Guimarães divides his sequence into three critical periods, I have opted for four in light of the increasing scholarship since 2008. Furthermore, since my early readings of Machado, the concept of Machado “reading” his readers has been very central to my own teaching and scholarship.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Lamonte Aidoo** is the Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Professor of Romance Studies at Duke University. He received his Ph.D. in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies from Brown University. Aidoo is a cultural historian and interdisciplinary scholar who specializes in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Brazilian history and culture with a focus on the construction of race, sexuality, law, medicine, and nation in Brazil and Lusophone Africa. He is author of *Slavery Unseen: Sex, Power, and Brazil's Myth of Racial Democracy* (Duke University Press) and is the coeditor of *Lima Barreto: New Critical Perspectives* (Lexington Books, 2013).

**Sidney Chalhoub** is Professor of History at Harvard University. He taught history at the University of Campinas, Brazil, for 30 years. He has published three books on the social history of Rio de Janeiro: *Trabalho, lar e botequim* (1986), on working-class culture in the early twentieth century; *Visões da liberdade* (1990), on the last decades of slavery in the city; and *Cidade febril* (1996), on tenements and epidemics in the second half of the nineteenth century. He also published *Machado de Assis, historiador* (2003), about the literature and political ideas of the most important nineteenth-century Brazilian novelist, and co-edited five other books on the social history of Brazil. His most recent monograph is *A força da escravidão: ilegalidade e costume no Brasil oitocentista* (2012), on illegal enslavement and the precariousness of freedom in nineteenth-century Brazil.

**G. Reginald Daniel** is Professor of Sociology at University of California, Santa Barbara; Affiliated Faculty, Department of Black Studies, Latin American and Iberian Studies, and Asian American Studies. His books include *More Than Black? Multiracial Identity and the New Racial Order* (Temple University Press, 2002); *Uncompleted Independence: The Creation and Revision of Racial Thinking in the United States*, edited with Paul R. Spickard (University of Notre Dame Press,

2002); *Race and Multiraciality in Brazil and the United States: Converging Paths?* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); and *Machado de Assis: Multiracial Identity and the Brazilian Novelist* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012). These are a culmination of much of his thinking on the relationship between social structure and racial identity formation—especially, multiracial identities. He has received significant media attention and participated as a panelist at various conferences as an expert on the topic of multiracial identity. He is also a member of the Advisory Board of AMEA (Association of MultiEthnic Americans) and the Advisory Council of the Mixed Heritage Center of MAVIN Foundation, and a former Advisory Board member of Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally). These have been the most prominent organizations involved in bringing about changes in the collection of official racial and ethnic data, as in the decennial census, which makes it possible for multiracial-identified individuals to acknowledge their various backgrounds.

**M. Elizabeth [Libby] Ginway** is Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies at the University of Florida, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on Brazilian and Latin American literature. She is author of *Brazilian Science Fiction: Cultural Myths and Nationhood in the Land of the Future* (Bucknell, 2004), a collection of essays *Alien Vision* (Devir 2010), and co-editor of *Latin American Science Fiction: Theory and Practice* (Palgrave, 2012) with J. Andrew Brown. She has published articles in *Brasil/Brazil, Extrapolation, Femspec, Foundation, Hispania, Luso-Brazilian Review, Modern Language Studies, Revista Iberoamericana*, and *Science Fiction Studies*. Her current book project is a comparative study on the science fiction and fantasy of Brazil and Mexico.

**Camilo Gomides** is Associate Professor of Portuguese at the University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras. He specializes in ecocriticism and evolutionary approaches in literary theory. He teaches Portuguese language and Brazilian literature and cinema. He is co-author of *Amazônia in the Arts: Ecocriticism versus the Economics of Deforestation*, with Joseph Henry Vogel. He has published in *Romance Notes, Interdisciplinary Studies of Environment and Literature, OMETECA Sciences and Humanities*, and the *Tulane Environmental Law Journal* on diverse themes, ranging from homoaffectivity to ecological debt and Columbus's Diary.

**Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht** is the Albert Guérard Professor in Literature at Stanford University. He teaches Romance and Comparative Literatures and has convened an ongoing "Philosophical Reading Group" at Stanford since 1989. His publications have been translated into more than 20 languages, and the most recent of his many books is "After 1945 -- Latency as Origin of the Present." Gumbrecht is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Professeur attaché au Collège de France, and has been a visiting professor at numerous academic institutions worldwide. He writes regularly for the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung"

and the “Estado de São Paulo.” In preparation is a book on Denis Diderot and the French Enlightenment philosophers.

**Earl E. Fitz** is Professor of Portuguese, Spanish, and Comparative Literature Affiliated faculty: Center for Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt University. Earl E. Fitz received his PhD in Comparative Literature from the City University of New York in 1977. His principal languages of concentration were Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, and German while his primary national literatures were those of Brazil, Spanish America, the USA, and Canada. Fitz is the author of a number of articles and books, including *Machado de Assis and Female Characterization: The Novels* (2014); *Rediscovering the New World: Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context* (1991), *Ambiguity and Gender in the New Novel of Brazil and Spanish America: A Comparative Assessment* (co-authored with Judith A. Payne) *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector* (2001), *Brazilian Narrative Traditions in a Comparative Context* (2005), and *Translation and the Rise of Inter-American Literature* (co-authored with Elizabeth Lowe). His most recent projects involve the completion of a comparative history of inter-American literature, a study of the Borges translation of Faulkner’s *The Wild Palms*, and an essay on Machado de Assis, Borges, and Clarice Lispector that offers a new, more comparative evaluation of Latin America’s renowned “New Narrative.”

**Richard Miskolci** is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Federal University of São Carlos in São Paulo, Brazil, where he is also founder and chair of Quereres: Núcleo de Pesquisa em Diferenças, Gênero e Sexualidade. He is also a researcher with the Núcleo de Estudos de Gênero Pagu at UNICAMP. He is author of the books *O desejo da nação: masculinidade e branquitude no Brasil de fins do Século XIX* (2012) and *Teoria Queer: um aprendizado pelas diferenças* (2012). He is also co-editor of *Diferenças na Educação: outros aprendizados* (with Jorge Leite Júnior) and *Discursos fora da ordem: sexualidades, saberes, e direitos* (with Larissa Pelúcio). He has published articles in *Sociologias*, *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, *cadernos pagu*, *Revista Estudos Feministas*, *Lua Nova*, *Revista de Sociologia e Política*, *Tempo Social*, and *Gênero*. In 2013, he was a research fellow at the University of California-Berkeley.

**Pedro Meira Monteiro** is Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at Princeton University. He teaches courses on Brazilian literature, Latin American essays, music and poetry, and cultural and intellectual history. His books include *A queda do aventureiro* (1999), *Um moralista nos trópicos* (2004), *Mário de Andrade e Sérgio Buarque de Holanda: Correspondência* (2012), *Cangoma Calling: Spirits and Rhythms of Freedom in Brazilian Jongo Slavery Songs* (2013, co-edited with Michael Stone), and *O futuro abolido: Machado de Assis e o Memorial de Aires* (forthcoming). With João Biehl, Lília Schwarcz and Antonio Sérgio Guimarães, he co-directs Princeton’s Global Network on “Race and Citizenship in the Americas.”

He was the editor of *ellipsis*, the journal of the American Portuguese Studies Association, from 2010 to 2014. His current research focuses on re-readings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in Latin America.

**Paulo Moreira** is Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at Yale University. His main areas of interest are American, Brazilian, and Mexican Twentieth-Century Literatures, Comparative Literature, Cinema, Poetry, Short Story, Modernism, Regionalism, and Translation Studies. He has published scholarly articles and reviews on poetry, the short story, Lima Barreto, Machado de Assis, Afro-Brazilian literature, Contemporary Brazilian Film, Faulkner, Guimarães Rosa, and Rulfo. Paulo Moreira has also published a poetry volume (*Quatro Partes*) and his poems have appeared in renowned Brazilian literary magazines (*Inimigo Rumor* and *Coyote*). His first book, *Modernismo Localista das Americas: Os contos de Faulkner, Guimarães Rosa e Rulfo*, was published in January 2013, and his second book, *Literary Relations Between Mexico and Brazil—Deep Undercurrents* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in December 2013.

**Marta Peixoto** is Associate Professor of Brazilian literature at New York University. She has worked primarily on twentieth-century Brazilian literature. Author of *Poesia com coisas* (1983), on the poet João Cabral de Melo Neto and *Passionate Fictions: Gender Narrative and Violence in Clarice Lispector* (1994), she has also published several essays on these writers, as well as on others, mainly poets. She has recently written on Brazilian cinema, with a focus on documentary film.

**Giulia Ricco** obtained both her BA (2010) and MA (2012) in Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Bologna, Italy, with an emphasis in English and Portuguese. Her MA thesis analyzed the representation of violence in the short stories of Brazilian writers Machado de Assis and Rubem Fonseca. The chapter in this collection is an excerpt of this larger work. She is a PhD candidate in Romance Studies at Duke University, working on both Brazil and Italy. Her main interests are violence and literature; politics of memory; meta-fictional cinema; and Atlantic studies. She is also the co-founder of the working group “Ocean Crossings” and the organizer of many Brazil-related events on campus.

**Fernando de Sousa Rocha** is Associate Professor of Portuguese and Chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Middlebury College. He is the author of *Subaltern Writings: Readings on Graciliano Ramos's Novels* (2013). He obtained a Master's and a PhD degree in Comparative Literature from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. He also holds a Master's degree in Letters (Brazilian Literature and Literary Theory) from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). His present research interests focus on slavery and its representations in Brazilian culture. He has articles published in journals such as *Luso-Brazilian Review*, *Itinerários* and *ArtCultura*.

**Sônia Roncador** is Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at UT Austin. She has published three books: *Domestic Servants in Literature and Testimony in Brazil (1889–1999)* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); *A doméstica imaginária: literatura, testemunhos, e a invenção da empregada doméstica no Brasil (1889–1999)* (Editora Universidade de Brasília, 2008); and *Poéticas do empobrecimento: a escrita derradeira de Clarice Lispector* (Annablume, 2002). Additionally, her articles have appeared in a number of peer-reviewed journals, such as *Revista de Crítica Literária Latinoamericana*, *Afro-Hispanic Review*, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, *Ellipsis: Journal of the American Portuguese Studies Association*, and *Revista de Letras*. Her current book project discusses the overlap of discourses on immigration and slavery and servitude in order to reveal the cross-currents of the Portuguese and African Diasporas in Brazil.

**Lília Moritz Schwarcz** is Full Professor in Anthropology at the University of São Paulo. Her main interests are the history of slavery, racial theories, history of the Brazilian Court, academic art, and history of anthropology in Brazil. She has published several books, two of which are in English: *Spectacle of Races: Scientists, Institutions and Racial Theories in Brazil at the End of the XIXth Century* (Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1999) and *The Emperors Beard: D. Pedro II a Tropical King* (Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 2004). She was a curator of exhibitions such as *The Great Travel of the King's Library* (2006) and *Nicolas-Antoine Taunay: a French Translation of the Tropics* (2008). She is also the editor of a complete collection of Lima Barreto's short stories, *Contos Completos de Lima Barreto* (Companhia das Letras, 2010). She was a fellow at the Guggenheim Foundation (2006–2007) and at the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University (2007), was a visiting professor at Oxford and Leiden Universities, a Tinker Professor at Columbia University (2008), and since 2011, is Global Professor at Princeton. She is a Member of the Advisory Group for the Harvard Brazilian Office since 2006.

**Daniel F. Silva** is Assistant Professor of Spanish and Portuguese and Comparative Literature at Middlebury College, having received his PhD from Brown University in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies. His research interests include Lusophone literatures and cinemas, comparative visual cultures, imperial discourses, and urban space. He is author of *Subjectivity and the Reproduction of Imperial Power: Empire's Individuals* (Routledge, 2015) and co-editor of *Lima Barreto: New Critical Perspectives* (Lexington Books, 2013), a collection of multidisciplinary essays on the life and oeuvre of Brazilian writer Lima Barreto, the first of its kind in English. His work has been published in peer-reviewed journals such as *Hispania* and *Chasqui*.

**Luiz Fernando Valente** Professor of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at Brown University, was educated in Brazil and the United States. His teaching and research interests include Brazilian narrative of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with special emphasis on José de Alencar, João Guimarães Rosa, João Ubaldo Ribeiro,

Euclides da Cunha, and Lima Barreto; the relationship of fiction and history; the construction of national identity and the representation of the nation; comparative literature, particularly the modern historical novel and the literature of the Americas; theory of literature, particularly the narrative; and Brazilian poetry since 1945. Some recent publications include *Mundividências: Leituras Comparativas de Guimarães Rosa*; “History, Fiction and National Identity in J. U. Ribeiro’s ‘An Invincible Memory’ and R. Coover’s ‘The Public Burning’”; “‘Estrelas indecifráveis’: ciência e literatura em Euclides da Cunha”; “Distopia e utopia nas letras brasileiras da pós-modernidade”; “Paulo Freire: desenvolvimento como prática de liberdade”; “O romance brasileiro de reavistação colonial: o caso de Luiz Antônio de Assis Brasil”; and “DeLillo’s Techno-Humanism.”

**Nelson H. Vieira** is University Professor of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies and Judaic Studies and Chair of the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at Brown University. He is American founding editor of the literary journal *Brasil/Brazil*, and former President of Latin American Jewish Studies Association (1995–2002). Besides numerous articles on Brazilian fiction, his major publications are *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Brazil*, Ed. & Trans. (2009); *Anonymous Celebrity* by Ignácio de Loyola Brandão, Trans. (2009); *The Prophet and Other Stories* by Samuel Rawet [Intro & Trans.] (1998); *Jewish Voices in Brazilian Literature: A Prophetic Discourse of Alterity* (1995); *Construindo a imagem do judeu: algumas abordagens teóricas* [Editor] (1994); *Brasil e Portugal: a imagem recíproca* (1991); *Roads to Today's Portugal* [Editor] (1983); and *The Promise* by Bernardo Santareno, Trans. (1981). He is working on a book manuscript dedicated to the oeuvre of Brazilian writer Dalton Trevisan.