

A Season in Casa Verde

Alfred Mac Adam

I first read Machado de Assis' novels with Professor Jack Tomlins, translator of Mário de Andrade's *Paulicéia Desvairada*, as an undergraduate at Rutgers University. I realized then that if I was ever going to be a Latinamericanist, I would have to assimilate Machado's work. The chance to put that utopian project into practice came when I was an assistant professor at Yale University. My colleague Emir Rodríguez Monegal, who had himself spent years in Brazil, always insisted on including Brazilian literature in his courses on Latin American literature, and I decided to follow his example.

Teaching *Brás Cubas* and *Dom Casmurro* in English led me to take an interest in Machado criticism, so, with a grant from the Ford Foundation, I went to Rio in the summer of 1971 to read all the criticism on Machado's novels by his Brazilian contemporaries. This in turn led me to write on an early Machado novel, *Resurreição*, which I felt had been neglected by Machado critics. Returning to Yale, I began writing my second book, a study of the Latin American novel in terms of genre: Here my study of Machado proved invaluable, because I could see that his satiric vision, especially in *Brás Cubas*, reappears in the Spanish American writers of the Boom.

I subsequently became interested in the Latin American novella. Again, Machado became the point of departure for my explorations of that genre. I was taken especially by "O Alienista," an incomplete translation of which existed in English. It was then that a strange sequence of coincidences began: I met Andrew Hoyer, the director of Arion Press in San Francisco, who wanted, on the one hand, to include an illustrated Latin American text among his artist books, and, on the other, to commission illustrations from the American artist, Carroll Dunham.

Coincidence became method: I was a friend of Dunham and had translated "O Alienista," which I intended to include in a course whose readings would be in English. Dunham read the manuscript, became fascinated, and immediately began producing drawings. Ultimately he selected twelve to be included with the translation, and the book appeared in 1998. To my knowledge, that was the first time Machado had appeared in English in an illustrated edition. I later translated a less well-known Machado novella, "O Imortal," because I was working on Jorge Luis Borges, whose story of the same title bears a striking resemblance to Machado's work.

Machado de Assis for me is the greatest Latin American writer of the nineteenth century. I hope that through translations, teaching, and academic studies I have been able to make students and general readers here in the United States aware of his tremendous talent.

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