

Raymundo Faoro, Reader of Machado de Assis

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Abstract. This paper provides a close reading of Raymundo Faoro's *Machado de Assis: a pirâmide e o trapézio* (1974), which shows to what extent Faoro's intensive reading of Machado de Assis coincided with the retrieval and deepening of his theses on the political formation of Brazil. In the case of Brazilian society during the Second Empire or at the beginning of the Republic—which is the stage for Machado's characters—Faoro's thesis combines a *synchronic framework* with historical process, or *diachrony*. Synchrony produces a static map; diachrony, movement and passage.

When Raymundo Faoro resolved to come to grips with Machado de Assis' works in a truly close struggle with Machado's universe of characters and situations taken from Imperial Brazil, his masterpiece, *Os donos do poder*, had not only been finished (having been published in 1958) but had just been completely revamped, as the preface to the second edition (1975) warns us. *Machado de Assis: a pirâmide e o trapézio* appeared in 1974, which shows to what extent his intensive reading of Machado coincided with the retrieval and deepening of his theses about the political formation of Brazil.

It is very tempting to yoke together the schemes of both books. According to a mimetic conception of literature, Machado's fiction should mirror the structure of Imperial Brazil as unveiled by the perceptive political scientist that Raymundo Faoro was. But a little methodological caution demands that the reader of Faoro as a reader of Machado (a doubly meta-linguistic operation) tactically separate the approaches, starting by apprehending the main

lines of *Os donos do poder* in order to ascertain to what extent they can be recognized in *Machado de Assis: a pirâmide e o trapézio*.

What is very impressive in *Os donos do poder*, at first reading, is the coherence that lasted almost six centuries, from D. João I, the master of Aviz, to Getúlio Vargas. Despite the plethora of historical data and through disparate political conjunctures, the historian perceives the permanence of a centralizing power, the *patrimonial state*, which serves the estates and is in turn served by them: first the aristocratic, the ecclesiastical, the forensic, and the military; then, the bureaucratic, in general. Thus, the political instance, in a broad sense, that is to say, the *government* and its agents, acquires a consistency, a ubiquity and a longevity that relativizes the production-owning classes to which economicism has always attributed the domination and rule of society.

The dependency, always pointed out by the Marxist vulgate, of the political instance on economic machinery, and of the ideological in transparent relation with class interests is, in Faoro, accepted in principle, but made dialectic by a reverse dependency, that is, by the evidence that the owners of wealth need, structurally or circumstantially, the manipulators of official power. The latter, in turn, enjoy the surpluses of economic life because they hold the power to tax and confiscate, controlling the producers of riches on behalf of the state. Capital and politics end up living together like a couple who are sometimes making love, sometimes arguing, but who never break up for good.

To support his thesis, Faoro starts with the vicissitudes of incipient Portuguese capitalism in the late Middle Ages to reach late Brazilian capitalism. He shows how far the colonial and Imperial estates and bureaucracies, the tentacles of the patrimonial state, were influential in regulating economic life, sometimes slowing it down, sometimes trying to stimulate it, by seducing moneyed men and attracting them to its circle of posts, titles, and distinctions, the tokens of *status* extraordinarily valued until the end of the Second Empire. The combination of honorific titles, administrative jobs, and access to public resources gave the Empire seven marquises, ten earls, 54 viscounts, and 316 barons, with the exclusion of the counseling judges of the High Court, the "comendadores," and the officials of the National Guard. It was the "corporation of power."

Summing up Max Weber, Faoro glosses him and quotes: "The estates rule, the classes negotiate. The estates are organs of the state, the classes are social categories" (*Donos* 47).

The term of comparison, by way of contrast, is United States political society, with its pilgrims' Puritanism, the rise of the self-made man, and the triumph

of an uncultivated bourgeoisie that would ignore titles and aristocratic airs: a competitive society in which the power of money and profit is legitimated by the modern ethic of labor and production. The Weberian mold is, in this case, evident: *it all amounts to evaluating social actions oriented by values*; further, it is ultimately these values, embedded in daily life, that condition the behaviors of a society, not excepting the economic ones. The internalized aspect of these values constitutes the *motives* that make individuals act in one way or another.¹

In the case of Brazilian society during the Second Empire or at the beginning of the Republic—which will be the stage for Machado's characters—Faoro's thesis combines a *synchronic framework* (where one sees estates and classes overlapping, and bureaucracies controlling economic agents) with historical process, or *diachrony*, which offers the slow emergence of modernizing factors, be it in the realm of entrepreneurial production or in the world of conduct and of progressive ideologies. Synchrony produces a static map; diachrony, movement and passage.

The Second Empire existed, up until the 1860s, under the hegemony of highly conservative and centralizing policies. The rural oligarchies shared the legislative power in the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate. As for the administrative posts, they were shared by the sons and relatives of estate owners, the magistrates, the army, the clergy, in sum, by the so-called "influences," which, in turn, lived on the surpluses of the export economy, joining forces around the Crown.

The ruling economic class (the sugar and coffee planters and their agents) and the estates of the Imperial bureaucracy necessarily closed their eyes to the permanence of slave labor, resisting as much as they could British pressure for the abolition of the slave trade. Novelist José de Alencar's exacerbated nativism is combined with the acceptance of the pro-slavery *status quo*. The hegemonic groups defended the practice of commercial liberalism (conquered by the opening of the ports in 1808) and of an exclusionary form of political liberalism, which perpetuated itself through the electoral census by denying the poor any representation in the assemblies, the Chamber and Senate. In the adoption of this elitist liberalism the Imperial policy closely followed the French example, whose major law, the Constitutional Charter of 1814, served as a model for Brazil's 1824 Constitution.

The electoral picture of the Second Empire is well known. Recent historiography has pointed out, however, a significant presence of voters of poor means in the elections prior to the Saraiva Law (1881), which excluded the

illiterate, drastically restricting access to the ballot boxes. Nonetheless, even if a considerable degree of participation in the first phase of the process is admitted, the fact still stands that those elected, the representatives and senators, never belonged to the same class as the poor voters. Just as in Europe at the time, pure and tough liberalism was a practice that directly interested the bourgeoisie and had nothing to do with egalitarian principles, which were seen as anarchic.² To repeat the obvious: *liberalism, in the first half of the nineteenth century, did not mean, and did not intend to mean democracy.*³

A conservative society... in the process of change

Raymundo Faoro presents convincing arguments and examples to uphold the thesis of the validity of two liberalisms throughout nineteenth-century Brazil. The fact that these are two ideological trends bearing the same denomination—*liberalism*—has been the cause of persistent mistakes, such as the notion of foreign, counterfeit, and misplaced liberal ideas, which confounds rather than clarifies the complex ideological texture of the Second Empire.⁴

The first liberalism, a long-standing ideology, has precise dates of birth as far as its institution in the history of nineteenth-century Brazil goes: 1808 and 1824. In 1808, there is the opening of the ports by Prince Regent Dom João, following the advice of the orthodox supporter of Adam Smith, Silva Lisboa (later Viscount of Cairu). Economic liberalism is established (which, besides, coexisted with slavery throughout the entire West), agricultural production being opened to international trade, with a pronounced partiality towards Great Britain, as can be verified in the treaties signed in 1810. The measure met the demands of British trade and, internally, satisfied the interests of the producers stifled by colonial exclusivity: this will be the first step towards independence. In 1824, Pedro I signed the Constitution, establishing norms of political representation, the vote for renters, and the functioning of legislative and executive powers through the combination of a parliamentary system and monarchy. It is a scheme very close to that of the French Constitutional Charter, which had introduced the moderating power, according to Benjamin Constant's conciliatory proposal.⁵

As functional ideology, this first liberalism occupied its place in a society emerging from the colonial system. Insofar as it was structured around property, it played the role of an ideological cement legitimating the economic practices and the political agreements of men who consolidated the new national state around a dynasty. After independence, slave labor *remained* as

a constitutive factor of the Brazilian economy; as for liberalism, it *became* the indispensable ideological factor for the set-up of the new nation-state.

In 1840, Pedro II's coming of age was brought forward in the wake of a centralizing movement destined to close the turbulent and centrifugal cycle of the Regency. The achievement of monarchical stability coincided with the rise of coffee in the Paraíba Valley, which, in turn, lacked hands and considerably increased its breeding stocks of slaves. Pro-slavery property integrated the order of acquired rights, which was the liberal-propertyied rationale.

Oligarchic liberalism will face its first crisis only in the 1860s, with the irruption of the second or "new liberalism" (Joaquim Nabuco), which will advocate in favor of direct elections, of restrictions to lifelong representation in the Senate and to the moderating power; it will gradually deal with the "servile question."

At this point, pure and tough "property-ism" reacts coherently against the proposal of the Law of the Free Womb, enforced in 1871 but which had been in preparation, under the auspices of the Emperor, since 1866. Traditional politicians, independent of their party affiliations, acted according to the tenets of private property that the Napoleonic Civil Code, a paradigm in the Western world, had consecrated when it maintained slavery, albeit omitting any reference to the institution Napoleon had introduced in the French Antilles in 1802. Here and there the post-Revolution liberal constitutions granted the landowning citizen the right to restrain the freedom of the poor, denying the latter citizenship and, ultimately, the right to buy the freedom of human beings torn from the coasts of Africa. The extreme effect of liberalism was complete inequality: capital, on one side; forced labor, on the other. In abolitionist Du Bois' perfect phrase: "It was freedom to destroy freedom."

The demand for indemnity for slave owners (which the positivist anti-liberals would condemn) was satisfied by the English, French, and Dutch governments when abolition was declared in their respective colonies, which is clear evidence that the right of property of man by man was fully in force in the metropolises ruled by liberal parliamentary monarchies. A law in force in Europe and in the Americas.

This same ideology—exclusive by force of its own historical formation—was still represented among us by Araújo Lima, Marquis of Olinda, a sustainer of Regressionism in the Regency's final years. He was a state counselor when Pedro II consulted him, in 1867, about the advantages of discussing the abolition of slave labor. To which the Marquis drastically replied: "The publicists and statesmen in Europe cannot imagine the situation of the countries

that depend on slave labor. Here, their ideas serve no purpose."⁶ This was a stance that, in those same years, was already being countered and practically outdone by the new liberalism.

For the now old liberal-"property-ist" credo, abolitionism was an exotic, counterfeit ideology, an offspring of the philanthropists' sentimentalism or the machination of utopians and subversives who intended to undermine the bases of the national economy and monarchy. Nabuco remarks in *O Abolicionismo*:

The opposition that agriculture made to the portion of the 28 September Act granting slaves the right to have their own savings and to use them to free themselves proves that it did not want to let even this insignificant crumb of freedom fall off its table. The agricultural workers of Bananal, for example, representing through their names the agriculture of São Paulo and of the borders of the province of Rio, wrote in a petition to the Chambers: "*Either there is property with its essential qualities, or we cannot decidedly exist.*" Enforced freedom, with all the measures relating to it, is revenge looming over all the houses, injury suspended over all the families, the annihilation of agriculture, the death of the country. (133)⁷

The liberal abolitionists, as we know through the testimony of Nabuco and Rui Barbosa, were called "communists" by the liberal-conservatives who could not tolerate the idea of state intervention in their constitutional right to use and abuse their position as proprietors.

This was an ideological complex that involved the West. The post-revolutionary bourgeois liberalism of Napoleon and the Restoration had combined, all over Europe, with a clear-cut separation of social classes. And it had formed a single body with the maintenance of slave labor in Brazil, in the south of the United States and in the French, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies, whose representatives opposed the proposals of emancipation in their respective metropolitan chambers. There was nothing exclusively Brazilian in this fusion of interests and ideological rationalization.

The historical place of the old exclusionary liberalism was delimited: it was the suitable ideology for the exploiters and beneficiaries of the plantation economy. It was a broad social space since it housed not only the direct agents of the agro-export network (slave traders, planters, commissaries) but also their organic intellectuals, the courts, Parliament, High Court, and provincial bureaucrats. For this historical block, what other ideology would better fit than the unconditional defense of property rights?

However, the restriction of this right, considered counterfeit from the point of view of the oligarchy (“Here, their ideas serve no purpose”), would be deemed just, civilized, and progressive by the new liberalism, which would fight to accomplish in Brazil the ideals of democracy that the 1848 revolution spread throughout Europe. *Only in 1848 did the French National Assembly abolish slavery.* If we do not take into account the very dialectic of nineteenth-century liberalism, that is, its contrasting moments, we will make the a-historical mistake of considering it “misplaced” in relation to Brazilian reality. As a matter of fact, both the old and the new liberal ideas occupied the spaces to which the very movement of Western capitalism destined them.

Sérgio Buarque, attentive to the moments of internal crisis, coined the phrase “liberals against liberals” to point to the intra-party contradictions, which agitated the political scene in the 1870s and 1880s (Holanda 195-238). Liberals still shut themselves up in their fear of abolitionist radicalism *versus* liberals open to the progressive winds that gave life simultaneously to the abolitionist and republican campaigns.

What is the *social* place of this second and renewed liberalism?

Faoro situates the new liberals among those who did not find their own promising places in the groups that benefited from monarchical centralization, high bureaucracy, and slavery rents. By the end of the 1860s, the political crisis began to undermine the pillars of the Empire, leading to its collapse twenty years later. Faoro glimpsed a systemic transformation from the 1860s-1870s onwards: “a class society, selective from a communitarian point of view and progressively closed, emerges from the picture of hierarchies and estates” (*Donos* 453). This is the moment when one will hear the modern voices of Tavares Bastos, Saldanha Marinho, Quintino Bocaiúva, José Bonifácio the Younger, of Castro Alves, Souza Dantas, Silveira Martins, Luis Gama, Joaquim Nabuco, Rui Barbosa, André Rebouças, and José do Patrocínio. In the realm of philosophical and scientific thought, this is the time of the 1870s generation, with what Sílvio Romero calls its “body of new ideas” that renews historiography and criticism among men like João Ribeiro, Capistrano de Abreu, José Veríssimo, and Araripe Jr.

Cities were, for their power of concentration and ideological diffusion, the nuclei of the new liberalism: the Rio de Janeiro of newspapers and associations, the São Paulo of the Law School, Recife, Salvador, Porto Alegre. As for the Northeast, impoverished by the extinction of the slave trade, and the intermittent crises of the sugar trade, it no longer considered the slave the

foundation of its economy; hence, abolitionism did not face, from Ceará to Bahia, the fierce opposition it would find in the more prosperous coffee-planting provinces of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The new liberalism was urban and northeastern.

Os donos do poder is enlightening. In the very dense chapter entitled “O Renascimento liberal e a República” (“Liberal Renaissance and the Republic”) Faoro shows how the new liberalism took roots in the dissatisfaction of “whole groups, which were active and powerful,” and which “had no space, nor played any role in the imperial order” (453). They were the offspring of the northeastern “squire-archy” going through a crisis and very attentive to the English or Yankee economy and politics. They were middle-class liberal professionals who needed to compete with the oligarchy’s protégés. They were radical abolitionists who no longer tolerated the dilatory coups of the Chamber and Senate. Last but not least, they were military men with a positivist education and republican ideals, who meant to wrench the country from the “theocratic-monarchic” period in which, according to Comte, the decrepit dynasties were still running aground. And all navigated the waters of the “democratic tide,” which, in Joaquim Nabuco’s reading, defined the spirit of the new liberalism.

Without advancing arguments here that will be better suited to the following investigation of Faoro as a reader of Machado, it seems pertinent to enquire: *would this not have been the ideological time of the young Machado who was active in the liberal press between 1860 and 1866*, precisely when the Liberal Party was called to action to face the dogmas of the confederation that boasted they were the Party of Order? But, if the old liberalism committed to the oligarchies seemed deceitful and oppressive to him, why then did the new liberalism or the nascent republicanism not carry him off his feet from the 1870s onwards? Why did the older Machado, who personally supported the new liberals, end up distancing himself from both? Why did he not propose, or cogitate, or even catch a glimpse of an alternative, a third way? The fact to be interpreted is that Machado de Assis, as a chronicler (his visible image as a public man), did not actively support any of the new tendencies or nostalgically support the old ones, because, at some point, he came to discredit each and any ideology that intended to transform the “human clay” and the society created from it. His deep disillusion would have prevented him from engaging in the reformist struggle of his youth’s companions and of those who came after them. A monarchist and a liberal, in a broad sense, but pro-

foundly skeptical, he preferred to depict the gloomy or simply laughable aspects of those who used the term “liberal” to defend their rights to property and political posts.

The new liberals, whom Machado also knew very well, did not inspire characters or fictional situations, which suggests, once again, the selective nature of the gaze that purports to be realistic.

Machado’s distancing is, in a broad sense, *moraliste*, ethical and philosophical, of will and thought. And it is aesthetic, once his narrative language ceases to be confused with either the late nineteenth-century novelists’ aggressive and direct naturalism (Adolfo Caminha, Aluísio Azevedo, Inglês e Sousa, Júlio Ribeiro), or Raul Pompéia’s painful expressionism. It will be biting, yet diplomatic; it will hurt but soothe.

Machado de Assis: the pyramid and the trapezium

From Raymundo Faoro’s perspective, Machado de Assis’ narrator represents, *on the level of the individual*, the march and countermarch of interests and will to power at the micro-social level: between man and woman, brothers, friends, and families. In other words, literature, as mimesis of the real, deals with the singular, whereas the social sciences construct the type that embodies the characteristics of a plurality of individuals. In this sense, *Machado de Assis: a pirâmide e o trapézio* resumes and individualizes *Os donos do poder*.

The modern novel is the privatization of the epic genre: this is the theoretical conquest of Marxist thought exemplarily formulated by Lukács in his *Theory of the Novel*. Faoro quotes Lukács only once. It is the passage in which Lukács criticizes realistic specific details and values the opposite kind of realism, which connects the minutiae to the whole of the composition (Faoro, *Machado* 492). This true realism, which makes sense of the characters’ smallest gestures and strikes the core of the drama—the motivations, the vested interests—is linked to the all-encompassing social picture, where the interplay of the same interests takes shape publicly and institutionally. It would be the task of the modern novelist to give shape to the subjective and inter-subjective aspects of conflicts. This is why the literary critic cannot ignore the relations, whether of affinity or withdrawal, which the narrator establishes with the social fabric.

Taking for granted the general and constant relationship between the novel and society, the touchstone of realism, Raymundo Faoro draws the map of the Second Empire’s political and economic life, turning his eyes towards

the characters and situations in Machado, a comprehensive survey that the exposition below will try to sum up in its main lines.

The plan of the book is neatly represented by the two geometrical figures of the title: the pyramid and the trapezium. These figures, sometimes overlapping, sometimes combined, constitute the synchronic axis of Faoro's thesis. They are the shape of the social picture as it was constituted in the Second Empire.

The *pyramid* draws the vertical class structure. The wide base relates to manual workers: the slaves, the freedmen, the poor in general, whether white or *mes-tizos*. The apex is constituted by the minute owning class: the planters, their agents, and the bankers. The tradesmen are placed midway up the pyramid and are graded according to their stock. The pyramid has a direct link with production and business. Its moving forces are accumulation, profit or high consumption—at the apex; the base is primarily the slave, and later the wage-earner.

The *trapezium* draws the horizontal structure of the estates. Overlapping with the agro-exporting economy, serving it or being serviced by it, by means of surplus taxes, the bureaucratic strata, the magistrates, imperial and provincial officials, the clergy, and the army. It is the realm of hierarchies dependent on posts, titles, sinecures, privileges; it is the “influences” that constitute the “corporation of power” and that depend on the Chamber, the Senate, and on personal power, the Emperor. As in *Os donos do poder, Machado de Assis: a pirâmide e o trapézio* minutely probes into this realm, in which *status* is the supreme ambition because it provides reputation and positions, which so many characters will crave for all of their lives, Brás Cubas first of all.

The diachronic axis follows the flow of events. Primarily after the 1860s, Brazilian society during the Second Empire changed gradually towards “late capitalism”—late but efficient—as one of the consequences of the liberation of capital made possible by the suspension of slave traffic. This change would produce modernizing behaviors, making the economic motivations more clearly visible. The critique of the pro-slavery regime finds a voice in Tavares Bastos (*Cartas do solitário, A província*), a colorful progressive *Yankee*. Economic progress and free labor are the foundations of Joaquim Nabuco's arguments in the heated words of *O abolicionismo*. Both have as their targets progress and modernity, which can only be capitalist, though not necessarily democratic.⁸

The synchronic axis contains the social structure, the pyramid, and the trapezium. The diachronic axis suggests the history of changes, passages, resistances. Both constitute the frame, the places in which Machado is going to situate his characters, giving some of them the typical traits of their class

or estate, but reserving for others specific characteristics capable of distinguishing them from the middle sectors and the masses, which, as we have known since Machiavelli, include the absolute majority of people.

We have finally come to the crucial issue of interpreting the Machadian gaze. In mapping out the social canvas of the Second Empire and witnessing the passage from a world slow in disappearing to another that is breaking in, would Raymundo Faoro have exhausted his task of reconstituting Machadian realism? To answer this crucial question, Faoro himself resorts to the existence of a third axis, which in its stasis and in its dynamics does not restrict itself to the representation of aspects of the social system (the sociology of literature's primary aim), but presupposes, in the writer's gaze, from his perspective, *the capacity to interpret behavior and fictional situations*.

On the hermeneutic axis, one tries to establish the relation of the writing subject to his objects. The subject reminisces, chooses, imagines, expresses himself, muses, discloses, judges, constructs. In a word pregnant with meaning: the subject *interprets* the other and interprets himself, as self-consciousness. All these operations, these movements of the soul made by the narrator, are pervaded by his life story and depend on a cultural and ideological complex that does not necessarily get confused with this or that contemporary current of thought.

Raymundo Faoro does not thematize an avowedly hermeneutic approach. A historian, sociologist, and political scientist, he set himself the primary task of finding, for each social niche, a typical character that would illustrate the pyramidal or trapezoidal structure of Brazilian public life. To accomplish this objective, he studied Machado's fiction by mapping out its politicians, by discriminating representatives and senators, whether candidates to a ministry or not; by examining the landowning classes, planters, capitalists, renters, financiers; by lingering on the behavior of dependents, clerks, employees, workers, slaves; by analyzing the characters connected with the army and the clergy; by reflecting on the influence of the nobility and of the Emperor; in short, by vertically and horizontally mapping out the society mirrored in the works of Brazil's sharpest observer.

The task might well be considered successfully accomplished since the purpose of acknowledging the class pyramid and the estates' trapezium was exemplarily completed. However, without publicizing any hermeneutic methodology, Faoro felt one dimension that the typological catalogue does not include: the examination of the nexus between writer and society seen from the point of view of the gaze rather than the mere empirical picture, in other words, seen from the point of view of reflection rather than the mere reflex.

It is significant that, on completing his work, it occurred to him that the image of the *mirror* was not sufficient: the last chapter is called "The mirror and the lamp." The mirror had been useful in his task as a historian. Another probing instrument was missing: a light that could select the profiles of representative objects and that intensely lit one aspect and left the others in shadow or complete darkness; a light that did not restrict itself to the passivity of the mirror but rather that moved in multiple and different directions, inward and outward, upward and downward, forward and backward, to one side and the other; a light that came very close, as does the myopic eye searching for the minute and the miniscule, or which reached far, very far, as do the farsighted, who can only see clearly at a distance, searching the horizon, the very high or very deep, at their ease; a crude light, the glare of which makes the object reverberate throughout the visual field, or a feeble light that envelops people and things in the shadow and blurs them in the mist of the dull gaze that hardly distinguishes the contours hidden behind the blemishes and blind spots.

This lamp identifies itself with the movements of the narrating consciousness. It is not an absolute *ego*, above or outside history, as the idealist philosopher might constitute it. It is a consciousness formed by a wider, denser, and more profound historicity than the time measured by the clock or calendar. The historicity immanent to the writer's consciousness is saturated with cultural memory, which offers him models of interpretation and judgment capable of qualifying the here-and-now stimuli and pondering the situations that the newspapers abound with in everyday life.

Sílvio Romero, accusing the author of *Quincas Borba* of being a "poor portraitist," and Labieno, defending him as a man of his time, made, according to Faoro, the same error, to judge Machado exclusively according to the specular criterion, as if such a photographic operation were able to measure the value of the fiction writer: "This scheme, a century old, worn out, and unproductive, would transform the literary into the non-literary, reducing it to social factors transposed to a pre-existing frame" (Faoro, *Machado* 485). Faoro teaches us to avoid the pitfalls of this lesser sociology: "[T]he common root of thought does not take the social fact for the literary fact. The historian and the novel writer, lost in the territory of their perspectives and perplexities, recur to the mirror to capture and reflect reality, whereas the lamp, which projects it, shines with a different intensity" (Faoro, *Machado* 486).

Scientifically oriented objectivism leaves aside the most characteristic element of the apprehension of social reality: the cultural relevance of the data.

The meaning of the social and historical phenomenon does not derive from laws, or from facts neutralized by the measure; rather, it allows understanding by means of values. The object presenting itself to the spectator is pre-determined by the meaning with which value infuses it, transforming it into a cultural object (Faoro, *Machado* 487).

The quotations just referred to aim to stress, in Faoro's claims, the terms *understanding*, *culture*, and *value*. Relying on Max Weber, our reader of Machado insists on the cultural and axiological dimension of the choices made by historians and, with more freedom, novelists. Culture is the source of value, it lends meaning to the episodes remembered or invented by the narrator. In Machado's case, the interpretative axis of behaviors is the analysis of the passions that motivate them, always; further, this has been, from Montaigne to La Rochefoucauld, from Machiavel to La Bruyère and to Schopenhauer, the favorite exercise of moralists.

Augusto Meyer, always attentive to the prospective movements of Machado de Assis, had already pointed out the relevance of the moralist's gaze in Machado's work. Faoro recovers the intuition of this extraordinary artist-critic, didactically stressing the difference between the moralizing moralist (forgive the tautology) and the analytical moralist:

Moralist does not mean moralizing, preacher of morals or censor of manners. Moralism has nothing to do with morals, but it has a lot to do with manners, *mores*, that is, "with the type of life and man's way of being in concrete reality, which can be immoral." Moralists are not educators, or teachers of ethics. They are observers, analysts, painters of men, infinite is their task. Their study is dedicated to the full complication of man's contradictory nature and his banal and concrete condition, which is revealed only when ethics steps aside to make room for the unbiased observation of the real. (Faoro, *Machado* 496)⁹

The hermeneutic axis is defined. Understanding Machado's gaze entails listening to a whole tradition of analysis of human behavior that is rooted in the perception of omnipresent self-esteem, vanity, the precariousness of conscience, and the preeminence of interest and desire over the demands of duty, or, using Freudian categories, of the pleasure principle over the reality principle.

That this axis of interpretation may coexist with sociological explanations, this is the claim that relates to the very internal coherence of *Machado de Assis: a pirâmide e o trapézio*. The awareness that these are two distinct approaches,

at the extreme of opposition, is expressed in the inter-title—"Moralism in conflict with history and society" (496).

Of what would this clash of interpretations consist?

Faoro believes he has detected the tension between the moral and psychological outlook (as the writer would have constructed it by modeling his experiences according to those of the moralists) and the typifying determinism with which academic sociology operates when it is time to explain behaviors inside and outside the text. Glossing a novelist, the critic writes: "A Cromwell or a Bonaparte reached the top of the pyramid, not due to the conjunction of social forces, but by means of the fire of his ambition to power."

In other words, for Machado, the will to power, insofar as it "burns with violence," constitutes the origin of the trajectory of men who wrote history. This statement relativizes the pure mechanism of social pressures. At the root of all the wishes that have animated human beings for centuries, a blind power throbs, indifferent to the destiny of those beings that it itself begot: this power is Nature, the will to live allegorized in Brás Cubas's delirium. In this order of relationships, society is the place in common where passions meet and fail to meet. Passions derived from a dispersed energy that transcends, precedes, and survives them, and, at the same time, informs and inhabits them, since every individual wish is inherent to cosmic will. The affinity with Shopenhauer's thinking stands out.

But, despite an ultimate debt to Nature, the Machadian construction of character will not be naturalistic, in a narrow sense, because "natural" desire itself challenges social norms. Hence the need for disguise, enticement, hypocrisy, and, sometimes, lies. Machado is a major analyst of the murky relations between first and second nature. The moralist acknowledges the disguise, but holds up the veil that hardly covers eternally savage nature, Life, the master of our desires, the ultimate source of our existence in this sublunary world.

However, if one considers the level of manners, of *mores*, as second nature, as imperious as the first, in Machado's own words, shall we by any chance have built the bridge that goes both ways between instincts and social conventions? Faoro recalls one of Pascal's sharpest observations, from *pensée* number 120: "Habit is second nature that destroys the first. But what is nature? Why is habit not natural? I fear this same nature is no longer first habit, the same way habit is second nature."

The Darwinian and Machiavellian struggle between strong lions and smart foxes will have been transposed to the social jungle, where only the

strong can say all they think, to the limit of cynicism, while the weak need to repress their feelings and intentions. Yet will it be fair to condemn what is, in the weak, a necessary defense? Moralism will no longer be, at this point, solely the acrid demythologization of the *moi haïssable* to take on realist, that is, concessive, diplomatic tones. The weak and poor, after all, would have the right to mislead the rich and strong, because they need to survive. The ambitions of the poor will no longer be reproachable due to their very right to rise to positions that the rich have enjoyed since birth. As to ingratitude, black in romantic and idealistic eyes, it will possibly mean the exercise of personal assertion, the reverse of the subservience to which dependents are constrained. The examples of Guimar and Iaiá Garcia are unequivocal. Moralism, universalizing the wishes and interests of the I (though they might be originally considered detestable, because they mean vanity and ambition), will ultimately understand the longing for equality that the new liberal-individualist society awakens in the poor and in the dependent. To understand means here to accept, concede, tolerate. Old ideas are called on to disentangle new situations.

The conflict between sociology and hermeneutics, drawn by Faoro, may weaken, provided *interpretation*—resting on the Western tradition of moral analysis—grants that passions, though recurring, are awakened by localized social stimuli, which are variable through time. Sociological close reading, in turn, will allow the interpreter the human, trans-temporal nature of passions, the spring of all behaviors, pre-existing and surviving the contingencies that set it in motion. Desire, trans-historical, will not be a-historical, however. The visceral hate between brothers, which caused Cain to kill Abel, Romulus to kill Remus, Esau and Jacob to fight in their mother's womb, and Joseph to be sold, returns in the bourgeois figures of Pedro and Paulo, enemies before birth, *ab ovo*, in Machado's novel. Passion takes on a thousand historical means of manifesting itself, and a thousand specific occasions. The moralist will excavate desire in its existential dynamics, as he did for centuries before yielding his object to psychoanalysis. And the sociologist will limit himself to the conditionings closest to interpersonal plots.

Returning to the analysis of the short story "O Espelho," Faoro says that Jacobina's "external soul," his officer's uniform, his unequivocally social nature, appears, in the narrator's voice, as the winner over his "internal soul," where the first "man" would dwell before being dominated by his interest in rising in life and standing out. For a deterministic sociological reading, the ultimate lesson of this short story is the indefectible victory of the social role

that structures the I. The hermeneutic reading of "O Espelho" reminds us, once again, of the soul's fragility, another dramatic example of human precariousness, of *which the character-narrator is fully aware*. Jacobina's *a posteriori* awareness is the lamp, whereas his social gaze returned him the mirror. Vanity creates situations that literally blur consciousness: an original sin from Pascal's Jansenistic perspective (the *moi haïssable* and its traps), it is simultaneously the touchstone of the social drama in which it is necessary to compete to play the roles... preferably the main ones.

First and second nature are closely intertwined, and the truth is that we are far from understanding the mutual relations of the vital and the psychological, and of both with the social.

To what extent is it possible to ideologically situate this mature Machado? We have, in principle, a narrator who is especially sensitive to the conditioning forces of the psychosocial fabric. But are they pressures coming from society, universally speaking, as second nature that it is, or only pressures of a specific phase of Brazilian society?

Machado de Assis, placed at the transition between the solid traditional and the new and contractual orders, between fundamental cohesion and the combination of interests, suspects that in the intertwined pathways there is a great mistake that loses and confounds everybody. If only the external soul illuminated man's steps, the exchange of the true for the false would be a fact, with the abandonment of universal values—that is, of traditional values (*Machado* 499).

It seems to me, at this point, that Max Weber takes Faoro's hand and dictates the opposite principles of traditional and modern society, the pair that German historicism crystallized in the terms *community* and *society*.

Though there is evidence of a Machado strongly inclined towards decorum and propriety, towards "elegant poverty" and purity of language, traditional values, I would not say the cleavage *traditional versus modern* was tainted in his work by positive and negative connotations, at least with reference to the constant presence there of passions and interests observable in all behaviors, whether of the beginning, middle, or end of the century. Selfishness is transversal, interests are circumstantial.

The passage from the old to the new society would have its obstacles and ridicules, its illusions (evident in some of the chronicles), but there is no longing for bygone days entrenched in his thought because the classic moralist sees history as an assemblage of violence and imposture, well or poorly disguised, which hardly allows for nostalgia or utopia. An example, among many: what

is reputation, the butt of Brás Cubas's and Rubião's concerns? A new name for glory, also vain, a laughable exaggeration of the vanity of vanities to which Ecclesiastes refers. It is obvious that the instruments of the old glory were made possible by the multiple forms of modern advertising, "this wanton and grave lady." But even here the moralist will say that, if manners and times have changed, the ultimate aim remains the same, because the motivation of the insatiable I does as well. Modernization neither improves nor aggravates behaviors ruled by the will to live and the will to power.

If Machado is lucid enough to represent the patriarchal style, which, as in all relations based on favor, introduces arbitrariness, his vision of society will nonetheless trust the modernized world of easy money, as we can read in his words of aversion to the Encilhamento race. Guizot's famous phrase—"Get rich," emblem of the new European bourgeoisie, seems no less than sinister to him.¹⁰

The characters that are successful in life and, somehow, mirror this changing society towards bourgeois hegemony will not be viewed by the narrator very approvingly; his gaze will be patronizing, at best. In his early novels, the upstart Procópio Dias is sordid in *Iaiá Garcia*; Camargo, in *Helena*, a father concerned with marrying his daughter to a rich man, is little less than a villain. Guiomar and Iaiá, young women of humble or low origin, rise socially thanks to their cunning and determined tactics, receiving an explanatory rather than complimentary treatment: in them, second nature, as imperious as first nature, rules and explains their actions. In *Iaiá*, "if there was ambition, it did not seem to be of good breed," a comment that bites and soothes. In his later phase, the rich characters or those who become rich are detestable, or almost. In *Memórias póstumas*, Cotrim is greedy and cruel; Lobo Neves is ambitious but superstitious and, after all, in the face of his wife's possible adultery, fears public opinion rather than the truth about his married life. As for Brás Cubas, who tells his story after he is dead, he too does not spare himself the exposition of fatuity and the practice of evading the scruples of his conscience through life. Brás lies and knows that others also deny him the truth, but ends up agreeing with his old friend Jacó Tavares' conclusion: "absolute veracity was incompatible with an advanced social state." Thus Machado judges that society that began to "advance." Virgília, Brás' lover, would not fail to prioritize social considerations all the time, and "was less scrupulous than her husband": although rich, she flattered an old friend of the family, since she kept alive "her hopes on his legacy." Falseness, which will prove to be implacable, is what is shown in *Quincas Borba* by Palha and Sofia

towards the naïve Rubião; the couple will climb socially, taking advantage of the ridiculous provincial man, whom they will abandon in his final phase of madness and loneliness. In *Dom Casmurro*, Escobar starts by borrowing money from the unambitious Dona Glória and will soon become rich thanks to his shrewd and fine skills. In *Esau e Jacó*, Nóbrega, the brother of the souls, acquires property thanks to deceit and will turn out to be the evil shadow in Flora's story.

Santos the banker, the twins' father, combines greed and his wish to become a squire: "He earned a lot and made others lose." Lastly, Tristão, in *Memorial de Aires*, changes from protected godson into young man with a future, but his career has an ambiguous taste for the reader: self-seeking or only "political"? All the suspicions, however, lose their force in this last work.

Machado is neither nostalgic nor an evolutionist, in the sense that the latter term refers to a line going from the traditional to the modern as a process that would go from worse to better. In his view, in both regimes interest and the fiercest selfishness can obtain, from which there is nothing to expect but the reproduction of force or cunning as levers of human behavior. In different contexts, both the old matron Dona Antônia, in *Casa Velha*, and the modern upstart couple, Palha and Sofia, in *Quincas Borba*, will throw their nets and concoct their villainies to achieve their aims and maintain their status. And, when there is one character "to whom the idea of the net was repugnant," as is the case with Estela in *Iaiá Garcia*, her fate will be haughty but resigned loneliness.

Therefore, the mature Machado's existential position in face of the "new liberalism" (announced by so many of his contemporaries) will be at the least reticent. Navigating the progressive waters of Saldanha Marinho, Quintino Bocaiúva, Tavares Bastos, Nabuco, Rui, Patrocínio, and others would mean having a confidence in human clay that seems excessive to the moral analyst. As is stated in the short story "Pai contra mãe," *social and human order is not always reached without the grotesque, and sometimes the cruel*. This claim originates in Brazil but is not restricted to Brazil: it refers to the "social order," a concept constructed here by a skeptical and transversal gaze.

Two other examples, taken from the last novels, the action of which takes place between the end of the Empire and beginning of the Republic, times of modernization in Rio de Janeiro. What can one expect from young Pedro and Paulo, brothers and enemies since childhood who, already triumphant in their political careers, swore to their dying mother that they would always live in reconciliation, and, nonetheless, soon afterwards resume their everlasting hate?

What can one expect from the elegant and refined young people in the new society, Tristão and Fidélia, so beloved and cared for by the Aguiar couple, seen from Aires's point of view in *Memorial*? That they fulfill the laws of life and tread the paths of personal happiness, even at the cost of the loneliness of their godparents, orphans in reverse. It will be the slightest of disappointments if compared, for example, with Rubião's tragic fate; in spite of this, it will mean the return of old and bitter certainties. *Les morts vont vite*, and with them the elderly: this is what our old counselor suggests, being not by coincidence a retired diplomat.

To reread *Machado de Assis: a pirâmide e o trapézio* is an invitation to a fertile dialogue between sociology and hermeneutics, explanation and understanding, the picture and the gaze, which would not displease master Raymondo Faoro, the Weber who probed, throughout his work, the intricate relations between individual and society.

Notes

¹ See the excellent introduction by Gabriel Cohn for the Brazilian edition of Max Weber's collected essays.

² A study of the electoral practices during the Second Empire, which contains new information to help understand the overall process, can be found in Carvalho 393–416.

³ The crucial distinction between liberalism and democracy prevailing in post-revolutionary Europe can be found in Laski's classic *O Liberalismo Europeu*. For Laski, the core of liberalism is the sacred nature of private property, which bears no structural relation whatsoever with egalitarianism. "The slave (the observation is Nabuco's) is still an asset like any other, which the master can dispose of like a horse, or a piece of furniture" (Nabuco, *O Abolicionismo*). The opposition between economic liberalism and democratic ideals was already explicit in the words said by Visconde de Cayru during the 1823 Constitutional Assembly: "Under no circumstances can any government tolerate that the Geneva sophist's doctrines of the Social Contract be taught in any classes" (Carvalho 85).

⁴ The thesis that the current ideologies throughout our political history would not correspond to "Brazilian reality" found expression in at least two different discourses:

1) In the nineteenth century, on the occasion of the debates around the Law of the Free Womb, the Marquis of Olinda, in the wake of Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos' and of Viscount of Uruguai's Regressionism, defended the pro-slavery regime and centralism, which seemed to be more suitable to Brazil's economy and political structure. Their refusal of abolitionist proposals initially formulated in Europe ("Here, their ideas serve no purpose") is an example of the conservatism that rejected *a priori* any change in the name of a national ideological specificity. If it came from abroad, it could not be any good here. The same nativist and reactionary syndrome animated José de Alencar's invectives against the project of freeing the newly born. Generally speaking, the combination of xenophobia and authoritarianism tends to deem foreign ideas, mainly the reformist ones, as impertinent and absurd. Thus, in the late 1920s, a fascist body of ideas defended an exaggerated

Brazilianism of ideas and values, differentiating itself from Modernism, which it had episodically joined (Prado). In the 1930s, a nationalistic and authoritarian current represented by the ideologues who supported the Estado Novo, like Azevedo Amaral and Oliveira Viana, contested the "idealistic" and displaced character of the liberal principles present in the 1891 Republican Constitution.

2) Among the interpreters of the history of ideologies in Brazil, there are scholars who, without the ideological bias of the nationalists quoted above, defend the hypothesis that the ideas divulged by European cultures, e.g., English or French liberalism and French positivism, would be misplaced in Brazil, not adjusting to a peripheral society, outdated in relation to the pace of the center. They would be artificial imitations. It is "trans-oceanism," in Capistrano de Abreu's words. It is the statement that "we are exiles in our own land," which pervades *Raízes do Brasil*, by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, supporting the supposition that the Brazilian ideologues prefer abstractions to a face-to-face struggle with the everyday.

Finally, it is the expression "misplaced ideas," coined by the literary critic Roberto Schwarz in his remarkable study on Machado de Assis that takes to its limit the thesis of the inappropriateness of an ideology of European origin (liberalism) in relation to a basic component of the Brazilian economy (slavery). In other interpreters, we find contrary arguments to the above-mentioned theses. Paulo Mercadante sees in the symbiosis liberalism-slavery a current use of Western liberalism (which was, without exception, exclusionary) due to the interests of the founders of the Brazilian nation-state; this work refutes the hypothesis of the artificialism of Western ideologies when applied to our politics. Maria Sylvia Carvalho Franco, in studies of high conceptual rigor, seeks to prove the structural unity of the market economy on this and on the other side of the Atlantic, which asserts itself in the incomplete character of Brazilian capitalism still based on compulsory labor (see her *Homens Livres na Ordem Escravocrata*). Maria Sylvia criticizes the expression "misplaced ideas" in her text "As idéias estão no lugar": the ideological production of liberalism was rooted in the world capitalist system, which constituted it *internally*, based on each specific situation. Everywhere, liberalism cements and rationalizes the interests of the ruling bourgeoisie, including slavery and favor in its dynamics. From Jacob Gorender's classic study (*O Escravismo Colonial*) it is possible to understand that the ruling class in the Empire could not avoid adhering to liberalism, as an intrinsically "property-ist" ideology. For the coffee or sugar producer and for the slave merchant, liberalism functioned, first, as a free market ideology. Recently, Gorender has returned to this topic, contesting the association of "exteriority" to liberalism in our oligarchic regime: the liberal ideals "were in their right place, they reproduced what its defenders wanted" (*Estudos Avançados*). Essayist Sérgio Paulo Rouanet formulated a radical critique of the several forms of ideological autonomism, insofar as the latter intends to deny the pertinence of ideas and ideals the first formulations of which have been conceived outside national borders. To understand the structural links between the pro-slavery regime and the building of the nation-state in the golden age of economic liberalism, see Luiz Felipe de Alencastro's incisive study "L'empire du Brésil." Recognizing the modeling function of the European ideologies and, at the same time, the pragmatism of their use by the politicians of the Empire, Guerreiro Ramos and José Murilo de Carvalho have made innovative contributions to the issue of the place of liberal ideas in our public life. Still fundamental, due to the acuity of his analyses, is Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos' "A práxis liberal no Brasil": for the author, oligarchic liberalism, supported by the census election and the permanence of slave labor, came to be the viable alternative that the founders of the new nation-state had at their disposal as counterpart of the colonial regime. This would not be, moreover, the only example of the perverse use of liberal-capitalist "rationality."

I have formulated a critique of the generalizing and undifferentiated nature of the hypotheses of "misplacement" and "exteriority" of liberalism in Brazil. They are mistaken evalua-

tions because they take liberal ideas for egalitarianism and democracy, ignoring the functionality of the liberal-“property-ist” norms in the construction of the juridical and political corpus of the Empire (see Bosi, “A Escravidão entre Dois Liberalismos”). Only when the post-1868 reformist generation let go of the old liberalism, dissociating it from the unconditional right of property, did it become possible, from a cultural point of view, for the liberal-democrat and the liberal-abolitionist militant of the 1870s and 1880s to emerge. (They are characters who symptomatically do not make an appearance in Machado de Assis’ novels). It seems to me that the concept of ideological filter explains the several kinds of use of Western currents, a hypothesis I have tried to test in the study of exclusionary liberalism, of democratic liberalism, and of social positivism. It is worth pointing out that all the ideologies professed among us in the twentieth century filtered ideas originating in Europe, from which, e.g., integralist, fascist, socialist, anarchist, communist, left-wing Christian, and revisionist discourses came. Left-wing doctrines have always been labeled “exogenous” and “inappropriate” by conservative ideologues.

⁵ For the presence of Benjamin Constant’s conciliatory French liberalism in the elaboration of the 1824 Constitution, see Mercadante, chaps. 3 and 4. The figure of the citizen-proprietor, the only one granted the right to elect and be elected, is key in the political discourse of Constant and Restoration liberalism, whose expressions were literally appropriated in our Charter. Benjamin Constant is explicit: “Only property enables men to exercise their political rights.” As for the “working class,” it would not have the time “indispensable for the acquisition of enlightenment, to the rectitude of judgment.” I have learned from Cecília Helena de Salles Oliveira that there are letters from Benjamin Constant to D. Pedro I, the examination of which will probably further clarify the influence of the Swiss-French thinker on our exclusionary liberalism.

⁶ See Nabuco *Um estadista*.

⁷ The first edition of *O abolicionismo* was published in London, in 1883.

⁸ Faoro’s considerations coincide with Richard Graham’s analytical observations in *Grã-Bretanha e o Início da Modernização no Brasil* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1973).

⁹ The quotation in this passage is from a book on Montaigne by Hugo Friedrich.

¹⁰ I am referring to a chronicle dated 7 July 1878 (Assis 386). I have made a few comments on the topic in Bosi, *O Teatro Político nas Crônicas de Machado de Assis*.

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